



HOUSE OF COMMONS



United Kingdom

Youth Parliament
MAKING OUR MARK

United Kingdom Youth Parliament Debate

11th November 2016

House of Commons

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Friday 11 November 2016

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

10.54 am

Mr Speaker: Welcome to the eighth sitting of the UK Youth Parliament in the House of Commons Chamber. This marks the beginning of UK Parliament Week, a programme of events and activities which connects people with the United Kingdom Parliament. This year, more than 250 activities and events are taking place across the UK. The issues to be debated today were chosen by the annual Make Your Mark ballot of 11 to 18-year-olds. The British Youth Council reported that, once again, the number of votes has increased, with 978,216 young people casting a vote this year. Today, the UK Youth Parliament will choose the issues that it wishes to have as the subjects of its priority campaigns for 2017.

This year's Youth Parliament also marks the third year of the Paul Boskett memorial award, which was set up in the wake of the passing 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 the opportunity today to vote in two categories: best debate lead speech; and best Back-Bench contribution. The presentation of awards will take place at a reception in January next year.

Today's proceedings will be broadcast live on the internet. Members of the Youth Parliament, as you know, at 11 o'clock we will observe two minutes' silence for Armistice Day. We have a tiny bit of time before then, so I just want to take this opportunity to underline something that I feel strongly and that I think should be obvious to you: everyone here—the Leader of the House of Commons, David Lidington, from whom you will shortly hear; the shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Valerie Vaz; the Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson; all who work in the service of the House; all who work for the British Youth Council; all of your support workers here present; and many besides—is wishing you well. We are cheering you on. It would be absurd for me to say to those who know that they are going to be speaking or those who hope to speak, "Don't be nervous." Of course you will feel a great sense of occasion, and it would be strange if there were not real adrenaline running through you—it is right and proper that there should be. But you will, I am sure, master your nerves, rather than allowing your nerves to master you. We are all on your side. We are very proud here in the House of Commons to host this great event. You probably know that I see it as a huge deal; it is an incredibly important fixture now in our annual parliamentary calendar. As I say, all of us are wishing you to succeed, and I hope it is a great day.

We have just over a minute to go before we have our two minutes' silence for Armistice Day. After the silence, we will hear from the Leader of the House and a message from the Prime Minister will be read out before

we get into our formal proceedings. Let us hope that it is a great day. We now have a countdown of just over 40 seconds.

I have already spotted a parliamentary colleague here, Christina Rees, the hon. Member for Neath, whose parliamentary assistant will be addressing the Chamber ere long. Christina, welcome to you.

11 am

The Youth Parliament observed a two-minute silence.

Thank you, colleagues. I call the Leader of the House of Commons, Mr David Lidington. [*Applause.*]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): I thank you, Mr Speaker, and Members of the Youth Parliament. I think you and I would probably agree that the initial greetings we have received make a welcome contrast from the reception we may, at times, get from our colleagues here during normal working sessions.

First, I wish to say that it is appropriate that this sitting should take place on Armistice Day. Here in Westminster, we remember not just those who died, but the importance of the values of Parliament, and the principles of a democratic and free society, for which they made that sacrifice. The shields you see at either end of this Chamber have been inscribed to recall the names of those Members of the House of Commons who fell during the first and second world wars, along with the names of those who in more recent years were murdered by terrorists seeking to attack the democratic values and institutions of this country.

Those principles of democracy, debate, tolerance and accountability unite Members from all political parties, on both sides of this House. As Leader of the House of Commons, part of my role is to reaffirm and uphold those ideals. I want to explain to colleagues here a little about my job, because it has two parts: it is, in part, representing the Government in Parliament, where I sit as a member of Theresa May's Cabinet and I am in charge of managing the Government's annual legislative programme, but it is also representing Parliament in Cabinet and Government as a whole.

This notion sometimes comes as a surprise to those who might think that Parliament and Government are essentially the same thing. After all, under our constitutional system, the Government stand on their ability to command a majority here in the House of Commons, and if it was not for that majority, my task of trying to deliver the Government's legislative agenda would be a great deal more challenging. But for a Parliament to matter—for a Parliament to play its full role, and a distinctive role, in public life—it is essential that it is able to operate as a strong, independent institution in its own right, and this Chamber has been performing that function for hundreds of years.

The scrutiny of legislation by Members, their questions every day to Ministers, and the work of inquiry by the Select Committees of the House result in, we hope, better and more accountable Government, and certainly better-quality legislation. That oversight work—that scrutiny by Parliament—underpins the concept of ministerial accountability: that, in the British system, Ministers, who are themselves Members of the legislature, also have to come and stand at this Dispatch Box, or at

[Mr David Lidington]

the Table in a Select Committee, and be questioned and held to account for the decisions they have taken as part of the Executive. Thanks to you, Mr Speaker, the increased use of the urgent question has made Parliament even more responsive to the most pressing matters of the day, even though it—occasionally—causes a certain amount of discomfort to Ministers when they are summoned here at short notice.

Whether on policy or on oversight, Parliament's ability to reflect the concerns and interests of British citizens depends on its status as a representative institution. This House has a proud history of ensuring that the voices of marginalised and socially excluded groups are heard and reflected in public debates. It is probably a little-known part of the routines of pretty well every Member of Parliament, regardless of party, and regardless of the part of the country they represent, that their work brings them into contact, week by week, and usually in their constituency surgeries, with people from every part of our society, and that we, in that constituency work, have to confront head on those who are the victims of injustice and those who feel that society, in some way, is not working for them.

As Leader of the House, I think that it is vital that we uphold that tradition of Parliament and that the Government, too, support it. Our objective must be nothing short of trying to build a democracy that works for everyone. Critical to that objective is ensuring that the voices of young people and their interests are heard loud and clear, and that is why the Government not only support the Youth Parliament in its mission, but take an interest in the subjects that you choose to debate. Previously, the Youth Parliament's Members have debated issues such as mental health, the living wage and exam resits, and those are all extremely important questions. So, too, are the issues that you will be debating later, and I will be particularly interested to see, when I read the accounts of today's debates, your consideration of how we might seek to build a better, kinder democracy, to take the wording you will be debating later.

So my message to colleagues from the Youth Parliament is that, just as the Government are committed to engaging with Parliament, so they take, and will continue to take, a great interest in the work of the Youth Parliament, too. That is why it is significant and right that the annual sitting takes place where we are right now. This Chamber is the heart of the United Kingdom's parliamentary democracy, and the fact that these debates take place here sends a signal about the importance of the UK Youth Parliament, both to parliamentarians and to the Government. It means that MPs here in the House, and Ministers in Whitehall, will be listening to hear what you have to say. I hope you will go away today not only having enjoyed and relished the experience,

but with a sense of confidence about communicating to your colleagues and contemporaries the fact that this is their Parliament as much as it is the Parliament of me or my colleagues in government, of Valerie or her colleagues in opposition, or even of you, Mr Speaker; it is the Parliament of young people as much as of anyone else.

This is still the place where you can seek to change this country and this society in the way you think it needs to be changed for the better. Of course, there will be many different ideas—contested ideas—about what change for the better actually means; that is what democratic debate is all about, but too often in the United Kingdom, the voice of young people is absent, and when the voice and vote of young people is absent, decisions are taken that affect young people's lives that they have not always chosen, in significant numbers, to help shape, even if the opportunities are there.

I hope that you will take back the message that this is a Parliament for you and all young men and women in this country. Seize those opportunities, enjoy today, and help us build that better, more vibrant democracy we on both sides of the House today—even those who are a bit long in the tooth—also long to see.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. I call Lawand Omar to read a message from the Prime Minister.

Lawand Omar (London): The message is as follows:

"I would like to welcome you to the House of Commons and to the UK Youth Parliament. Congratulations to you all on your fantastic achievement in this year's Make Your Mark ballot. I understand that just under 1 million votes were cast. I know that this represents another year-on-year increase in the number of young people voting, and this is great to see. Thank you all for the effort you have put into this worthwhile democratic campaign.

I believe that part of Government's role is to build a better and stronger democracy for future generations to participate in. I want the UK to be the great meritocracy of the world, and a fundamental part of this is ensuring that all young people get the best possible start in life. I am determined to build a country that works for everyone and to ensure that young people can go as far as their talents show, regardless of their backgrounds.

The UK Youth Parliament is a wonderfully inclusive example of democracy in action. You are drawn from all different backgrounds and represent the breadth and diversity of our society today. This opportunity is one you can use to build the skills you need to succeed in life. By being part of today's event, you are already on a path to making a positive change. The points you make today are valuable, and it is important that we listen to you. I hope that you have a fantastic day in the Commons, and I wish you well for the future.

Theresa May."

Mr Speaker: Lawand, thank you very much indeed, and we send our thanks of course to the Prime Minister for her support, which is extremely important to the UK Youth Parliament.

NHS Cuts

Mr Speaker: The Youth Parliament will now consider the first motion of the day: we must stop cuts that affect the NHS. The full motion is printed on the Order Paper. To move the motion—expecting a very warm welcome from you all—I call, from Yorkshire and Humber, Ashley Gregory.

11.14 am

Ashley Gregory (Yorkshire and Humber): I speak in favour of the motion:

We believe the NHS cannot be sustained while funding cuts are being made. We must keep our vital services to protect young people.

In 1942, Sir William Beveridge said:

“Medical treatment covering all requirements will be provided for all citizens by a national health service”.

The NHS was born. Seventy-four years later, the national health service, the service that has provided for countless young people across the country, is at risk of being cut to a service that provides a bare minimum. The Government have set out plans for the NHS to make £22 billion of efficiency savings. However, the important issue is whether that will affect the quality of service that is provided. That £22 billion is more than double the amount that the Government spend on the entire Department for Transport, so we must not underestimate the scale of the savings that are to be made.

Those savings affect all of you directly, from the amount of time you will wait to see your doctor to the availability of a dentist appointment in your local authority. In places such as Huddersfield we have already seen the devastating effects that the cuts are having. Here, the proposal to close the A&E department has been given the go-ahead in order to centralise services in Halifax, meaning that people needing often life-saving treatment are having to travel even further to get it. We must have our views and interests heard and stop further cuts such as this.

At local level, many services are finding that the funding they receive per patient is reducing. That includes services such as school nursing. Surely it is wrong to cut such local and, more importantly, vital services. Surely it is wrong that healthcare is becoming a sort of postcode lottery depending on the amount of funding that your local area receives. I believe that is fundamentally wrong.

Over the past year, the UK Youth Parliament has been campaigning to improve mental health services and we have seen some amazing changes, especially in my local area of Rotherham, where we have met service providers. We should continue to improve mental health services across the country, but surely this cannot be possible if we allow the devastating cuts to the NHS to take place—cuts that will dismantle, damage and dissolve the national health service that we all know and love.

Everyone has mental health, and the cuts should not put that at stake. We should be lobbying local NHS trusts, MPs and unions to protect services specifically for young people. The one available appointment in your A&E department could potentially be the difference between life and death. The NHS may be a complex issue, but that does not mean that change is impossible. Change happens when you fight for something that you

believe in. Change happened in 1948 when the NHS was founded, and change could happen here today in this Chamber.

Nye Bevan once said:

“The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with faith to fight for it.”

Now I ask you all this question: do you have the faith to fight for your NHS? [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Ashley, thank you for a very fluent and assured start to our proceedings. To oppose the motion, I call from the East of England—I hope and expect that you will give this speaker an equally enthusiastic and warm welcome—Nicholas Gardner.

Nicholas Gardner (East of England): The national health service is one of the UK’s great institutions, based on a commitment to universal healthcare that is free at the point of use, which is a core principle that we should protect and preserve. However, it would not be an overstatement to say that the NHS is one of the most complicated aspects of government, with so many moving parts. The question I pose to you today is this: what lasting change can we really make to this sprawling beast? Our challenge is great and our time is short. We have an issue that is so complex and so fraught with difficulty that a year spent on this campaign would be a year spent just trying to get to grips with the issues that face the NHS while making no real progress.

The target of this campaign—cuts—could steer us away from the true issues of the NHS: maintaining high standards for young people, be that shorter waiting times, less bureaucracy or better-targeted services. Our doctors and nurses are some of the best in the world, but we must ensure that they are able to continue to deliver a high-quality service in this climate of greater pressure.

The question of quality is key. Is the NHS really all down to money? Standards matter to every young person across the UK, and just writing a blank cheque does not raise standards. We have all had experience of poor services, as demonstrated in our past mental health campaigns. Should we not aim for an NHS driven by quality of service rather than quantity of money?

Finally, what would a national campaign look like when a lot of services are dealt with on a local basis? County and not country is responsible for many of our services, and an issue for the north-east may not necessarily be an issue for the south-west. We would struggle to co-ordinate a national message because we have different issues from NHS trust to NHS trust.

We as MYPs and young people should express our undivided commitment to healthcare that is free at the point of use, but this campaign is not the way to do it. To answer Nye Bevan, I am willing to fight for the NHS, but it must be one worth fighting for—not one that wastes money on out-of-date and ageing infrastructure, but one that is efficient, of a higher quality and safer, and one that works for and benefits every young person across this great country.

Mr Speaker: I would like to call a speaker, assuming somebody wishes to contribute, from Scotland. Is a speaker from Scotland willing to contribute? Not if you don’t want to.

Keiran O'Neill (Scotland): I represent Glasgow and west Scotland.

The NHS was created in recognition of the poverty, pain and suffering from before the war. Of course we cannot fix the NHS in a year, but if we can commit to ensure that the NHS is a vital service that is free at the point of use for everyone, regardless of who they are, we have to support it. The NHS is not one of the most important institutions in the United Kingdom; it is the most important institution. We should do everything we can to protect it.

Mr Speaker: Who from Wales wants to contribute to this debate? Not if you don't want to.

Samuel Taylor (Wales): The NHS is one of the United Kingdom's national treasures. It is a unique virtue of our amazing country. Very few countries have a healthcare system like ours, so we need to preserve it and work towards stopping the cuts that affect the NHS. I feel very strongly about this issue because I am the MYP for Blaenau Gwent, which was Aneurin Bevan's original constituency. He worked very hard to help to found the NHS to improve our healthcare system. Surely we should work equally as hard to help to preserve it.

Mr Speaker: Every year I always strive incredibly hard to get almost an exact gender balance, and so far we have not heard from women. Do we have a female speaker from the West Midlands? No; not in this debate. In that case, I will look somewhere else. Who wishes to contribute from the South East?

Mishca Gandhi (South East): With the recent fall in the value of the pound, the UK economy is much weaker. Cuts are constantly being made to services. As transforming as this campaign sounds, it is not achievable. If even our MPs cannot protect the NHS from being cut in certain areas, how are we as a Youth Parliament going to influence the Government to commit to such proposals? I think we should focus on and vote for campaigns where we will really see a change in a year.

Hannah Douglass (North East): The NHS is at the heart and soul of each of our lives, from every birth to every death, dealing with the physical and emotional pain we suffer. Funding the NHS is not just about funding the services we need; it is about funding our future. As MYPs, we have to think about what we want out of our NHS. I know for sure that I would like a guaranteed free service throughout my life—for me, for all young people and for everyone. We deserve it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Hannah. That was a wonderfully succinct speech—and it was delivered without notes; that was quite outstanding. Well done, you. Who have we got from London who wants to take part in this debate?

Amishta Aubeelack (London): I represent the London Borough of Redbridge. Did you know that the NHS deals with over 1 million patients every 36 hours? It deals with approximately 54.3 million patients in England alone, and 64.6 million in the whole of the UK. Cutting NHS funding inevitably affects every single one of us sitting here today. The NHS provides a considerable

amount of employment, and the UK's dependence on such a critical service makes it so important. Cuts to the NHS should not be considered, simply because we would fall apart without it.

Mr Speaker: How about a contributor from the East Midlands?

Kian Hearnshaw (East Midlands): I represent Lincolnshire.

I love the NHS, and I would like to pay my respects to NHS workers, who provide world-class care, even in dire economic times. However, the NHS is firmly in the hands of the regular Members of Parliament who sit in this Chamber. I feel that the NHS is not an issue that should be addressed by young people; there are better uses of Members of the Youth Parliament's time. I will vote for anti-discrimination to remain the subject of the campaign, and I call on you all to do the same. The Government have trouble dealing with the NHS, as well as the EU and the economy. The great and the good are focusing on these issues, and I feel that the Youth Parliament cannot do anything more effective than what is currently being achieved. One thing we can do, however, is to tackle discrimination. In my opinion, the more important campaign of fighting the discrimination at the heart of society needs every fibre of our being, and all of our time.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Surely there is somebody from the North West.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We will try to accommodate as many as we can, over a period.

Wiktoria Matuszewska (North West): I am from the Salford constituency.

It is not surprising that the topic of stopping cuts to the NHS has come in the top five in the Make Your Mark ballot, because as we can tell, a lot of young people feel that we need to do something about that. Of course the issue of cuts to the NHS is very important, but do we have the power and influence to make a decision, through our Parliament, to stop these cuts? As was said, it is not Parliament that makes the cuts; it is the counties, and this is for them to decide. As a young elected representative, I think that we have much more important issues to deal with, such as votes at 16 and stopping cuts to youth services, than stopping cuts to the NHS. In my opinion, and in the opinion of many people here, I assume, we do not have the power to stop the cuts.

Mr Speaker: What about Yorkshire and Humber?

William McCullion (Yorkshire and Humber): I would like to highlight the fact that as Members of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament, we are part of a neutral organisation. Cuts are an austerity measure. To some, austerity is the answer to our economic troubles; to others, it is some terrible behemoth that must be slain. I ask of you: how can we hope to approach this tremendous issue in a neutral, politically unbiased fashion that appeases us all?

Mr Speaker: What about the quite sizeable delegation from London? Who is interested?

Tofunmi Omisore (London): I represent the London Borough of Hounslow. The reason why it is really important to stop cuts to the NHS is not just because those cuts might be affecting people's physical health. Under the health service, we have mental health provisions that are already underfunded and suffering. That means that young people are not getting the services that they need to treat their mental health issues, or even to ask for or seek help for those issues.

When cuts are made to the NHS, it is unable to add funding for mental health services, which are already underfunded. Cutting funding even more has another effect on all the young people who suffer with mental health issues and are trying to seek help from the NHS, but cannot because no provision, or not enough, is available. That is why I feel strongly that we should vote for this motion.

Mr Speaker: Anybody from the West Midlands?

Glen Corda (West Midlands): I am the MYP for Redditch.

My biggest concern is that if you add up the shortfall of funding for the NHS this year, it probably comes to about £6 billion. If we cannot stop the funding cuts now, for certain we will not be able to in the coming years. The second problem is the psychological pressure on future medics, especially younger ones who are in sixth form right now, thinking about the situation. The huge pressure on the NHS is affecting their attitudes. Finally, youth services are being affected disproportionately. For example, I believe that there are 11% fewer school nurses this year.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Quite a large group of people from the North West have stood. The tendency to demonstrative behaviour tends to increase by the year—I say this in no insulting or critical spirit. I was much struck by the young woman with the green jacket and pink dress who is in a state of almost uncontrollable excitement. We look forward to hearing from you.

Jennifer Blackledge (North West): I am from Stockport. The NHS is an extremely important service. It has a drastic impact on my life, as someone who is disabled, and it had a drastic impact on my dad's life, because he had a brain haemorrhage. But, by doing this one-year campaign—remember, MYPs, that our campaigns only last one year—we will be doing our NHS a disservice. By campaigning for only one year, we cannot really do anything.

Tackling cuts to the NHS is a lifelong campaign that we should all be fighting for, for our entire lives. MYPs, we already stand for this issue because it is in our manifesto. By making it our campaign, we would just be wasting money, because we cannot do something in one year. There are much more important issues that we can do something about in one year. Choosing this as our campaign would just be a waste. Our NHS needs our time and effort to care for it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Can I interest Scotland again in the matter?

Molly Kirby (Scotland): I am from north-east Scotland. "Our generation's epidemic": that was the response that us, as Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, got from the young people of our nation when we asked them, "What do you think of mental health?" I believe that you English MYPs should choose this as your campaign because we are facing a fundamental crisis in our mental health services, and I strongly believe that we can help young people if you choose this campaign.

Obviously the topic is not a matter for Scotland, as the NHS is a devolved matter, but imagine what we could do with a nationwide campaign to stop cuts to mental health funding. There is no need to cut funding to the NHS. It has survived this long. If the Government can find funding for Trident and to take people out to fight terrorists, surely they can find funding to secure our NHS. I urge you all to vote for this as your national campaign for England.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. There are only two parts of the UK from which I have not been able to elicit a speaker, so I will have another go. Can I persuade anybody from the South West?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: There is a young woman brandishing a document or a pad.

Kira Lewis (South West): I am the Member for Taunton Deane and west Somerset.

The NHS deals with everyday emergencies and is at the very heart of our society. I thank the junior doctors who came to my previous school when they were meant to be on strike to teach the masses CPR—a very valuable skill. [*Applause.*] That happened all over the country in all our constituencies, but those doctors were not heard or listened to, because the media did not want to play that out.

We need to fight not just for current services, but for targeted services for rural young people, for whom services have been decimated over the years. However, I ask: can we help? I thank the regular Members of the Chamber for their strong interest in and passion for mental health, physical health and everything else the NHS covers, including the Member for my area of Taunton Deane, Rebecca Pow, who has looked into young people's mental health in the area.

We need to fight for the unheard in mental health services; fight for the one in four; fight for those who, day by day, need help but do not get it because of the cuts. We need to encourage our generation to go into medicine—a very valuable field indeed. We need to hold Members of the regular Chamber to account for their actions, but we cannot do that by ourselves.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. When you mentioned Taunton Deane, I immediately thought of my colleague, Rebecca Pow, who is a most active Member of this place. If you are as active in the Youth Parliament as she is in this Chamber, you are taking a very active and conscientious interest indeed.

[Mr Speaker]

I will make one last effort in this debate to attract a speaker from Northern Ireland. Perhaps we can hear from the young woman towards the back.

Emma Rooney (Northern Ireland): I represent South Down.

I agree that our NHS is a very important service and that we should be able to access healthcare free at the point of delivery, but the NHS is not the only service that is facing cuts. What about our fire service, our police service and our schools? We cannot ignore the fact that austerity is damaging our public services. While I agree that it is very important to fund the NHS, we must fund all our public services if we expect them to work. How are we supposed to have effective public services if we do not put any money into them? I say to MYPs in England that, yes, I agree you should fund your NHS, but please think twice about not funding your other public services as well.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. We have had participants from all parts of the country, which is extremely welcome. To conclude the debate—

Rhianna-May Duffy (East of England): What about the East of England?

Mr Speaker: We did have a contributor from the East of England at the start of the debate, but that is a very fair point: we had a contributor from the Front Bench from the East of England, but we have not had a Back-Bench contributor from the East of England. If somebody from the Back Benches wishes to contribute, I should be delighted to hear him or her. That was a very fair heckle; it is what we call an orderly heckle.

Matthew Tinker (East of England): I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Epping Forest.

The NHS is a fundamental part of the United Kingdom. It is a very British organisation. Imagine losing Ant and Dec. Imagine the BBC losing “The Great British Bake Off”—[*Interruption.*] I’ve started something now. The NHS is vital to the infrastructure of the United Kingdom.

I am so proud that my grandmother served in the NHS and that my auntie serves in the NHS. These are our future jobs. Members of the Youth Parliament who are currently studying A-levels or GCSEs, or at university—whatever you are studying—your future jobs are at stake, as are the jobs of people who currently work in the NHS. It is completely underfunded. Remember: it is our future.

The NHS is a critical part of British infrastructure, and I have to say that it cares for all of us. No matter whether we are black or white, gay or straight, rich or poor, we all have free access to healthcare. All of our teachers have access. All of our religious leaders have access. Your bus and transport drivers have access. All of our politicians have access. Have you noticed how members of those groups are in each of the upcoming debates? The NHS provides for all, and I really hope we are able to vote for this issue today.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have been giving each other rounds of applause, but I do not deserve applause. All I have done is said some words, strung them together into sentences and represented my constituents. If you want to give anyone applause, give your nurses, your doctors and your junior doctors your applause. Thank you very much. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for that speech. I am so glad that we had an additional speaker: a Back-Bench speaker from the East of England, as opposed to the speaker from the Front Bench. To conclude the debate, I call, and ask you enthusiastically to welcome, from the East Midlands, Florence Orchard.

Florence Orchard (East Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MYPs, I do not know about you, but when I first heard about “stop cuts that affect the NHS” I was not really sure about the issue, let alone how it impacts on young people. After all, what even is an efficiency cut? What is a CPG? And £22 billion—where did that number even come from? Yet, more than 100,000 young people felt passionate enough to put a cross in the box in hope of making it our national campaign, so we simply cannot ignore it.

The NHS is one of Britain’s greatest achievements. We have some of the most amazing healthcare professionals in the world. From hearing the debate, it is clear that we all care about it and want to make it the best possible service. However, many believe the NHS is already underfunded, and new savings of roughly one fifth of the current budget are likely to overstretch it. If that happens, that will directly affect you all. From longer waiting times to the potential closing of A&Es, the likelihood of maintaining good-quality services while making the savings needed is very low.

This is a brand new and exciting campaign that we as a Youth Parliament could come together to work on, to fight any changes to our NHS and guarantee a positive environment for all those who are ill. With this campaign, there is the opportunity to utilise our previous work on tackling mental health while still focusing on a new issue.

However, nobody can dispute the fact that the NHS is an extremely complicated structure, and perhaps it is just too much to try to combat in one year. With local authorities becoming more independent, and, in Manchester’s case, devolving from the NHS entirely, that calls into question whether this should be a local campaign instead of a national one. With structures like the NHS Youth Forum already in place, should we be working with those organisations or leaving them to it?

Due to the complexity of the health service, perhaps it would be wiser to spend our time campaigning on a different issue. Furthermore, some may believe that the campaign is unnecessary as the Government have already committed to spending 22% of their budget on the NHS. Yes, that 22% will maintain the current state of the NHS for the moment, but, taking the increasing population into account, that is only a short-term solution. If we work together to lobby our MPs and local health services and show our passion for this issue on social media, we have the potential to create a stable NHS not just for the short term but for the long term.

MYPs, today it falls to you. Is this campaign just too complex and ambitious, or is it worth the work to create an amazing change?

Mr Speaker: Florence, thank you for rounding off the debate in terrific style. It has been a great first debate. I hope you are energised and inspired by the contributions you have either made or heard others make.

Public Elections: Votes for 16 and 17-year-olds

11.44 am

Mr Jack Norquoy (Scotland): I will speak in favour of the motion:

We believe that all 16 and 17-year-olds should be given the right to vote in public elections in the UK.

Hello. My name is Jack and I am 17. I can vote in Scotland, and I did vote in May. I cannot begin to describe the honour it was to cast my ballot. Here is why I believe that every single 16 and 17-year-old in this country should also be allowed to vote.

Lowering the voting age comes down to two things: maturity and marginalisation. We know what 16 and 17-year-olds can contribute, but smoking isn't voting. Voting is a civil rights issue. However, we can offer much more to our society. Most of us are making major decisions about our futures and many of us already offer much more, by holding responsibilities such as being a young carer. Today we are grounded with an interest in current affairs and granted a vote. We as a Youth Parliament can help transform this interest into direct political engagement.

Early engagement with politics will help create lasting improvements to turnout and the more representative democracy that we so desperately need. As we sit in the heart of this democracy, we are also sitting together as the voices that should be represented in this democracy. The 2014 Scottish referendum proved that if you give us the responsibility, we will cast it on polling day. That day saw queues of teenagers outside polling stations; with three in four teenagers voting, it was that day that led to the Scottish Parliament unanimously lowering the voting age.

We find ourselves in the absurd situation where if you are a 16-year-old lad from Dumfries, you can vote for a councillor next May, but if you live just 30 miles down the road in Carlisle, you can't. Following June's EU referendum, we face difficulties ahead and further marginalisation, but a great opportunity is also here. Extending the franchise is no longer just about voting, but about reversing the trend of young people's marginalisation and making sure that the Government benefit from the legitimacy and oversight of all their citizens.

MYPs, we are here to debate and decide between five great topics, but bear this in mind: gaining the right to vote at 16 will give us all the power to seek change in our education service, to our transport system, to our health service, and the power to tackle racism and religious discrimination. Voting at 16 should not be determined by what accent you have. Now is the time, Youth Parliament: it is time for this United Kingdom to be united on the right to vote at 16. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Jack, thank you for that very powerful speech. Thank you, Members of the Youth Parliament, for your warm and enthusiastic welcome of it; I especially thank the Scottish delegation fan club of Jack's for their explicit and demonstrative show of support, which is entirely in order.

Just before I ask you to welcome our next speaker, I should say that it is my practice to try to identify Members of the House of Commons who are here to

support you. But I would also like to mention a very senior member of our staff who is taking an interest and is here to offer support to you. He is the Clerk Assistant in the House, the second most senior procedural official in the House of Commons—Dr John Benger. John, put your hands up so that everybody can see you. *[Applause.]* I work with John every day of the working week to try to make this place function better, and I can tell you that he is a terrific ally to me in trying to promote diversity and inclusion within the House service—within the staff make-up of this place—and it is absolutely typical of him that he should be here to support you. Thank you, John, and thank you to all our Clerks, who can be relied upon to provide a terrific service.

I now ask you enthusiastically to welcome our next speaker, to oppose the motion, from Wales, Matthew von Rooyen.

Matthew von Rooyen (Wales): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I am delighted to be here for another year's sitting. Thank you for all the work you have been doing to ensure that the Youth Parliament sits here year after year.

If I may beg your indulgence for a moment, Mr Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Christina Rees, the Member of Parliament for Neath, not only as my employer, but as someone who champions young people. In the past fortnight she and I have spoken about several matters affecting young people and young people's mental health. It is a pleasure to work with you, Chris. Thank you for everything.

The House of Commons is the heart of our democracy. Developed over many centuries, this is where democracy is. That is why we are here today: to do democracy. However, we have a Government—and they have a majority in this place—who are not only not in favour of reducing the voting age from 18, but who actively oppose it. With rumours of a second Scottish independence referendum, with the recent result of the referendum showing that the majority of British people wish to leave the European Union, and with recent developments in the United States of America, the Government are going to be far too busy to work on policies that are not absolutely necessary, so we are not going to be able to get their support over the next year.

What we are seeing yet again is the Government putting young people to the back of the queue, excluding them from the democratic process. Young people are being excluded from taking part in democracy. What we are seeing is the Government stifling democracy. It is a very real fact that we will not be able to bring about any change over the next year, or over the next several years. So I ask you this: is now really the right time to invest all our energies on a campaign that is destined to fail?

For this campaign to be a success, we have just 365 days; 52 weeks; 12 months; a year. Alongside MPs and peers, we have been campaigning to reduce the voting age for well over a decade, and what do we have to show for our efforts? Can anyone under the age of 18 lawfully vote for their Member of Parliament? To achieve success, we need time, resources and Government support. I note that the Minister for Civil Society is not in his place at the moment, but I ask him, when he reads or watches this debate later, to consider bringing young people into our democracy.

The action plans do nothing to change the Government's policy. They call for the submission of a local council motion—a local council motion, Mr Speaker? They call for us to write to the local press—the local press, Mr Speaker, really? They call for MPs to sponsor a debate, but not on the Floor of this House under your chairmanship, Mr Speaker, but down the corridor in Westminster Hall. While those plans might be effective for a local campaign, I suggest that they will do nothing to change Government policy on reducing the voting age.

I suggest that we should vote today for a topic that has a realistic prospect of success, to achieve what our constituents truly want. Friends, I suggest to you all today that you do not vote for votes at 16. Without Government support, and without substantial changes to education policy to introduce a curriculum for life, reducing the voting age would be deeply unwise and almost impossible.

Friends, we have been elected by our constituents to come here today to do democracy. The campaign for a curriculum for life and the need to tackle racial and religious discrimination received the most votes and came top of the priority ballot. We are here today, friends, to do democracy. If we truly are going to do democracy and make the most of this opportunity, we will vote in the way our constituents have told us to vote: we will vote for a curriculum for life and we will vote to tackle racial discrimination. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for that speech, Matthew. We have had a great start to the debate. Who do we have from Yorkshire and Humber who wishes to contribute to the debate?

Liberty Branston (Yorkshire and Humber): I am 13, and to me it seems like quite a long time until I will be voting. MYPs represent everyone aged 11 to 18. If five years' worth of people are not affected by the campaign, do they feel excluded, and maybe not as affected in our community? I do not really have a view on this campaign yet, but it is important to bear in mind the views of younger people as well as yourselves—I know that a lot of you are older. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed, and congratulations on your first speech in the House of Commons. Do we have a would-be contributor from Northern Ireland?

Louis Welsh-Rush (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I represent East Londonderry.

In Northern Ireland, we are in a unique position: we have a land border with the EU. In the light of the EU referendum, it became clear that there is a democratic deficit in elections in the UK in general. The vast majority of Northern Ireland voted to stay in the EU, and none of Scotland voted out. It has become clear to me and my constituency that we are clearly not being listened to in the UK in general.

I believe fundamentally that it was an England-based election. We are being dragged out of the EU against our will. We have a land border with the Republic of Ireland and a lot of our economy relies on cross-border

trade. If a trade border was to go up, our economy would be damaged beyond repair. I believe that, had votes at 16 been backed and we had had the vote, the result of the referendum could have been changed. They have votes at 16 in Scotland, so why can't the rest of us?

Mr Speaker: Who do we have wanting to contribute from the East of England?

Rhianna-May Duffy (East of England): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from Bedford Borough.

I am fighting for the right for 16 and 17-year-olds to vote. You are allowed to leave home, get a job and have kids at 16, but not vote. How can you live in a world if you cannot vote and do not have a say in how it is run? That is what the suffragettes fought for. The former MP for Bristol West said that cutting the voting age would be a

“vital step in the renewal of Britain’s democracy”.

I understand that some people think that this is a hard campaign to achieve, but don't UK MYPs love a good challenge?

Mr Speaker: Who do we have from London?

Sean Sinanan (London): I represent the London Borough of Enfield. The issue of voting at 16 has affected youths for a long time, repeatedly popping up on the ballot, but now is the time to take it on again. The main argument against voting at 16 is outdated; saying that we are not old enough or mature enough to vote is to stereotype. Mr Speaker, look around at all the beautiful people who simply defy that statement. At 16, we are practically allowed to grow up, but we are restrained from having our voices heard. Given the “controversial” current affairs, this topic is more important than ever, and it shows a way for the youth to be included in our society. To those MPs who believe it is not realistic to tackle topics such as these and that change is impossible, I say: your mind-set needs to be changed.

Let me tell you something: change cannot happen without a sense of idealism. We need to have faith in ourselves before we put faith in the campaigns. Therefore, let us choose this topic and together let us finally put this issue to rest.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Who wants to contribute from the West Midlands? Let us have this chap who is waving at me—fist, thumb and the rest—with a marvellous demonstration of enthusiasm. Let us hear from him.

Sarjan Hira (West Midlands): Thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr Speaker. Most of us here are between the ages of 11 and 18. I say to 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15-year-olds: can't we stand as peers together to help you to vote by the time you reach 16? I say to 16 and 17-year-olds: we should be eligible to vote right now. We should stand together, peer to peer, as students of the UK, to say, “We can vote for our democracy—for our future.” That depends on us, because we are the future. We are fantastic. We are powerful. We are amazing. We are the best, because we are the youth of the United Kingdom. It is simple: if we vote together and stand together to say, “We can vote at the ages of 16 and 17”, we will be setting an example.

Thank you, Scotland. Thank you so much for voting in your referendum, because at the moment it is the senior citizens in this country who are voting. As we are helping them to sort out how to use Snapchat filters, let us sort out ourselves, because we are mature. Look at us all here today, showing that we are mature and responsible, and that we can vote. So let us stand—after having sat down, in my case—and say, “Yes, we can vote from the age of 16”. Remember, 11 to 15-year-olds, that you will thank us later on if we say, “Yes, in a few years' time, you will be able to vote for your democracy and whichever political party you want.” You will say, “I had a voice and I decided for my future.” So let us stand together for having votes at the ages of 16 and 17.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for addressing us with great vim, dynamism and eloquence. I am quite sure that what you say about young people and the people in this Chamber is true, but may I gently remind everyone not, in their enthusiasm, to forget to say their names?

Sarjan Hira: I am Sarjan Hira from Wolverhampton. I study performing arts and love acting, so talking is a favourite thing of mine. Votes for 16 and 17-year olds—we need it! We deserve this the most in the world, and we will set an incredible example.

Mr Speaker: Our friend here, in addition to his many other great attributes, clearly has a very long name. We are extremely obliged to him. Thank you for that contribution and for the passion you have shown.

Elizabeth Thornton (South East): A 16-year-old can leave school and get an apprenticeship; start a family; be liable to pay taxes; fight for their country; and get married. Why then are 16-year-olds not given the responsibility of voting? How can we be told that we can contribute money to our country but that we do not have a say in how it is spent? How can we be told that we can risk our lives for our country but that we do not have a say in what we are risking our lives for? This is such an important issue and together we can combat this. Together, we can change and give 16 and 17-year-olds a right to vote. Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Ladies and gentleman, we cannot be silent. We need to stand up and fight for our right for our voices to be heard.

Mr Speaker: Just before I try to secure a speaker from the South West, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome—sitting in the Under Gallery, unless my eyesight is failing me, and I trust that it is not—Stephen Benn. I mentioned Stephen for two reasons. First, because he does fantastic work to bring together the science community and Parliament, and he and I have been working together on that cause over many, many years. Secondly, Stephen is brother to Hilary Benn, who is an extremely respected and senior Member of this House, and a former Cabinet Minister, and he is currently Chair of the so-called Brexit Select Committee. Stephen is, of course, also the son of the late and, whatever your politics, the great parliamentarian Tony Benn, who spent half a century

[Mr Speaker]

of his life in politics, being passionate in and on behalf of Parliament. Stephen, it is great to welcome you. Thank you for joining us today.

Jessica Hill (South West): I am Jessica Hill, from South Somerset. As the Youth Parliament, we should be fighting for our youth voice on youth issues. Yes, representing young people in our constituencies is terribly important, but we should hold them up and let them tell us what they want and need. I am 16, and I highly doubt that, in the next two years, I will happen upon an epiphany that will allow me to vote appropriately, as, according to some on this issue, I will. Doing these things might be difficult—this might be a hard way for us to go about this issue—but when has that ever stopped us? I refuse to stand for young people not having a voice. As a Youth Parliament Member, I say, let us speak for ourselves.

Chengkai Xie (North West): My name is Chengkai Xie, and I represent Preston, Lancashire. Coming from China to the UK three years ago, my life has been changed greatly. Living in a liberal democracy, I am fully aware of, and appreciate, the importance of voting rights. However, I personally do not agree with the motion to lower the voting age to 16.

I am opposed to my hon. Friends' argument that young people need to vote to make a political impact. There are various ways for us to participate in politics. The brilliant work done by us, the British Youth Parliament, is a great example. Although many of us probably cannot vote at general elections, we can nevertheless make our mark in British youth politics. We have a real impact on Government. The most important thing is that we can campaign to make positive changes for all young people in the country.

On the other hand, I am very sad, and even embarrassed, to say that people aged between 18 and 24 have consistently been the group with the lowest turnout at elections, and even at the EU referendum, which would have a massive impact on young people's lives. It would be irrational of us to lower the voting age while leaving the apathetic young voters' voice unheard. Clearly, there is a democratic deficit here. More should be done to engage young people in politics. For example, voting for the campaign to create a curriculum for life, to prepare us through an appropriate political curriculum and to enrich our political minds, would be great.

My fellow MYPs, a line has, after all, to be drawn somewhere, and the age of 18 would be a sensible cutting point. All the evidence tells us that the time for lowering the voting age has yet come. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Just before I call a speaker from the East Midlands—start thinking about it, if you are interested—I should just mention, vis-à-vis the Benn family, that, as some people know, I was always hugely fond of, and had a terrific relationship with, Tony Benn, and I was given to impersonating him. Towards the end of his life, Tony Benn, who was always a believer in young people, said, most magnificently, “The only purpose of the old is to encourage the young”. I thought that that was a wonderful statement of his approach to life.

Now, who do we have from the East Midlands? [Interruption.] Ooh, there is a chap literally leaping off the ground; he will be airborne ere long. Yes, let us hear from the chap with blond, curly hair, who was leaping off the ground, and in a minority of one in doing so.

Thomas Morrell (East Midlands): I would just like to point out that I am ginger.

I want to talk about 23 June. It was a shocking day for some, and a day I sat at home and drank a lot of cups of tea. I did not have much of a choice. I could not vote and had to watch my parents walk out the door, go and vote and then go to work. And then I went to work, like they do. They are over 18, I am under 18; they get to vote, I do not. How is that fair? How can you compare two people between who there is a two-year age gap, or a much larger age gap, and say that they get to vote but I do not? There are a lot more than 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds in the UK, and that could change the whole face of an election. We are talking about just one vote, or maybe a lot of votes—1.5 million of them. Imagine if we were on the electoral roll! Your vote is worth a lot and needs to be worth it now.

Timothy Would (North East): For anyone who thinks that this motion cannot work or be acted on in a year, I would just say this: if my mother can work day and night, two jobs, every day of the week and the weekend, I am pretty sure we can do a lot of good in one year to get votes at 16. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Is there a female contributor from Wales? [Interruption.] Yes, there is, and she is displaying huge enthusiasm and gusto. Let us hear from you.

Sian Bolton (Wales): When I first saw that this issue was on the ballot, I was really torn. As an avid campaigner for votes at 16 for many years, my initial reaction was to support it, but I had mixed feelings about it being the UKYP issue for 2016. Is this the right time? The last Government blocked the Lords amendment giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote for the EU referendum. If we choose this topic, will we struggle to achieve any real change? Are we better off placing this issue on the agenda in an election year, when we could make an impact on political parties' manifestos?

When I spoke to my forum about it, they lost it with me. They said, “Why should we let the fact that we have been stopped before stop us trying again? We have to keep pushing.” As always, they were right. We cannot give up on this issue. We cannot let it slip to the bottom of the agenda. We have to keep pushing so that eventually every 16-year-old will get the right to vote. We have to keep pushing for an answer and a voice. We have to keep pushing until we finally get legislation enfranchising us. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Esther Joy Boadu (London): Recently, in the past few years, young people have taken a new interest in politics, and this is due to the fact that the changes being discussed now will affect us as young people. So why do we not have the choice to voice our opinions? Why do the older generation get to vote on matters that will not affect them for much longer? I strongly believe that this motion is very important. We are meant to have the right to free speech, but do we?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but all good things come to an end. We are slightly behind time, and we cannot really afford to get further behind time. We must now conclude the debate.

Several MYPs: What about Scotland?

Mr Speaker: We have not heard from Scotland in this debate. Well, we will have a speaker from Scotland.

Elinor Pearce (Scotland): I am Elinor Pearce, and I represent the highlands and islands of Scotland.

Last year, 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland were able to vote. For me, that is an absolutely amazing opportunity. As an organisation that stands for equality, this is something that we should be fighting for across the UK. My second point is that politicians need to look around. Today the Chamber is filled with 280 young people who are all enthusiastic and knowledgeable about politics. We are so often stereotyped as a disengaged, unresponsive generation due to our age. If you support this campaign, we can stand together and change that view.

I urge you to take a look at our next topic. It is an utter contradiction that we should be adult and mature enough to pay full price for public transport and have other responsibilities yet that does not transfer to benefits such as voting. Today—I am not going to lie—I have been very disheartened by the Youth Parliament. A word has been used a lot: “can’t”. We have heard that we can’t make a difference. What kind of message is that to our constituents? I can assure you that every speech, every vote and every letter does make a difference.

We were elected because we can make change. Please support votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. Please make a difference.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I emphasise that in each of the two debates every part of the country has been heard. The very slight difference between us has been that colleagues have not regarded a Front-Bench speech as counting—they want to be sure of having a Back-Bench contributor from the East of England and from Scotland—and I am very happy to respect that principle and to try to ensure that, in each case, that happens. We now know for certain that every area of the country has been represented. That is not the same as saying that I am able to call everybody—time does not allow that—but we are doing our best to ensure that this is a completely fair and equal process.

To conclude the debate, please give a very enthusiastic welcome to our concluding speaker from Northern Ireland, Darragh O’Reilly.

Darragh O’Reilly (Northern Ireland): Go raibh maith agat, Ceann Comhairle.

The age we live in is a time of turmoil—a time of turmoil on Tuesday night, and a time of turmoil on 23 June. What I must say to you is that in this time of turmoil in our politics, in our Government and in our society, do the Government have the time to deal with this issue? It is a question not of “Should they?” but “Will they?”

Secondly, can we even be successful in one short year? Is it enough time, and is 16 the right age? We are all aware of the total and utter shambolic way in which politics is taught in schools, and of the way it isn’t. We see a curriculum for life come up again and again in Make Your Mark. Ought we to campaign for the education we need before the voting that we so want?

However, that is not really true. I have seen one-trick pony campaigns—the one-shot ones—come and I have seen them go, but I tell you this: votes at 16 is no one-trick pony. It is nothing short of handing young people the freedom to achieve freedom. The freedom actually to fund the NHS. The freedom actually to have a decent transport system. The freedom to tackle racism. It is the power to do so and, by Christ, if we are a Youth Parliament and we say that we don’t want that power and we can’t get that power, what are we but a talking shop?

Sixteen and 17-year-olds would have kept us in the EU. I live five-and-a-half miles from the Irish Republic. Do you think my constituents were too happy when they were denied a vote and that the vote went a certain way due to an old gang? I love them and all, but the thing is that my community is on the line, and this Government have no accountability to me or my constituents. If we don’t stand up for them, I will eat my hat if that is the United Kingdom.

Just imagine if a Government decided to abolish the transport pass for pensioners and charged sky-high transport prices, or if the Government abolished housing benefit for over-65s as they have done for under-21s. They would be out in a day. We all know that, and we know why: old people vote, and they vote in droves. If we had the vote and voted in droves, we would no longer be the small part of the big society. Our issues would go from the bottom to the top. We ought to do that.

In the end, is votes at 16 the key to the door of democracy, or are we opening it to a beautiful brick wall? Go away, have a think and get back to me.

Mr Speaker: Thank you so much for winding up that debate with fluency, with sincerity and with the quality for which we are looking more than any other: passion. That speech had passion in abundance, which is a wonderful thing for the rest of us to observe.

Public Transport

12.21 pm

Liam Cartwright (North East): I wish to speak in favour of the motion:

We need to improve the pricing structure, cleanliness, frequency, reliability, accessibility, and treatment of young people on public transport, including those in rural areas.

I am not sure how to follow Darragh's speech, but I will give it a go.

Across the UK, we have the luxury of a diverse network of public transport systems, from rail, bus and ferry. On the surface, it is superb. We can all travel independently and hassle-free. Only when we look at the issues raised by our constituents does the can of worms truly start to open. Since 2012, when public transport first came on the agenda of the UK Youth Parliament, we have seen no change. Four years and no change, and the issues are exactly the same.

We are calling for cheaper, better and more accessible transport. We are calling for it now. The first change we wish to see implemented is a UK-standardised fare system for bus and rail. What will that look like? The age at which people are obliged to purchase an adult ticket would be raised to 18. After all, in the eyes of the law, we turn adult at that age. Why at the tender ages of 14, 15 and 16 are we paying adult fares? That injustice must be ironed out.

It is not right that transport companies capitalise on our need to use their services to attend compulsory education. In my constituency in Newcastle upon Tyne, a young person over the age of 16 could pay up to £7 a day for a ticket. The situation is similar across the whole country, but those in London travel completely for free. Why? There is no reason why fares should differ because of geographical location. That must be changed to a system of standardised fares for everyone.

Finally, we wish to see clean, frequent and reliable bus and rail systems. In rural areas, the waiting time for a bus can be in excess of an hour, which can be the difference between being a whole lesson late for school and being on time. Bus companies need to produce a more frequent bus service in line with our needs.

The issue of public transport returns time and again, and has been debated in this Chamber over and over. The time has come when we listen to the needs of our constituents, and to rectify ever-worsening transport problems. How do we do that? We will lobby local government and MPs to support us. We will make local service providers listen to our concerns until they understand that the problems of public transport can no longer be swept under the carpet. We will shape a transport system for young people; we will provide fares that reflect our age; and we will have frequent bus services. Not only that, but services will be accessible to all. Let us be the generation of MYPs to make a real change within transport.

Mr Speaker: Liam, thank you very much indeed for kicking off this third and final debate of the morning. To oppose the motion, please welcome enthusiastically, from the North West of England, Caitlin Cavanagh.

Caitlin Cavanagh (North West): There are massive inequalities between those deemed 15-year-old adults and those deemed 18-year-old children, and between

those who can miss a bus and still be on time, and those who will have to wait so long for another that they miss half their day. So how can anyone stand up here and say, "No, we should not work for better transport"?

The young people of my city, Liverpool, worked for better transport by campaigning for our youth ticket—the My Ticket, which enables me, as an under-19, to travel across six local authorities for £2 a day. Lightbulbs should be flashing, because that shows that better transport is achievable; we did it, but it took us over five years.

We are in times of austerity, when budgets are being cut like paper to save money, so how will the Government fund cheaper transport and concessions? Some people argue that it should be from the £1.1 billion spent on bus passes for the elderly—something that I know my nan would not be too pleased about, and she can vote. If we had over a year, perhaps we could apply enough pressure to the Government to make them find the money to support this, but 12 months just will not cut it. I know that I am so lucky to have affordable transport, but you, too, can work within your local authority and focus on transport issues, if you need to. Some people may argue against this because they believe that young people cannot achieve those things. That is not the case, but success cannot be rushed.

Problems with the campaign brief must also be considered. What is "better" transport nationally? "Better" in Cornwall may be reducing unaffordable prices, while in London, a problem may be too many of us northerners standing on the wrong side of the tube escalators. And ask yourselves whether better transport in some places would be better for our planet. In many urban areas, why work for better transport if it is already good? Why work for better transport when we can campaign for 16 and 17-year-olds to vote on it in general elections instead? For us to be truly united as an organisation, we must tackle issues that affect all local authorities, not an issue that is a postcode lottery, so I will stand up here and say, "No, working for better transport is not something that we as the UK Youth Parliament should do," as this is a topic that you must tackle in your local area instead.

Mr Speaker: Caitlin, thank you very much indeed. Who do we have as a would-be contributor from the South West of England?

Chelsea White (South West): Hi, I am from Somerset. In order to go to college every day, I have to pay £650 for a bus pass every year; that is the most expensive bus pass in the country. I am from Bridgwater, which consists of the most deprived wards in Somerset. The fact that families face this financial pressure simply to send their kid to an educational institution, as is compulsory, is absolutely disgusting. Even for low-income families, like mine, it is still £300 a year. With regard to costs, how is it that we are categorised as adults when it comes to transport, and made to pay these ridiculous fares, when in every other aspect of our lives we are treated as children? We need a national student fare introduced in order to provide equality within public transport.

Mr Speaker: It is now timely for me to welcome Sir Peter Bottomley, who has just entered the Chamber. He is the Conservative Member of Parliament for Worthing West and has been in this place since the mid-1970s, so

he has a long track record of service to the House of Commons and he is a long-time believer in the rights and opportunities of young people. Peter, thank you very much for joining us today.

Do we have a would-be contributor from Wales? We do. Please, let's hear from you.

Samantha Locke (Wales): I am from Torfaen. I really do not think that I need to tell you people that transport needs to be cheaper and more accessible for us. In Wales, most of our buses do not have ramps. Therefore, disabled people cannot even use the buses. To me, that is ridiculous. Most taxi drivers are not Criminal Records Bureau checked, meaning that we do not know whether they are safe. Do you really want a young person to get in a taxi with a woman or a man who might not be safe? Personally, I would not want my son or daughter to do that.

Finally, us 16-year-olds are forced to pay for an adult ticket on a bus to get to work, yet we work for a child's wage. It is our job, as MYPs, to attend education, but because we are forced to go to places of education, we are made to pay to get to that education. Isn't that wrong? It is our job as MYPs to distinguish between what young people want and what young people need. Cheaper, better transport is something that young people need.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Does anybody from Scotland want to take part in this debate?

Taylor Mair (Scotland): I represent Mid Scotland and Fife. A lot of you will know of Stagecoach. Its headquarters are in my home town, Perth, in the heart of Scotland. About six months ago, the company introduced a system where a Dayrider ticket cost £1.90 to travel around the city. That lasted for as little as three weeks, but Sir Brian Souter, whose company earns hundreds of millions of pounds a year, did not want to subsidise it. ScotRail is now being operated by Abellio and Network Rail. If there were reduced train fares and all young people had the opportunity to take advantage of them, they, like my colleague from the South West, would not have to pay £650 a year.

It is absurd that the Government will not provide funding for young people to travel around. It stops young people having the opportunity to expand their viewpoints and maybe get involved with politics. So please support the motion. Support votes at 16, but if people cannot use transport, they cannot get to the polling stations to vote.

Mr Speaker: Who from London wants to take part?

Jonelle Awomoyi (London): I represent the London Borough of Croydon. Two days ago a tram derailed, taking the lives of seven innocent people. The first victim to be identified was a young teenager, just one year older than me. Hearing about that instantly struck a chord. The tram is a method of transport that I take regularly, and that lots of my friends and family regularly use. Trams should be fitted with safety protection systems to apply brakes automatically if they are going too fast. Lives are too precious to be lost in such a way.

Mr Speaker: What about Yorkshire and Humber?

Benjamin Waudby (Yorkshire and Humber): I would like to respond to my friend from Liverpool with the point made by my friend from the South West. I congratulate my friend from Liverpool and the people of Liverpool on the My Ticket campaign. However, that experience is completely different from that of my friend in the South West. Paying £650 to go to college, which is essential for your future, is an absolute disgrace, but can we really do anything nationally? My bus fare for college is £190 a year, which is a significant difference, but this is a devolved issue. As we mentioned with the NHS earlier, every local area is different. Nationally, with transport, it is not viable, feasible or achievable to do anything. Instead, should we not have casual youth debates about a curriculum for life, politics, votes at 16 or anything else? I plead with you not to support this motion, but to support a curriculum for life.

Mr Speaker: Is there a would-be contributor from Northern Ireland?

Ben Sharkey (Northern Ireland): I am from Lagan Valley.

I support this motion 100%. Beyond the financial aspect of helping young people and students, I believe it would help us all through great environmental benefits. More people using better public transport infrastructure would lead to a cut in emissions from private vehicles. That would benefit the entire world, which is why I believe everyone should support the motion.

Furthermore, we cannot just say for every issue, "Can we do this in a year?" We have to go into it optimistically. We owe that to our constituents.

Mr Speaker: Who do we have from the East of England?

Megan Day (East of England): I am the representative of Mid Suffolk.

Today, I talk not just on behalf of young people, but on behalf of our home, our planet and our environment. I do not need to stand here and lecture you all on the dangers of air pollution and global warming—you all know about that already. What I do want to bring to your attention is that 25% of Britain's carbon emissions are caused by transport. Did you know that one full bus can take up to 50 cars off the road and that one full train can take up to 600 cars off the road?

Mid Suffolk, the area that I represent, is very rural and isolated. The public transport there is irregular and expensive. How can we expect to reduce our carbon footprint if there are no alternatives? Something needs to be done, and something can be done—that something can be done by us.

Mr Speaker: Who do we have from the South East of England? You have been trying for a while.

Alaa Fawaz (South East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from Slough.

It is all well and good to get young people off the streets and to provide positive activities, but it is no use if young people cannot afford to get to them. Although Transport for London has concessions for young people, that is not the case nationwide. If we had a national

concession for young people, it would make transport cheaper and accessible for all, and more young people would use it. It would reduce the number of cars on the road and contribute to a greener society. Of course, it would also stop the taxi service of mum and dad.

Recent legislation expects young people to stay in education until they are 18. Why are we charging them adult fares when they are only 16 and making it unaffordable to attend colleges, internships, apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities? I urge you all to vote for this motion, because I get a taxi nearly every day after school and I do not feel safe. I do not feel safe just getting back home from school, which takes only five minutes. That should not be the way forward—thank you all.

Mr Speaker: Who do we have from the East Midlands?

Nishat Tamanna (East Midlands): I am an MYP for Leicestershire.

Why is it that when you become 18, you can drink, smoke or take out a mortgage—you can do whatever you want to do? It is because you are classed as an adult. However, when you are 16, you have so much responsibility. I go to work, I go to college and I am here today speaking as a representative. I do all that, yet I am still treated like a child. I find that very discriminatory and unfair. How can we treat someone like that? We can't.

I have to get not one but two buses to get to the college that I chose to attend. When you go into education, you have to be there until the age of 18. You should have a choice as to where you would like to go in your constituency, or even outside your constituency. You should know that you will pay a lower fare, which you and your family can afford. Why is it so unfair? Why is this so expensive that people might choose not to go into education because they have to provide not just for themselves, but for their family?

Mr Speaker: What about the North East of England?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Gosh, it's a toss-up.

Thomas Crawford (North East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have the pleasure of representing the young people of Sunderland. I have heard brilliant explanations of why we should completely back the motion, and I agree 100% with every single one of them, whether on the issues of age or the environment.

I would like to make a few comments about the practicalities of the motion. People say it is ambitious, but isn't everything that we do ambitious? It was ambitious to secure debates in this Chamber and to sit on these green Benches. We never thought that would pay off but, when it did, the pay-off was even bigger. We have doubts about local campaigns, but the bigger the doubts, the bigger the pay-off. I urge everyone to back the campaign. Do not let the word "ambition" put us off; let it encourage us even further.

Mr Speaker: We have two Front-Bench contributors in this debate from the North West. Is there a Back Bencher who is thirsting to contribute? A woman in a burgundy top is waving at me.

Lucia Harrington (North West): I represent south Cumbria. Making transport accessible for all people is important, especially in regards to transport provision for post-16 learners. As there is no statutory concessionary travel scheme for students in full-time education, many students have to pay a vast amount of money to attend their sixth form or college.

Train fares are particularly expensive, and very little support is put in place for people who cannot afford these services. This particularly affects young people in rural areas, because they usually have to travel further to get to school or college. For example, it will cost me around £1,000 to attend sixth form this year. Luckily, I have a family who can pay for my travel costs, but some students do not. For example, a friend of mine has to work long hours after school just so that she can afford to get to sixth form. That is wrong. If the Government want us to stay in education until we are 18, they should provide the means for us to get to the schools we want, which we have worked very hard to get into.

Mr Speaker: Does anybody else from London wish to contribute?

Hamza Taouzzale (London): I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Westminster—so welcome, everybody. *[Laughter.]*

I feel really sorry for my counterparts in the Chamber who have to pay such a ridiculous amount just to go to college and get an education—to do things that essentially should be free. I am from probably the best zone to live in in London—zone 1—so I only pay about £1.30 to go anywhere in London. I am privileged in that sense, and I am also privileged in that I can walk to school, because I only live about five minutes from my school.

It is ridiculous to say that we should not campaign for lowering transport costs. As we have heard, as soon as that doubt creeps into our minds, everything fails. Doubt is the hell that we go through every day. People doubted that we would be able to make it here. People doubted that we would be successful in our lives, but here we are. I want to urge, "Do not let doubt overtake you." We are stronger than that and we are better than that. We are the young people who will be successful. We will make our country greater than it has ever been. We are the future. When doubt hits you, tell it to go away—tell it, "See you another day, not today," and get rid of it. At the end of the day, we are best people we can possibly be and we want the best for our country.

Mr Speaker: To conclude the final debate of the morning, I ask you warmly to welcome, from the North West of England, Lucy Boardman.

Lucy Boardman (North West): Every single day, hundreds of thousands of young people up and down the country start their mornings using public transport. From the north to the south and everywhere in between, the lights flash, the engines rev, and we begin our journeys to school, college and work.

But are young people getting services of a high standard at an affordable price? If not, what can we as a Youth Parliament do about it? We can make a real impact locally. We can put pressure on transport companies to run services more often, at lower prices, and to engage

with young people to help to shape those services. However, are the Government really going to commit nationally to greater public transport concessions, particularly in the current economic climate? Could we really make a difference in the 12 months that we have?

Since young people are now legally required to remain in some form of full-time education until they are 18, it seems logical that young people's transport concessions should be extended accordingly. But money does not grow on trees, so which other services would need to be cut to fund this? Yes, we have campaigned on this issue before, but there is still so much more to be done.

In 2012, the Youth Select Committee found that the cost of public transport fares was a key issue for young people, and clearly it remains so. When we asked almost 1 million young people which topic was the most important to them, more than 120,000 of them voted for transport. However, there are already pressure groups working solely on this issue. The Campaign for Better Transport is already well established and making progress, so perhaps we should invest both our time and resources into an alternative topic that might be more achievable and that would produce better results.

For those with a disability, public transport is often a difficult and inaccessible mode of travel. For those in rural areas, buses can be infrequent or may not arrive at all. It is clear that something needs to change, but is the same change needed in every area? Transport in Durham is very different from that in Derbyshire, which is again different from that in Devon. Can we tackle this issue on a national scale, or should we be making it a local priority instead?

In the end it is up to you. We could turn our attention elsewhere, ready to accept a new challenge, and tackle a new issue. Alternatively, we could spend another year campaigning for better, more affordable and more accessible

transport, building on the progress that we have already made to help to bring about a positive change in the lives of every young person we represent. So, do you want to get off the train and change platforms, or keep the engine running and finish the journey?

Mr Speaker: Lucy, thank you very much indeed for that excellent winding-up speech.

Just before we conclude this morning's proceedings, I would like to acknowledge the very welcome presence of the Clerk of the House—the most senior Officer of the House—David Natzler. I referred earlier to Dr John Benger, who is Clerk Assistant. David Natzler is our Clerk. He is not very old, but he has been in the service of the House for over 40 years. He sits at the Table in front of me every sitting day when I am in this Chair, so our co-operation is of the highest importance. David, thank you for your interest and support. *[Applause.]*

Members of the Youth Parliament, that concludes the morning session of our sitting. The Youth Parliament will now adjourn until 1.30 pm. I invite you all please to return to Westminster Hall for lunch.

12.48 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.29 pm

Sitting resumed.

Mr Speaker: I hope you enjoyed lunch, even if it wasn't long enough. It is great to have you back.

The Youth Parliament will now consider the fourth motion of the day, which is on tackling racism and religious discrimination, particularly against people who are Muslim or Jewish. To move the motion, I call Lizy Porter, from Army Welfare Services, Germany.

Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination

Elizabeth Porter (BAF (Germany)): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I wish to speak in favour of the motion:

We believe that more efforts must be made to ensure that we work together to combat racism and other forms of racially motivated hatred amongst young people; and ensure young people know the dangers of such hatred.

Human rights are the backbone of equality. Many people are denied their human rights on a daily basis, but why? Why do we, as humans, feel that it is acceptable to torture another man or woman because of the colour of their skin or their religious beliefs? In today's society it is unbelievable that racism and religious discrimination exist, especially with the diversity of cultures in the UK. We are told, by the significant people in our lives, who we should or should not associate with. But we are in 2016—why is this still an issue?

As Members of the Youth Parliament, we should be trying to combat this hatred. As young people, we have a voice that can be heard, and will be heard. Existing laws are in place, and there are organisations that work to battle against religious and racial discrimination, yet the past year has seen a 49% increase in reported hate crimes. If you are unsure, that means that 53,819 hate crimes were reported in just 365 days.

This is the second year we have debated this topic. For the second time, thousands of young people have told us that this issue needs to be addressed, so why has that not yet happened? This is our opportunity, as young people, to keep up this national campaign and finish the journey we have started. We need to construct a path without religious and racial discrimination along which to guide future generations. Not everyone is perfect—I am not denying that—but I know we have the power to make the impossible possible. Imagine it was one of your relatives, or maybe a friend. How would you feel? How would you make a change?

Nelson Mandela once said:

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

I ask you to join me in voting for the motion to give the nation the best chance at making a change. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Lizzy, for kicking off the debate with spirit and passion. Now, Members of the Youth Parliament, I hope you will give an equally warm welcome to Joscel Manirambona from the West Midlands, who will oppose the motion.

Joscel Manirambona (West Midlands): The Race Relations Act 1976 marked a point in British history at which a beacon of hope was sparked for all ethnic minorities living in the UK. It initiated an attack on the perpetual plague that is racism and religious discrimination. So why is it that in 2016, exactly 40 years later, I can stand before you today saying otherwise? Numerous laws have been put in place, but can you tell me that you can walk out into your local neighbourhood and honestly say that racism and religious discrimination have truly been addressed?

In 2013-14, we saw approximately 37,000 racially motivated crimes reported to the police, and 2015 showed a 15% increase, with roughly 43,000 reported crimes. This, ladies and gentlemen, is evidently a growing epidemic, which has grown almost beyond our control, as Members of the Youth Parliament.

Look around you, look at where you are, look at the person sitting next to you: we are the United Kingdom Youth Parliament—a diverse body of young individuals, all with the common aim of making change. You do not believe me? In this room alone, 33% of us are black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group, while 32% of us are Christians, and 10% of us are Muslims. The statistics speak for themselves.

We are currently sitting within the four walls of British democracy. Can you not see that the change is in our hands? If we were given more than a year to orchestrate an effective campaign—the key word being “effective”—then maybe, just maybe, we could tackle the burden that is racism and religious discrimination. However, time would simply not be in our favour in tackling such a large-scale issue. That is exactly why the UK Youth Parliament is already working in alliance with the likes of Kick It Out and the Anti Bullying Alliance—people who devote their time to tackling racial and religious discrimination. We are already dealing with this issue.

Racism and religious discrimination are concepts that have rippled throughout the ages and made a mark in history, so it would seem unlikely that we could accomplish our aims in a mere six months. But these things can be changed over time, and that begins with us. We are the chosen ones, called forth to bring change. We were elected to bring change. We are sitting right here, right now, to bring change. But let us make that change on another topic of equal importance—change that we can bring about with the resources at our disposal. Simultaneously, let us, behind closed doors, develop our arsenal to tackle the burden of history that is racism and religious discrimination. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Joscel, thank you very much.

Lily Thompson (East of England): I represent Central Bedfordshire, in the East of England. I feel so passionate about this topic, because, although every one of us is different on the outside, we are not very different on the inside. If we looked inside of us, we would see that we are not that different—we all have a heart, we all have a brain. We need to understand that every one of us is human—although we may be different on the outside, we are still human on the inside. Bullies do not understand that, so if we can help them to understand, we might be able to prevent these things from happening in the future, and we might be able to prevent the high numbers of suicides that occur because of bullying and the self-harming. If we just let people know what is really happening, I feel that we can make a difference. A little goes a long way.

Jacob Reid (North West): I represent Carlisle and Eden, in Cumbria. It is completely undeniable that, since Brexit, and in recent times, hate crime and discrimination have risen. I do not know how we let that happen, because that is not who we are as a country,

and it is not who we are as decent human beings. It is perhaps because of that that this issue gained so much support on the Make Your Mark ballot. The result of that ballot shows that 123,499 young people are telling us that they know that any form of discrimination—any form—is completely wrong. And more than that: they are using their democratic voice in society to tell us that. That, I think, is something to be proud of. Undoubtedly, a small minority of young people do discriminate, but I believe that it is only a small minority. For those people, we need to lead by example, like we have all been doing throughout our lives. Although this is a highly important issue, the way to get rid of racial discrimination or racism completely is not through a national campaign, which is why I cannot support this motion.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed, Jacob.

Muzdalfa Ahmed (Yorkshire and Humber): Here is my question to all of you: what does my race have to do with my ability to succeed in my life? Why are people more worried about the piece of fabric on my head than my ability to succeed in my life? Why are people more worried about the piece of fabric on my head than what is inside it? How disgusting is that sort of view? We are living in the 21st century, yet young people like me still have to feel that nasty stuff—we still have to feel Islamophobia or anti-Semitism. I am speaking not for myself, but for some 1,800 young people who elected me as their MYP. I am speaking for a wee girl who cannot leave home alone because of the stigma attached to her name. I am speaking for an 11-year-old boy called Asad who saw no choice but to hang himself because he had to face bullying every other day. MYPs, it is easy to say that we are living in a multicultural society and everyone has so-called “equal opportunities”, but it is not enough just to make legislation and then lean back. Race and religion remain the elephants in the room and need to be tackled. MYPs, we are on the right track. This year, we made good progress on this campaign, but it is not over and a lot still needs to be done. We must continue to foster the idea of inclusiveness, and that begins with education and understanding so that people do not fear differences but embrace them. We need to teach our country to love and have empathy. We need to challenge people on social media and on mainstream media about their perception of Islam. We need to inform institutions about how to celebrate diversity instead of trying to ignore it. This comes only when you and I engage with people on a social and community level. It will come only when you and I become a voice for the young people who are putting their faith in you by passing this motion today. It is time to take the ladder and turn it into a bridge.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for that outstanding contribution.

Stephanie Ezeadum (Wales): I would like to discuss a point that no one has mentioned yet: racial discrimination within schools. I was faced with that in my last two years of high school. A teacher who had begged me to join his class actually felt the need to put me down about my race, about the country that I came from, about my continent and about my parents. He made me feel as though I was less than anyone else in that class

—that I was no better than them because my skin colour was darker than theirs. That man is still teaching at that school. When I reported him, because I just could not take it any longer, I was told that I was the problem. I have this attitude, you see; it is an attitude that comes out when I am faced with so much aggression that I just lash out. That happened only once, but I was told that I was the problem. I was told that I was the reason why comments were made about my race, my continent, my family, my ancestors and my friends. Apparently, I was the problem: a student sitting in his class wanting nothing else but to learn was the problem. My mother came in to school and they told her that I was the problem. My teachers asked about it and they said that I was the problem. My friends asked about it, but they were told that I was the problem. People did everything in their power to protect this man but did nothing to help me, and I was the student who was suffering from this abuse in the first place. I was the student who did not want to go to his class any more. I said no. I would not step into a class with a man who could not respect me, my race and everything I was. This is what I am, and if he does not want it, he does not have to take it. That will not, however, influence my education.

This is what I want to say. Teachers are second only to our parents. In their classes, we are like blank pages; they have the power to fill us in with positive comments and positive influences. They have so much power over us, but they just do not understand. From a young age, they are watching over us and taking care of us when our parents are not there. They speak to us and tell us so many things. They teach us and help us to grow, yet one negative comment can completely tear a person down and destroy a child’s future. It almost destroyed mine, but there was no way in hell I was going to let that happen, because I knew what I was worth. Not everyone is that lucky.

That is why we should pass this motion. The groundwork in respect of race and religious discrimination has already been laid in a campaign chosen last year by thousands of young people across Britain, and it was chosen for a reason. Brexit has shown us that this campaign is needed now more than ever. We need to stand together in solidarity. We need to show the UK that young people from black and minority ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds are not afraid to stand up and say, “This is who we are”, and we will not be shamed for it. We need to stand up together and show that those suffering should not suffer in silence; they should tell us their pain. I know that many here will probably have experienced the things I have experienced.

My brother has the same teacher now, and I am afraid that he might experience the same things I did. There are so many other little children joining his class, new in year 7; they do not know the world, and that is what they will be faced with, and the school will not do anything about it. They are too concerned about covering themselves. I feel like right now education is our main priority—teachers, more than students, need to be educated, because, whereas with children it is sometimes ignorance, teachers know what they are saying and how it can damage us. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: That was a formidable speech. The reaction of your colleagues bears testimony to their appreciation of what you have said, of the eloquence

[Mr Speaker]

with which you said it and of your courage in rising to your feet to do so. That, if I may say so, is what this place is about. Indeed, it should be the defining characteristic of any Parliament, be it the House of Commons or the UK Youth Parliament: a readiness to stand up for what you believe. If you can invest your speeches with the passion and authenticity of personal experience, as you and others have done, so much the better.

Forgive me colleagues, but earlier I called somebody from the East of England, and was absolutely delighted to do so, but I have since been advised that there is a young woman from the East Midlands who is seeking to contribute but who is not in a position to stand. If that be so—it was the intelligence I was given—and if that person wishes to speak from a sedentary position, as we describe it in Parliament, that is fine. Please go ahead.

Chandler Wilson (East Midlands): I am Chandler Wilson—they/them pronouns—and I represent the Pioneers in Nottinghamshire.

I see people not according to their racial or religious identity but as people. There is so much hate in the world at the moment, and it is increasing because of recent events. There was a case in a Walmart in America where a Muslim woman had her hijab pulled off and was pretty much told to go kill herself just because of her religion. Things like that could easily be happening in the UK, but people may not feel that they can come forward or they may be afraid of potential police corruption that means they will be treated as the person doing wrong rather than as a victim. No matter what our skin colour and no matter what religion we believe in, we all stand together in unity in showing that it is not acceptable to treat others that way.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. On this great issue, what about London?

Iman Samad (London): My name is Iman Samad, and I am from the London Borough of Sutton.

It is 2016, yet still 123,944 young people voted to tackle racial and religious discrimination. Does that not say enough? Racism still exists. In the past year, religious hate crimes have gone up by 34%. It is 2016, and I am standing here urging you to vote for a campaign that should have been achieved years ago.

We have done so much in the past year, but we have so much more to achieve. Yes, maybe we won't eradicate all forms of racial and religious discrimination, but we can at least try. No one should feel scared to walk down the street because of the colour of their skin or because they wear a hijab. If we change even one mind-set and if we stop even one hate crime, that would be enough for me, because I would know that we have made a change.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Now let us hear a voice from Scotland on this important matter.

Alex Robertson (Scotland): I am Alex Robertson, and I represent Glasgow and the West of Scotland.

Diversity and growth are what the country needs. No longer should people of these backgrounds lose faith in their community. We need to recognise the vital contributions that these people make to our society. We

need to strive to eradicate racism, and we need to get behind this campaign. Most importantly, we need to say loud and clear that this is unacceptable. With this campaign we can encourage the diversity and growth that we want to see.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a would-be contributor on this matter from Northern Ireland?

Clíodhna McCaffrey (Northern Ireland): I am Clíodhna McCaffrey, and I represent West Belfast.

In Northern Ireland we know a lot about religious discrimination. Our society is one of the most divided in the world due to religious tensions between two communities. So many people suffer from racism and religious discrimination on a daily basis, and we need to make a point that this is not acceptable.

In the current political climate, where politicians can get elected on promises of keeping immigrants out and speak in support of blatant racism, we should stand together to show people who are persecuted that we do not support this. Even though this is last year's campaign, following the racism and turmoil caused by the US election and the EU referendum, which have brought up all sorts of underlying hatred and discrimination, this is a very relevant issue that is fitting to be our UK-wide campaign.

I also urge you all to pick votes at 16 as your other campaign. With Northern Ireland being a very religious place, many young people wish to distance themselves from the bigoted and backwards policies that many parties in our country have. Most young people are a lot more open-minded than the older generation. Maybe if we had votes at 16 women would have rights to their own reproductive organs, and would have the right to safe and legal abortions, and LGBT people would not be discriminated against in marriage legislation based on their sexuality.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, again, for an important voice of personal experience. I will call someone from the South West in a moment, so you can gear yourselves up if you are from the South West.

Right at the back of the Chamber is the Director General of the House of Commons, Ian Ailles. [Applause.] Ian is our first Director General, and he and I have been working together for almost 13 months. He did ask me, at a very early stage, what priorities I had on which he, with me, could focus. I said that I wanted to focus, in no particular order, on better service delivery by the House to Members and staff, and to visitors from across the country and around the world. Secondly, I said that I want you, Ian—this is crucially important—to help me to make this place more diverse and inclusive, not least in terms of the staff make-up of the House, and the opportunities for the nurture and promotion of talented people from all backgrounds, parts of the country, ethnicities and so on. Ian and I are working together on that, and I think it is fair to say already—I will not go into it now—that some considerable progress has been made. Thank you, Ian, and thank you for showing your support.

Jacob Bishop-Ponte (South West): After the two accounts we have just heard from the two incredible individuals who just spoke in the debate, I am sure that every MYP recognises the importance of this campaign. Now more

than ever following Brexit and the recent appointment of the new President-elect Donald Trump—many consider his campaign to have been inflammatory, and he won on almost-racist rhetoric—this campaign and message needs to be getting out there. We have also heard many disgusting reports from across the world of religious items being ripped off individuals in the streets, which is unacceptable, as I am sure we all agree.

We have heard many times today that a year is not long enough to campaign on an issue, and especially on an issue as big as this one. However, this campaign has run from last year, and if it continues in this coming year, I am sure those who are working on it can continue to make headway and to make a statement. It is about making a statement against xenophobia and racism, and about making a statement that everyone is welcome in our country.

Connor Dyer (South East): Our growing world faces a real problem. The world focuses on how we are divided rather than on how we can stand together. Recent elections and referendums only mirror the fact that global society is breaking away rather than pulling together, but the Youth Parliament stands defiant. We are living proof of diversity, co-operation, friendship and compassion.

Race and religion are not barriers. It is ideal that we can be unique and have a passion to achieve our goals together. We as young people must stand together to break the division in our society and around the globe. Young people have spoken. The Youth Parliament is the embodiment of our responsibility and our shared dream of facing discrimination, standing against division and sending an unneeded part of society to the history books.

Jessica Hugill (North East): This campaign is wonderful. I was lucky enough to sit in the debate last year. On the train home, we were discussing how many great things we could do to help to tackle racism and discrimination. I am so pleased to say that, in my local area, the campaign was a massive success, but that it is not to say that we should stop there. There is so much more that we can do. This is an opportunity for us to begin our culture of equality and respect in our communities.

The campaign reflects the very best of the Youth Parliament, because it is about something that we can actually achieve. As young people, we are able to move forward and bring light into a world that really needs it. We need to show that we are the generation that will be respectful of each other. The best part is that we can celebrate exactly what the Youth Parliament is. We can go out and show that diversity is brilliant, as we always do in events such as this.

We have so much power on this issue. We do not have to ask the Government to change legislation—to tell them, “We want this new law.” All we have to do is promote what is brilliant about us as young people, and ensure that we teach the generations of the future exactly what it is like to show respect.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for a heartfelt and lucid contribution to the debate. Before I call somebody from the West Midlands—we have had a Front-Bench speaker from the West Midlands, but not a Back-Bench speaker—I would like to refer to the fact that until a

moment ago, we had in the Serjeant at Arms’s chair Victor Akinbile, who is a very senior member of the House service. His background is in civil engineering, but he serves as an Associate Serjeant. He is one of the most senior staff in the House. Victor, thank you for your support. [*Applause.*]

I also welcome with great enthusiasm the recently appointed Serjeant at Arms, Mohammed El-Hajji. He has already been taken to all our hearts, and is highly popular with Members. He has a very strong background, from the Ministry of Justice and elsewhere, in customer service—in looking after the people who come here. He also happens to be the first black and minority ethnic Serjeant in the history of the House of Commons. [*Applause.*] Kamal, thank you—he is ordinarily known as Kamal—very much indeed for everything that you do, and for the support that you offer me and the House.

May we have a contributor from the West Midlands?

Darram Kooner (West Midlands): I represent Wolverhampton. In Make Your Mark this year, 124,000 young people voted for this issue. What does that statistic tell us? It tells us that young people in Wolverhampton and across the UK believe that it is not right or fair that people are discriminated against because of who they are or what they believe. As David Cameron said last year:

“Whether you are Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Christian or Sikh, whether you were born here or born abroad, we can all feel part of this country”.

That is why I urge you all to vote for this to be our campaign of 2017. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, colleagues. This has been a great debate. We have sought, again, to accommodate every part of the UK, and I think that we have done so. I look for a conclusion to the debate from, and your enthusiastic welcome for, Ryan Harnell, from the South West.

Ryan Harnell (South West): We are all politically incorrect from time to time. We say stupid things, and we make mistakes, but most of the time, we grow out of it. “Hate crime” are two small words that hold an awful lot of weight. I care about this issue, because I know that as a United Kingdom, we are caring, compassionate and tolerant. Just from what I can see in this Chamber, I know that we would do everything in our power to end discrimination for good, but, my friends, the question is: do we have the power?

It is proposed that over the next year, we combat this issue by lobbying our MPs to do more and by ensuring that our heads of schools promote integration in their places of learning. However, in 2012 the Government outlined a strategy of their own. They are committed to handing over responsibilities to our local authorities. Through enhanced education, Britain’s young people are already engaged in tackling the issue, so I ask you, is this campaign worth it when work is already being done at a higher level? Ask yourselves: in the given time, is it possible to make a change or is the fear just too great to overcome?

The United Kingdom that I am proud to be a part of makes the impossible the possible. We do not fear the unknown; we embrace it. Together, we were among the

first nations in the world to abolish slavery. Together, our Governments have introduced laws that deny prejudice a foothold in our world. Together we have come so far in this battle but we must not forget how long it took to change the hearts and minds of our nation, because, friends, that is what we are dealing with—hearts and minds. Lest we forget on this day, of all days, the price of that freedom, justice and equality.

Our strength comes from diversity. Together we comprise 1,000 cultures, languages and traditions that, with each generation, have been sown into the very fabric of our people. That is what makes us the United Kingdom. There is no place for racism in today's world and many at the Youth Parliament have argued that we must do everything we possibly can to continue the campaign that we have begun to stamp out racism however far off or distant that may seem to be.

Friends, whether through campaigning or just a change in our everyday actions, it is fundamental that we focus on those things that unite us, not divide us, and that we work together to tackle this oh so very important issue. "Why?", you might ask. Well, in the vein of my personal hero, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, I say: it's 2016.

Mr Speaker: Ryan, thank you very much indeed. Again, that was a magnificent, thoroughly assured and passionate conclusion to a very high quality debate of which the UK Youth Parliament can and should be very proud. Colleagues, we now come to the consideration of our fifth and final motion of the day.

Curriculum for Life

Lili Donlon-Mansbridge (South West): I wish to speak in favour of the motion:

PSHE should have statutory status in the national curriculum and be delivered by specially trained teachers. These lessons should develop young people's political knowledge, better sex and relationships education, cultural awareness, community cohesion, finance skills and sustainable living.

When we discovered the marvellous ability of a seatbelt, we made it law that they be worn in cars. When research showed that one in two smokers dies from a related disease, we banned smoking in public places. Computer coding, which is increasingly important in later life, is now taught from the age of five. But, for some odd reason, teaching students about how to vote or open a bank account, or about basic life skills, is still not law. How can that be when Ofsted has said that 40% of personal, social, health and economic education teaching is not good enough, and when nearly 500 times the amount of young people in this Chamber tell us that they want and need to learn life skills?

MYPs, we have a captive audience. In January, a private Member's Bill about making PSHE compulsory will be read in the Commons. Let us lobby our MPs to support it. Let us not waste this opportunity.

With this campaign, we can achieve more than any other. Political education makes our case for votes at 16 stronger. Learning about different cultures in itself tackles racism and religious prejudice. In a world where pornography is just a click away, every young person deserves to have their right to be educated about sex and relationships protected in law.

How can we demand that our local schools include a curriculum for life when the subject is not recognised by the Government? How can we expect our teachers to be well trained when a curriculum for life is an optional extra in a system increasingly focused on academic study? How can we argue that young people do not value PSHE when too often our life lessons are on an irrelevant topic or simply non-existent? Yes, working on local campaigns in our local areas can be invaluable, but it is no guarantee.

We work with other enthused young people, hear suggestions and ideas, and then we watch as, for all their creativity, our solutions are not listened to. MYPs, our voices must be heard. The stakes are high. Compulsory life education is within our reach. Let us not fall at the final hurdle and lose sight of what young people have asked for repeatedly. Let us fight for what we all know is deserved, necessary and fair. The purpose of the Youth Parliament is to hear the voices of young people. MYPs, let us listen to them.

In the end, what we aim to achieve is simple. We know the marvellous ability of life education; we have all seen the research. Let us make it law that young people are prepared for life.

Mr Speaker: Lili, thank you for a great start to our final debate. Members of the Youth Parliament, to oppose the motion please welcome, from the South East of England, Lucy Page.

Lucy Page (South East): I know we have all escaped from lessons today, but I would like to take you back into the classroom. Most of us have had to listen to the awkward teaching of supposed life skills, which the

majority of pupils consider to be of little value in its current form. Some would say that I am lucky to have been taught PSHE, but learning to check the sell-by dates on contraception should only be the start of the story. What about consent, financial or political education? Surely those should not be ignored.

The problem is not the curriculum, but the quality of its delivery. According to Ofsted, 38% of teachers lack the required expertise to provide this information, with 20% being completely untrained. Place yourself in their shoes: the mounting pressures on core subjects, as well as the sheer size and sensitive nature of this topic, can explain why these vital areas are avoided.

The diversity represented in this Chamber today is extraordinary. I can see young people from all different backgrounds here to achieve one thing: change. I am not speaking about diversity in race, nor in gender or even religion, but in education. The chances are that the person next to you today does not learn in the same type of school or college. That not only determines our curriculum, but the very fundamentals of what we are taught.

Ask yourself, at a time when our educational system is more fractured than ever before, is it conceivable, let alone appropriate, to demand one universal curriculum for life? We should not underestimate the responsibility of parents or, more importantly, our ability to think for ourselves. We have campaigned on this issue once before—we have a report to prove it. However, that does not change the fact that it is simply not feasible to train every teacher. It is not achievable in one year alone to create a unified curriculum for life.

MYPs, each of you has the skills to successfully challenge your schools to incorporate higher-quality PSHE lessons. The devolution of this campaign does not go far enough. We need to approach individual schools to increase the achievability of this broad and complex issue and to ensure that individual priorities are not watered down by geographical differences.

Of course, it is our duty to take into account the priority issue, but all these issues are important. UK Youth Parliament, let us use our influence not to promote an issue where the system is not working against us but to bring about the very thing for which we are here today: change.

Mr Speaker: Lucy, thank you very much indeed. Do we have a would-be contributor from Scotland?

Osama Aslam (Scotland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I represent Mid Scotland and Fife. MYPs, why is a curriculum for life important? Why is it necessary? Earlier this year, 152,701 young people obtained Scottish Higher passes. More than a quarter of young people obtained an A or A* in their A-levels. Last year, the number of young people going into further education was at a record high: 532,300.

As a nation, our education system is moving forward—or is it? The sad and bitter truth is that when it comes to basic life skills, our generation is lacking. As a great man, Albert Einstein, once said:

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.”

We study, we learn, and still we know very little. Yes, of course school provides us with the opportunity to learn numerous skills and strengths, which can help us to

develop and advance throughout our youth. However, the current education system is flawed as the skills that will prepare us for our future life are consistently overlooked.

When people leave education in this day and age, the majority do not know much about sexual education, politics, first aid, self-defence or different ethnic or religious cultures. We do not know how to cook, how to pay taxes, how to survive without certain technology, how to maintain a good credit history or how to apply for loans and mortgages. That is not only wrong; it is unjust. MYPs, by supporting a curriculum for life for all young people throughout the UK, we can and will be able to help them get ready for the rest of their lives.

Mr Speaker: Now, my friends, how about us having a speaker from Wales?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Good heavens! Someone who leapt up who is holding a book in her hand—you all leapt up, but you leapt up the highest or the quickest.

Ruth Chohan (Wales): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am not sure where you all go to school, but in my school I was taught how to set up a bank account and about sex and relationships. I had the opportunity to travel and to learn about different cultures, and I had the opportunity to learn how to vote. The reason for that is I did not go to school. I was home-schooled. It is disappointing to watch as my peers do not get the same opportunities and are not regarded with the same care.

Mr Speaker: Well, that was wonderfully succinct. If I could sometimes persuade my colleagues to express themselves with comparable brevity, we would make much speedier progress in the House, but it is not always easy, I can assure you. Let us see if we can have a contributor from Yorkshire and Humber.

Thomas Sayner (Yorkshire and Humber): Curriculum for life is the Swiss army knife—the multi-tool of campaigns. It can set the foundations for future campaigns. Teaching on political awareness can go on to increase support for a votes at 16 campaign. Also, different cultures can increase the support and effectiveness of other campaigns. By supporting a curriculum for life campaign, we can increase the progress the Youth Parliament makes in future campaigns.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. How about the North West of England? Gosh! There is much waving.

Dana-Lee Moon (North West): I am going to be real with everyone because we are real people, there are real lives and situations, and real decisions need to be made. One of those is about whether we need a curriculum for life. I say yes. I can openly say that I am very uneducated; I have spent numerous years in primary school, five years in high school and am now in my second year of college, but I still do not know many, many things about general life.

How are we supposed to grow up and do all these big, grown-up things and make all these decisions when we are not taught about them? We have to learn by ourselves. That is not really fair. I do not understand how people expect us to be these big things but are not going to help us get there.

We need set topics and they need to be factual. Things like tackling racism: if people are giving their opinions on it and not teaching it correctly, that is not going to get rid of it. From what I have found out, we need set topics such as pregnancy and contraception because people need to know about such things properly. That is linked to LGBT-plus; that is clearly not spoken about because there is still discrimination and hurtful things are happening to these people. That is unacceptable in my opinion, and I am pretty sure that most—maybe all—you will agree on that one.

Nobody really likes to talk about the issue of mental health, but we are getting there. People do not realise that they might have a mental health problem. If we are educated properly with this curriculum for life, people can get the help that they need, move forward and be happier with themselves; and we may have fewer suicides and less hurt going around. That is just a thought that I am going to put out there.

Finance is a big one. I started driving recently, and I have no idea about insurance. I pay monthly—what is all that about? I pay national insurance. I was like, “Why is money being taken out of my pay that I worked so hard for?” That was never explained. Things like that are a big thing.

First aid—this does my head in—[*Laughter.*] It does. It is one of the most annoying things in the world, but it is so vital because we can save lives. Imagine if something happened to someone in here and no one was educated in what to do. That person could lose their life—a voice lost. What are we doing? We need these things—to learn and talk properly—in our education system.

What are we doing here? Before I got into the role of MYP, I had no idea about politics. I still do not really know a lot, but I am learning. I have not done that through school; school has taught me nothing about politics. How can I, uneducated, represent 19,000 young people in the Wigan borough? That is not really fair on me or them. So I am learning with you guys, and I want to thank you for helping me to learn.

Another thing I want to quickly point out is employability. How many people’s teachers have said to them that they need to do a CV because they need a job? If you tell me I need to do something to get something and I do not know why or how or what I am doing, I am not really going to want to do it. If you are not going to explain it to me, I am not going to know what I am doing so I am going to lose interest. That, again, is why we need this curriculum for life. If I do not know about something, I am not going to want to do it or want to know. That is the truth for me.

Another thing is that it is a bit unfair. People in London might learn something different from people in Wigan or Scotland. That is creating an unfair advantage for other people. Some people are learning something and becoming more skilled in one thing and other people are missing out on those opportunities. This is why we need set topics and a set curriculum so that everyone has the same chances. That is what we need.

We are all quite big on everything being equal and seeing everyone is equal. I am going to love you and leave you with one question: does anybody else think that we are being denied equality in the education system, because I downright do?

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Now, how about a contributor from the East of England?

Harry Dignum (East of England): As a young person, I am rather worried. Many people are leaving school not knowing about some of the core things in life, such as paying taxes, understanding different people’s cultures and beliefs, being able to do a successful job interview, and much more. To be honest, I do not know about many of those things. Unemployment is a growing problem in the UK, and not being taught life skills and lessons must be a core reason. So please make sure that this is the subject we tackle as the Youth Parliament.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for that excellent and very succinct speech. We have not yet heard from London. We must hear from London. What about this gentleman in the striped tie, who is in a state of unadulterated excitement, and from whom we will now hear?

Dilan Dattani (London): Thank you so much, Mr Speaker. My name is Dilan Dattani and I represent the constituency of Brent, in the best region in the UK Youth Parliament: London. Learning about sex and relationships is equivalent to a GCSE. With the education system being reformed each year, it is imperative that we support this motion today.

Young people across my area are worried. They are worried that they are leaving school without the relevant skills to equip them for the outside world. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get a job and to get a CV written, and interview skills are overlooked as children are becoming statistics. Every single one of you is just a number on a league table. We are not looked at as individuals. We have thoughts and opinions, and we must not be deprived of what we have to say.

When I look upon the education system, I see different people with different abilities being put down. They are being put down on their strengths, being told, “You’re not good enough.” That is not what I want to see. We are the next generation, and we need to stand up and be counted.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Now, who have we got from the North East of England?

Jessica Halliday (North East of England): My name is Jess Halliday and I am from Darlington. Having been in Catholic education since the age of four, it is prominent that the sex education I received was rather lacking. To be honest, I did not even know condoms had sell-buy dates until I watched “Bridget Jones’s Baby”. Frankly, this is a safety issue. That is why a national curriculum for life is vital in making sure that everyone has the understanding they need, whether in sex education, finance or politics. So many issues that we, as a Youth Parliament, have come across, such as first aid training and body image, have highlighted the need for a national curriculum for life. By choosing this as our main issue, we will be allowing ourselves to make a difference.

Mr Speaker: Who have we got from Northern Ireland?

James Savage (Northern Ireland): I represent Strangford. I have to correct my good friend from London who has just spoken, because I represent the best region in the Youth Parliament.

Education is the silver bullet. It is a means by which we can accomplish so many goals within the Youth Parliament. On tackling votes at 16, how could we ask to get the vote at 16 without first properly ensuring that people are educated enough to vote and understand what policies they are looking at? When it comes to tackling religious and racial discrimination and promoting cultural awareness and community cohesion, this is a particularly important topic, especially in Northern Ireland. We have a divided community. We are in a post-conflict society. We would be the first generation of young people to reach the voting age since the Good Friday agreement. We now have the opportunity to work together across the community divide, and across religious and racial divides, to come together to improve the education system.

There are people all over this country who have a lot of hatred and bitterness. There are people who do horrible things, such as attacking war memorials and religious structures, but those people were not born wanting to do those things. Nobody is born with hatred. They are not educated enough, and they do not have the cultural awareness and understanding of different religions or communities, to be able to work together and get along with them. We can work together to put forward a curriculum for life that will educate young people and leave them in a better position to work together with their peers and get along with one another.

Mr Speaker: I am seeking a contributor from the East Midlands; who are we going to have? *[Interruption.]* Wow. The woman waving a scarf—I am not sure what it denotes precisely, but we will hear from you.

Abi Lovering (East Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from Rutland.

It is hard to believe that a curriculum to prepare us for life is still not compulsory. Look at how much support it has received—from two royal societies, five Select Committee Chairs, five teaching unions, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Public Health England, the Children's Commissioner, the chief medical officer, the national police lead for preventing child sexual exploitation, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the NSPCC, Barnardo's, Stonewall and the End Violence Against Women Coalition. Even the media are in favour of a curriculum for life, which sends a very powerful message, and that is not to mention the number of Cabinet Ministers, especially female ones, who were furious when David Cameron completely refused such a motion. One of those Cabinet Ministers is now our Prime Minister. However, he has a massive list of priorities that are currently ahead of this issue, so we as the UK Youth Parliament need to show how urgent this issue is not just to Theresa May, but to everyone.

Mr Speaker: In the name of gender balance, I am looking to call a young man from the South East—*[Interruption.]* Good heavens; that was a sort of squawking effect. Let us hear from you.

Sibil Sabu (South East): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Chichester and West Arun.

I ask fellow MYPs to vote for the curriculum for life motion because it will let the Government and the people of Britain know that we young people value our education. I tell you this because there is a divide in Britain. West Sussex currently gets 10% less than the national average in funding per student, so it gets £200 million less than pupils in London. How is that fair?

If you vote for this motion, we, as Members of the Youth Parliament, who are supposed to channel the voices of the people who do not have the power to speak out, will be able to do so against this great injustice in West Sussex. Those people will have their voices heard and we will be able to tell the Government and the people of Britain that education should be fair and that everyone should be funded equally. Just because you live in a certain area, that does not mean that your education means more than someone's in another area.

After we campaigned last year, the Government pledged £930,000 from April 2016 to March 2017. You might think that was a good thing, but it comes out at less than £10 per child. That puts the value of a child's education in West Sussex as less than two return tickets from Chichester to Barnham, which means we are worth less than two railway tickets—that is unfair. I say again: we need to vote for a curriculum for life because education will trump hate.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Who do we have from the South West?

Alysha Bodman (South West): I represent Gloucestershire.

I am sure most of us agree that the sex and relationships education that we received was inadequate. I believe in the importance of having a curriculum for life to focus on respect and consent, which are the basis of relationships. I would also like a more inclusive curriculum for life, as I believe that the PSHE that we are receiving at the moment is very heteronormative. Moreover, how can the stigma around feminism and gender equality be tackled without education on those issues? A curriculum for life would include them. Furthermore, the number of young people who do not understand how taxes and personal finance work simply because they were not informed about them is shocking. The list goes on. As those reasons all demonstrate, if we fail to act on this issue, young people will be entering adulthood unprepared. This campaign is achievable for the Youth Parliament, so I urge you all to vote for it.

Rosie Narrowmore (West Midlands): I represent Dudley.

I truly think that we should listen not only to the people in this room today, but to the people at home. The reason why this issue is being debated is that the people who are not here today voted for it. They want lessons that develop their political knowledge, financial skills and much more. If people from across the UK believe that we can help to offer them a broader curriculum, we need to listen. In the west midlands, 8,828 people voted for a curriculum for life. This was also the top issue in my local area. All I can say is that I urge you—I plead with you—to make this issue our campaign for 2017.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: This almost goes without saying, but let me just underline the point: I am sorry that, every year, there is untapped demand, if I can put it that way—there are people who wish to contribute, but the time is not available for me to call them to do so. The Chair tries to be fair—this happens as well in the Chamber of the House of Commons every day, for that matter—so I am sorry if you were not called to speak, but thank you for coming, thank you for showing your support, and thank you for all you do in the course of the year as a Member of the Youth Parliament. This debate—there is a succession of speeches in the next debate to follow, as you will know—is, however, to be concluded by a speaker from London, to whom I hope you will give an enthusiastic welcome, namely Victor Sarpong.

Victor Sarpong (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker; thank you, London.

An educated man once said, “A child educated only in school is an uneducated child.” Why is this? It is simply because our schools do not teach us the life skills we all need and use every day in life. That is unfortunate, but it is fortunate that we, as a Youth Parliament, have recognised this issue. It is in our manifesto, and it was on the Make Your Mark ballot—it was the top issue this year, with nearly 1 million people voting.

We have just debated the idea of having a curriculum for life as our national campaign—in short, learning about things that actually matter, not just for an exam. We know that finance and taxes matter, that knowing how to actually get a job matters, that knowing sexual education matters, that knowing culture in this country matters, and that knowing what happens in here—at this very Dispatch Box—matters.

The idea is to deal with this and to challenge the fact that these things are not being taught in the schools that everyone goes to but, as in all things, we have to ask questions to see whether this would be a successful campaign for us. We want to be taught these things in school about life, but I have found that life is such a good educator—such a good teacher. It is our experiences that nurture us and shape us as the people we are today, but should it be up to us to learn these things or should

it be up to the state, which expects us to know these things, to teach us them? We have to ask: who is teaching these life skills? If this is going to work, we need teachers to be educated in how to educate us with these life skills, but would extra training be a burden for the teacher? Would this be a burden for us, given that we already have so much to deal with due to exams and other things?

We also have to consider the time available. I have noticed a theme today: a lot of people do not think that we can do things in a year. I believe that whether we achieve a goal or make the smallest impact, we still achieve something—no matter what area we pick, that will apply. I believe that things can be done in a year. People revise for their A-level exams in a year, and the political climate in the UK and the USA has changed a tremendous amount in less than a year, so I believe that change is possible in a year. This is about whether we believe we can achieve things in a year and whether we take the opportunity of the campaign.

All the things we are talking about today, such as the NHS and voting at 16, are important. This is about whether we should focus on one of those issues or on our education. That is up to us—it is up to you guys—but I know that we can all agree on this: something is definitely wrong with our education system. The scrutinising system puts things in us, but the word “education” comes from the word “educate”, which means to bring out. Education is supposed to bring things out of us and show us our worth. I am more than the two train tickets, and I am more than the D or the A that I got on exam day, but our education does not show us this, and that is what we should challenge. We have to put this as a campaign if we want to do these things and if we in the Youth Parliament want to make change. Can we do that? Should we recognise that all lives matter in this situation and that all life skills should be taught to people? In one year, can we take meaningful steps on creating a curriculum that will prepare all young people for life?

Mr Speaker: Victor, thank you very much for what you have said and for the way in which you have said it.

A Better, Kinder Democracy

2.42 pm

Brahmpreet Kaur Gulati (East Midlands): In my world, every one of us enters this unusual world with a thriving desire to make our change among the crowds of billions, but for one second shut your eyes and portray an image where people are beheaded and their bodies are whipped until the skin does not meet the colour of their lips just for asking a simple question or following a religion that does not meet the majority of the division. This western state begins to embrace LGBT, where everyone has the right to be who they want to be, but remember that in parts of the world a gun is aimed at a forehead for loving a man or a woman. These children, full of innocence, dreams no bigger or smaller than ours, shall never hear a fairy tale again. Instead, they are forced to pick up the weapon nearest their bed. Citizens of this state are all slaves to one being who believes he can dictate, forgetting those juvenile children and their incredible dreams, and those who are doctors and nurses to his land. Although this vision is hard for us to imagine, away from the glories and sparks of developments and improvements, yes, there still is a world that exists like this. Democracy is learning from history's mistakes and not repeating a period where one man dictates. Democracy is empowerment for all, not just a man, but those of another colour of skin, those who love the same, and those perhaps born with a different way to live.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for what I think, by common consent, was an extremely effective and moving speech.

Isreal Genius (East of England): I wish to speak about an issue that is having a catastrophic effect on politics the world over: the prevalence of an entrenched "us versus them" mentality, not just along racial and religious lines but, just as dangerously, along political lines. This means that decisions made by the electorate and the House are often made based on not who has the best ideas, but who has the loudest supporters, the most repeatable insult, or an inaccurate but emotive attack on their opposition.

We must all endeavour to understand the points of view on both sides of an argument, and as such understand that those on the other side often have good intentions. We therefore need to stop the insults and start respecting each other. I am by no means implying that we should censor ourselves or go soft on our opponents—sometimes it is necessary to attack an idea with a certain ferocity—but we should never attack the supporters of an idea, and the media should focus not on people but on policy. If we continue as is, we shall see the decline of the world's oldest parliamentary democracy.

Saadia Sajid (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Anecdotes from my mother, we all have those.

She used to tell me a story, and this is how it goes:

She once met a woman in Pakistan, who had a democratic ambition

But forbidden from voting because that was culturally a male tradition.

She was crying out for a voice, a caged bird.

Then she became the first female PM of her country, it was her time to be heard.

Democracy for you may be a relationship between you and the government, a whole hearted exchange,

But my vision of democracy is about creating opportunities for positive change.

So I volunteered for Girlguiding, seeing young girls prosper and grow,

That's what we should be broadcasting—a kinder politics—not what the media show.

Let's break down the wall of ignorance, activate the voices of the voiceless,

Engage the disengaged, otherwise democracy is just noiseless.

Let's stabilise our democracy, grab it with both hands,

Advocate a pluralist democracy and articulate our plans.

Obama said we came here "not to fear the future, but to shape it",

So let's congregate and change the world, the way we see fit.

Democratisation of the youth needs to happen fast,

Campaigning on votes at 16, that must be a thing of the past,

A chronically unrepresentative Parliament? That's the status quo,

In subsequent times, a Parliament that resembles us, is one we need to know.

Promote a tolerant democracy, welcome refugees with open arms

Fulfilling our humanitarian duties, that will just do no harm.

Because there is more that binds us together than what tears us apart,

We may not share the same blood but we share the same passion in our hearts.

Dreams may be as fragile as glass that makes up a mirror.

But guess what? You can create your own reflection,

Shape our democracy in YOUR own chosen direction.

Because democracy is for EVERYONE, not just the privileged few,

Regardless of your background, age or gender, it has been created for me and for you.

Mr Speaker: Saadia, thank you very much. That was a beautiful and penetrating contribution, and it has left its mark.

Emily Dormer (North East): It is easy for us to forget how lucky we are to live in a nation where we can decide who makes the decisions that shape our lives. It is easy for us to forget that in other parts of the world, voices go unheard and politicians are never held to account. We can show them the merits of a democracy—how innovation and economic prosperity can come when we remove the red tape that stifles young entrepreneurs, and how giving young people the chance to vote gives them the greatest stake in the success of our society—but there is so much more that we can do. We need to give young people the tools so that they can participate in, and eventually run, our democracy. Too often, young people knowing or caring about politics is met with scepticism or surprise. Too often, our value as voters is undermined because we are considered to be apathetic, which means that we become the sacrificial lambs of the political system. Too often, value is based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion, but in this room we can see that every voice is valuable. When we build with cement and compassion binding us together, we build a stronger, more united democracy.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Emily. Now, from the North West of England, I call Sarah Stearne.

Sarah Stearne (North West): In my vision of a kinder democracy, I acknowledge that it is impossible to legislate for kindness. No statute can ever ensure that all politicians will act kindly yet, as the next generation of decision makers and influencers, I believe it is our role to lead by example. We should demonstrate grace and kindness in all our actions and reactions. It is the qualities of grace and kindness that our democracy needs in order to deal with the refugee crisis, protect our environment and dispel the wave of racist attacks that gripped our nation this past year. You cannot legislate for kindness. This can be achieved only through the actions of ordinary people.

My vision of a better democracy is one that enfranchises a wider electorate. A significant sector of our society was left unrepresented in the recent referendum. Youth, we who will bear the impact of the referendum the longest, had no say in the outcome. It is significant that at 16 we are given a national insurance number and deemed old enough to contribute to the welfare state. At 16 we are deemed old enough to consent sexually. At 16 we are deemed old enough to be tested academically in a way that fundamentally influences our chances in life. If we can be so painstakingly assessed on our academic abilities, surely we can be trusted with the weight of political decisions, especially in the light of the impressive turnout of Scottish youth. On our journey to a better and kinder democracy, and in the same spirit that won 18-year-olds the vote in 1969, may we get 16-year-olds the vote, but may we do so kindly.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Sarah. Now let us welcome, from Northern Ireland, Francesca Drumm.

Francesca Drumm (Northern Ireland): The world around us is changing fast, not just our political landscape but on a social, geographical and cultural level. We all agree that the past months have been among the most chaotic and confusing that we, as young people, have witnessed, yet we strive to raise our voices above the arguments and discourse. We renounce the role of bystanders and observers who are overlooked in the arguments and disregarded in the debates. The voices of our generation cry out for recognition. We seek to be heard and, above all, we pursue the truth. We search for honesty and seek out integrity. We believe that those values should be the cornerstone of any political argument, yet they have been overlooked among the fearmongering, the falsehoods and the hype of recent times.

Today, as we consider the prospect of a kinder, fairer democracy, we have the crucial task as young people of communicating the values that are integral to our generation: hope, possibility and vision for a new world where boundaries between them and us are breached. A society that looks in on itself grows smaller and weaker with each passing day. Remember, MYPs, that as engaged, enthusiastic and optimistic young people we are leading that call for change right here, right now, in every corner of the UK and Europe and across the globe.

That is particularly true for me as a young person from Northern Ireland and a member of the post-conflict Good Friday generation. I am not cynical, disfranchised or pessimistic about the future of democracy—quite

the opposite: I am inspired by the young people across our communities in Northern Ireland, who actively seek out a better, kinder democracy and play their part in shaking off inherited divisions, exchanging them for optimism and hope, coupled with open minds and a vision for the future that motivates us to lead this call for change. We also earned us the right to debate in this great Chamber this afternoon. We are the generation who will exchange fear for hope, disregard for mutual respect, and suspicion for trust.

Kieran Mark Pannell (Scotland): I'd like quickly to thank my mum and dad, who helped dress me today; my sisters and my friend, who helped me get my essay done on time; and the Scottish Youth Parliament staff, who got the greatest region down here on time. I want to say quickly to all you England fans: prepare for a hammering tonight.

My first thought about a fairer, kinder democracy was that the way things are is not the way they have to be. I cannot recall who said that—I am just repeating it. Thinking about the current situation and how we got here, and spending hours pointing the finger at the people to blame, which I love doing, is useless. We should look to the future.

The media provides us with a negative outlook. There is the pressure of exams; increases in the pension age, which mean fewer jobs for young people; and there is a weak economic climate. The future looks bleak, but the way things are is not the way they have to be. We need to be optimistic and put pressure on existing elected officials. We need to oppose the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the comprehensive economic and trade agreement and the trade in services agreement, which I believe threaten democracy and our public services. We must also support a greener future through a just transition from the oil and gas sector to the renewable sector. That will allow us to improve countries elsewhere.

That is just the tip of the iceberg and it shows us that we have our work cut out. Regardless of our personal political beliefs, we need to stand together. The way things are is not the way things have to be. We might not know where we are going, but we know where we are coming from, which I find exciting.

Warda Mansur (South East): Fifteen million young people live in the UK, which is nearly one quarter of the entire population. Despite that, we have barely any influence over the decisions that affect our futures. Young people are faced with so many problems: rising university fees, poverty and discrimination—the list goes on—but we are teetering on the irony that, while we are best placed to address those issues, we are not given the chance to do so. That is not because we are apathetic; we care deeply about social causes, and when given the opportunity, young people can do great things. Take Malala: she is only 19 years old, but look at what she has managed to achieve. We all have this potential for greatness, but it is being counterbalanced by a feeling of impotence and disillusionment, and that is not okay.

We need to engage young people. Politicians need to reach out to us and give us the chance to be part of decision making. Also, political education should be introduced in all schools, so that we can lessen voter ignorance and thus improve our democracy. Ultimately,

that is what democracy means. It is the power of the people, by the people. The term “people” is inclusive, not divisive. It encompasses young and old, male and female, able and disabled, and all the glorious diversity in between. It is only by ensuring that we can all have our fair say that we can move forward to a better and kinder democracy. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Warda. Now we will hear from Jack Payne, from the South West.

Jack Payne (South West): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Good day, all. I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Bristol, and also the elected south representative of the NHS Youth Forum. I want to talk about how I am trying to make a better, kinder democracy. I am trying to campaign for disability rights. In particular, I have a current campaign to try to make politics more inclusive for young people who are disabled. There are very few MPs who have a disability. This inequality in our democracy motivated me to campaign for a more representative democracy, so that disabled people have a voice in Parliament. Everybody, no matter what their religion, race or ability, should be able to make their mark in politics without suffering from prejudice. Earlier this year, at the annual sitting, a motion in my name and the names of two others was passed on raising awareness of disability rights and encouraging disabled people into politics.

Finally, on 23 June, the referendum showed our country to be highly divided. I want the youth of today to show that we can work together, make our society more inclusive and, as a whole, ensure a better, kinder democracy. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Jack, both for your speech and for the work that you are doing and have just described to us.

Elin Bold (Wales): This year in politics, we seem to have lost focus. We have forgotten that there is more to people than votes, and have used hateful and ignorant words that inspire hatred and ignorance. Democracy should be used as a tool to give people power over their life and help them to make a difference in their community, so why have so few political debates this year focused on that? Instead, emphasis has been placed on inciting fear and hatred. These arguments cause divisions within our communities. They cause people to be suspicious of their neighbours and to hate the person sitting next to them on the bus. We are being encouraged to divide ourselves, based on race, ethnic origin and religion, at a time when we most need to stand united to solve the challenges that we face.

An example close to my heart is our response to the refugee crisis. Instead of offering help, people are being encouraged to hate and fear the most vulnerable group of people on the planet. We are using human beings as ways to scaremonger, but fear cannot be used as a way of garnering votes. Dividing our communities is not the way to get support, because democracy is not about division, hatred and fear; it is about people working together to build a better future. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Elin, thank you for that contribution. I now call Cheyenne Darko from the West Midlands.

Cheyenne Darko (West Midlands): I thank my deputy and my support workers who made this possible, and the people who are rooting for me.

I believe strongly in racial equality and cultural diversity. The Kick It Out campaign has shown me that anybody can take a stand in combating racism or any other subject they feel strongly about. Stereotypes are labels that have been attached to different communities through hate and ignorance, but it is time that we ripped those labels off. Let us go into the schools. After all, 11 to 18-year-olds are the ones who elected us to do this job. They need us. Social media will make a massive difference. We live on our phones. We need to report these things and stop them from happening because this is the 21st century. It is 2016. How can these things be carrying on?

Instead of shunning change, we should accept it with open arms and celebrate our differences. Martin Luther King Jr. once said

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

We should not see someone as a colour, a religion, a tradition, a country or a race. We should see them as we see ourselves so that we can leave a legacy behind for the youth of the future, and love all.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Cheyenne. The penultimate speaker is Ali Khosravi.

Ali Khosravi (Yorkshire and Humber): I am deeply honoured and humbled to be speaking in this Chamber today. It was, of course, in this House that William Wilberforce from Yorkshire argued time after time for the abolition of slavery and changed the course of history forever. We must never underestimate the words that are being spoken in this House, at the heart of British democracy. However, in today’s changing and challenging world, there has never been a more urgent need for a better, kinder democracy where change does not only happen from Westminster or Whitehall, but from our communities right across a country—a democracy where people are not disengaged or misinformed, but instead take an active part in the national conversation, represented by a gender-balanced Parliament with Members from all backgrounds and walks of life, truly reflecting the British society. It is about building a people-powered democracy. Surely, that is not the vision for the future. It is the vision for today and it is the right way forward. Let us turn that vision into reality and be the voice of hope in the silence of fear.

Mr Speaker: Yet another succinct but very powerful speech which has pithily captured the mood of the Parliament. The last speaker, representing the Army Welfare Service, for whom I hope you will give a rapturous welcome, is Liam West.

Liam West (Army Welfare Service): “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.” That is a quote from arguably the greatest Prime Minister ever to have served, Winston Churchill.

Democracy across the world and in the UK is great in theory, because it means that everyone over the age of 18 can vote and that all their votes count equally. However, as a young person, I feel that decisions are being made over which I have no influence.

Furthermore, a problem with democracy is that you need to register in order to vote. For some young people, that might be too much of a waste of time. A solution would be to register people automatically as soon as they turn 18, or possibly 16 or 17 for one-off votes such as the referendum.

Finally, I come to Brexit. An explanation for the low turnout of the youth vote in the referendum could be that the polls indicated that the remain campaign would win, so young people decided that they did not need to turn out for the remain campaign to win. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. We have had over 90 speakers today. If memory serves me correctly, we have had 93, but I stand to be corrected if I have got it wrong. We have had a very large number of carefully considered contributions into which much effort has gone. They have been delivered with great eloquence and passion, and there have been some remarkable personal testimonies in the course of the proceedings.

I hope that you feel proud to have been part of this great enterprise—proud if you have spoken; proud if you have heard a great speech; and proud if you have had a new thought as a result of what you have heard. It has been a very special experience.

The Youth Parliament will now vote on which of the five subjects debated today to select as its national campaign issues. In the Lobby, you will be given two ballot papers: one for the two reserved—that is, UK-wide—subjects and one 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, Members of the Youth Parliament, please return to your place 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. The Division Lobbies are now open. Thank you.

3.12 pm

Division

3.27 pm

Mr Speaker: Members of the Youth Parliament, we are about to hear from the Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, whom I know you will give a very warm welcome, but just before I ask Rob to address us, perhaps I can just say this about my parliamentary colleagues: sometimes, although they are loth to admit it, they can be a tad sensitive, and they can be most upset if they are not noticed. I have referred to a number of parliamentary colleagues here present, and I am about to refer to a very distinguished one in heartfelt terms, but before that let me just ask whether there are any other parliamentary colleagues here present whom I have not identified in the course of the day. No, I don't think there are.

Let me take this opportunity very warmly to welcome my parliamentary colleague and friend, Alistair Burt, who is sitting on the Front Bench. Until very recently,

Alistair served in government, where he has had a distinguished track record. When he left the Government a few months ago, he sidled up to the Chair to ask whether I would mind if, in answering the last question that was put to him, he said a few words of thanks to colleagues from across the House for their engagement with and support for him over the years. I said, "Of course, Alistair. You should do that." And he did. A mark of the esteem in which Alistair is held, and the affection that is felt towards him, was that he got an absolutely terrific send-off from colleagues, importantly, on both sides of the House—from people in his own party and people on the Opposition Benches.

That is because Alistair seeks to live his faith day by day, to adhere to his values and to be a conscientious, articulate, highly effective and compassionate public servant. That is what he has always done, and therefore he is hugely popular across the House. In my experience, he has always believed in young people and the importance of their role and participation in public life. Alistair, it is typical of you to be here today. Let's give Alistair a round of applause. [*Applause.*]

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I have never had that before in the House; it was rather nice. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: It is something you can tell the grandchildren about.

Now, please give a very warm welcome to the Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson. [*Applause.*]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is great to be here with so many Members of the UK Youth Parliament. I congratulate you all on getting here, and I congratulate the speakers on their fine performances throughout the day.

I do not think it is unfair or unkind to say that the collective age of the Chamber has dropped by a few centuries since I was here on Monday afternoon, and this place looks and feels all the better for it. As the Minister for Civil Society, I attend lots of events and meetings, but the UK Youth Parliament is always a personal highlight of my year. Year after year, the speeches reach new heights, and when I see your skill, passion and determination to bring about positive change, I know that the future of this country is in safe hands.

It might be in your hands sooner than you think. I know there is a perception that Parliament is full of middle-aged men—I do not count myself among them—but that does not have to be true. William Pitt the Younger was an MP by the age of 22 and Prime Minister by the age of 24. That is a remarkable achievement by anybody's standards—although he did go on to drink quite a lot of port and is believed to have died of gout at 40. Thinking about it, he might not have been the best example of a role model for you guys.

How about the current baby of the House? I know that that is perhaps a slightly patronising term, but over the years it seems to have stuck. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) was just 20 when she was elected last year—only a few years older than some of those here today. Her maiden speech has had nearly 1 million views on YouTube alone, which

I can guarantee is more than my entire career put together. If you are over 18, let nobody tell you that you are too young, because you are not.

Sometimes young people get quite a bad rap, particularly from the media. It is said that you are not interested in politics—that you would rather vote for the “X Factor” than in a general election. Not that the two are mutually exclusive, of course: I believe that my vote put Little Mix where they are today. *[Laughter.]* I was very sorry that I could not save Gifty, though. This year’s Make Your Mark ballot has proved those critics of young people absolutely wrong. As the Speaker said earlier, there were 978,216 votes cast—so close to that 1 million mark. I am expecting a breakthrough next year. I have set the challenge; it is now over to you to deliver it.

My own political involvement began at the age of 22 when I ran to be president of my students union at the University of Reading. To this day I remember it very clearly, partly because one of the other three candidates was a pot plant. *[Laughter.]* You may snigger, but it was a very cultured and particularly herbaceous pot plant, if my memory serves me right. Try to think of Groot from Marvel’s “Guardians of the Galaxy”, but with a much smaller vocabulary and less movement. There are, of course, members of the royal family who talk to plants, so do not underestimate a pot plant.

You have all shown today that if you want to get involved in politics, there is a place for you here—just step up and claim it. But, of course, do lay off the port—and if your opponent is a pot plant, that helps to make it a little easier as well.

Make Your Mark, the Youth Select Committee and the UK Youth Parliament have been an indisputable success, and it is for that reason that, back in January, I announced continued financial support for the Youth Parliament and all its associated activities. *[Applause.]* That support is going to last until the end of this Government’s term, in 2020, and I am happy to confirm that commitment again today.

Members of the Youth Parliament, as well as the hundreds of thousands of young people who voted in advance of the sitting today, are the real stars of the show, but no star—not even Kanye West—can get on the road without the help of a top team, although I suspect he might think differently. My daughter told me that Kanye is considering running for President of the USA in 2020. Now, who would vote for Kanye? *[Interruption.]* Interesting—well, just think, if Donald Trump can make it to President of the United States, there is hope for Kanye West. *[Applause.]*

If Kanye does run, he is going to need a top team, whether he wants one or not, and in your case that support comes from the British Youth Council. I would like to make special mention of James Cathcart, who worked for many years as the council’s chief executive, before his departure earlier this year. I know he is here today, sitting at the back of the Chamber. *[Applause.]* On behalf of all of us, thank you, James—you have seen the rapturous applause you got—for all the people you have supported here today and in years gone by. You have made an outstanding contribution to the future of young people in this country.

My round of thank yous would not be complete without a mention of Mr Speaker—the Speaker of this House—who has overseen today’s proceedings with his

usual skill and judgment. Since becoming Speaker—seven years ago, I think it was—he has been a hugely committed supporter and champion of the Youth Parliament, and I know how extremely popular he is with you all here today. Two years ago, one of the MYPs brought an owl into the Commons Chamber—not a real one, obviously. Whenever he wanted to get Mr Speaker’s attention, he held up the owl and waved it at him frantically. That has not caught on yet. I wonder why. I am sure Mr Speaker remembers that occasion very well—it was, well, quite a hoot at the time. *[Interruption.]* I apologise to the House for that joke, and I am sacking my speechwriter tomorrow morning. Commiserations to anybody who tried, but failed, to catch the Speaker’s attention. Don’t worry—even we full-time MPs know how that can feel, as Mr Speaker said earlier. Maybe I should invest in that owl after all.

I would like now to comment on a few of the stand-out speeches and speakers, but if you do not hear your name, please do not feel unappreciated—sometimes I could not catch people’s names, and some people did not say who they were when they started their speeches, so that will be the reason why you are not mentioned. Year after year, I am consistently impressed by the quality of speaking skills we see at these sittings, and this year’s contributions were no exception. If I can start with the NHS cuts debate, from earlier this morning, Emma Rooney from Northern Ireland gave an extremely impassioned speech. If I pronounce some of your names wrongly, it is because I had to write them down in my scrawly handwriting. William McCullion made a strong case that this issue is not fit for a non-partisan campaign for the Youth Parliament. It was nice to see the East of England giving the Speaker a hard time, and making sure they got to be heard. It is a good job they were, because Matthew Tinker from Epping Forest gave a funny and confidently delivered speech, remembering our brilliant NHS staff and the great work they do. Florence Orchard gave a really balanced summary of the debate.

We then moved on to the voting age debate, which, unfortunately, I was only able to watch on TV. I apologise to Matthew von Rooyen, who noted my absence at the time. *[Interruption.]* It happens in real life, too. He asked me personally to consider young people and bringing them into our democracy, and I think the presence of you all in this Chamber today shows that young people are really engaged and contributing to our democracy. Clearly, the voting age is not the principal factor in engaging young people’s interest and involvement in politics. Sarjan Hira from Wolverhampton, having gestured enthusiastically to catch Mr Speaker’s attention, brought the House down—*[Interruption.]* He almost did it again. He brought the House down with a humorous and thundering display, truly befitting an aspiring actor or perhaps a political orator. Chengkai Xie from Preston courageously took the Floor with a conflicting position to that taken by preceding speakers, arguing against a lowering of the voting age and emphasising how young people can make their mark and are already doing so. Obviously, all of you are a testament to that fact. Thomas Morrell from Nottinghamshire leapt out of his seat and, once extricated from the rafters, delivered a calm, assured speech drawing on his own personal experience. Darragh O’Reilly from Northern Ireland—*[Applause.]* You certainly could not fault his confidence, passion or sincerity, all of which are important attributes

[Mr Rob Wilson]

in this House. However, I urge caution when making public pledges to eat your hat—Paddy Ashdown is best placed to advise on that one.

We then moved on to the debate on public transport, where a special mention should go to Liam Cartwright and Caitlin Cavanagh, who had the unenviable task of following Darragh but rose brilliantly to the occasion. Megan Day from Suffolk stressed the importance of environmentally friendly transport policies and utilising cutting-edge technologies to reduce pollution.

We then moved on to the tackling racism debate, and there were some powerful contributions. Lizy Porter made cogent and well-marshalled arguments. Joscel Manirambona elegantly and effectively argued his case. Having seen him at the Dispatch Box, I think there is definitely future Prime Minister material there. Lily Thompson and Jacob Reid also made speeches, with Jacob reminding me of a young William Hague in his delivery, although he obviously still has the hair! Muzdalfa Ahmed made a very personal and extremely powerful speech, which rightly got a standing ovation at the end of it. Stephanie Ezeadum made an extraordinary contribution from the Back Benches without having a single note with her—it was really impressive. Chandler Wilson, I was so pleased that you made your speech sitting down, because people should never fear being different and you did not, so congratulations to you. Finally, let me say that Ryan Harnell looked born to be at the Dispatch Box—need I say more.

We then moved on to the debate on a curriculum for life. Lili Donlon-Mansbridge gave a confident and robust opening statement. Lucy Page got a standing ovation before she even spoke, and some politicians would love to have been in her shoes. As it turned out, it was a well-deserved standing ovation. Dana-Lee Moon from Wigan said at the start of her speech that she was uneducated, but proved, with every word she said, to be quite the opposite. James Savage spoke with real knowledge and understanding, and without notes. Abi Lovering, may I say that rarely have I seen a scarf used in such an impressive way to get Mr Speaker's attention? Victor Sarpong—[*Applause.*] I have seen iPads at the Dispatch Box but never iPhones. I do not know whether he was playing one of those games on it, but he was eloquent, persuasive and comfortable in this House. It was a great way to finish the debate. Well done, Victor.

Then we had the “Better, Kinder Democracy” debate. I really cannot pick out anyone from that debate—every single speech was superb—so I congratulate everyone who spoke. In fact, I sincerely thank everyone who took part in all the debates, as well as those who stood but did not get called. I was particularly interested to hear the debate on tackling racial and religious discrimination, because the Youth Select Committee is due to report on this subject this week. Previous Youth Select Committee reports have been very influential and have even altered Government policy, and I expect that this year's report will be similarly persuasive.

Many of you will know that I am the Minister responsible for youth policy. I want to let you know a little of what we have been doing on your behalf. In recent months, we have announced £80 million of new investment in youth projects, and we are continuing to increase investment in the National Citizen Service, which I hope many of you have been on. If you have

taken part, please spread the word about how much you got from the experience. We want to get as many 16-year-olds as possible taking part in NCS by 2020. Young people telling other young people about the great experience they have had has the most powerful advertising effect in reaching other young people.

As you all know, we are now leaving the European Union. Chances are you will all live in the United Kingdom longer than those of us currently in Parliament. Take Mr Speaker, for example—he probably jogs, clearly pumps iron, eats well and, I dare say, takes a few vitamins; how could he do such a demanding job otherwise? But despite doing all those things, the chances are that you here today will outlive him and all my colleagues. So we are working with our colleagues in the Department for Exiting the European Union to make sure that your generation gets a voice during the coming negotiations. After all, it is your future we are building.

Those are only some of the many projects and initiatives running across Government. All are made to ensure that you, your friends and those coming after—yes, even those annoying little brothers and sisters—get the best start in life and that your opinions are heard. In her maiden speech this summer, the Prime Minister made it clear that she wanted to build a shared, united society and to fight social injustice wherever it was found. I know, not just from what I have heard today but from all my work with young people, that these are your priorities too and that you want a world where everybody gets the same chance and same opportunities.

As Civil Society Minister, I will continue to make sure that your voice is heard, and I will report back to the Prime Minister on all today's debates and on all the points you have raised. I know that she is more than ready to listen. So thank you, once again, and I am sure it will not be long before I count some of you as full-time colleagues in the House. I look forward to that time—just leave the owls at home.

Mr Speaker: Minister, thank you for what you have said and for the way you have said it. Both are greatly appreciated. I now call the shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Valerie Vaz.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Did you enjoy yourselves today? [MYPs: “Yes.”] Great, because you are now going to join me in thanking the British Youth Council, everyone on the parliamentary estate, the Doorkeepers—they call them that, but they are much more—those involved in Parliament Week, your families, and Mr Speaker for chairing the debate. [*Applause.*]

Hon. Members, you are showing us the way. Your decision to add extra time to debate a kinder, better democracy has never been more important, not only after 23 June but after what has been happening in America—we have not even had the chance to debate that in Parliament, and we will follow you. Jack, you showed us how important it is to move people with disabilities to the front of the agenda. You have made a difference as a member of the NHS Youth Forum.

Hon. Members, you are showing us the way to an inclusive society. As the Minister said, 2 million young people have taken part in your ballot over the past few years. This year, 978,126 young people voted on the topics that you have discussed today. Connor Hill from Dudley returned the most ballots, 8,722. Caitlin Cavanagh

from Liverpool returned 7,222. Samantha-Rose Beacham from Derbyshire collected 6,563. As Liberty, aged 13, said, we need to hear what young people are saying.

Hon. Members, you are showing us the way because, during your debates, you have focused on the issues. You did not focus on personalities and you did not denigrate anyone. You have shown commitment, discipline, strength and even wisdom, remembering junior doctors and nurses who look after us when we are at our most vulnerable or the mum who has to work two jobs.

You have shown us that you are ambitious for your constituents. Despite all your other responsibilities, you have put yourselves up for election and you have come here. You have worked really hard on all your speeches. You have given up your time for public service, so even if you did not speak—I am sorry, Rory Fittes, because I know you tried very hard—the fact that you are sitting here in Parliament is important. There will be other opportunities to show your talents. As the Minister said, some of you will be sitting here on the green benches.

We need to agitate—sorry, debate—if we want to make any changes, because I can tell you that I would not be standing here today if it was not for women agitating. Women were not allowed on the Floor of the House. We were up there, behind a grill, and it is only because women chained themselves to that grill, which is now in Central Lobby, that I am able to stand here as a Member of Parliament. [*Applause.*] Here is the punchline. If Donald Trump, as the President-elect, had anything to do with it, I would be behind a wall, let alone a grill. [*Applause.*]

When you go back down through Westminster Hall, look back at the entrance to St Stephen's chapel and you will see the most beautiful work of art—launched by Mr Speaker—by Mary Branson, who is our artist in residence. The work consists of 168 glass discs that light up as the tide rises and falls. The discs represent the 168 pieces of legislation passed by Parliament that have made a difference to equality. That is what I want you to do: to remember the fight for justice and for equal rights for everyone, irrespective of race, gender or disability.

That is why what you have done today is so important. You have challenged prejudice and discrimination, and you have persuaded us that our public services need to be better. Muzdalfa, yes, we have to respect each other. It is not about what is on your head; it is about what is in your head. Stephanie, your pain was palpable. Probably all of us either know someone or is someone who has been through what Stephanie has been through. If you think you are going to have fun, that you are going to go home now and collect your goody bag, your work is not done. Each one of you Members of the Youth Parliament has to report back to your constituents. Take those topics and lobby your MPs. Lobby the Minister, who seems to have a lot of money, and he can tomorrow pass legislation for votes for people aged 16 and 17—there you are, you heard it here.

If you want a curriculum to prepare you for life, lobby your school, your headteacher and your school council. Set up lunchtime and after-school clubs. Go to other schools and tell them what you have done here today, and what you did in your year as a Member of the Youth Parliament, because now you are now the mentors. Young people will come to you to ask how they can become a Member of the Youth Parliament,

and how they can run for it and end up in this Chamber. Use your incredible gifts and talents that I have seen in abundance today to help other people and give something back.

Mr Speaker, Minister and Alistair Burt, I am sure you were inspired today. We will go away and work hard to make this country worthy of you all.

Mr Speaker: I thank the shadow Leader of the House for that speech. We now have what is described as a speech of thanks—thanks, I hope, to all of you.

Connor Hill (West Midlands): Members of the UK Youth Parliament, today we sit here in the glorious centre of democracy in our country knowing that we represent 978,216 young people from our Make Your Mark consultation. Today we sit here in this historic Chamber of rhetoric, a wonderful setting for many political spats throughout the centuries. Today, MYPs, we make history—is not 978,216 just an astonishing number, Mr Speaker? One in six young people is represented by MYPs sitting in the House today and Make Your Mark champions across the country.

I have to thank many people who made today possible. Without them, we would not be sitting on these green Benches today. First, our thanks go to those who back us in our local authorities. MYPs, please join me in thanking our wonderful youth workers in the Gallery, some of whom had to endure very early get-ups this morning. [*Applause.*] From our hearts, we thank you.

As previously stated, the House of Commons is truly divine, not only because of the ancient architectural structure of the buildings, but because of the eloquent and efficient manner of the House of Commons parliamentary staff. Their gracious hospitality is no less than inviting. Today, we thank you. [*Applause.*] Special thanks go to the Principal Doorkeeper, Phil Howse, who has taken care of us in the most prodigious manner. [*Applause.*]

This sitting would not be possible without the Outreach and Engagement team, which has worked endlessly to ensure that today's debates were in order. May we have a round of applause for David Clark and his team, and all those who have worked behind the scenes? [*Applause.*] I have known David since I was little, 12-year-old, baby-faced Connor. We hope he is as proud of us today as we are of him.

We always love to see Members of Parliament who represent us daily in this hallowed Chamber and sit with us during our debates. I thank the Minister for Civil Society, Mr Rob Wilson MP, whose support has been gracious, as well as the Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. David Lidington MP, and the shadow Leader of the House, Valerie Vaz MP, whose speeches were no less than inspiring. [*Applause.*] The Minister with responsibility for the constitution, Chris Skidmore MP, was unable to join us, but he sends his support. We also need to thank those Deputy Members and Members of the UK Youth Parliament who could not be with us at this prestigious event. We thank them for their work and time.

There is one man in this room, right at the heart of democracy, who never fails to amaze me—a man of great eloquence, whose voice never seems to get any less inspirational, and who, without being cringeworthy, is

my inspiration. Please join me in thanking the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow. *[Applause.]* Thanks also to the amazing procedures group representatives, who have expertly led our regions to synchronised success. On behalf of all four corners of the UK, I thank them for enabling us to succeed. *[Applause.]*

A massive thanks to all at the British Youth Council, which is really our backbone, supporting us in all our endeavours. A shout out in particular to the outgoing chief executive officer, James Cathcart, who has been an amazing CEO over the past few years. Thanks also to the amazing Zoe Cumberland, with whom I got a great selfie earlier this year—joking aside, Zoe works hard to ensure that the UK Youth Parliament and the British Youth Council are seen and heard—and to all the BYC youth democracy co-ordinators across the country; they are dotted around the room, and you are truly amazing. *[Applause.]*

I have a couple of personal thank-yous. Thanks to my parents, Robert and Amanda, who are stars at making sure that I am where I need to be, when I need to be there, and at supporting me in all my endeavours. I thank King Edward VI College, my current educational establishment, as well my previous school, the Wordsley School, for allowing me this opportunity and giving me the ability to develop as a person. I would not be standing here today if it was not for them. To the teachers who invested so much time in me, Mr and Mrs Lambert, I thank you ever so much. *[Applause.]*

Members of the UK Youth Parliament, without sounding clichéd, I have a dream—a dream that we take hold of the real promises of democracy and carry them out, no matter what the campaign. We need to look at these new campaigns as a matter of urgency; it is what young people want. As Martin Luther King said, we cannot be satisfied as long as young people's needs are not satisfied, too. Our national campaign will be on either combating racial and religious discrimination, or voting at 16 and 17. We invite MPs to discuss the campaigns on our national day of action, Friday 20 January 2017. Let us go out, put words into action, and change lives for the better, as you will be changing lives this year and today. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Connor, thank you for a very warm and gracious tribute to the very large number of people without whom today's event could not take place. You delivered that speech with a real piquancy, and everybody whom you thanked will be very appreciative of it and will never forget it.

Before I offer some closing remarks, I have the results of the votes. First, I will give you the votes in respect of the one reserved issue on which you feel that the UK Youth Parliament should campaign in the year ahead. You had a choice, as you know, between two alternatives: "Tackling racism and religious discrimination" had 117 votes; and "Votes for 16 and 17 year olds in all public elections" attracted 159 votes—*[Applause.]* That was a very ecstatic welcome from a very large body of supporters. It is the democratic process, so there will be delight, ecstasy and relief. Inevitably, as in any democratic contest, there will be people on the other side of the argument who think, "Ah, I wanted it to be something else." That, in a sense, is your induction to the democratic

process. That is the nature of the beast, but a very good democratic beast it is. Your theme in the year ahead, therefore, will be "Votes for 16 and 17 year olds in all public elections".

In respect of the one devolved—in this case, England-only—issue, the voting was as follows: "We must stop cuts that affect the NHS" received 30 votes; "Make public transport cheaper, better and accessible for all" received 32 votes; and "A curriculum to prepare us for life" had 213 votes—*[Applause.]* "A curriculum to prepare us for life" will therefore be your one devolved, England-only issue on which, in the year ahead, the UK Youth Parliament shall campaign.

Members of the Youth Parliament, many of you started the day at a very early hour. It has been, I hope, a hugely stimulating but, to a degree perhaps, almost inevitably—necessarily—an arduous experience. Fulsome tributes have already been expressed, not least by Connor, but before that with great eloquence and generosity of spirit by the Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, whom I thank for his speech and all he has done in support today and throughout the year, and, of course, by the shadow Leader of the House, Valerie Vaz. Both those Front-Bench speeches captured the mood and did what we do too rarely, and ought to do more often and with complete sincerity—it costs nothing—which is to utter those two words: thank you. That was what Rob, Valerie and Connor did.

Without going through all the people who have been mentioned, I want to put on record my appreciation on behalf of us all to those who have helped, whether today only or on a much more ongoing basis, to facilitate the work of the UK Youth Parliament: the sitting in the Chamber; the annual conference; the establishment, functioning and follow-through on the work of the Youth Select Committee; and the activity that is facilitated and to which administrative support is provided in local areas throughout the country. With real sincerity and, I think, something of a lump in the throat, thanks were properly expressed to all your youth workers for whom engagement with and leadership of the UK Youth Parliament is, at least to some degree, a labour of love. Those people do this because they want to make a difference.

I have thanked a number of people in the House and I make no apology for that: the Clerks, the people in my own office, those who assist in the Serjeant at Arms team, people who provide catering services and many others besides. To all my parliamentary colleagues who have assisted, whether by being here today, by offering support to a local MYP, by observing from a distance or by helping in their local constituency those who want to be part of the Youth Parliament, I say a big thank you.

I underline our appreciation of, tribute to and respect for James Cathcart, with whom I have forged a great working relationship over the last seven years. James, I think you know from the spontaneous reaction to what was said how valued and appreciated you are. You may be calling it a day in day-to-day terms, but you have talent, know-how and a contribution to continue. I very much hope that in other ways, possibly even in other parts of the world, you will help to crystallise the skills, energies and ambitions of young people into a functioning and dynamic part of a good democracy. *[Applause.]*

Members of the Youth Parliament, I want to say a small number of things to you. First, as far as I am concerned, it is an honour and a privilege to be in the Chair as Speaker of the House of Commons and to chair these proceedings, and indeed to attend your conference.

Forgive me, because I have made this point before, but not all of you will have heard it. When I was elected Speaker in June 2009, a small number of months after the House had voted, with my support, to allow the UK Youth Parliament to hold an annual sitting, I was informed by my staff that the session was upcoming in the autumn and that the senior Deputy Speaker in the House, a very highly respected and accomplished Deputy Speaker, Sir Alan Haselhurst, would be taking the Chair. The reason that was happening was that the Speaker, Michael Martin, was ordinarily in his constituency in Glasgow on a Friday and intended to be so. Alan Haselhurst was perfectly happy to be in the Chair.

Instinctively and immediately I thought, with no disrespect to Alan, who would have done it extremely well, “That’s not what I want. I voted for this sitting, I voted for this right, I voted for this proceeding to happen and I think I should be there to chair it.” I therefore said to Alan Haselhurst, “Alan, you have the day off.”—it was not really a day off, but a day off from the House of Commons—“Spend your time in your Saffron Walden constituency or doing whatever you want to do. I intend to chair the proceedings.”

Of course, there are always different motive forces. I was relishing it. I thought it would be huge fun and something that I would massively enjoy. I was not wrong on any of those fronts, but I also chose to chair it for the very simple reason that I believed then, as I believe now, that if we in Parliament want to be respected by young people, we must show our respect for young people—respect is a two-way street. [*Applause.*]

It was precisely that mindset that led me to signal to the UK Youth Parliament within days of my election that if—and, by definition, only if—it wanted me to attend its annual sitting, meeting, conference—call it what you will—outside of Westminster, I should be privileged to attend and say some words. It was in Canterbury in 2009, and I resolved then that every year I would chair the session in the Chamber of the House of Commons and that every year I would, if welcome and invited, visit and speak to the annual meeting, wherever it took place in the United Kingdom.

This is the eighth year in which I have had the huge privilege of chairing your proceedings here and of visiting and addressing your meeting in different parts of the United Kingdom. I regard that as a privilege I will never forget. That is my outlook. It does not have to be everybody else’s outlook, but it is what I believe.

I mentioned enjoyment. Of course, anybody privileged to be a Member of Parliament—among our number currently in the Chamber, Alistair Burt has got greater experience than any of us, having first been elected very young in 1983—knows what a privilege it is, and we love what we do. I love being Member of Parliament for Buckingham. I love, of course, being Speaker of the House of Commons. There are other things, however, one can love doing. I love spending time with my family; I love going to football matches; I love going to tennis tournaments; I love doing all sorts of things in the course of my day-to-day life. Two of the things to

which I look forward more than anything in the whole annual calendar are chairing these proceedings and visiting that annual conference. The reason I say that to you, my friends, is that you are the future of our democracy and, in a very real sense—incapable of being contradicted as I make this point—you are the future of our country.

Rob hinted at the next point that I think I should make, but I want to underline what he said and what others have mentioned. In a very real sense, we here in the House of Commons can learn from the UK Youth Parliament. It was true back in ’09 and it is true—if anything probably even more so—in 2016. Indeed, I can think of two respects in which we here can learn, and should have the humility to be ready to gain, from your example. First, as anybody could see and hear today, you truly represent the diversity of modern Britain in a way that, currently, the House of Commons does not. It does so rather better than it did, but we should most definitely aspire to do more. The Youth Parliament has always had terrific representation from women. It has always had great representation from the black and minority ethnic communities of Britain. It has always been open to and supportive of those with disabilities. It has championed the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities of our country. So it really has been diverse and inclusive in a way that makes you a role model for others to seek to emulate.

The other respect in which, if I may say so, you have set an example is by the way in which you have behaved. Reference was made to this only a few moments ago. Sure, the arguments we have in Parliament are about immediate issues, sometimes—often—entailing legislation that will, within weeks if not days, affect people’s lives and about which there can be passionately held differences of opinion. They are not abstract differences and they are not Oxford Union debates, and we are not ever going to be simply members of a debating society.

Moreover, there will be noise. We are not going to behave like Trappist monks; that cannot be expected and would not be wanted. A degree of passion, spontaneous outbursts and periodic anger have always been part of the culture of the House of Commons over centuries, and realistically they probably always will be. But there is a balance to be struck and periodically when we teeter over the edge into orchestrated barracking and personal abuse, a cacophony of noise and a determination to shout someone down for daring to hold an opinion that differs from our own, we are spray-painting our shop window, because those are instances that get coverage and are heard and seen and widely deprecated. To the huge and enduring credit of the UK Youth Parliament, that has not been the spirit or tenor of the debates today. There have been differences of opinion, but no one has been shouted at, let alone shouted down. People have argued their case, sticking to the issues and playing the ball rather than the man or woman, seeking to adduce evidence in their support and speaking in many cases from powerful—in some instances, searing and keenly felt—personal experience. That has been respected by other Members of this Parliament. That is a fantastic example to have set.

You have chosen subjects of huge and continuing interest, on which your campaigning contribution can potentially make a decisive difference. You have forged an ongoing relationship with the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and with the Leader

[Mr Speaker]

of the House, from whom you heard in welcoming terms at the start of our proceedings. You have forged and will go on forging relationships with both of them and with the shadow Leader of the House, not to mention your own Members of Parliament, who should be—and, if they are not, must be made by you—aware of your membership of this place and your commitment to, engagement with, and involvement and leadership in, public life.

I am thrilled by the subjects you have chosen. I wish you great success and I can only repeat my commitment, both in respect of people in Aylesbury Vale, which is my

area, and much more widely, to try to preserve and build on the strong relationship between the House of Commons as an institution and the UK Youth Parliament. If you keep welcoming me, I will keep visiting you; if you keep coming here, I intend to be here to hear you and have the joy, privilege and honour of chairing your proceedings.

Thank you for everything you have said and done and everything by way of values and principle that you represent. If I may conclude in the traditional parliamentary fashion, until we meet again: order, order. *[Applause.]*

Youth Parliament adjourned at 4.22 pm.