



HOUSE OF COMMONS



United Kingdom

Youth Parliament
MAKING OUR MARK

United Kingdom Youth Parliament Debate

13th November 2015

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Friday 13 November 2015

[MR SPEAKER IN THE CHAIR]

11 am

Mr Speaker: Parliamentary colleagues here present, but, more importantly, Members of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament, welcome to the Chamber of the House of Commons.

Less than an hour ago, I was talking to the debate leads and to a number of the Magna Carta speakers, and I asked which of them had been present here last year. A small smattering had been—about a third, I would guess—but the great majority had not participated. Perhaps I may just ask: hands up, which of you were here last year? I see that it was a very small proportion, probably not even one eighth, if that. The vast majority of you are new, and you could not be more welcome.

This is the seventh meeting of the UK Youth Parliament in the House of Commons Chamber. We began what is now a very established and revered tradition in 2009, and I hope it will continue year after year, decade after decade.

The issues to be debated today were chosen by the annual Make Your Mark ballot of 11 to 18-year-olds, as you know. Last year, the number of votes cast almost doubled from the previous year. The British Youth Council reports that this year the number has increased again, with 968,091 young people casting a vote—congratulations to all of you. You do not need me to tell you what your target is for next year—it is that million mark, and I am quite sure you will attain it. Today, you will choose the issues that you wish to have as the subjects of your priority campaigns for 2016.

Friends, this year's Youth Parliament also marks the second year of the Paul Boskett memorial award. The award was set up last year in the wake of the passing of Paul Boskett MBE, who was one of the driving forces behind the UK Youth Parliament and a very prominent figure indeed at the British Youth Council. I remember Paul fondly and with great respect.

British Youth Council support workers and parliamentary staff will have the opportunity today to vote for a speech from a debate lead and a speech from another MYP, and 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 who wish to speak should stand in their place. It is helpful if you state your name and region at the beginning of your speech, just to be sure that the *Hansard* writers—those who compile the *Official Report*—know who you are. It is also probably advisable when you are called to pause for a moment—a matter of a couple of seconds—before starting, to enable your microphone to be activated.

There are just two other things I want to say, and then I will have the great pleasure of calling the Deputy Leader of the House, Dr Thérèse Coffey, to make some opening remarks to you, and thereafter the shadow Leader of the House, Chris Bryant.

First, on a sombre note, the funeral of Michael Meacher is taking place today in London. Michael served in this House as Labour Member of Parliament for Oldham West and Royton for 45 years. I mention Michael because

he was esteemed across the House for his dedication, his principle, his sincerity and his service. I am with you because I want to be here, and I cannot be at his funeral, but I think it only fitting that we acknowledge that service and our due respect to someone who took his responsibilities as a constituency Member of Parliament and a scrutineer of the Executive, as well as a one-time Minister, very seriously indeed.

The second thing I say to you is that the reason I am here year after year after year is partly that I enjoy the occasion, but also because I believe fundamentally and deeply in the United Kingdom Youth Parliament. Before I was elected Speaker I was one of the people who voted for your right to stage your annual debates here, and I remember one fairly crusty individual who is no longer a Member of Parliament—he has retired—and who was profoundly opposed to the Youth Parliament coming here. I did not share his dire prophecy of what would happen—he thought that at the very least if you were allowed to come here chewing gum would be left all over the Chamber and, at worst, penknives would be used and great damage inflicted on the Benches that he loved. I said that I thought that was stuff and nonsense, and I predicted that Members of the Youth Parliament would be proud to come here, would speak well and would behave much better than we do day to day.

I say in vindication of you as Members of the Youth Parliament that over the past six years I have been proved right on all three counts. There is no reason why today should be any different. I sense your feeling of pride in being here, I am confident that you will speak well, and I am sure that you will behave impeccably. Just remember, from Thérèse and Chris, to all the other Members who are observing proceedings, and to teachers, support workers, representatives of the British Youth Council, staff of the House and me, we are all on your side. We wish you well—we are proud of the fact that you are here—and I hope that you have a great day.

I will not be able to call everybody to speak, but I will try to call people from the different parts of the UK proportionately, and to ensure that there is a proper gender balance. I will do everything that I can to maximise participation. Thank you for coming—it is going to be a special day. Will you please give a warm and enthusiastic welcome to the Deputy Leader of the House, Dr Thérèse Coffey? [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I thank you Mr Speaker, and I thank the Youth Parliament. In the 800th year of Magna Carta, and the seventh year in which the UK Youth Parliament has met in the Chamber of the House of Commons, on behalf of the Government I would like to extend a warm welcome to all Members of the Youth Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written a letter to you, which will be read out by one of your colleagues shortly.

I have represented the constituents of Suffolk Coastal since 2010, and more recently I have served as a member of the Government. Together with the Leader of the House, I am responsible for representing Government in Parliament and representing Parliament in Government.

I hope that all Members of the Youth Parliament will cherish the opportunity to be here and treasure the memories of sitting in the Chamber. This is a very

special chamber. It is an honour to sit on the Benches and I expect all Members of the Youth Parliament to make the most of this during today's debate, using the opportunity with an appropriate consciousness of the history, traditions and conventions of their surroundings.

One such tradition is the saying of Prayers at the start of every sitting day. This is a special time in the Chamber. All business in the Chamber, including your debates today, takes place in public, and is recorded on television and in *Hansard*. I should advise you that, in comparison with previous years, there are some new camera angles that will be used. Daily Prayers are the only time when the Chamber is attended exclusively by Members, along with the Speaker's Chaplain and the Serjeant at Arms. There are several daily Prayers, but the one that I find special asks that Members

"keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all".

I invite Members of the Youth Parliament to look around at the walls of the Chamber, where they will see the shields that commemorate Members of the House who were killed in the two world wars and in terrorist attacks. Each day during Prayers, Members turn to the walls and face the shields, conscious of the sacrifices made. The arch we pass under as we enter the Chamber is made of bomb-scarred stone, rebuilt after the Chamber was destroyed during world war two. It acts as a reminder of what war can hold and the attack on democracy.

What matters in this House is the quality of debate. Debates in this House are not mere democratic window dressing or paying lip service to issues, but have a profound impact. Speeches in the House can turn minds. The Assisted Dying Bill, a private Member's Bill, was debated in the Chamber earlier this year, and it attracted huge interest. The House voted overwhelmingly to reject those plans on the right to die in England and Wales. However, the result of the vote was not a foregone conclusion and many minds were swayed during the course of the debate. Do not underestimate the power of the words that are spoken in the Chamber.

It is this tradition of thorough debate and effective scrutiny that Members of the Youth Parliament enter today. I am sure that they will make the most of the opportunity and will be powerful advocates for the young people whom they have been sent here to represent.

I was about to suggest that another long-standing tradition of the House is to refrain from applauding during the speeches, as you, Mr Speaker, have reminded hon. Members repeatedly during this Session. However, what matters is that the young people here get to speak, and the more I speak, the less time there is for them, so I conclude by wishing everybody here well for today.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Thérèse. I call the shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Mr Chris Bryant.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Thank you very much. It is a complete delight for me to be standing here addressing the Youth Parliament, because I was the Member of Parliament who moved the motion that the Youth Parliament be allowed to sit in this Chamber, which was successful because you, Mr Speaker, voted for it, and you, Thérèse, voted against it.

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman is accurate about what happened in 2010, but he will be aware that in 2015 I moved the motion and it secured the unanimous backing of the House.

Chris Bryant: There is more rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repenteth, so I accept your apology, Thérèse.

The single most important thing in politics—the one piece of advice I can give—is never let your ambition be determined by other people. Always campaign for what you believe in. Always believe in what you campaign for—of course, those two things have to go together, but I remember the debate on allowing the Youth Parliament to sit here. We had the Great High Crustiness himself—well, several of them—arguing that if we allowed young people in here, it would be a fundamental undermining of the whole history of Parliament, and all the rest of it. We were right to change the rules then, and I am delighted that you are able to be here and I get to speak, because I always like that.

I say never let other people determine your ambition, because I am slightly homosexual. Well, in fact I am completely homosexual. I just thought I would break it you gently. Mind you, with this tie I am not sure what else I could be—sorry, that is a terrible stereotype. The point I am making is that in my lifetime the opportunities for lesbian, gay, transsexual and bisexual people have been completely transformed in this country, because people did not let their ambition be limited by other people's prejudices, and it was an enormous delight for me in 2010 to be able to get married in this building, the first gay man to be able to do so. We then had quite a good party in your house, Mr Speaker; I do not think you paid for the drink, though.

There are a few other things I want to say—advice from an old man about politics. Many of you will not go into politics, but maybe some of you will. Maybe there is a future Prime Minister in here; maybe there are several. Maybe several of you will end up sitting on these Benches as elected Members or, for that matter, I hope one day as elected Members of the House of Lords.

The first thing I would say is always check the facts. When somebody tells you something, do not just presume it is true. I bet you have all been told that these two red lines on the carpet are two swords' lengths apart. It is nonsense. It is a myth that everybody perpetuates, time after time. It is nonsense. For a start, they would be very short swords. Secondly, people have not been allowed to carry a sword in the Chamber, apart from the Serjeant at Arms, for centuries. The last time I can find anybody recorded as wearing a sword in the Chamber was in 1784, when the then Prime Minister, Lord North, who lost the American colonies, and who was very short-sighted, tripped on somebody else's case and managed to take somebody else's wig off with his sword. That was in 1784, and it was not in this Chamber, but a previous Chamber. If you look at any of the pictures of the House of Commons, there is no carpet until 1850, so it is a complete myth. The reason I am telling you this story is: do not just accept something as truth because somebody told you it; check the facts in politics.

The other thing I would say is do not ever worry too much what other people think of you—really don't, especially if you want to go into politics. Thérèse and I are as one on this. A couple of years ago, I received two emails. The first said, "Dear Mr Bryant, I have just seen you on French television. Can I just say it was wonderful to see such a handsome man speaking so fluently in French and putting across such a good pro-European argument? It made me proud to be British." Immediately

after that—two seconds later—an email arrived that said, “Dear Mr Bryant, I have just seen you on France 24. What an odious little fart you are.” The point is, you will not win everyone over, and it really does not matter.

For that matter, do not believe half the stuff you read about yourself in the newspapers: about a tenth of it will be true, but the rest will not be. In the end, in politics, you have to believe in something, and then fight for it and campaign for it until you achieve it. Of course, you have to build alliances with other people—that is why political parties matter; it is not just about you as an individual—but in the end, it is about you doing what is right, not necessarily what you think will be popular.

There is loads more advice I could give. Turn up on time. Don’t call a vote until you know you are going to win. Stay for the vote. Learn how to count—that’s a really useful one. Don’t read the *Daily Mail*. [Applause.] But the most important piece of advice I can give you, which perhaps works for life as well, is always respect your opponents. If you do not, they will win, for a start, because they will have crafted a better argument and you will not have listened to them properly. In the end, every single person I know who has been involved in politics has been decent and honourable, and has wanted to work for the common good. That is why I say you should respect your opponents.

I hope you have an absolutely wonderful day today—I am sure you will. Although I do not think that Thérèse and I will be here for the whole debate, we will none the less be watching you with interest. I am really proud that the Youth Parliament is able to sit on these green Benches. This is where other MPs sit, but you have every bit as much of a right to sit here as we do. [Applause.]

Mr Speaker: Chris, thank you very much. I now call Owen Winter, who is going to read a message to us from the Prime Minister.

Owen Winter (South West): The letter is as follows:

“Welcome to the House of Commons and to the UK Youth Parliament. I would like to start by congratulating you all on this year’s Make Your Mark ballot, in which nearly a million votes were cast. This demonstrates how engaged young people are in issues that matter to them, and how much they want to make their voices heard.

As you may know, this year marks the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta, the document that paved the way for Parliament and democracy as we know it. I know that Members

of the Youth Parliament will speak on Magna Carta and their ideas for a modern charter later today. Your comments on this, alongside those made during today’s other debates, will be fully reported by *Hansard*, so that a written record of them exists. I hope this serves as evidence of how seriously your views are taken as the representatives for young people in your local areas.

Rob Wilson, the Minister for Civil Society, who has responsibility for youth policy, will be present at today’s debate. After attending last year’s Youth Parliament, I know how much he is looking forward to hearing young representatives’ views again and I have asked him to report back to me on the lively discussions he is sure to hear.

I hope that your experience of the House of Commons is an unforgettable one, and I wish you all the very best for the future. David Cameron.” [Applause.]

Mr Speaker: Owen, thank you very much indeed. You spoke for yourself, you represented the Prime Minister, and you are a representative of the South West, so that region should be duly proud of you.

Reference was made to Rob Wilson, the Minister within whose remit the Youth Parliament falls. Rob is not able to be here at the moment, but he will be here later today and I know he will listen intently to what you have to say. We are looking forward to it with interest and anticipation.

Just before we get under way—during the course of the day, I will reference Members of Parliament here present—I want to acknowledge with thanks the presence of Tim Loughton, the Member of Parliament for East Worthing and Shoreham, who is a former children’s Minister and a long-time supporter of the right of the UK Youth Parliament to hold its debates here. Indeed, more widely, Tim has long been a champion of the UK Youth Parliament. Colleagues, I am underlining the fact that you are surrounded by friends.

What Chris Bryant said was very important: you will speak from principle and with passion and commitment. It is always worth listening to constructive criticism, but you should not for a moment, either today or subsequently in your political activity, ever be deflected, still less dispirited, by hostility or abuse, because, as Chris implied, frankly it just does not matter. The key thing is to remain focused on what you believe, what you want to do and what you seek to campaign to accomplish. As long as you go about that with good will, commitment and integrity, you can be proud. As I say, never be blown off course by anybody else. It is great to have you here.

Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination

11.21 am

Mr Speaker: The Youth Parliament will now consider the first motion of the day: working together to combat racism and religious discrimination, particularly against people who are Muslim or Jewish—the motion as printed, as we say in the proceedings of the House, on the Order Paper. To move the motion—let’s get into the spirit of the thing, Members of the Youth Parliament—please give an acclamatory welcome to our proposer from Yorkshire and the Humber, Shamim Miah. [*Applause.*]

Shamim Miah (Yorkshire and Humber): 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.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and good morning, Members of the Youth Parliament. In every walk of life, in every community and in every society, there are good things and there are bad. Let me put that concept into perspective for you: Captain Hook and Peter Pan, Horrid Henry and Moody Margaret, and Ed Miliband and bacon butties. Similarly, in every belief system and in every race, there are good people and there are bad, but that is obvious, is it not? So why do statistics paint a different picture? Why do one in five people feel racially discriminated against every single day? Why did 95,000 young people feel it necessary to vote for this motion as a Make your Mark issue? Surely MYPs can see that racism is still a very prominent and active thing in our society.

Although we may live in a diverse society and are protected by certain laws, we have forgotten that real equality lies not on a piece of paper, nor in a piece of legislation, but through our actions that make each of us feel we belong and are equal in our communities. Some of you may be thinking, “Racism doesn’t affect me. How are we going to solve such a big issue in such a short amount of time?” The simple answer is: we can. We can bring change to these issues, because even if what we get out of it is one person feeling like they belong, we have made that difference.

MYPs, I know there are a few of us who like to log on to Facebook and upload a cheeky smile, but think about it: have we ever seen a racially or religiously hateful post and made the decision to ignore it? In doing so, we allow discrimination to go on, hiding under the mask of humour. Where do we draw the line under these persistent hate crimes? Let’s face it: we need change. The Government have put an integration and equality strategy in place, and now it is time for us—Members of the Youth Parliament across the UK—to work with our MPs and the Government to make sure those are implemented effectively and that each and every one of us are represented effectively. Locally, we can work with our schools and academies to celebrate diversity and put tackling racism and religious discrimination at the forefront of our lives and our education, therefore addressing the lack of understanding of and negative stereotypes associated with certain religions and races.

MYPs, I have a dream—a vision of greatness and change—and it includes every single one of us in the Chamber. We have the opportunity now either to leave this campaign and let it slide under the box, or to put an end to racism, stand up to discrimination and make it a thing of the past by choosing this as our national campaign. I invite you, Members of the Youth Parliament, to join me in solidarity: Join me in the fight against racism and religious discrimination. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Shamim, thank you for getting us off to such a confident and articulate start. Please, Members of the Youth Parliament, give a similarly warm welcome to the person who is now going to oppose the motion—from London, Hannah Morris. [*Applause.*]

Hannah Morris (London): No baby is born a hater. To them, a different pigment of the skin or belief in the heart is no more significant than a different shade of the eye or colour of the hair. Prejudices are learnt and acquired, taking root as they are passed on over many generations.

I am furious that there has been a 43% increase in religious-related hate crimes since last year, and a 15% increase in those that are race-related. I am equally enraged that the crimes of a few individuals can be used to tarnish a whole community’s reputation. But making this our campaign is not the solution.

Nationally, it is decided that we lobby MPs, but what will we actually ask them to do? New legislation is unnecessary if current laws are not being enforced. However, all hope is not lost. Social change, which builds on the legal framework, is currently occurring. Has Nadiya Hussain, winner of the 2015 “Bake Off”, viewed by 14.5 million people, not done more to improve race relations than a raft of new unimplemented laws?

Shamim proposes we increase education on racial and religious diversity. However, school is the one place where discrimination is already being successfully tackled. It would be brilliant if this progress could be rolled out into the wider community over five or 10 years. If only there was a select committee of young people in every public sector, including hospitals and the police force, to act as the conscience for equality. Unfortunately, that is not our proposed plan of action.

Now, listen: only two of the five motions debated today can go on to be our national campaigns—this and the living wage. Some 968,000 young people voted in “Make your Mark”. By passing this motion, will we be doing them justice? More than double the number who voted for it voted for the living wage. We are choosing between the issues that came first and last.

Why do you think young people voted in this way? Two things are clear. First, we are the generation with the potential to make change. Secondly, the solution is not immediate; it will occur gradually over many decades and centuries to come. Improvements are being made. Look at how diverse this Chamber is today. The UK Youth Parliament already stands for equality, whether or not it is our campaign.

Let us carry the message of equality out of the Chamber. Let us tackle the issue and lead the change. Let us fight for what is right, but by example and for the rest of our lives, not through a single year’s campaign. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Hannah, thank you for that immensely accomplished speech. We have got off to a cracking start with two very strong speeches.

We have just in excess of 20 minutes for this debate, so I am looking for Back-Bench contributors. There is no formal time limit, but we are looking for speeches of a couple of minutes, as I think you know. Who wants to contribute to this debate? Please stand if you wish to catch my eye.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: A waving phenomenon. Will people say from where they come?

Rahima Begum (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Hammersmith and Fulham.

If you believe that Islamophobia does not exist, you are part of the problem. Over 95,000 young people voted for us to tackle racism and religious inequality. Islam is portrayed in a negative way in a lot of the mainstream media, where a young Muslim like myself is seen as a terrorist or an extremist, as being oppressed by men and as a possible Syria runaway.

That is exactly why I want us to pick racism and religious discrimination as our national campaign. I have had racism expressed to me, and I have had people be Islamophobic to me, and I was not able to speak out about it. If we vote for this motion, we can help young people speak out about these issues.

We can work on this campaign by creating a debate. We can create a discussion in schools and in youth organisations like the UK Youth Parliament, so that we can talk about racism and religious tolerance. We can spread a positive image of young people from different races and different religions. We can show that it does not matter what you look like or what religion you are—we are young people, and we are awesome. Lastly, we can work with the Government to make sure that policies are actually helping people of different races and religions, not affecting them negatively. So remember: let's be game changers. Let's start today by voting to tackle racism. *[Applause.]*

Euan Waddell (Scotland): I represent East Renfrewshire in the west of Scotland.

Coming from East Renfrewshire—one of the most culturally diverse areas in Scotland—I know that racism is a big issue. As Members of the UK Youth Parliament, we are the leaders of tomorrow, and we need to lead by example. Racism should be a thing of the past. We live in the 21st century, for goodness' sake. Racism should not be felt by anybody.

Racism should be our national campaign because it affects everybody in every community. I think it is something all of us can really get behind as we strive towards equality for all young people. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Sophie Bell (Northern Ireland): As many of you know, we have our own sectarian issues in Northern Ireland, but we also have religious ones. These issues are a big problem for us. In Belfast alone, hate crime is up by 43%, which is especially bad for young people, because we want to feel integrated into our societies.

I urge you to support the motion, because no matter what your ethnicity or your religion—or your lack thereof—you should be able to contribute to our society. *[Applause.]*

Amira El-Fanichi (East of England): I am representing Hertfordshire and the East of England.

The Equality Act 2010 aims, among other things, to reduce socioeconomic inequalities, to prohibit victimisation and to amend the laws relating to rights and responsibilities in family relationships. A 2013 survey of British social attitudes reported an increase to 30% in the number of people describing themselves as having some degree of racial prejudice, compared with an all-time low of 25% in 2001.

We have recently celebrated 40 years since the birth of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The Act put in place a legal framework offering women and men the same protections against bias and harassment in the workplace. We have not lived up to the ideals those laws were designed around. We are still in a society where women are paid less than their male counterparts.

In conclusion, equality and discrimination cannot be legislated for alone. Instead, we need a commitment from policymakers, businesses and educators to work in partnership and to change entrenched racist attitudes so that these laws are embedded in our culture. We need to find ways to bring down systematic barriers and to create a happy society. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Marouf Ahmed (North West): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am Marouf “is on fire” Ahmed—*[Laughter.]* I represent Oldham; I'm from the North West. I believe that this is a very important issue for Members of the Youth Parliament. We are all enthusiastic young people. We are the future generation of this country. We need to take this one small step to creating change in the UK. It took Rosa Parks not getting up off her seat for the Montgomery bus boycott to take place and, as we know, from that there was huge change for black people in the United States of America. I believe that this one-year campaign will be a trigger for ongoing campaigns in the future. *[Applause.]*

Elif Emma True (North East): I'm from South Tyneside. I think that not many people in the Chamber are going to disagree with this motion, but a contributory factor for someone who does disagree with it is perhaps that we are all from different parts of the UK and we all experience diversity very differently. For example, in the north-east, you are considered diverse if you are from Scotland. We do not have the same experience as you have in London or other more diverse places. I think that that contributes to the fact that certain extreme right-wing parties came third in the majority of constituencies in the north-east. To me, that is bizarre.

Where we live, we can't just go outside and see people who are diverse, ethnically or religiously, from us and realise that they are in fact just the same as us. A lot of the time, we see what we see in the newspapers and say, “Oh, that must be true,” because we can't experience it and see that it is not true. I think that a lot of people do believe in that kind of thing, with 30% of the north-east saying that they have racial prejudice towards people, which is disgusting to me. Surely you must all agree that something needs to change. I support this motion and think that you all should as well. *[Applause.]*

Charlie Doherty (South East): I represent Crawley and East Grinstead.

I feel that this should be our campaign or one of the two campaigns. I think that this is part of the issue. I have witnessed it myself and it may be the reason why this subject came fifth out of the chosen issues: people are not aware that what they are saying could be racially or religiously offensive to someone. I have witnessed in my local area people younger than me, my age and older making racial comments. To them, it may seem like just a joke, but to someone else it may hit close to home and seriously affect them. They may see that as racism, but to other people it may be just a joke, so I feel that this being one of our campaigns would be such a good cause, as it would enable people really to understand what racism is and how it could be affecting other people when they don't really realise it. *[Applause.]*

Cameron Docherty (Wales): I represent Rhondda Cynon Taf in Wales. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Farmyard noises are quite common in the House—*[Laughter.]*

Cameron Docherty: I oppose this motion and will explain why. I am completely ashamed, as a citizen of the UK, that religious hate crimes have gone up by 43% and race hate crimes are at 42,930. I am ashamed of what is happening with certain right-wing groups, which I will not name. They include one very large one on Facebook and Twitter, which is very popular and all over young people's screens.

I have said what I have said because I decided to do some research on the stats I found. I went on the Home Office website and found that although we are looking at race and religion, we are ignoring lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender discrimination and ignoring disability, despite there being a higher increase in disability and LGBT hate crimes than in those relating to race and despite there being higher hate crimes in relation to LGBT than in relation to religion. I hope no one is going to tell me that that is not important, as that is almost 10,000 hate crimes out of the Home Office total of 52,000. How can we be saying that almost a fifth of those hate crimes do not matter because they do not involve race or religion?

Young people sometimes seem to find it funny to insult people, irrespective of whether they are straight or gay, disabled or not disabled, by calling them certain names—bullying names, but people let them go because it is seen as a joke. This is a hate crime and bullying, yet it is seen as a joke when fun is made of different people's sexual orientations or certain aspects of their personality. That is why I am opposing this motion, because until every hate crime is accounted for and we stop this from happening, we will not be doing our job. We are not counting for these people, but only counting for certain things.

I respect Shamim Miah's point, but he has to understand that LGB rights, trans-gender rights, disability rights and discrimination do matter. There should be no discrimination. *[Applause.]*

Emma Curran (West Midlands): Some may remember that I spoke against this motion at the annual sitting on the grounds that I did not feel it was right to focus

purely on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Rather, I thought we should take a stance against all behaviour of this kind as it is equally negative. For the same reason, I ask you to vote against this motion. I am worried that focusing on only one or two kinds of religious discrimination sends out an isolating message rather than one of unity and togetherness.

I would hate a young person who has been victimised, without experiencing Islamophobia or anti-Semitism, to think that their representatives place more emphasis on those kinds of behaviour. In fact, we should take a stance against all racism and religious discrimination, which is equally wrong. We should condemn all forms of this unlawful and unforgivable behaviour. Without this particular clause, I would totally support the motion, because the issue is important and it is a proper challenge for us—but not in this way. *[Applause.]*

Zara Qureshi (London): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I represent Hounslow.

Everyone thinks that racism is an issue of the past. My borough is thought to be the epitome of racial tolerance and harmony, yet racial attacks are going up 10% year on year. We know that British youth are more diverse than our parents, but we need to combat racism, challenge ourselves and put questions to everyone we know about this. Even more importantly, the UK Youth Parliament needs to ask itself, "Are we really representative of the UK, and are we using our diversity as our strength? Are we really doing that?" That is where we need to start. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: We have yet to hear a Back-Bench contributor from Yorkshire and Humberside. I am slightly concerned that you will fall over by jumping up and down with such buoyancy and enthusiasm, but I cannot ignore it: thou shalt be heard.

Eleri Kirkpatrick-Lorente (Yorkshire and Humberside): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from Sheffield.

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that this is the most important motion we are voting on today. Many of you might be asking why we should vote for it. The fact is that, at the moment in our communities, there is hatred, intolerance and ignorance, and the best way to combat that is by saying that young people believe that that is wrong.

I agree with some of the points made by the opposing side, but there is no denying that there are other forms of discrimination and hatred. There is LGBT discrimination; there is disability discrimination, but that does not mean that the discrimination mentioned in the motion is not an issue. In fact, we should encourage going further; at least this is a start.

Many people deny that racism exists in this country, but by agreeing with this campaign we are already half way there. We are admitting there is a problem and we are trying to fix it. I do not think we are ignoring other types of discrimination just because we do not have a particular clause in the campaign. We are just saying that for this year, we want to focus on this issue, and that the Youth Parliament does not endorse hatred of any kind, but especially on this level.

The fact is that the number of hate crimes last year was 46,180, and that includes religious and race hate crimes. I would like all of you to join me in saying that

that is 46,180 hate crimes too many, and that we should definitely solve this as a Youth Parliament. I know it is a long time until we have to vote, but this is an issue that matters to young people. How can we claim to live in a liberal democracy if people are discriminated against on the basis of their religion, their culture or their skin colour—arbitrary factors that do not really matter because it is personality that is important? So please vote for this issue. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Very well spoken. Thank you.

Matthew Joliffe (South West): I have been speaking to a 14-year-old from an Islamic background in my constituency who has had first-hand experience of racism in Poole. Hearing from her what she goes through on a daily basis really shocked me. I firmly believe that it is vital that we reduce the negative perceptions and stereotypes of other beliefs and faiths. She consistently experiences abuse at school and on the street, often from people who are unknown to her. This makes her feel so self-conscious about her culture and other people's attitudes towards her that she is often afraid even to go into town. This cannot happen. We must not let it happen. So today, I ask you all to join me, and to help to make a significant change in the life of her and many, many others. *[Applause.]*

Connor Dwyer (North West): It is an honour to speak today, Mr Speaker, and I am very proud to speak on behalf of a city that is, and has been for many generations, multicultural, respectful and peaceful. In young and old, there is very little ignorance, and it is ignorance that we must fight, because it is ignorance that is at the core of religious and racial discrimination. We must use our education system not just to promote British values, but to promote the values of all cultures and of all beliefs, races and religions. Am I wrong in saying, Mr Speaker, that the greatest British value of all is indeed respect?

We must use education to expose the lies that are so often spread across social media, in the media itself, and even by those in politics: those who spread hate, those who spread discrimination, those who spread this vile disease across our communities. Nelson Mandela once referred to education as the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. We, as the Youth Parliament, must use this campaign to make education that weapon to fight ignorance, destroy intolerance, and fight racism at its very core. This campaign may be only a small step on a very long road, but that road leads to a peaceful future. Please join me on it. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Very well done.

We have yet to hear a voice from the east midlands. Gosh! I am spoilt for choice.

Ria Pahwa (East Midlands): I represent Leicester City.

Racism will end when the sun grows cold. Since we were five, we have been the beneficiaries of our school's policy on equality, diversity and inclusion. We make posters for black history month, hold nativity plays at Christmas, draw rangoli patterns for Diwali, and learn about sacrifice at Eid. Respect for different values is already part of our curriculum at every stage of education, and it has not worked.

While I agree with the statement that all young people should work together to combat racism, it is simply a pipe dream. In an ideal society, we could teach people to abhor racism, that race itself is a false construct, and that we are all essentially the same. However, although our society attempts to enlighten us with tolerance and tells us that intolerance is morally wrong, a percentage of our population will always fail to tolerate anyone different from their own group.

Racism is illogical, so we cannot have a reasoned debate about it. Despite our valiant efforts, racism refuses to die. Therefore, although I wish this could be our campaign, there is no way to reason with the unreasonable. *[Applause.]*

Daanyall Khan (South East): As a young Muslim, I have often faced racial and religious discrimination. We all know about 9/11, and my life has probably never been the same since then. However, I would not support this motion simply because I feel that lobbying will not make any difference. We already have so many laws and so much legislation in place.

The biggest issue is ignorance, as many speakers have said. What we need to realise is that ignorance is one vital reason why racism and religious discrimination are perpetuated throughout our society. Religious discrimination against Sikhs has increased massively over the last 10 years. Because Sikh people wear turbans, they are often seen as Muslim, which causes a chain effect.

If anyone really feels that they want to support this motion, they would be better off voting for a curriculum for life, which is probably one of the best ways to combat racism. I ask everyone here today: who has been talked to in school about why racism is wrong? We are all told that it is a bad thing and that we just shouldn't do it, but if you are not told why, you will probably go and support it. If a child is not told that he is going to burn his hand if he puts it in a fire, he is more likely to put his hand in a fire. That is why I ask you all here today not to support this motion but instead to think logically about the reasons why racial and religious discrimination occur. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: If possible, I would like one more speaker from Scotland. I don't think I am proving myself to be Sherlock Holmes if I suggest that you are from Scotland.

Kain McLeod (Scotland): At least I hope so. Going back to what an MYP said earlier, if you vote for a curriculum for life, it is an England-only issue—it will not affect Scotland—and racism is a UK-wide problem. I live in the north-east of Scotland, Aberdeenshire to be precise, and it is one of the least diverse areas in Scotland. This was in my manifesto for a reason.

This is an issue for the UK, and although one in five hate crimes will be ignored, four out of five will not. I found out that the worst you can get for a racist crime is six months in jail, which is not right. We need to change attitudes, and people who will not change their attitude need to be given more punishment. A quick observation: everyone who has spoken against this motion, apart from one, has been white. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: We must now wind up this debate. And to conclude it, from the south-west of England, I call Freya Pigott.

Freya Pigott (South West): “Go back to your country.” “Go home and make a bomb on the internet.” “I’ll kick you in the uterus and you will never have a kid again.” Exactly a month ago on 13 October, a film taken on the 206 London bus went viral on the internet. It depicted one passenger hurling abuse and threats at two other passengers who just so happened to be Muslim.

Such incidents are not uncommon. The rate of Islamophobic crime has grown by 70% in the capital, and anti-Semitic attacks have increased by more than 50% within a year. Racism is as prevalent as ever, with black people being up to 17.5 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police. Black people are even having to wait 32% longer than white people simply to cross a road. With stats like these, and with just under 100,000 young people voting for this topic in Make Your Mark, it is evident that racism and religious discrimination is an issue that has yet to meet its end. However, is it up to young people to adopt armour and take up this cause?

Time. How much of it do we have? This could be 365 days of productivity and success, changing attitudes and educating minds. However, with the school-based approach it could be 365 days of phone calls with no answers, inboxes with no replies and an unchanging situation.

Circumstance. Where are we starting from? The campaign suggests that the Government need to do more, but surely with the 2010 introduction of the equalities strategy and the 2012 establishment of the hate crime action plan there is little more that the Government can do. However, is the basic introduction of these laws doing the situation justice? With 89% of hate crime being race or religion related, the numbers tell us otherwise.

Effectiveness. Stand Up To Racism and FAIR, the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, are two examples of charities that are already fighting the problem. If we vote for the motion, surely we run the risk of depriving them of their purpose and diluting the cause altogether—but undoubtedly we know that another voice will only make the objective louder and make the goal more realistic.

Time, circumstance and effectiveness: three factors that will inevitably have an impact on the outcome. MYPs in the Chamber today, it is your job to make the decision. Can we make a reality from this vision? *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Freya, thank you for winding up the debate so effectively. I am sorry that not everybody could be called, but that is always the case in such circumstances. We will do our best to accommodate people in subsequent debates. Obviously, you have a better chance of speaking if you try to catch my eye in more than just one debate.

Mental Health

Mr Speaker: Before we consider the second motion on mental health services, I want to mention to you that the Minister for Community and Social Care at the Department of Health, Mr Alistair Burt, is unable to be with us, but he has sent a statement. It is a most excellent statement, but it contains a large number of words and I am not able to read the whole thing out because I want you to have the chance to continue your debates. He says that he is not able to be here as he is at a conference in the middle east, but he welcomes the fact that mental health has been voted as a priority for discussion and emphasises that mental health is a personal priority area of policy for him.

Specifically, he says:

“We know that wellbeing and educational attainment go hand in hand and that is why I am working so closely with my colleague Sam Gyimah, the first Education minister with responsibility for mental health. We will also be launching the largest ever national campaign to reduce stigma and discrimination targeted both at young people and their parents at the end of this month.”

He goes on to say:

“The Department of Health and Department for Education will continue to work with you as MYPs and DMYPs, and many other groups of young people, to ensure that the views of young people are incorporated into the work we are doing. I will be attending the launch of the British Youth Council’s Youth Select Committee report on mental health next Tuesday and I look forward to responding to the report’s findings and recommendations on behalf of the Government.”

We are grateful to Alistair.

I underline my delight that you have chosen this subject. Today is about you, what you think, what you are doing and what you want, but by way of encouragement and reinforcement of your efforts, I will mention that mental health has been much more discussed in this House in recent years. Specifically, I think that the attempt to destigmatise the issue and remove the taboo received a huge boost when a number of my colleagues chose to speak out about their personal experiences. Ever since then, there has been a greater focus on the issue. I have just penned an article on what the House is doing to boost mental health services for Members of Parliament, which is about to be published. All credit to you for what you are doing and I look forward to the debate on this motion. Please enthusiastically welcome Namir Chowdhury, from the West Midlands, to move the motion. *[Applause.]*

11.59 am

Namir Chowdhury (West Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to speak in favour of the motion:

We believe that mental health education should be made compulsory in our curriculum. This should provide information about common clinical conditions including depression and challenge stereotypes and taboos surrounding mental health issues. We believe the UK government should increase provision of mental health services for young people and improve the existing facilities by making them accessible, free of charge and age appropriate. Young people with mental health conditions should receive treatment in mental health services that work exclusively with young people.

When I say “1.8 million”, am I talking about the population of a city? Perhaps I am talking about the number of selfies Kim Kardashian takes in a day.

No—I am referring to how many young people suffer from a mental health illness, with more than 50% of those being under 14.

The services available do not reflect that need: only 6% of mental health funding is for young people. That is disgraceful, but the Youth Select Committee's investigation into this area shows us what we need to do. It would be a waste of a year's campaigning if we did not carry it forward by choosing mental health today. I am proud that we prioritised this issue last year, and we have identified the most deprived areas, but there is more to do.

This issue got 30% more votes in Make Your Mark. The people we represent realised that 12 months simply have not been enough. We need 12 more—just 12 more—to implement these changes, so that the silent cry of 1.8 million young people does not go unheard. We need to fight for a school counsellor and improve awareness in the curriculum—the impacts would be nothing short of life-saving.

Let me give you an example. I once mentored a lovely girl who struggled to cope with every-day life. One day, her best friend showed her an unhealthy escape and she began to crave the feeling of being numb. She forgot about everything else, and her friends no longer existed. She stopped eating. She refused to go outside. She became trapped. And in all that time she had to overcome the stereotypes around mental health, find the courage to contact these cash-strapped services, and deal with the constant referrals and rejections, when all she wanted was someone just to listen. We can be the voice that gives her what she desperately needs, not what she is told to need.

I want you to think about her. She suffered because of this stigma, a flaw in society which has existed for too long and meant that too many people get hurt. It needs to be challenged, so let us challenge it through mental health awareness—it is costless, yet priceless. We have to show you that if you are suffering from depression, anorexia, self-harm or any other illness, you are not attention-seeking and you are not worthless.

Imagine the number of lives improved, or even saved, if we make the right choice today. MYPs, we cannot approach this decision as elected representatives; we have to approach it as human beings. So let us use this platform to make sure that young people are free to express their feelings, that the last year of hard campaigning was worth while and that generations are proud because those young people who felt lost were empowered by our efforts.

Mr Speaker: Namir, thank you for that heartfelt and passionate opening speech in our debate, which is hugely appreciated by the House. To oppose the motion, I call Alisha Gibbons from Wales. I hope you will give her a very warm welcome.

Alisha Gibbons (Wales): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Your mother, your brother or even your next-door neighbour: don't you have the responsibility to listen? Mental health affects everyone, not just pupils in school. We should not be campaigning for mental health education to be made compulsory in our schools, because it affects the young, the old and anyone in between. We need to tackle stigma, challenge attitudes and change behaviour around mental illness. To do that, we need a community

approach that involves everybody; we must not put the responsibility just on to schools. The Government's 2011 mental health strategy "No health without mental health" stated:

"By promoting good mental health and intervening early, particularly in the crucial childhood and teenage years, we can help to prevent mental illness from developing and mitigate its effects when it does."

If that is true, should we really wait for school? Does not the family have an important role to play in the health, well-being and happiness of children? What about those who are not in school—those who are home tutored, those who are not in employment, education or training, and those who are over 16 who face a challenging time of transition? How do they access information on mental health?

Over £4.4 million was given to local authorities in Wales to run school-based counselling services in 2012. The campaign speaks about ensuring that every school has a counsellor. Why? Is it just to be told that you are not enough of a danger to yourself, after you finally have the courage to ask for help? That is what happened to my friend and me. Many young people do not see school as a safe place. Would you want to talk about or admit to personal difficulties? It is hard for many young people because of the fear of the consequences and the stigma. It can bring a feeling of personal shame.

I celebrate the Youth Select Committee's report on mental health. Its recommendations have been welcomed by Ministers and acknowledged by the Department of Health. Our voices have been heard on the issue, so why spend another 12 months tackling it? We need to provide a safe environment for young people to share their difficulties—not just with teachers. It does not have to be at school; it can be at a local youth club, someone's living room or even a park bench. We need to tackle this as a community. If the mental health of young children is fundamental for us, we must emphasise that you do not have to be an expert to talk about mental health—you just need to begin a conversation about it, as someone did with me.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for that powerful speech. Can we hear a contributor from Northern Ireland?

Niesha Kelly (Northern Ireland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Many young people going to school every day suffer from a mental health disorder, and do not even realise that they have it, for the simple reason that it cannot be seen in their physical appearance. They are told daily that they are just upset and will get over it, but how do we know that they will?

I speak from experience in saying it is not easy to have mental health problems, and I am tired of seeing many people feeling the same way. No one deserves to go through something like that, and it affects children as young as nine. Even though we cannot stop people from having mental health problems or being diagnosed as having them, we certainly can and must help them. We must get them the mental health education that they need so that they do not feel isolated in school, inform them that there is someone they can turn to for help, provide the funding for the counselling they are entitled to and, most importantly, make them realise that they are important and that the mental health problem from which they suffer does not dictate their future.

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Wow! Lots of people want to speak. Anyone from Scotland?

Molly Kirby (Scotland): Molly Kirby from central Scotland—if you have not guessed from the tartan dress.

To put it into perspective, one in 10 young people under 15 suffers from a mental health issue. With over 300 young people in the UK Youth Parliament, that means that, statistically, 30 of us will suffer from a mental health issue, but would any of you know what to do? Would you know where to seek help? Would you get that help? Probably not. It is shocking that young people do not get the help that they need. In my school, we have a counsellor, but there is a waiting list. Why should someone have to wait to get help that should be provided by the Government?

This is a really important issue for Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament. We chose mental health as our national campaign for 2016. What could we do with a UK-wide campaign on mental health? The Government could not ignore us. It is about time that we took a stand and said that young people's mental health is important. It is not something that can be ignored. Just because it cannot be seen does not mean that it is not there, and I would urge you all to vote for the issue.

Mr Speaker: Thank you so much for that sincere and wonderfully fluent speech. I would like to hear someone from London. Specifically, is there anyone from Islington or north London?

Tosin Ilemobola (London): Me, sir.

Mr Speaker: Are you an Arsenal fan?

Tosin Ilemobola: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Good, you can speak.

Tosin Ilemobola: Oh my gosh, thank you so much for the opportunity. I am the MYP for Barnet. Mental health—those two simple words describe something that can make someone feel as if their whole life is not worth living. I used to think that a mental health problem just meant that someone was upset, and I would say that they should solve it by going out more. I later found out that this is far from the truth. One in six people suffers from mental health problems. This is the statistic for the number of people in Britain who experience at least one type of mental illness at any time in their lives—one in six. The number of people who wake up every morning thinking about how their day is going to be harder than everyone else's—one in six. The number of people who need to be understood and helped—one in six.

We need to make sure that people feel comfortable talking about mental health with their family, friends and experts. We need to make sure that people never know the pain of being made fun of, due to having a mental illness. We need to make sure that these people—these one in six of the British population—are living a life in which they wake up every morning and know how to deal with their obstacles, and know that there are people who understand and can help them with their obstacles. Vote for the motion. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Who have we got from Yorkshire and Humberside?

Alex Pennington (Yorkshire and Humber): In 2014 a survey was carried out which found that 15% of young people with mental health issues felt that they were bullied. Although the Government announced at the time that they were working with schools to reduce this number, is there really any concrete evidence that this had happened?

Mental health affects everyone, whether positively or negatively. There has been a rise in mental health issues among young people. Is it not our responsibility to tackle an issue which so directly affects young people especially? The first step must be to tackle stigma and eliminate the preconception of mental health as a taboo subject. From there, as the biggest youth voice in the country, there is no limit to what we can achieve to expand mental health services and eliminate bullying and discrimination centred around mental health. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a representative from Wales who would like to contribute to these exchanges?

Laura Luke (Wales): It was mentioned earlier that mental health issues can affect everyone, not just young people. I agree with this statement, as mental health problems can develop at any time on any day to anyone. Although starting at an early age may help combat mental health issues, it may not work for everyone. Therefore we need extra support for those who are not in school, extra support for those who are in school, and extra support for those who are afraid to speak out.

MYPs opposite only offer half the solution, so all of us today must take responsibility, even if it is just doing something as simple as speaking out and challenging mental health stereotypes.

Mr Speaker: What about the east of England?

Tom Bolitho (East of England): Obviously, everyone here agrees that mental health is a really big problem, but my issue with this motion is whether this is the best place for us to be most effective. I think that we work best when we have bottom-up grassroots campaigns, but this is an issue that has to be dealt with from the top. There are other motions that would allow us to better help young people, working within the communities and with our communities.

Furthermore, we should highlight the fact that this is a difficult campaign for a lot of MYPs to campaign on. It is an issue that affects them personally, and in the past perhaps it has not been dealt with in the most sensitive manner, so if it is decided to make this the campaign, I ask that all the organisations involved commit to making it sensitive and safe for the MYPs campaigning on it.

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

Noah Aldous (North West): I held up the owl last year.

This is about education. Most of us are in school, college or sixth form. Through education we learn to progress in life and to further understand subjects. How

can someone expect to be a premier league footballer without proper training and education? The best thing we can do to get rid of mental health stigma, issues and misunderstandings is to educate and include people. We need to include the people who refuse to accept that it is an issue—we should keep educating them until they fully understand that it is an issue.

I keep hearing that one in six people is affected. One in six people may speak Spanish or German. Those are subjects at school; so should mental health be—simple as. *[Applause.]*

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

Liam Cartwright (North East): During a visit to one of the best mental health services for young people in the country, it became apparent that education within the services is not up to par with education outside the services. We cannot have 12-year-olds and 18-year-olds in the same class or expect them to have the same kind of education. We should rectify that to make sure that every young person has a fair crack of the whip. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: It is London's turn again. Who are we going to hear from? *[Interruption.]* Gosh, you are going to burst. I am very worried about you. I hope you are going to be all right—of course you are, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Saffron Worrell (London): I represent the London borough of Lewisham. Why does this campaign mean so much to me? Because it symbolises what young people have to fight for. We need to feel valued. We need to feel happy, and that the future is going to be bright. Some young people do not feel that way. Ninety-five per cent. of young offenders have a mental health illness. Did you know that if you are mentally ill you are more likely to end up in prison than under mental health services?

We need to stand up and make a change on this. We need to show young people that we are listening and are representing them. This issue affects everyone—everyone has mental health. Let's stand up against mental health illnesses, and stand up for emotional wellbeing. We should not just show young people how to fight for jobs when they are older, or how to fight to be heard in school or to get good grades. Let's teach young people the value of living. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: We need to hear someone from the South West. There is a forest of hands, including one that is wobbling and waving—your good self.

Chelsea White (South West): I represent Sedgemoor and Mendip. The statistics on mental health there are that between one in three, one in four and one in six people are affected. Those numbers are still too high. Despite those high numbers, there is still such a huge stigma about mental health. Shows such as “The Big Bang Theory” glorify that stigma. I want to emphasise that the fact that we cannot see a mental health illness does not mean that it is not as important as physical illness.

On the point made earlier about the campaign needing to be top down, I think that for this campaign, the more voices there are, the better. We still have so much to do

as a body, and I want to be part of a body that works so that future generations of young people have support, whether self-referral services or referral services. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: In case you are wondering why I am not going from one side of the Chamber to the other, I should say that I am very anxious that every debate should feature a contribution from each part of the country. So far in this debate we have not heard from either the East Midlands or the West Midlands. Let us start with the East Midlands.

George Baker (East Midlands): I want to come back to the statistic given earlier—the one in six. I think it is more than that. One in six people might have a mental illness, but I guarantee you that you will know someone who does. That is why education is so important. It is not just a case of educating those people with a mental illness but educating those who have to help them—those who have friends who come to them for help. This motion is so important, because it is important that we all know what to do. It is so easy. There is more Government spending every year on mental health—£1.25 billion in the last Budget—so let us make sure that that money is spent wisely. We can do that. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: We can squeeze one more person in before the winding-up speech. Who do we have standing from the West Midlands? Let us have the young woman who is second to the end, waving at me.

Laura Sheldon (West Midlands): Before I start, I want to say that my body is doing all it can to stop me having a panic attack, so please bear with me. That really proves how much of a hidden issue mental health is.

Funding cuts and a lack of education have left young people suffering in silence. We hear that one in four people suffer from a mental health issue at some point in their lives, but I think it is four in four, because everyone hits a bump in the road at some point in their lives. Everyone needs help, and we all know that prevention is better than cure.

The Youth Select Committee report on mental health, which I am proud to say I was involved in, will go to the Government next week, but that is not enough. We need to speak for the weak—those who do not have a voice. We are elected to represent young people, and every single young person suffers from exam stress. Every single young person suffers from some sort of mental health issue, and we need to finish the job we started.

Several MYPs *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I am so sorry because, as is normal in these situations, demand exceeds supply; in other words, more people want to speak than there is time for. We have, I am afraid, to move on to the third debate shortly, so forgive me. Please keep trying in subsequent debates if you have not spoken. Please give a very warm welcome to the speaker from the East of England who will wind up this debate, Toby Jeffery.

Toby Jeffery (East of England): It does not matter how much money the Government invest in young people's mental health, if the young people who use the

services say they are not good enough, there is still more work to do. Despite the Government setting waiting time standards for the talking therapies available to young people, referral waiting times are still ludicrously long.

Before we start talking about the services, let us consider the fact that young people face a stigma attached to mental health. We know that nearly three in four young people fear the reactions of friends when they talk about possible mental health problems, which tells us that young people need someone they can trust and talk to openly about their issues. When young people go online looking for help, so that they can begin to understand exactly what they are feeling, they are often directed to organisations such as ChildLine. ChildLine is not a mental health service. The second year of the Youth Parliament's mental health campaign could focus on those three things: services, stigma and the availability of accessible resources for young people.

This year has been challenging, despite all our efforts. Whether we are putting up posters in schools, speaking to clinical commissioning groups about the services they provide or fighting the cuts to CAMHS, we are not always being listened to. It is worth questioning what the specific objectives of our campaign this year were and whether we have achieved them. There have been calls for us to move on to another campaign, seeing as the Government are perhaps responding to the crisis that young people are facing up and down the country. They have invested an extra £1.25 billion in improving mental health services for children, young people and new mothers. We should ask ourselves: is it worth putting more time and effort into campaigning for another year, when action will be taken without our influence?

I am without doubt that young people with mental health problems are watching this speech today online, on TV or in this Chamber. Regardless of what happens in the vote, they must understand that they do not have to face their problems alone. They must understand that there are people who will help them and that it will get better. I leave you with this question: is choosing mental health as our national campaign a good way to demonstrate that?

Mr Speaker: Toby, thank you for beautifully winding up what I think has been an impassioned, principled and really valuable debate. Whatever you decide, you will always remember this debate, and so will I.

Public Transport

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, the Youth Parliament will now consider the third motion of the day, and the last of our morning session, to make public transport cheaper, better and accessible for all, as printed on the Order Paper.

12.24 am

Rose Warburton (North West): I want to speak in favour of the motion:

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

Northumberland: a 14-year-old is made to pay an adult bus fare to school every day. Warrington: a 16-year-old requires weekly doctor's appointments, but can no longer afford the journeys. Given the chance, would you help these young people? I hope so, because today—right now—you have that chance.

Four years ago, the Youth Select Committee prepared a report on transport. Four weeks ago, 108,000 young people voted that we campaign on this issue once again. If an illness were diagnosed four years ago, would you stop the treatments today? Let us use the evidence from the report to create a reformed, refreshed and reinvented campaign. Let us aim for a reform, such as a national concessionary scheme to provide discounted travel for young people, similar to the young person's rail card.

Many will question what we can really achieve on a national scale when local authorities are at different stages. Let us use that to our advantage, increasing a patch quilt of reform, naming the places where transport is accessible and showing those where it is not but it could be. Let us lobby MPs to put pressure on the Government to reintroduce the Youth Select Committee for transport. Let us give transport another push—the final push it needs.

This issue is so much more than buses, trains and expense; it leaves young people feeling disdained, deprived and disillusioned. As a child, I could not wait to experience a bus or a train journey. I looked forward to the wipers swishing, children chattering and drivers honking. However, when we grow up, blue steam trains lose their smiley faces, and we forget to notice the swishing and the honking while we worry whether we can afford the bus to school tomorrow.

In 2008, the Local Transport Act was passed, stating that local authorities are required to consult young people on public transport; yet, how many of you have been given the chance to shape your local services? In 2010, a national consultation found that one third of NEET young people—those not in education, employment or training—would continue in education or training if given financial support for transport. In 2015, the Make Your Mark consultation has proven that young people are not content about these services.

Today, we have the opportunity to restore the magic of a day-to-day necessity. Today, we have the chance to make a difference—to make a change—and tomorrow, we will make young people's voices heard, their journeys more affordable and their transport more accessible.
[Applause.]

Mr Speaker: Rose, thank you very much, indeed. Now, to oppose the motion, from the East Midlands, I call—and please welcome—Daria Eckert.

Daria Eckert (East Midlands): I live between Leicestershire and Leicester. As in most places, we are dependent on our public transport to take us to school, to a part-time job or to our friends. In Leicestershire, I know it is a real issue to get from one village to the next. We have been trying to work with our bus companies to make improvements, but it may take a long time before we reach a good conclusion. However, if I lived one mile further north into Leicester city, the story would be different because there transport is less of an issue, so perhaps we would discuss different issues, such as racism, mental health or the living wage.

Can this campaign really be a co-ordinated success if we all come from different places with different needs? For example, the person sitting next to you may have a very different public transport network from yours, with different privatised companies and a public transport system you do not even have. With different times and different prices, each community needs to tackle transport as a community, not a nation.

Transport takes time, commitment and huge investment. Four years ago, transport was our national campaign; yet I am not sure that much changed. What is to say that this year will be any different? We should be using the Youth Select Committee's recommendations in our local areas, instead of producing new ones just to use nationally.

Cheaper transport—how sensible is that demand? Who will pay? We would be asking private companies to reduce their income. Even if we lobbied our MPs to pressure the Government to support the bus discount card, the Government are unlikely to commit to it. Maybe our efforts are better put elsewhere.

In one area, the demand is for more buses at certain times; in another, it is to make the trams cheaper. All some areas want is a bus; and most areas want an accessible network, not in 2020, but today.

Yes, transport is unbelievably important in some areas, and it needs to be tackled—but not by us all, and not nationally. So let us instead invest our time and effort in a campaign where each MYP can make a difference and where we can make a real impact. *[Applause.]*

Gareth Hampton (Northern Ireland): I believe in this motion because I live in a city called Armagh. It is the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, yet it is the only city in the UK without a train station. Why is this? It is because politicians are not bothered. Our politics is not represented in Westminster.

The lack of a train station prevents us from accessing higher education elsewhere, just because we live away in rural Armagh. Private cars cost a lot in insurance, and young people simply cannot afford that. This motion should be supported to make sure that everyone has access to education, no matter where they are from. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Just before I call the next speaker, I want to acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the Attorney General—the last time I looked, he was the Member for Kenilworth and Southam. He just sidled up to me and said he was about to go. He added, “They’re very good, aren’t they?” I said, “Yes, they certainly are.” Jeremy, thank you for giving us your moral support and for being present here today. It is greatly appreciated.

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Thanks. Well done, everyone.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Okay, do we have a speaker from Scotland? Yes, let us hear the young man here.

Robbie McIntosh (Scotland): Now, you will have to forgive me, because I’m a bit chesty. I’ve been a bit ill recently—the cold north and all that.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am Robbie McIntosh, for Clackmannanshire, which is in the region of Clackmannanshire and Dunblane, in Mid Scotland and Fife.

The Scottish Youth Parliament has policies regarding public transport, several of which are comprehensive and very effective. However, I would like to speak about the UK level, although I know that this is a devolved issue.

The pros regarding public transport—*[Interruption.]* Sorry about that. My voice is breaking up. It’s the cold—it’s terrible, so it is. Given what has been said about public services, they certainly do need to be improved, and the funding does need to be there.

I have a story regarding a private bus company that provides our school with school buses. I mean no disrespect to the company—I know its owner, and he is a pleasant enough man—but the buses are not up to par. We have discovered insects in the ceiling. We have discovered faults with the buses. Inspections on the buses by Police Scotland found drivers without bus driving licences. There were faults with the engines and the transmission.

That is caused by my council’s lack of negotiating power. Clackmannanshire council is one of the most cash-strapped in Scotland. I do not expect your pity or any empathy for my county; money is a problem, and we will deal with it as is. However, the lack of a negotiating position puts us in this position. The lives of children are put at stake if buses are not being driven by people who understand the rules of the road. Faulty parts are not acceptable.

I am speaking in favour of the motion, but I have some concerns. I mentioned that Clackmannanshire is very cash-strapped. As the MYP who spoke against the motion rightly said, where do we find the money? How do we finance this? My council will not be able to afford this. If this was a UK-wide issue, we’d be up doo-doo creek without a paddle—this would be a real issue for us. How can we expect companies to provide this? How can we expect local authorities to provide compensation? I would like to stress that I take issue with the wording of the motion. How do you enforce these standards? How do you measure pricing structure? How do you measure treatment of young people? Is that to do with the gruffness of bus drivers? Is it them not nodding their head after you say thank you? Or is it a matter that we have to address with their PR and corporate departments? I think that it is very wise that we look at this very carefully. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for that very confident and capable speech. Sometimes when I want an hon. Member to bring his or her speech to an end, I stand up and say, “I’m extremely grateful to the hon. Member,” which one of the sketch writers once said is

my polite way of saying, “Shut up, sunshine.” But I’m not telling you to shut up. That was a very good speech; thank you very much.

I want a speaker from the South East now, and one person has been trying to catch my eye for quite some time.

Angel Layer (South East): I am from Kent, which is in the South East. Kent is massive geographically; I can’t even explain how big it is. In Kent, we have Kent Youth County Council and we have been campaigning for years on transport, which is why I support this motion.

Transport as an England-only issue would be so crucial to helping us. There would be shared resources. It would mean that everybody got a chance to share the resources, such as posters to put on buses to make them cleaner. We would be able to talk to bus companies to make fares cheaper. I try to travel to Kent Youth County Council meetings, and it takes me an hour on a bus. It takes me 20 minutes in a car. But if I was in a different area of Kent, it would take me 10 minutes to get into Essex, in the east of England, or into London. This is not fair. Transport needs to be better, so that we can all, as young people, access different types of area in the country and we can become friends because we will be together more. *[Applause.]*

Connor Hill (West Midlands): I represent the area of Dudley in the West Midlands. Although I don’t agree with this motion, I also agree with it. We are talking about an England-only campaign. I look over to my friends in London, who get their bus transport for free. That’s a lot of young people in England we won’t be campaigning on. Is that right? No, it isn’t.

My other point is for the motion. I went on a bus a couple of weeks ago and was questioned for 10 minutes about my age, simply because I was on an inset day doing a Make Your Mark assembly. I was questioned for 10 minutes on a bus. Is that acceptable for young people? It was simply because I was paying either £3.10 or £4.20. That is not correct. I urge you to vote with your heart rather than in line with what everybody says. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you. What about Wales? There is a fellow waving at me very demonstratively. We look forward to hearing from him.

Matthew van Rooyen (Wales): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Obviously, I am paying a lot of attention to Chris Bryant’s points earlier about being passionate about what we believe in.

Mr Speaker, I would like to start by saying thank you very much for all the work that you have been doing to make sure that we can be here today. Without the work that you have done, we would not be here, so I am incredibly grateful for that. *[Applause.]*

The motion before us fails to take into account one fundamental matter. People use transport to get to school, college, university, work, wherever. The motions that are also on the paper can be focused around those places—around schools, colleges and so on. But if we cannot actually get to the schools and colleges because the public transport service is so weak, so poor, and so

expensive, how on earth are we going to enact any of these other motions and be successful in campaigning on them? The answer is simple: we can’t.

My commute to college takes me two hours each way; it is a four-hour journey. I leave just after 6 o’clock in the morning to get to college just after 8 for a 9 o’clock start. The trains are every hour and it’s an absolute nightmare. I am still doing it. I don’t know why I am doing it—well, I’m doing it because I want to do it. The fact is that the train services that I am going on are horrendous. We are not doing enough, as a Youth Parliament and as young people, to campaign on these issues and we really should be doing that.

Even the bus services in my Bridgend constituency are expensive, as it costs £3.90 for an adult single ticket to anywhere. I was speaking to some Transport for London staff yesterday, and found that it costs roughly the same amount for a single ticket between zones 1 to 7 off peak. Bridgend is hardly London, Mr Speaker.

I finish by saying that in order to enact any of the other motions and ensure that they are successful, we need to work with schools, but we need to ensure that young people can get to these schools so that these proposals and motions can be successful in the first place. *[Applause.]*

Annabelle Cooper (North East): I represent Northumberland, and I thank Rose Warburton for mentioning Northumberland earlier.

When we are 14 years old, we have to pay an adult fare on a bus. Excuse me, but when I was 14, I was still studying for my GCSEs, and the only money I had was pocket money from my mother. My brother is 15, and when he was 14, he had to pay the adult fare, too. That is just horrendous at that age. At 14, we are not adults, and claiming that we are is despicable.

Public transport was debated here a few years ago, and we had a national campaign, which was fantastic. People say this a local authority issue but if it is, we should lobby and campaign to get our councils to help us. If the councils do not have much hold over the matter, we should do the same thing and campaign to the operators as well. We need to get them to help us. If young people have to pay so much for public transport, they are going to use it less and less. Our friends here and our friends back home all use public transport. It is up to us to help them. We represent young people, and young people use public transport every single day. It is up to us to help them.

I carried out a campaign for two years, and during that time one particular quote stood out to me when someone said, “The cost of travel is taking over my family”. That was said by an average student at a school in Northumberland. If that cost is taking over a family, surely that screams something emotional. People in that position need help, and the only help they can get is from us. We must help them. If this is a national campaign, we must tell people in power and bus operators that this is pathetic and that public transport needs help. Young people need that help in order to get to school and to socialise with others. *[Applause.]*

Yasmin Rufo (London): I am from the London borough of Ealing.

Given that we elected transport as one of our campaigns a few years back, I echo what many people have said—that we need a new focus, something that is much closer to a national campaign than a local issue.

So let us look at the injustice that young people around the world face every single day. What is it based on? Their skin colour, their religion or general discrimination, which is appalling. Mr Speaker and fellow MYPs, we cannot let this continue. As was mentioned earlier, religious hate crimes totalled over 3,000 last year. How can we let these unjust crimes to continue to increase, by sitting back and not helping the most vulnerable in our society?

We all know that UKYP has given us a voice to use when society says that our voice does not matter. UKYP has given us the confidence to stand up for beliefs if society tries to say that we shouldn't really have beliefs. UKYP has given us the ability to make a change in society, so let us grasp that change altogether. Let us grasp the opportunity we have been given. Let us work to help those young people who face oppression, unequal opportunities and discrimination in their daily lives. Let us vote to end discrimination because it is not a matter of opinion; it is about making a choice to improve lives. *[Applause.]*

Morgan Binnarsley (Yorkshire and Humberside): I represent Wakefield East.

Transport has been appearing consistently in the top five in Make Your Mark. We, as young people, want it to be made cheaper and more accessible. In Wakefield East, bus transport is becoming limited, and those in the rural areas are struggling to get buses at a fair price. I live in a small town within Wakefield, and if I want to travel to school, I have to take two buses. They cost me £6 a day, and some will not even accept my bus pass.

I know that this does not just affect me; it affects everyone. One of my UKYP colleagues, who spoke in this very Chamber last year, has to travel to university using a railcard, but the railcard does not work until 10 am, so she has to pay the full price every day. That is not fair, and the issue needs to be tackled. *[Applause.]*

Cameron Johnson (East Midlands): School transport is mostly supplied free in the UK for students and pupils. Why is it “mostly”? If you are in education, it should be supplied for you free, whether you are a sixth-former or a student. It should not matter, in my opinion. It should be supplied to you free, for reasons to do with education. *[Applause.]*

Maia Gaynor (North West): I am from Liverpool.

Public transport has improved a lot in my area over the past couple of years as a result of the work done by young people. I think that this should be more a local or regional campaign than a national campaign, because, obviously, the situation varies from area to area. Experiences of public transport are more likely to be positive for those living in a city, as opposed to a rural area. *[Applause.]*

Sarah Staples (South West): I am from Plymouth, the isolated city of the south-west. It takes us more than four hours on a train to get to London, and the same distance is travelled much more quickly in other areas of the country. Take buses, for instance. I pay £45 a month for my bus pass, and there is still no bus that can

get me to work on time on a Sunday. We need to sort this issue out. It is putting people off getting part-time jobs in certain areas of the city, because they cannot travel to different areas. We are lucky in Plymouth, because we are a city, but other areas in the region are more rural, and there are no buses to get people anywhere. We need to fix this for young people. It is the fault of all of us. *[Applause.]*

Benjamin Denton-Cardew (East of England): I represent the good people of central Suffolk in north Ipswich.

It is now Government policy that all young people are expected to stay in learning or education until they are 18 years old. There is, however, no entitlement to free home-to-school transport from the age of 16, and the Government have not provided any further funding to support transport for those who reach that age. The only funding available is a school-provided bursary for poorer students from poorer backgrounds, which covers the bus fare. Great! Problem solved? Well, no.

I live in a very rural constituency, and many families have to drive just to get to the nearest bus to get to the nearest school, which is often a few miles away. In my case, it was nine miles away. That is not something that many families can afford. It is eating into the budgets of those on lower working incomes. I feel strongly that the cost of a bus journey should be significantly reduced, or scrapped altogether, for post-16 graduates, particularly if they are going to the relevant sixth-form or other college. Having access to a facility in which you are being educated should be a right of all post-16 students in the UK, and if their education is to continue until they are 18, it should be Government-funded as well. I look forward to living, one day, in a world that does not totally discriminate against those from poor backgrounds and prevent them from getting to their places of education or work. How deep mum or dad's pockets are should not determine your A-level grades.

I have only four further words, and they are “Let's make it happen”. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: That was a wonderfully pithy conclusion. I am afraid that we have run out of time. We need to wind up this debate—there will be more debates this afternoon. Please give an enthusiastic welcome to the winder up of this debate, from Northern Ireland, Ryan Simpson. *[Applause.]*

Ryan Simpson (Northern Ireland): Transport, it is what we all rely on to carry out our daily lives. Think of today. Since this morning, I have already been in a car, train, bus and plane, so I know the struggle, which literally spans the entire United Kingdom, or does it?

One of my closest friends has a two-hour commute home from school every day. As we have heard in this debate, everyone can relate to her: infrequent services, constant changes. Even when a service does turn up, it is at an inconvenient time. That is no use to anyone. All young people feel the same, whether they are trying to meet up with their friends in town, attend a hospital appointment or even get to their school or college. It is simply unacceptable.

Let us think realistically. Could this campaign be achievable? With the exception of certain devolved Administrations and their nationalised transport networks, we are not lobbying the Government; we are lobbying

the transport companies that control the fares and some local authorities that control the services. We already see a great disparity between transport companies and local authorities across the country. That will lead to an unco-ordinated campaign where success in one region could be failure in another.

We have done so much already. In 2012, the Youth Select Committee's topic was transport, and they have given us guidelines on what a campaign could entail. They have outlined the fare thresholds for children, accessibility for the disabled, rural transport for those less central and support for young people who suffer from the inability to pay their fares. We have already made some ground, so perhaps we can continue on and fight to enforce the Local Transport Act 2008, which is designed to involve young people in decision making—there is no evidence of that. We can fight to raise the adult fare threshold to 18, the way it should be, and we can fight for more efficient routes into the countryside to help those who live in rural areas.

A transport campaign would be a never-ending journey. There is no scheduled timetable, the route map is ever expanding, and who knows what potholes lie in the road ahead? When has that stopped us? The UK Youth Parliament, from campaigning on votes at 16, the living wage, mental health and all our campaigns on the ground, has a duty to strive to make the lives of young people better.

My favourite fictional politician, Frank Underwood, shares some advice on this subject, funnily enough:

“It is common sense to take a method and try it. And if it fails, admit it frankly... But above all, try something.”

When you go to vote on the devolved campaign today, I hope you remember that young people are vital to any

society, and so is transportation. Ask yourselves: can our great nation, the United Kingdom, survive when two vital parts of society cannot mix effectively? [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Ryan, thank you for that. And thank you to each and every one of you who has contributed, and thank you to those of you who have been patiently waiting and have not yet been called. Just before we wrap up and go off for lunch, I want to acknowledge the presence of the hon. Gentleman, the Member for Jarrow, Mr Stephen Hepburn, who came into Parliament with me in 1997. Stephen is here today to offer his support to the UK Youth Parliament. Thank you, Stephen. [*Applause.*]

I know that we are finishing the morning session a bit late, but I am afraid that we have to try to get back on track, so you need to be back here from Westminster Hall, where you are headed for lunch, for 1.30 pm, when I look forward to opening this afternoon's proceedings. Thank you for a great morning's debates.

12.54 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.30 pm

Sitting resumed.

Mr Speaker: I hope that you are refreshed, revitalised and reinvigorated for this afternoon's debates. If they are as good as those this morning, everybody listening is in for a treat. Colleagues, we shall now consider the fourth motion of the day, on a curriculum to prepare us for life.

Curriculum For Life

Hamzah Ahmed (South East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to support 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 almost 132,000 Make Your Mark respondents chose this as their top issue and when 92% of students think that personal, social, health and economic education should be a mandatory subject taught in schools, it is our responsibility, as elected representatives of young people, to listen. Sure, we have chosen a curriculum for life as our devolved campaign in the past. Sure, there are other groups campaigning for quality PSHE, sex and relationships and finance education, but that does not mean that we should abandon the campaign and all we have achieved just because we have gained some ground.

On the contrary, we must persevere. Unemployment in the UK is falling drastically, but the same cannot be said for youth unemployment. We, as young people, are three times as likely to be unemployed as our seasoned counterparts. That should not be an issue, though. Young people do not need to work; we just need to spend prolonged hours in an education system that is there to equip us with the skills required to tackle the greater world, right? Sadly, that could not be further from the truth.

Let us make no mistake. It is wonderful learning the value of *x*, but why do we not teach young people how to prepare a CV or find a job that will help them to progress in the field of their choice? Why do most secondary schools cover topics such as reproduction and puberty but leave out vital issues such as the importance of consent or the influence of pornography in our society? Why do we expect young people to be politically engaged when we learn more about politics from watching "Game of Thrones" than we learn in our classrooms? Those skills are paramount in the transition to adulthood.

The campaign itself will not be difficult. I am not saying that we need to reinvent the wheel. The infrastructure is already in place for us. This issue has cross-party support, so engage your MPs and tell them that this is what young people want. Write to Nicky Morgan saying that this will benefit not only us but society as a whole. Tell our party leaders that there needs to be a youth-led overhaul of the education system. Our collective voices carry more weight than is needed for this campaign to be successful.

I agree that racism poses a huge threat to the fabric of our society and I agree that the stigma attached to mental illnesses is degrading, to say the least, but these issues will not be solved by one year of campaigning. We must start from the ground up. We must have a curriculum for life. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: To oppose the motion, I ask you to welcome Bridget Okhioigbe with equal enthusiasm.

Bridget Okhioigbe (London): A curriculum for life. Think. Think about how you envisage its success. Two years ago, our UK Youth Parliament campaign was on

the curriculum for life. The Youth Select Committee produced a 37 page report on what the campaign involved. Fact. Ofsted is now in support and has deemed it appropriate to keep improving PSHE education. Fact. We live in a society where citizenship education is compulsory. Fact. We, young people, have made a change. Fact.

What now? Where do we go from here? We have pushed our voices through MPs to headteachers, from schools to the streets. Other organisations, such as the PSHE Association, use our reports to find out what young people want in this education. This is so deep, but it needs one of us, a young person from the UK Youth Parliament, to be involved and to represent us. We did this, but what more can we do? We cannot lobby our MPs again, as they have heard it all before; it will be another year when the young people do not witness change. We need to show them our diversity and representation of all. We, as the people, need to see stats before assumptions. The number of unemployed young people is down by 35% in two years, and teenage pregnancies are at a record low. Yes, we have the support of Nicky Morgan, who is as passionate about this as we are, but we as the people need to see action. Making this statutory does not guarantee practical success.

What else? Should we get headteachers to sign for PSHE again? That is all well and good, but how do we judge that? Should we make students do an end-of-year exam? Should we rate teachers on their work? Should we even get stats from each syllabus? Wait, does that sound familiar? It does because Ofsted already does those things and gives us the information. Can't you see what I am trying to say? They heard us; we don't need this as a campaign because we were successful the first time. PSHE, sex and relationships education, and citizenship are past the point of being tackled nationally; this is a local situation. We have fought through this campaign and we got an outcome. Why repeat the exact same thing when the stats show us that the success of this campaign has gotten lower?

We are the voices of change. We are the voices of power. We were successful in one area so let's prove it in the next. A new campaign has hotline blinged, and I know that when that hotline blings, that can only mean one thing. Let's focus on the new rather than improved, because whether you learn how to pay your bills or to vote, you will still do things your way, even with help. This comes only from experience; life and lessons go hand in hand. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Bridget.

Jack Logue (Northern Ireland): We should support the motion because a curriculum for life will take into consideration the first two motions; it will help make us aware of the effects of racism, stigma and the association with mental health. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: That was wonderfully succinct.

Lucie Duffy (Scotland): I live in Edinburgh, which is in the Lothian area. Young people deserve an education about this information. We deserve to know this, so that we can make progress in our later lives and fulfil our ambitions as far as we can. In the Scottish Youth Parliament, we have 27 policies on PHSE, and that surely must mean something—it must mean that we

want a change. In a recent survey I carried out among 14-year-olds, I found that 80% of them had not been taught about things such as genital mutilation or how to deal with rape, which are very important issues. In many places, the curriculum has not been updated for 15 years, which means that it has not been updated since 2000 and so does not include many modern aspects of the curriculum that it really should. As well as a political education, we need this sort of education. I have just turned 16 and am now eligible to vote in Scotland, yet I have no idea of even how to register to vote. I do not even know how the system really works, so I think we really need this education. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: I probably should have said at the start—please do not take this personally, as it is not intended to be directed towards any one person—that if you have already spoken, do not try to contribute again, simply because a huge number of people have not spoken at all yet.

Sophie Jones (Wales): I represent Caerphilly. Some of us talk about the skills that we are not taught such as how to manage money or understanding politics, but I want to focus on one area of PSHE. In 2013, the Youth Select Committee looked at a curriculum for life. Janet Palmer, spoke about her report, “Not Yet Good Enough”, and she gave oral evidence. She said that young people were taught about puberty and safe sex, but that there was less emphasis on sexual consent and the influence of pornography.

Our education needs to cover relevant topics such as revenge porn. Measures to deal with that were put into legislation this February, yet young people still do not know what it is. It should become a criminal offence, as doing something like that on the spur of the moment could affect someone for the rest of their life. Our education should be relevant and up to date, so that young people are prepared for today’s society. As Malala said in a speech to the UN, pen and paper are our greatest weapon. *[Applause.]*

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: What about a voice from the West Midlands? The gentleman who is holding up two hands, demonstrating a worthy ambition. Let us hear from him.

Jamie Graham (West Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am the MYP for Telford and Wrekin.

Before you go into the statistics, ask yourself whether you are ready to go out into the world to face its problems—the highs and lows—and do you think that our education right now prepares us for that? I do not, and nor do many people in Telford and Wrekin. This is our chance to give them a chance that, in the past, people did not have: to understand how it works; how to vote; and about sex and relationships. Having this as our campaign will have an impact on the other issues, which is why I support it strongly. As Hamzah Ahmed said, education is a driving force for these issues. That is why I am strongly against it—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, there is no coming back from that one, is there? I am strongly for the motion, and I urge other MYPs to support it. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. As you have just proved, you found your own salvation, which is a key technique in politics.

Several MYPs rose—

Ebony Cropper (North West): I am from Bolton. We need a curriculum to prepare us for life. How many of us are coming to the end of our mandatory education and are clueless about the adult world, finance, mortgages and areas other than your local one where you might want to go to university? It is pivotal for us to be taught life skills in high school. We need to be taught about diversity in politics and things that will affect us in our adult life. We need to be taught about healthy relationships. It is great knowing about Pythagoras’ theorem, but we need a campaign on something practical. We need something relevant to our future, so I urge you all to vote for a curriculum to prepare us for life. *[Applause.]*

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: What about someone from the East Midlands? The gentleman with the spiky hair.

Mitchel Duggins (East Midlands): Thank you for the compliment, Mr Speaker. In school we learn about obvious things. Yes, I am sure we all love doing algebra and maths, and I am sure that we love learning about “Of Mice and Men” in English lessons. However, schools are missing important things. Yes, we learn the rights and wrongs in sex education, and we learn the basics of politics such as who the Prime Minister is. We need to do things in much more in depth. I am sure we love trigonometry, but let us learn about something that is beneficial to young people such as preparing for interviews, and learning about finance. Let us be honest: do we know what is out there—the rights and wrongs of the big world? That is why we need a curriculum for life, and I really think you should vote for the motion. *[Applause.]*

Several MYPs rose—

The Speaker: What about someone from London? There is a chap at the back who I am worried might expire if not called. He is holding a little red book, and I think his time has arrived.

Hamza King (London): I am an MYP for Brent. After 12 years of education I have been taught to calculate the area of a circle, but I have not been taught to calculate the amount of money I need to live on. I have been taught how many organs are in my body, but I have not been taught how to feed or maintain them. I have been taught the importance of education and living a balanced life, but when I leave for university I will not have the skills to live independently.

The youth are often portrayed in a negative light in this society. The 2011 riots, high levels of knife crime and teenage pregnancy make us look bad. Maybe this is because we have not been taught to live on our own. In the education system that we have now, we are asked to make life-changing decisions, but we still have to put our hand up and ask permission to use the toilet. Before we can help everyone else, we need to learn how to help ourselves. That is why I believe we should support the curriculum for life. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed, let me mention, as I have been doing throughout the day, another colleague who has joined us, and I am most grateful to him—Julian

Smith, the Conservative Member of Parliament for Skipton and Ripon, who is accompanied by a mini-Smith, his little one. Julian, thank you very much for lending your support to the UKYP today.

Salema Khatun (Yorkshire and Humber): A curriculum to prepare us for life—what does that include? Drug, financial, political, citizenship and sex and relationships education and community cohesion, all collectively the framework for our development. However, this has taken a back seat in Parliament as of September 2013, when PSHE was made a non-statutory subject. So, as a favour to our young people—the parents of tomorrow who will be able to pass on their knowledge—MYPs, let's bring back the curriculum for life to help empower our young people and to encourage them to speak and have the confidence to be able to turn their words into action, to become leaders. That is why I urge you to pass this motion. Thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: I am about to call a speaker from the South East of England, but before I do so, let me take this opportunity to welcome the Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, from whom we will hear in due course. Rob, thank you very much for joining us today. We look forward to hearing from you ere long.

Now, somebody from the South East.

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Who is it to be? Ah, this is a most dextrous device—somebody who has a book entitled, “How to be a successful politician”. She is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. I call her. I want to hear what she has to say.

Amber Saunders (South East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. My first point is somewhat against the curriculum for life, but my second, which is bigger, is for it. First, there is a stigma around PSHE. In my school we have learning for life days. I think I had my third on Monday, and it's only November. As sixth-formers, we feel it is a waste of our time. There is so much else we could be doing.

But—this is my point for—we should start making these lessons more beneficial, make citizenship compulsory, and give ourselves a qualification for doing PSHE. At the moment we do not get anything for it. We just turn up. I remember in year 9 being given a colouring sheet to learn about Hinduism. Yeah, that really helped me out. It is clearly not good enough. Even if it is compulsory now to do PSHE, what are we getting for it? If young people are still voting for it, it doesn't matter if it is compulsory or not, because still, clearly, it is not good enough. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: What about the South West of England? Who's trying from the South West? The fellow waving a red handkerchief, who is obviously refereeing a motor race of some sort. We are grateful to him.

Jack Alderman (South West): Allow me to just pop it back in my pocket, Mr Speaker.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, Mr Speaker. I represent Exeter in Devon. Now, ladies and gentlemen, more than 1 million 18-year-olds in the UK are signed up to Facebook, which compares with

only 520,000 18-year-olds on the electoral roll. That is a shocking statistic, in this delegate's opinion, and it further emphasises why we need political education in our system. Politics should be a compulsory GCSE and should teach young people the value of political engagement. That would not only aid the principles of democracy but allow young people to make strong, well-informed decisions in their future.

Emily Fox (East of England): This campaign was in the top three in Norfolk, so we know that there is dissatisfaction within the education system, which needs to be changed. It covers all the other Make your Mark topics, so it is completely relevant to young people.

We need finance skills, because who knows? That person over there might go to university without knowing how to pay for their university fees. They might not know how to manage a grant. That really needs to be solved. If people were taught about mental illness, maybe the taboo and stigma around it would not exist any more. I have been taught about those issues, but many people have not, and they really need to be.

If we are being asked to do things like pay tax when we are older, we should know what it is going towards. If I go to uni in the future, I might not know about finance or other things, and that will not be helpful to me. These skills can be lifesavers—especially first aid. If we do not know first aid, we do not know how to stop someone choking or having a heart attack, and that means we cannot save lives.

Danny Brown (North East): I admit that our manifesto has quite a lot of issues in it, but imagine if, at the start of a campaign, we did not have to explain to young people what an issue was about because they already knew about it. The curriculum for life is not just something you go into school and learn some interesting stuff about for an hour a week. It gives you a foundation. It is not just the first step; it is the main step.

We also have to think about who is going to teach it. Will it just be your normal form teacher? It could be your maths teacher, your science teacher or your history teacher. Teachers will say, “Well, I've been on a course so I'm now an expert in this,” but are they? We need to think about that. We might pass the motion, but who is going to teach this? We cannot go to one level and then suddenly say, “Hang on—we forgot to make the big step here.” That is what we need to consider.

Frankie Walker (London): I am from the borough of Havering. The curriculum for life is essential. We go into the world not having the right skills we need to survive. I am going to uni, but do I know how I am going to pay my fees? Do I know how to pick a uni? Do I know how to write a personal statement? Those skills, which we lack, are essential, especially for people who want to go into further education.

We also need political skills. Some people of 18 do not even know who the Prime Minister is, and that is shocking. It is important we have this education to help and empower our young people, so that we do not go into the world not knowing anything. We will then be able to make decisions independently, without having to rely on the internet, for instance, which not everyone has access to.

It is important we pass this motion. It incorporates all the things we represent as the youth. We can talk about religious discrimination and racial discrimination, which I feel passionate about, by bringing them into the curriculum. We can also bring in mental health. The curriculum for life covers a broad spectrum of issues, and we should pass this motion.

Mr Speaker: I would like to hear a voice from Scotland now.

Jack Norquoy (Scotland): On behalf of Scotland, may I say thank you to you, Mr Speaker, for your continued support for the Youth Parliament and for allowing us to be here in this Chamber today? *[Applause.]*

I will begin with a personal experience. A couple of months back, I went on a first aid course. It struck me how important yet how simple a skill that is to learn. It needs to be introduced, to save lives. As much as providing the qualifications that we need to get into university and further education, should not school also provide the skills we need for life? Too long have I sat in PSHE classes without learning anything new—just coming into the classroom, then walking out again. We need to create a generation that is better educated about issues beyond the academic ones.

My fellow Scottish MYP mentioned that the Scottish Youth Parliament has 27 policies on this issue. Earlier, an MYP opposed to the motion spoke about how we have had this as our campaign before and how it had been successful. Look at the debate right now. Was it really successful? The example of Scotland should spread: we understand the importance of this and we need to get the message across the whole UK. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Do we have a would-be contributor from Wales? Your moment has arrived, sir.

Matthew Walker (Wales): I consciously made the decision to take the international baccalaureate because I thought the A-level curriculum would not prepare me for wider life. This campaign is wholly achievable. Last year, Professor Donaldson conducted a review of the curriculum in Wales. He consulted with Funky Dragon, the former Youth Assembly for Wales, which influenced the consultation. Last week, Professor Donaldson brought out his results, and the Welsh Government told us that they would have a massive overhaul of the curriculum at large.

This campaign is completely necessary and is something that we could very easily achieve. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: This is always the most dispiriting part, but every debate has to be concluded, and I am sorry but now this one must be. There is another debate to

follow, and so there will be an opportunity for people who have not contributed to do so. Jess Macklin will wind up the debate, and I know you will give her an enthusiastic welcome. *[Applause.]*

Jessica Macklin (Army Welfare Service): As young people, eventually we have to grow up and get older. With that comes responsibility. When confronted with daily life, most of us like to think that we have the common sense to get by, but are we really prepared for the life ahead of us?

Our national campaign actions would call on MPs to put pressure on the Government to give PSHE statutory status. But is an uninterested teacher who simply resorts to putting on an old video about the importance of contraception while using your PSHE lesson to mark work from a “more important” class going to benefit your future in any way? No. Ensuring that MPs also understand that good quality PSHE will be achieved only if teachers are trained, and we can see, locally, which schools have trained teachers and are allocating adequate time to the subject, has the potential to have a real impact on our futures.

Just last week I went to open my very own bank account. My mum had to go with me—and yes, that was embarrassing. I felt childish. At our ages, none of us should have to feel that way—like we are too naive or immature to make our own way in life. I would like to think it is something I could have done by myself, but in reality I did not know whether I wanted a current account or a savings account, and I was really grateful that I had my mum there. But is lobbying MPs going to teach us the difference between an ISA and an APR?

If change is our only constant, we need to make sure that, if this campaign is successful, it is relevant to the current environment that we are growing up in. Young people cannot rely on songs by American hip-hop artists to educate them about the importance of bills they have to pay. Our knowledge should be gained during our school years.

Would a curriculum for life have the power to provide young people with the resilience to thrive in our changing world? Our voices are already heard through other organisations solely dedicated to campaigning for a curriculum for life. We have campaigned for a curriculum for life before, and have already made progress in this area, but does its ranking second highest in the Make Your Mark ballot suggest that more may yet be done for this campaign? That raises this question: are the campaign actions enough to achieve real change and can we justify another year spent campaigning for a curriculum for life, or is it time we turn our focus to conquering a new issue? *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Jess, thank you for winding up the debate in such a sincere and serious-minded way.

A Living Wage

Mr Speaker: Members of the UK Youth Parliament, we now come to the fifth and final debate of the day on the motion that everyone should be paid at least the living wage. To move the motion, I call, and invite you enthusiastically to welcome, from Scotland, Ewan McCall.

2 pm

Ewan McCall (Scotland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to speak in favour of the motion:

That we believe that everyone aged 16 and above should be able to live comfortably; they should be paid the living wage as calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy.

Over 1 million people in the UK today use food banks. Nearly 30% of children live in poverty. Hopes, dreams and aspirations are extinguished daily by financial worries and, shockingly, most of the families worst hit are in full-time work. MYPs, this is our chance to break this cycle of poverty, to correct injustice and discrimination, and to relight the flame of imagination in our generation by finally extending the living wage to all.

Some of you may be wondering why we are debating this now, months after the Government announced plans for a new national living wage. It is because there is a huge hole in the plans—the exclusion of 7.5 million 16 to 24-year-olds. That is the same age group that, in October, the Equality and Human Rights Commission identified as most likely to be living in poverty.

Along with rising tuition fees, rising child poverty, rising youth homelessness, rising youth unemployment and, now, tax credit cuts, we are left the most disadvantaged generation ever. It is beyond question that we deserve to be included in this national pay rise.

Financially, the living wage presents important opportunities. Already, child poverty costs the UK an estimated £29 billion a year. Even if we saved a fraction of this figure—a figure similar to Scotland's entire yearly budget—we would have enough responsibly to reimburse small businesses with tax breaks, allowing them to keep young people employable.

It is now the case that if you go to university, you will leave, on average, with £44,000 of debt. With higher wages, we can ensure that this figure is reduced dramatically and that education never becomes a luxury of the elite. For those who go into work, the same work deserves the same pay, regardless of age. Belated and damaging discrimination such as this is what we as an organisation exist to stand up to.

In contrast to other campaigns debated today, this one is on both a practical and achievable issue and could be implemented instantly by a simple change to the law, not by a national attitude. Locally, we can campaign for businesses and local authorities to sign up to the voluntary living wage of £8.25 per hour, which already has 2,000 participating employers and the backing of the Scottish Government. Additionally, the voluntary living wage has no age limit whatsoever—something we must ensure the new national living wage reflects.

In the end, we must also remember that this campaign came top in all regions and all nations of the UK by a landslide. It can leave a legacy that changes the value of youth, providing us and generations to come with the opportunity to start life with confidence and clarity. We can live in a land where no working family will live in

poverty, where millions are spared the injustice of a childhood tormented by debt and hunger and where food banks are a mere symbol of an austere past now long gone. We can live in a time where a university place does not come with a shackle, and where honest work is repaid with one fair wage.

Let us make this year count. Let us give this campaign that final push. Let us finally get out there and achieve the living wage for all. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Ewan, thank you for addressing us with a crisp and wonderful eloquence in proposing that motion. I think it was hugely appreciated by the House as a whole.

Hal Meakin from the North West of England will now speak in opposition to the motion, and I hope that you will give Hal a similarly warm welcome.

Hal Meakin (North West): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The basic cost of living in the UK at the moment is £8.25 an hour. That is also the living wage, as set by the Living Wage Foundation and calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy. On the other hand, the national living wage is £7.20 an hour. That is the one being introduced in April by the Government. As you can see, it is nowhere near the basic cost of living in the UK at the moment. The difference between the real living wage and the national living wage is £1.05. That is a problem for us as a Youth Parliament.

The UK living wage campaign was launched 14 years ago. Fourteen years of lobbying MPs and local businesses, and all we got was a national living wage that is short by £2,600 every year. Fourteen years, and workers are still being denied a decent standard of living.

We do not have 14 years. How can we convince MPs to pledge even more money for 16 to 24-year-olds in one year, when there clearly is not enough money to fund a proper living wage in the first place?

What about the local corner shop? Even with the Government's attempts to address the living wage, with the £7.20 an hour in April, businesses are already planning to raise their prices. If the Federation of Small Businesses is saying that a third of small employers expect the living wage to negatively impact their business, how will small employers respond to us when we come lobbying them? This cannot be the right time to start trying to convince businesses to invest in young people, when they themselves are struggling to get by.

Under-25s will not benefit from the national living wage. It took 14 years of hard work to get to this point—14 years to see a national living wage that will still fall short when it comes to supporting a family with the cost of living.

If you look around, you can see that the issue is not that we do not care, and not that we are afraid to try, but that, in one year, this campaign will, realistically, not achieve what it wants to. That is why we should focus our efforts on other, more achievable campaigns. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you. This time round, we will take a speaker from London.

Tolu Akingbade (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker. My name is Tolu Akingbade, and I am the Member of the Youth Parliament from the London borough of Havering.

I support the motion because I believe in equality and justice. That is what I have been taught to believe in over the 10 years I have been in school. Yet, the Government, who own the school, refuse to acknowledge that. Opposing the motion is saying that you agree with the oppression of young people. So today, Youth Parliament, we must rise up against this oppression. Thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Let us hear, again, a voice from Scotland.

Elinor Pearce (Scotland): At the moment, we have the national minimum wage. This does not acknowledge the level of income required to have a good standard of living. People can survive, but they cannot live, on this wage. That means that they face social inequalities that richer peers do not.

The Scottish Youth Parliament has campaigned on introducing the living wage. Scotland now has a recognition scheme that acknowledges companies that pay the living wage to employees. As far as I am aware, England does not have one.

The living wage is higher in London than in other parts of England or in Scotland. What about places like Edinburgh, Aberdeen and rural areas, where living costs are a lot higher? It costs me £60 to get from Edinburgh to Inverness. That is ridiculous. The living wage will mean that people can afford those higher costs, so I support this motion. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: What about Northern Ireland? There is a fellow who is obviously practising the high jump in readiness for the next Olympics. We look forward to hearing from you, sir. [*Applause.*]

Darragh O'Reilly (Northern Ireland): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle—thank you, Mr Speaker. In Ireland we are very good at the high jump.

I represent Fermanagh and South Tyrone—the most westerly constituency in the UK. Surely, fellow MYPs, it is more than ever vital to fight for a living wage now, when 16 to 24-year-olds, as Ewan aptly pointed out, will be adversely affected by multiple cuts and now tax credit cuts. This Government seem, in my eyes anyway, from the far west, to have contempt for young people—not to value them—because if it is not student loans, it will be housing benefit, and if it is not housing benefit, it will be tax credit cuts. They are going to take away thousands of pounds from the poorest and some of the most hard-working people in this country, but most importantly, young people in that age group, 16 to 24, are trying to get a start in life. We are saying, “Okay. Maybe I don’t have the grades to get on a higher pay scale, but hey, I’m out here trying”, yet we are still suffering on a discriminatory minimum wage. They won’t get the national minimum wage, which is not a minimum wage anyway. What are we going to do for them? And now there are these tax credit cuts. I think that it is morally totally reprehensible to cut money simply to be able to afford to give tax cuts to the rich, tax cuts to corporations, tax cuts to the most wealthy in society. [*Applause.*] It is absolutely vital that we have an economy that is high wage and high benefit for those

who are vulnerable and for the disabled and that is high tax if necessary for the wealthiest, not neoliberalist class war. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Thank you for that speech and all the passion that it embodied. Let’s hear a speaker from Yorkshire and Humber.

Ali Khosravi (Yorkshire and Humber): We are living in the sixth largest country economically on earth. When the national minimum wage was introduced, its critics said that the economy would collapse and businesses would leave the country, but the economy did not collapse and businesses did not leave. We need to take an evolutionary and progressive step. Let’s take that step now. Let’s turn surviving into living. Let’s move forward. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Let’s hear a voice of Wales.

Caitlin Smith (Wales): I represent Powys in Wales. I have a Saturday job; I work on Saturday afternoons, and my hourly rate of pay is £3.79. That means that my dad pays more in petrol to drive me to that job than I earn. We cannot ignore the fact that far from it being just a personal anecdote that I have come here to tell you, this is the issue that gained the most votes from the people we are here to represent. As a result, we have a democratic mandate to support this motion. That is why we should support this motion and make this the issue that we campaign on. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: How about the East of England? Let’s hear from the gentleman wearing the tartan tie and the poppy.

Nicholas Gardner (East of England): I represent Hertfordshire, East of England. We have all heard some very good arguments for the living wage. I am sorry to disappoint you, but I am against this motion. I am against it because of one basic principle: it will have a reverse effect on young people. Businesses cannot afford to pay people the living wage, especially people at 16. They are still recovering from the biggest economic crashes in a generation and possibly a century, and now we are expecting them to pay huge amounts of money when they are not able to do so. People will lose jobs and be worse off. About 60,000 jobs will be lost as a result of the new living wage as it is, never mind the minimum wage recommended to us.

Furthermore, we also need to consider whether, at the age of 16, we need to earn £8.20 an hour. We are all in education, and most of us live at home. Do we need to support a household, which is the reason for having a living wage? We should think more deeply about this issue and calculate before we waste our votes on this issue when we could focus on something that affects every single young person we represent—mental health or a curriculum for life, for example.

Mr Speaker: It is now the turn of the west midlands.

Deepika Khali (West Midlands): I am from Dudley in the west midlands.

The idea behind the living wage is very simple—that a person should be paid decently in order adequately to provide for their family. I think two issues being

discussed today go hand in hand—mental health and the living wage. According to Mental Health Network NHS Confederation stats, men in the lowest household income group were three times more likely to have a common mental disorder than those in the highest-income households.

So what now? We need to make sure that the motion on the living wage goes forward so we can help people working long hours in multiple jobs who are still living in poverty and those who have suffered a mental illness and are currently trying to turn their lives around by looking for jobs.

Mr Speaker: We would like to hear a voice from the south-east.

Seb Kenny (South East): I think we should have a living wage paid to those who are over 16. We are behind many other nations when it comes to paying the living wage for these people. Leaving aside the problems that some teenage parents face in trying adequately to feed and clothe their families, there are also many workers who are forced to hold down multiple jobs to support their family. We should think of the impact on our young people nationwide. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Who would like to try to from the south-west?

Owen Davies (South West): Someone asked earlier whether 16-year-olds really need a living wage—and, frankly, I think that is ridiculous. I know people and know of people who by no fault or choice of their own live independently of their parents, renting accommodation and living off benefits because their work does not pay enough, which I think is appalling. It is nonsensical and cruel to single out the most vulnerable people in society by denying them a wage that lets them simply live. That is why I support this motion.

Mr Speaker: And now someone from the east midlands.

Florence Orchard (East Midlands): I am from Nottinghamshire.

Despite being an amazing and enthusiastic group of young people, there is only so much we can do. Perhaps this campaign is a bit too idealistic and unachievable. We have spent a whole year on it already, and, to be honest, I have not seen much of a difference, despite our best efforts. Now might be the time to focus on something new.

Furthermore, if 16 and 17-year-olds were paid the living wage, they would lose their competitive edge and would probably not be employed as much. Why would an employer take on a 16 or 17-year-old with no experience rather than a much older person with lots of experience in the field?

Lastly, this campaign focuses only on 16, 17 and 18-year-olds, but we represent a lot of other young people, too. We can better represent them through other issues such as a curriculum for life, because that goes for all people between the ages of 11 and 18.

Mr Speaker: A contributor, please, from the north-west of England.

Laura Curran (North West): As you may already know, a so-called living wage was announced earlier this year, but there are numerous glaring problems with it. For instance, no one aged under 25 can receive the living wage. It is easy to imagine people in power claiming that younger people are not productive enough to earn it, but what is even funnier to imagine is their reason for choosing the age of 25 in the first place. Picture this: a 24-year-old goes to sleep one night, and then wakes up on their 25th birthday to see the magical productivity fairy, who sprinkles them with magic dust—and now they have an undying urge to work their socks off. It is a ridiculous concept, I know, but that ridiculousness is what is preventing young people from earning a wage that they deserve.

It is time to wake the decision makers up, take them out of their fantasy, and bring them back to reality. Age does not define productivity, and that is why everyone should receive a real living wage.

Mr Speaker: What about the north-east of England? You have been jumping up and down for some hours: you will probably sleep very well tonight.

Emily Dormer (North East): When I talk to my constituents in the wonderful city of Newcastle, they are angered by the age pay gap. The media are constantly talking about the gender pay gap and how ridiculous and unjust it is, but we, as Members of the Youth Parliament, need to recognise the injustice in the age pay gap. We have a duty to the people whom we represent to ensure that the same work means the same pay, and we need to ensure that they are represented. I believe that a stronger, more motivated, more efficient work force creates a stronger, more efficient economy.

Mr Speaker: Members of the Youth Parliament, I did not know that that was Emily Dormer. I am now going to embarrass her in front of everyone. I know your dad: your dad and I were at university together. Your dad is a very clever bloke.

We are now going to hear someone from London. The chap with the curly hair has been waiting for a considerable time.

Zak Wagman (London): I represent Harrow, where once again—just as happened last year—the living wage came out on top, as it did throughout the UK. That, for me, is a message that the UK Youth Parliament has to wake up and do its job. Clearly, whatever we did last year was not enough, and the young people are disappointed. The Government have put the living wage on the political map, whatever we think of their new policies. Now it is up to us to make sure that it is on the youth politics map. We did not do that last year, and that is why it has won again, and why we must try again to make sure that the young people finally get what they want out of a Youth Parliament that they deserve.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Who wants to contribute from the west midlands?

Ajay Bawa (West Midlands): I come from Royal Leamington Spa, representing Warwickshire in the west midlands.

The living wage has three benefits. It benefits business, family and society. A study examining the business benefits of implementing the living wage policy in the UK found that more than 80% of employees believed that the living wage had enhanced the quality of the work of their staff, while absenteeism had fallen by approximately 25%. The living wage benefits the family, and it gives people the opportunity to provide for themselves and for others. According to the study, 75% of employees reported an increase in the quality of their work as a result of the living wage. It is also good for society.

The living wage campaign was launched in 2001 by parents in east London who were frustrated because working in minimum-wage jobs left them no family time. I urge you to recognise that the living wage can be a part of the solution.

Ellie Bradley (North West): I am the MYP for Wyre in Lancashire.

Mr Speaker, fellow MYPs, I want to ask you a question: why are we here today? I believe that we are here to improve the lives of young people, not to ostracise them, which is what I believe the living wage would do. Why do businesses hire young people when they have no, or little, skills and experience? I will tell you why: because we are cheaper to employ.

We might do more harm than good if we raise wages to the living wage. Yes, it would really benefit people in financial difficulty—I know what it is like not to be able to afford to travel to college or put food on the table—but I believe that the living wage would push more young people out of jobs. Yes, the living wage got the most votes, but do young people really understand the possible consequences, or were they just thinking about their own bank accounts? We need to remember who we are here for and what we want to achieve: a better life for us, as young people, and our constituents. A living wage is not the answer.

Sami Ayoub (East Midlands): I represent Nottinghamshire. At the moment, employers think that we are skivvies to do all their little jobs, but eventually they would get rid of us if we raised the living wage for 16 and 17-year-olds. If wages rise, so will the price of food, rent and mortgages. If we do all that, eventually we will be back to square one and repeating this whole process, which is a complete waste of our time. We should focus on something more important to all of us.

Vikita Khetani (London): I am from the London borough of Brent. Unemployment rates are the lowest they have ever been, primarily due to the fact that more people have started their own businesses and have become self-employed. With the rise of small business owners, such as my dad, it has become increasingly difficult to pay the national living wage, especially in London. We should encourage such businesses to grow, and we should support small business owners who may not be able to pay the living wage. They are benefiting the economy and helping our unemployment levels, so we should help them.

Brian Terry (North East): I am the Member of the Youth Parliament for Sunderland. Whether or not you believe in a living wage, you must agree that pay should be based on skill and experience, not on race, gender or

sexuality, and certainly not on age. Anything less is discrimination. As MYPs, we have a responsibility—no, a duty—to serve young people. I can think of no greater service than a fair wage for their skill and experience.

Mr Speaker: As the years pass, the UKYP is getting better not only in its presentation skills but in lobbying the Chair—more and more ingeniously, and more and more aggressively—but, unfortunately, one region is very slightly over-represented, only very marginally, and I cannot call someone from there at the moment. I need to call someone from the south-east, which is slightly under-represented. No woman from the south-east has spoken in this debate, but that deficit is about to be corrected by a young woman in the fourth row who is standing with what looks like a cheque book in her hand, but I am sure it is not—it is a notepad.

Kate Jameson (South East): I represent the region of Buckinghamshire. We have heard why the living wage does not affect young people directly and how it might discourage businesses from employing more young people, but what about the young people who are discouraged by the minimum wage at the moment? As we have heard from fellow Members, £3.78 per hour is bound to discourage more young people from being employed and lead them to rely on benefits in later life. Surely through a living wage we can encourage more young people to go out into the world of work and embrace it, as we have heard in our debate on the curriculum for life, expanding their experiences and getting the skills they need to enhance their futures. That is why you should vote for this motion. [*Applause.*]

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but we are running out of time, although we have time for another contributor from the South West

Sophie Giltinan (South West): I represent the city of Bristol. The living wage is currently a hot topic, as in July the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Government would introduce their national living wage for all staff over 25. That came as great news, as it means that more than 2.5 million workers will receive a much-needed pay rise, and I agree with the notion that work is the surest way out of poverty. However, the Government rate is based on median earnings whereas the Living Wage Foundation rate is calculated according to the actual cost of living. The Government rate is effectively a higher national minimum wage, not a living wage.

What about the millions of under-25s not covered by the announcement? Why should I be paid less when everything costs me exactly the same as it would if I was over 25? The living wage receives cross-party support, which comes as no surprise given that London Economics found that 80% of living-wage employers noticed an increase in productivity. The living wage benefits businesses, families and our society and that is why I believe that it should be our campaign for the next year. [*Applause.*]

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Unlike in the House of Commons, where from day to day many people come to listen to what is said but do not have a particular desire to speak,

everybody here wants to speak and I absolutely understand that, but short of expanding the time available dramatically it is always the case that demand will exceed supply. I am sorry to disappoint colleagues who are waiting to contribute, but every debate has to come to an end. There will probably be a very short opportunity for points of order later, which must not be abused. Let us give a hugely enthusiastic welcome to Jessica Hugill, who will wind up the debate. *[Applause.]*

Jess Hugill (North East): A living wage based on the cost of living, rather than just an increased minimum wage, would be ideal as it would level the playing field for everybody over the age of 16, but we must consider whether it is our main priority, even if it is relevant only to the top age bracket of the young people we represent. At the moment, a minimum wage job will pay a 16 or 17-year-old under £4 an hour, half the value of the UK living wage. What would that get you these days? The bus home and a burger? Perhaps even one of your favourite childhood chocolate frogs—but you would have to forget the carrier bag.

Young people work hard for the money they earn, but the question we must ask is whether we deserve more or whether we are just grateful to have a job in the first place. The introduction of a living wage could benefit many, as we have heard today. It would aim to reduce the rates of in-work poverty and could ease the pressure on Government support programmes. It could even increase motivation, productivity and economic output.

However, we must also consider the issues surrounding the campaign for a living wage. Some employers might struggle to raise their wage bill, which could reduce the number of jobs available. An increase in the wage might also increase the cost of living and could make the poverty line higher. We cannot expect to solve this immediately. As I am sure we will know from experience,

change does not happen overnight, but the biggest risk we face is standing here year after year campaigning for an even higher wage as the cost of living continues to increase. But the Government have already announced that as of April next year there will be an increased wage for people over the age of 25. That is not the living wage we want—it is an increased minimum wage—but it is a step in the right direction. Are we content in knowing that the Government are already changing their ways, or could this be the perfect platform from which to launch our campaign? This is not a new campaign for us and there are limited routes we could take, but will lobbying MPs for a change in legislation and promoting the businesses that are already offering us this living wage be enough?

We must also question whether this will be a successful national campaign or whether we will gain a living wage for more young people if we scale it down to local campaigning and our regional campaigns. No matter what we choose, we must remember one thing: today in this Chamber, there are more voices than there are young people seated. There are the voices of millions of young people across the UK. As those elected as their representatives, we must decide: do we campaign for a living wage and everything that comes with it, or shall we turn our focus to something else for 2016? *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for that wind-up, Jessica. I thank everyone who has contributed in each of the five debates that have so successfully been staged today. In a new and welcome innovation in our proceedings, this year, for obvious commemorative reasons, we are to hear speeches from people representing each part of the UK here represented on the subject—it is very personal—of their Magna Carta. Lucy Boardman is the first of those speakers. She is from the East Midlands. Please give her an acclamatory welcome. *[Applause.]*

My Magna Carta

2.37 pm

Lucy Boardman (East Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Magna Carta, a peace treaty revoking the absolute power of the monarch, signed in 1215 by King John of England, is one of the most celebrated documents in history. It was a crucial turning point on the road to establishing freedom and the democratic society that we live in today. However, it is not a question of what Magna Carta has done in the past, but of what it will continue to do in the future, what knowledge we can learn from it and what will be its legacy for the next generation. The single most important message that should be emphasised by Magna Carta is that each and every one of us, no matter how different or diverse we may be, deserves to be free to live safely, without the fear of persecution, violence or harm. That is a right, not a privilege, that we as the UK Youth Parliament must continue to strive for to this day, on behalf of all young people, no matter what their race, colour or religion.

In the 800 years since the signing of Magna Carta, there has of course been fighting and unrest, but the treaty remains a symbol of peace, representing the fundamental human rights of the people of Britain. Magna Carta's lasting legacy to me, and I hope to all of you, is the knowledge that the pen truly is mightier than the sword. I pray that we, the next generation, will take that fact forward with us into the future, so that we may put aside our differences and work together towards a stronger, safer and more peaceful society.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed, Lucy.

Monica Yianni (East of England): I have always wondered what life was like 800 years ago

When the taxman went from door to door and the wi-fi was really slow

No one had heard of Facebook, a hashtag wasn't a thing
 But problems were arising, because of a particular king.
 The Magna Carta was created by kings and barons, too
 But is this ancient document still relevant to me and you?
 In a word where nature is dying and stigma is used a lot
 It is so important to remember it is who you are, not what.
 We are lucky here in the UK because the UK has a heart
 But if you look at places like Sudan, don't even let me start.
 Lots of people are hungry, some can't even write their name
 A lack of food, clean water and education, humanity is to blame.
 Animals are testers for make-up, wild beasts are being shot,
 It seems to me these are the creatures the old Magna Carta forgot.
 We need a new Magna Carta, you can call it what you will,
 No living creature, no matter where, should have to foot the bill.
 It does not matter who you are, nor where you are from,
 Your gender, your race, your religion, we all just need to get along.
 We all live on the same planet, and we all breathe the same air,
 So why should I have rights that others don't, how is that even fair?
 So people in the Commons, it's time MPs heard our call,
 We need a new Magna Carta for all creatures great and small.

[Applause.]

Mr Speaker: Monica, that was a wonderfully creative approach, and the enthusiastic reception that you enjoyed is testimony to the effectiveness and distinctiveness of your approach. That was your USP, and I do not think it will be forgotten for a long time. Thank you. Next, Talin Aslanian from London.

Talin Aslanian (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is a hard act to follow, but I will try my best. Magna Carta, which was sealed in June 1215, said:

"To all free men of our kingdom we have...granted, for us and our heirs for ever, all the liberties written out below".

I would wish that written in a modern Magna Carta is a legal requirement for all young people to be taught their rights at school and for young people to have easy access to information on their rights. If that was in the school curriculum, young people would know that the convention on the rights of the child, which a UK Government agreed to follow in 1991, includes article 12, which says that every child and young person has the right to be heard and their views taken seriously on all matter affecting them.

Knowing about one right could be the small boost needed to empower a young person to take a stand on the things they believe in. Too often, individuals are deceived by larger powers that rely on citizens being misinformed about their rights. Genuine education about human rights could help to prevent that and make it more difficult for those larger powers to control lives, as individuals would have the tools to help their situation. That way, we would give young people the ability to grow into citizens who know their rights and hopefully respect other people's rights in the process, taking us one step closer to ensuring that other people's human rights are not breached. That would be my wish for a modern Magna Carta.

Mr Speaker: Talin, thank you very much indeed. Next is Lauren Howells from the North East.

Lauren Howells (North East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. We are here today because 800 years ago, a group of people thought the principle of having a say in how the country was run was worth fighting for. Magna Carta is one of the most celebrated documents of all time, as it began the process of establishing democracy in a fairer, safer and more representative Britain. Its values stand for much more than just a peace treaty signed in 1215. It show that the power of people who want change can make lives better for generations to come. One of its most important clauses states:

"To no one will we...deny or delay right or justice."

We must elaborate on that. In a modern society with 1 million people using food banks, we must push the fight against poverty forward, particularly by ensuring that no one is disadvantaged by their place of birth when it comes to education and healthcare. That is true justice in society.

In addition, as a collective, we need to end disillusionment with politics. That could happen if people were taught more about the political system and what decisions made within it mean for them. That would transform the view of politics in society, and people would no longer hold the distorted view that the media have given many of them.

The UK Youth Parliament has always pushed for people to be given a better understanding of society for life. We must press forward with this and always strive for more. A clause in my Magna Carta would definitely include this. The longer you stay in one place, the greater your chances of disillusionment, so let's move Britain forward. We can change Britain, but we must get Britain to stand with us. Thank you.

Caitlin Cavanagh (North West): In 1215 the barons of England fought for their rights, resulting in the Magna Carta, but what are we going to fight for today? Alan Turing said:

"We can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done."

In two years' time we can see a European referendum, and in five years' time we can see another general election. However, so many members of the armed forces, workers and parents, are not eligible to vote in either the European referendum or the general election because they are not deemed mature enough.

Democracy can be defined as the practice or principles of social equality—something the barons began to fight for in 1215 and something that we can continue today by gaining our rights. Democracy is something we should be able to take for granted, but so many countries are not as democratic as our own, so we should engage ourselves with issues we care about, such as votes at 16, because even if we are not always heard, we still have the right to speak. As Turing said, we can see plenty that needs to be done, votes at 16 being just one of the things we can campaign for, but gender equality, racial equality and the end of austerity are examples of things that we as a generation can work towards—[*Applause.*] In doing so, we can continue what the barons began and become a greater democratic society.

Helen Jennings (Northern Ireland): The idea of a British Bill of Rights has its roots in the Magna Carta. As a prelude to the global human rights movement, the Magna Carta should form the basis for a modern charter of rights for UK citizens in 2015.

The Magna Carta states:

"No Freeman shall be taken or imprisoned"—

in modern terms, outlawing slavery centuries before the anti-slavery movement.

The Magna Carta specifies:

"No Freeman shall be . . . disseised of his Freehold, or Liberties"—

a right to liberty and security one century before the first recorded use of habeas corpus in 1305.

"No Freeman shall be . . . outlawed, or exiled or . . . destroyed"—

a guarantee of citizenship and against torture.

"Nor will We . . . condemn him, but by lawful judgement"—

fair trial.

These are the principles I wish to see as the foundation for a modern charter. These are articles 2 through 6 of the European convention on human rights. Therefore I present to you, friends and colleagues, my Magna Carta, the Human Rights Act 1998, the instrument enabling people to enforce their convention rights in UK courts. Far from requiring a new reworking of the Magna Carta for 2015, in the Human Rights Act we already have an effective and comprehensive modern charter of

rights for UK citizens, a direct descendant of the great charter. To lose it would be a tragedy, and to forget to fight for it would be a travesty. Thank you.

Rachael Brogan (Scotland): As we sit here in the home of politics and democracy in the United Kingdom, it is only fitting to pay tribute to the importance of the Magna Carta and the impact it still has today. Also known as Magna Carta Libertatum, it literally translates as "the great charter of liberties". To me, that is what Magna Carta represents—freedom. Even though Magna Carta was signed at a time when England and Scotland were separate states, we too recognised the importance of freedom in a similarly significant document: the Declaration of Arbroath. One of the most famous quotes from the declaration is:

"It is not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom—for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself."

I believe that both those documents are symbols of the freedom that I can see as I look around me, in my local area and in my country.

Freedom is young people having their say through consultations such as Make Your Mark. Freedom is young people voting for their representatives in Youth Parliament elections, without which none of us would be here today. Freedom is young people in the United Kingdom having the right to free education, to life and to say exactly what they are thinking and feeling. Freedom is young people aged 16 and over in Scotland being able to vote for whoever they wish in Scottish elections—a true representation of democracy. Freedom is me being able to stand up here, 800 years after Magna Carta was signed, to talk about the amazing influence it has had and is still having on us as young people. Finally, freedom is the democracy that we live in—that we are lucky enough to live in—of which I could not be prouder to be a part. [*Applause.*]

Elisenda Mitchell (South East): Let me start by asking you a question: what do the Bill of Rights, the declaration of independence and the universal declaration of human rights all have in common? The answer is that their source of inspiration is the Magna Carta.

Apart from those hugely important pieces of legislation, the Magna Carta also has a personal relevance to me. Coming from Kent, I grew up visiting Canterbury Cathedral, where the Archbishop Stephen Langton, who is said to be the architect of the Magna Carta, is buried. As well as that, as an aspiring barrister, I greatly champion the use of the Magna Carta as evidence against the passing of the terrorism Bill that proposed detainment without charge for 42 days.

That, however, is only how the Magna Carta has affected me as one young person. Consider how the Magna Carta has affected everyone in this Chamber, all of those beyond our age demographic and for the past 800 years. Therefore, in the spirit of this anniversary, I would like to propose a new right, or rather, reaffirm one: the right to fair representation in court, in the light of legal aid cuts. Nelson Mandela used the Magna Carta in his trial, to ensure fair legal rights. We must ensure that fair legal rights are experienced by all, for not only the present but, let's say, another 800 years to come. [*Applause.*]

Alysha Bodman (South West): In 1215, timber was utilised to house the growing population. However, during that time, one true foundation was laid, weathering not with the times and representing the initiation of democracy: the Magna Carta, a copy of which lies in my region of the South West.

For me, the Magna Carta was one of the first stages in combating gender inequality. Prior to its creation, the then Countess of Gloucester, Isabella, married King John, before being deserted once it was realised that she was unable to bear children. That demonstrates the then perceived role of women in society, as inferior creatures who could be seen but not heard. Since then, Gloucester has appointed its first ever female bishop. As a constituency, we are beginning to see progress, but there is still room for change.

How can we feel represented in our Parliament when only 29% of all MPs are female? [*Applause.*] My question: why are women always a minority in politics? I would adapt the Magna Carta to ensure that it does not remain a relic of a past misogynistic society but instead represents the voice of a future shrouded in equality. I am proud to say that we, the Youth Parliament, are the commencement of such changes, ensuring that voices are not just heard but listened to. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Alysha, your speech clearly struck a chord and resonated with the gathering here today, as manifested in people's standing up and showing their appreciation. I should mention in passing—you can do the calculation for yourselves in any case—that at least so far as the Magna Carta speeches are concerned there has been a large preponderance of female contributors. I hope that that is welcomed by a lot of you. [*Applause.*] In fact, 11 out of 12 speeches are from female contributors. We will hear in due course from what I will call the statutory male—I am sure he will deliver a most outstanding oration. In the meantime, we will hear from Katherine Davies from Wales.

Katherine Davies (Wales): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Speaker. When the Magna Carta was being created in 1215, no one could have predicted what the UK would look like today, and what the concerns of its young people would be in the 21st century, especially as certain powers are now devolved to nations.

Since 1215 we have fought against the black death, launched the industrial revolution and taken part in two world wars, to name a few events from which we have learned hugely. That is why, if I was helping to create a modern charter for 2015, I would make sure education and learning were at the forefront of it, on behalf of all young people, to make sure that each and every young person is able to achieve their full potential through their education.

Not everyone finds education easy. We have our own strengths and weaknesses in all aspects of daily life, and exams do not show those. We have to unlock people's potential to see how talented they are. We are the future generation, and without having varying types of education that suit the needs of different individuals we will never see everyone's full potential.

In Wales, over the coming years, we will be facing huge educational reforms. However, we still need to make sure that young people have a varied curriculum that is constantly developing, so that they are taught the

skills needed to be prepared for life. That is obviously important to all of us, as it has been debated in the Chamber today. That is why it is so valuable.

It is our right to have an education and for that education to develop each child's talents and personality to the full. Education starts the moment you are born but will stay with you for life. Diolch. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Katherine, thank you very much indeed. We are now going to hear from Hazeem Arif from the West Midlands—the statutory male.

Hazeem Arif (West Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker. On the bank of the River Thames, 800 years ago, a document no less altering to the state of this nation than the waters alongside it was formed. Let us turn our eyes to the next 800 years and beyond, for we today—children of that first revolution, citizens of a free nation, born from the cold hardships of bitter millennia and united in the cause of rights for all—here and across the world, bear the banner of freedom still. Let generations to come look back on this day and say that this generation had the courage, the dedication and the faith, though in the face of darkness, to champion the cause of freedom for all.

The symbol of Magna Carta stands great still, 800 years on from that day on the bank of the Thames, although today, in this world of freedom, those battles that our forebears fought are still issues around the globe. Young people today still bear the burden of poverty, disease and slavery, but we are not here to curse the darkness but to light a candle. For the trumpet summons us again—not to a revolution with arms, though courage we need, but to join a long struggle year in, year out to uphold, defend and protect the rights of our fellow citizens of the world. For that, my friends, is the spirit of Magna Carta: the rights of the people above any other.

Across every city, every town and village in this nation there is a wall greater than the creation of any man, which though we see it not, looks down at us with cold reproof. The divisions in our society that separate rich from poor, well from unwell and religion from religion, though great, must be torn down until the wall shall fall. In the name of our liberties, I bid we stand. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Hazeem, thank you for that stirring and powerful address.

Toni Paxford (Yorkshire and Humber): I wonder if the barons who challenged the system eight centuries ago realised the significance the 63 clauses—carved, and sealed—would have for humanity. I wonder if they ever realised that their stance against an established structure would become a sewn-in feature of our society.

We are immensely proud of that feature. We guide, aid and support other Governments who are still sowing the seeds that have flourished so successfully in our own country. We protect and celebrate individuality through human rights, which incorporate fairness, dignity and justice. It is not just a legacy for Surrey or even for Great Britain, but an international recognition for humanity. This document and the highly adaptable framework has not only assisted extraordinary movements, but has allowed quintessential British principles of acceptance, tolerance and diversity to expand, making our country unique and cosmopolitan.

Magna Carta may be fading away in its physical form, but the barons had the foresight to set down on paper possibly the most important document regarding justice, liberty and democracy. It proves that we need to learn from yesterday to act today to improve tomorrow, as there is only one race—the human race, where nobody is left behind. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Toni, thank you for speaking to us in such a poignant fashion. It represents a truly beautiful end to our proceedings, or if not quite an end to our proceedings, at any rate an end to the formal debate and speech making by Members of the Youth Parliament. It has been an extremely uplifting experience for me and, rather more importantly, I hope for all of you. To those of you who have spoken, thank you. I hope you are proud. To those of you who were unable to speak on this occasion, I hope future opportunities beckon, and I urge you to redouble your efforts.

Colleagues, the Youth Parliament will now vote on which of the five subjects debated today to select as your national campaign issue. Forgive me for going about this rather prosaic business in a Noddy fashion, but it is worth being absolutely clear what is to happen. In the Lobby, you will be given two ballot papers. One is for the two reserved—that is to say, UK-wide—subjects. The other is for the three devolved—for today's purposes, England-only—subjects. You should place a cross in the box next to the subject you would like to vote for on each ballot paper and hand the completed ballot papers to the Doorkeepers in the Lobby. Afterwards, 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 staff of the House of Commons will be on hand to assist you. In accordance with custom and practice, I will shortly disappear and come back in due course to announce the result and for the next stage of our proceedings. I am pleased to tell you that the Division Lobbies are now open.

3.6 pm

Division

3.27 pm

Mr Speaker: I am now in a position to announce the results of the two ballots in which you have just voted. The first is for the campaign on the one devolved—that is to say, for our purposes today, England-only—issue. I shall announce the votes in ascending order of numbers cast. Third, with 43 votes, was the motion “Make public transport cheaper, better and accessible for all.” Second, with 110 votes, was “A curriculum to prepare us for life.” The winning motion, with 117 votes, was “Mental Health services should be improved with our help.” *[Applause.]*

In relation to the reserved issue on which you have decided to campaign in the period ahead—as you know, there was a choice between two topics—the votes cast were as follows: 117 votes for the motion “Everyone should be paid at least the Living Wage,” but with 155 votes—*[Applause]*—you have chosen to prioritise the motion “Working together to combat racism and religious discrimination.” That is your theme for the year.

Colleagues, thank you very much indeed. I mentioned that the Minister for Civil Society at the Cabinet Office was unable to be with us this morning, and we always knew that that would be the case, but I said that he would be with us, as he has been, this afternoon and we are extremely grateful for that. The hon. Gentleman has multiple responsibilities in his role and you will hear from him now. Please give a warm and appreciative reception to Rob Wilson. *[Applause.]*

3.30 pm

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and Members of the Youth Parliament. It is a great honour to speak to you at this year's UK Youth Parliament and to bring it to a close after a stimulating, energetic and insightful day. I am slightly worried, however. I am worried that my speech will lack the colour and excitement of those made by the MYPs who preceded me in today's debates, as you have articulated your views with such professionalism and passion.

As part of my role as Minister for Civil Society, I have responsibility for youth policy. I meet and work with young people all the time and I am constantly impressed by the eloquence and engaging nature of the current generation of young people across this country of ours. Today's debates have reinforced that impression. Your ability to express yourselves and your interest in issues that affect young people and society at large has been truly inspiring. You are the future of our country and it is greatly encouraging that that future shows such massive potential.

I also thank you for your efforts towards this year's Make Your Mark ballot, which culminated in a record-breaking 967,000 votes cast to choose today's topics. By any measure, that is a remarkable achievement that would not have been possible without all your hard work. It is astonishing to think that the number of people voting in Make Your Mark has risen from roughly a quarter of a million to close to 1 million this year. That sum of nearly 1 million votes means that 16.5% of the nation's young people—of its 11 to 18-year-olds—had their say. What a great demonstration of young people's interest and what a great vehicle for your collective voice to be heard.

I thank Mr Speaker, who has marshalled this year's Youth Parliament as expertly as he has in past years, as well as the Deputy Leader of the House, Thérèse Coffey, and the shadow Leader of the House, Chris Bryant. Their support for today's debate has been invaluable and I know that Mr Speaker has been a great champion of the Youth Parliament. I thank the staff and Doorkeepers of the House of Commons who have, I hope, made this a special day for you today.

It is particularly satisfying that the Youth Parliament has been invited to continue its yearly residence of the House of Commons for the remainder of the Government's term of office, until 2020—*[Applause.]* If only I could get my fellow MPs to give me a round of applause in the middle of a speech, instead of shouting at me. Although I would expect MYPs to have the 20:20 vision to make such an excellent decision, such clarity of foresight is not always associated with Members of Parliament, so I am delighted that it has been confirmed that those sittings will remain in the Chamber.

Finally, many thanks to the British Youth Council for organising today's Parliament, overseeing the Make Your Mark ballot and administering many other activities that aim to promote the voice of young people locally, nationally and internationally. Thank you all so much for the work that you do.

As I am sure you are aware, my work as Minister for Civil Society and Member of Parliament for Reading East means that I am a frequent visitor to this place. My first days in the Houses of Parliament were back in May 2005, and I have attended regularly during the 10 years since. As such, I have become accustomed to the House of Commons' usual atmosphere. As you have probably seen, it is a hugely historic building. That sense of history is accentuated by the building's layout, by the portraits of great figures that hang from its walls and by its traditions, but I cannot escape noticing that the House has been a very different place today. From glancing around, I can see that there is an almost equal split in today's attendance between male and female MYPs. *[Applause.]* There is a similarly representative proportion of MYPs in terms of ethnicity. *[Applause.]* Today, Parliament physically resembles the people it represents with much greater accuracy.

Today's Chamber is also, unsurprisingly, far more youthful than normal; I hear that the average age of attendees today is a mere 16 years old, whereas it normally stands at 50 years of age—doesn't it, Mr Speaker? Your youthfulness certainly lends the Chamber a more pleasing air, and I can only congratulate the Youth Parliament on showing its more elderly colleagues the way forward.

Returning to the debates, may I again remark on their quality? Without exception, you offered your perspectives in a lively and informative manner. I was only here for the latter two debates and the Magna Carta contributions. I wish to touch on some of the contributions made during that first debate, on the curriculum for life. I am so pleased that you all kept to Mr Speaker's direction to Members of the full Parliament to keep contributions short and pithy—well done to you all on that.

If I get your names wrong, it is because I had some trouble hearing through the thing behind my ear; if you lean back, you will see what I mean. I was interested by the holistic approach to education suggested by Hamza King from Brent. Amber Saunders from Milton Keynes was talking about how to be a successful politician—I think she showed us all that she already is. Emily Fox from Norfolk talked about the importance of the wider curriculum and whether to go to university, and I would say that she is a certainty to do that.

Jack Alderman from Exeter, may I say that I loved the Devon accent? Frankie from Havering listed a lot of things to add to the curriculum and, like Danny Brown from Darlington, made a contribution without any notes—I congratulate them both on that. To Jack from Scotland and the others who contributed from other parts of the UK, I say that it was really good to see all parts of the United Kingdom so brilliantly represented. Jess Macklin summed up the arguments very professionally, and perhaps she can explain hip-hop to me some time later.

As a mark of the genuine influence that the Youth Parliament and the Youth Select Committee have, I would like to mention how much the previous coalition Government took in the Youth Select Committee's ideas on this subject when it produced a report back in 2013. I

know that the coalition felt that the quality of the evidence produced by the Committee was exceptionally high, and the report's influence continues today, as does that of other Select Committee reports. In terms of Government policy, the teaching of PSHE is central to our efforts to provide pupils with a curriculum for life.

I was interested in the debate on the living wage, and I shall say a few words about those of you who contributed. Ewan McCall spoke with passion and marshalled his facts extremely well to support his argument. Hal Meakin, who spoke against the motion, made a clever argument that a one-year campaign would not work because it would be too short. Hal Pearce's speech was a first—I do not think I have ever heard anyone make a speech with the support of an iPhone, which was really interesting. Darragh O'Reilly from Northern Ireland was loud, proud and passionate. Caitlin Smith is worth much more than £3.79 an hour; Nicholas Gardner from the East of England was right to highlight the effects on young people of being priced out of the market. Emily Dormer from the North East widened the debate to talk about the age pay gap. I am sure that she did not get preferential treatment from the Speaker because her father is known to him.

Turning to Ellie Bradley, I would say to contributors that it is okay to be nervous when making a speech in a place like this. I thought she got her message across extremely clearly and extremely well, so well done on that. Vikita from Brent gave us another perspective from her family's business. It is important in Parliament to speak from personal experience and the experiences that one has gained through one's life, family and career. Jessica Hugill summed up—I would really love a burger and a chocolate frog if they are on offer later—and gave a fair and balanced view of the debate.

Three more topics were discussed today, and tackling racism turned out to be the winner. Doing so is absolutely vital. We believe that everyone in Britain has the right to feel safe and at ease in the place where they live. Similarly, young people's mental health is a priority for the Government; £1.4 billion of funding has been made available over the course of the Parliament to make improvements, including faster and improved treatment for eating disorders. I look forward to the formal launch of the Youth Select Committee report on 17 November.

Finally, the Government recognise that the cost of transport can be an issue for young people—my son is always complaining to me about it—which is why we have introduced initiatives such as the 16 to 19 bursary fund to support the most financially disadvantaged young people in the country.

I move on to the Magna Carta speeches. I was impressed by the contributions that were made and the suggestion of a new charter of rights. As MYPs know, 2015 marks the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta at Runnymede. The document established the principle that everyone, including the king, should be subject to the law. That principle and others, such as the universal right to a fair and free trial, proved to be fundamental in the development of our democracy.

Magna Carta should remind us that democracy did not just appear out of thin air; it is the reward of centuries of struggle and forceful negotiation between rulers and subjects. Democracy needs to be respected, cherished and encouraged. Everything that I have seen

and heard today suggests that the future of our democracy is in safe hands. Thanks to Lucy, Monica—that was an outstanding contribution, Monica, and my personal favourite of the day—Talin, Lauren, Caitlin, Helen, Racheal, Elisenda, Alysha, Katherine, Toni and, last but not least, Hazeem. Well done to all of you on your contributions.

Despite the strength of today's debates on Magna Carta and the five subject areas, some people still claim that young people are not engaged in politics. I know that that is not true. Young people may or may not have an interest in parliamentary party politics, but an overwhelming number are passionate about making a difference in the societies and communities in which they live. A survey undertaken by the Cabinet Office last year showed that an astonishingly high number of young people—40% of 10 to 20-year-olds—regularly participate in local social ventures and schemes. I greatly welcome their enthusiasm and the influence that they have in their own communities.

I know that after participating in social action or events like today's Youth Parliament, young people feel more confident, which helps them to develop the skills necessary for life and for work. The Government are therefore committed to supporting young people, giving people like you the power and the opportunity to play a part in your communities and to build these important skills.

I am very keen that we make social action a habit for life. In my ministerial role one of the initiatives I have responsibility for is the National Citizen Service, which you may have heard of; some of you may even have taken part in it. In NCS young people get the chance to set up volunteering and social action projects, and I have seen first-hand the transformative role that this programme can play. Despite this, young people are still faced with numerous challenges, especially in today's economic climate. It is therefore even more important that we listen to the voice of young people, who can bring a fresh perspective and great new ideas to many of the challenges that we all face as a country.

We need to make sure that young people's opinions are heard and that their counsel is always sought on the issues that affect them. Today's Youth Parliament is just one aspect of our work in this area, and I remain committed to engaging with young people at every possible opportunity. As Minister for Civil Society, I am dedicated to championing the contribution that young people make to society, and I will continue to ensure that your voices are heard in Whitehall and well beyond. As a consequence, I will report back to the Prime Minister on today's proceedings and I am sure that he will be as impressed as I have been by the discerning and intelligent debate today. I hope you have had a great day today, even though it is Friday the 13th. Good luck with everything and— who knows?—maybe we will see some of you back at this Dispatch Box in a few years' time.

Mr Speaker: Minister, thank you very much indeed for that speech, which is greatly appreciated. Minhaz Abedin will now give you a vote of thanks on behalf of the Parliament.

Minhaz Abedin (Yorkshire and Humber): Mr Speaker, thank you.

Members of the Youth Parliament, I was going to start this speech with, "We made it", but then I realised that it was a bit better than that: 969,992 young people made it. Every person sat in this Chamber has witnessed something historic today, so let us take a second to realise what we have accomplished. Today we represented the voice of nearly a million young people. Today we empowered a generation. Today we made a difference. MYPs, we have proven that young people will not only voice their opinion, but will do what is necessary to make that opinion a reality. I am sure that a Chamber full of young people seeking change is going to have a few MPs or, for that matter, Ministers sleeping uncomfortably in their beds tonight.

The UK Youth Parliament is what brings us here today, and behind the name are the brilliant individuals who make up the British Youth Council, working alongside our youth workers, who go to admirable lengths to make sure we always succeed. I would like to ask for a round of applause for our dear youth workers. On behalf of the Chamber, I thank you for everything you have done. [*Applause.*]

A lot of components make up today, and the House of Commons is the magnificent centrepiece to all. That is why I ask you all to give a gracious thank you to the House of Commons staff, whose warm hospitality has allowed for today's proceedings to go so smoothly. A special thanks goes to the Principal Doorkeeper, Phil Howse, who has taken care of us in the most eloquent manner. Thank you, Mr Howse. [*Applause.*]

Alongside the House of Commons staff, the outreach and engagement team has worked tremendously hard to make this sitting possible. May we have a round of applause for Mr David Clark—I see him creeping in the corner; you really cannot hide from the eyes of young people—and his team? I thank everyone who has made this debate a success. [*Applause.*]

It is always a welcoming sight to see Members of Parliament supporting us on these hallowed green Benches. I give a special thanks to the Minister for Civil Society, Mr Rob Wilson MP, whose dedicated support throughout Make Your Mark saw it reach incredible heights. I also thank both the Deputy Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Thérèse Coffey MP and Chris Bryant MP, for their inspired speeches to the Chamber today. I hope Mr Speaker will pass this on: we thoroughly appreciated their kind words. [*Applause.*]

There is one thing missing from today's proceedings: the Deputy Members and Members of the Youth Parliament who unfortunately could not be here to celebrate what is a showcase of youth democracy. Without them, I think you will all agree, we would not be here with the voice of nearly 1 million young people behind us, so thank you to them.

A special thank you goes to the procedures group representatives, who expertly led our regions to synchronised success. May we give a round of applause to them, with their awkward-looking faces right now? On behalf of all four corners of the UK, I thank you for enabling us to succeed. [*Applause.*]

And now, a particularly important person is left to thank. MYPs, only one person in this entire Chamber can put a smile on our faces in such a heated political arena, while having the tenacity simultaneously to chair

this debate in such an immaculate fashion: our very own model of sartorial elegance, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr John Bercow. After it got me a solid 100 likes, I thought I would return the compliment you gave me last year. You are a legend to millions of young people. Thank you, Sir. *[Applause.]*

Before I come to an end, I want to thank a few more people, starting with my own schools, the Grammar School at Leeds and Prince Henry's grammar school, which have led to me standing here today. I also thank the 8,732 young people in Leeds who supported my campaign to allow their voices to be heard in this amazing Chamber, with a particular mention to Mr Smith, a mentor of humbling stature. I know we all have mentors in our lives, whether in school or at home, and I want to say thank you to them as well.

It was only four years ago that a clean-shaven, baby-faced Minhaz stood for election. This journey is a credit to my family and friends in Leeds, who have stood by me, alongside the 300 Members of the Youth Parliament who sit here today. I want to thank you all.

I wrote in my notes at this point that I was going to tell you how much I hated the person who did the closing speech because they were the barrier between you and the results. Clearly, that went well. *[Laughter.]* But people have seen the passion here today when we heard those results. No matter what the outcome, we have voiced the opinion of young people. What more could we have asked for?

And what a Chamber to do it in. When we get to be in this Chamber, we come in and see how amazing it is, but then we settle in and start doing our job of representing the voice of young people. To me, that is humbling, so thank you.

Our national campaign will be to combat racial and religious discrimination, starting today, as we invite our MPs to our national day of action on 22 January 2016. Members of the Youth Parliament, you should be proud of your achievements and of what you have accomplished both in Make Your Mark and in this Chamber today. Let us go out, put words into action and change lives for the better. Do not be mistaken—you will be changing lives this year, so let us do it right. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Minhaz, on behalf of everyone here and from the bottom of my heart, thank you for what you have said and for the inimitable eloquence with which you have said it. It is hugely appreciated and thoroughly fitting that you have embraced, in your expression of thanks, the vast panoply of different people, hailing from different departments of this House and from different parts of the country, who collectively have produced the educational, energising, inspiring experience that everyone here today has enjoyed.

I underline the thanks that you expressed, and which the Minister very properly articulated, to all who have facilitated today's event. Teachers, parents and youth workers often go unmentioned but they should not. They are absolutely pivotal figures in the operation of the work of the UK Youth Parliament; many are assembled here today, and we thank them for their idealism as well as for their very practical commitment.

As you will appreciate, I am indebted on a daily basis to all who facilitate the broadly smooth running of the Chamber of the House of Commons. The Clerks sitting

in front of me are both expert and dedicated, and I am immensely appreciative of their contribution today. Please put your hands together in appreciation for them. *[Applause.]*

Tribute has very properly been paid to the Principal Doorkeeper, Phil Howse. I add a tribute to the acting Serjeant at Arms, Bob Twigger, and the whole team of Doorkeepers, who have oiled the wheels of today's operation. We are very appreciative of what you have done: unruffled, calm, not demonstrative, but simply efficient. It has been a great job of work.

I mentioned at the outset, when the Deputy Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House spoke, that I would reference parliamentary colleagues attending our proceedings, and at various stages during the day I have done so. Many who are not in the Chamber today have, nevertheless, given huge support to you, both in facilitating today's debate by voting for the right for it to take place and, very often, in interacting with you individually in your own constituencies and areas of the country, thereby bolstering and underscoring the important work of the UK Youth Parliament.

I also mentioned at the outset, probably for the umpteenth time, the occasion on which it was put to me, in a red-faced and spluttering rage by a very senior Member of the House now no longer in this place, that if you came here, spoke and debated the topics of your choice in defiance of all previous convention, creating a new and—in his judgment, unwelcome—precedent, the consequences would be disastrous in the form of pieces of chewing gum strewn all over the Chamber, or worse, in the form of the hazardous and damaging use of penknives on the Benches he loved.

I told the Member concerned at the time that, although I respected his right to hold his view and his candour in expressing it to me directly, in every other respect I utterly deprecated what he had to say, because I thought that it was the most appalling calumny on young people as a whole. I said that to brand, label and typecast the Members of the Youth Parliament as, in effect, a bunch of delinquents who could not be trusted to operate here was a piece of scandalous bigotry of which he ought to be thoroughly ashamed. As I said to you, and I made the point not to vindicate myself but to vindicate you, my three predictions to him six years ago—that you would be proud to come here, that you would speak well and that you would behave much better than we do—have all been proved right. Each and every year, you perform magnificently.

Rob Wilson correctly pointed out, as I have myself done on several occasions, that a very encouraging, refreshing and welcome feature of the UK Youth Parliament is just how representative you are both in gender terms and in respect of ethnic diversity. I think it is probably true that you are relatively representative in socioeconomic terms as well. There are people from all walks of life and different types of background, and from different areas of the country. I expect, and in a sense I would hope, you are predominantly people who attend state schools, because 93% of children and young people do so, but there will no doubt be a proportion from the independent sector as well. From whichever part of the country you come, whichever type of school you attend and whether you are male or female, black or white, the youngest or the oldest, you are, and I hope you have felt yourselves to be, extremely welcome.

What Members of the Youth Parliament do is absolutely vital. Perhaps I could be forgiven for pointing out to you what a few people might know but most of you will not, which is that before I had the great privilege to be elected to the office of Speaker, as its 157th occupant, I sat for a period of years on the International Development Committee of the House, whose responsibility is to scrutinise the work of the Department for International Development. In that capacity, I travelled to many strife-torn and beleaguered parts of the world, where, among other things, I met and have engrained upon my mind the experience of meeting people in quite the most desperate plight, people for whom the word “poor” scarcely begins to describe the scale of their deprivation, people eking out an existence, and people not living—we talked earlier about the living wage—but existing on less than \$1 a day. It is a commonplace and a truism, but a valid one to inject at this point, that, very often, the plight of immensely, excruciatingly poor people around the world has been created or exacerbated by an absence of democracy and rights. The two do not always go together, but very often they do. Poverty and poor governance—the absence of democracy, despotism, tyranny and the most egregious abuse of human rights you could expect to encounter anywhere in the world.

Although I spent quite a lot of time visiting African countries as a shadow Secretary of State, I have always had a clearer and more stark recollection of my visit to the Thailand-Burma border in the company of people from Christian Solidarity Worldwide in April 2004—my first, although not my last, visit to that border. I must say to you, Members of the Youth Parliament, that I met men and women there in as bad a situation as I have encountered anywhere. I have always had the searing imprint upon my mind of meeting—I have never encountered anything to surpass this in terms of depravity—parents who told me through interpreters that they had seen their children shot dead in front of them by members of the Burma army, the Tatmadaw. I also met children who had seen their parents shot dead in front of them by members of the Burma Army, the Tatmadaw.

I met one man who had been subject to the most appalling water torture by a member of the Tatmadaw. As it happens, he was a person of faith, although we were meeting people of faith and people of no particular faith. I asked him what he thought of the army officer who had poured gallons of water into him and then stamped up and down on his stomach. Members of the Youth Parliament, he said to me through the translator, “Mr Bercow, I love him because he is my brother.” When I heard him say that, you will appreciate that I thought—that day, there and then, never to be forgotten—I have no right to look away, to think of something else and to forget that experience, this subject or the rights of the people of that country.

Combined with that man’s quite breathtaking dignity and absence of bitterness, I discovered, in the course of our conversation, that there was also a steely resolve to ensure that, one day, he and his fellow citizens in Burma would be free—that they would have a right to vote and that they would be able to choose who represented them. It was that experience—that visit and that induction into the affairs of one particularly brutal totalitarian dictatorship—that caused me to take a greater interest in these issues.

Some years later, I had the great privilege to be able to invite the leader of the Opposition in Burma, the Nobel peace prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, to address both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall, which she did on 21 June 2012. On that occasion, in the course of her speech, she said she would like to appeal to the British Parliament for practical help to assist democrats campaigning for democratic pluralism, civil rights and the triumph of liberty, justice and the rule of law in her country.

Those of you who take some interest in international affairs will be aware that, last Sunday, there was, for the first time in 25 years—thanks not least to the heroic and breathtaking efforts of Daw Suu and her colleagues—a general election and, as far as we can see, a free general election. Twenty-five years, she and her party won. *[Applause.]* Twenty-five years ago, the democrats won unmistakably, but the result was ignored by the brutal military junta. I have a sense that 25 years on, a denial of that victory will simply not be possible. It is heartening that what should be will be as, I think, the outgoing Government have acknowledged the victory of the National League for Democracy.

You may think that this is all a long way from you and wonder why I mention this particular hobby-horse. I do so, of course, because it is emblematic, friends, colleagues, Members of the UK Youth Parliament, of a much wider cause—the attempt everywhere always, without exception, of human beings to ensure that they are free and can make their own choice.

As Rob Wilson said in his speech, politics does matter. Even if you dislike the formalities and sometimes even what you might regard as the trivialities of the party battle—you may eschew and despise the ad hominem attacks by one person on another that you see instead of a proper focus on issues of principle—I absolutely refuse to believe, as Rob refused to believe, that somehow young people are not interested in politics. That is simply not true. I go round the country all the time, to schools, colleges and universities, and I often ask, “How many of you are interested in politics?” At the start, when I ask the question in those bald terms, the numbers who raise their hands are frequently small, but when I say to people, “How many of you care about the job that you are going to get when you leave school or education beyond school?”, huge numbers of hands go up. When I ask, “How many of you care about occupying a decent home and being able to afford to do so?”, huge numbers of hands go up. When I ask, “How many of you care about being able to access quality healthcare, irrespective of your means, at such time as you require it?”, huge numbers of hands go up. To give but one other example, when I ask, “How many of you care about the plight of the poorest people on the face of the planet, who are eking out a wretchedly inadequate existence, and do you feel that you should do something to help them?”, huge numbers of hands go up.

People do care about politics, and I will explain what is the great beauty of our system, for all its imperfections and fallibilities, which are inevitable, as it is a human creation. We should say at least two if not, as I would say, three cheers for our system, and the reason, which Daw Suu and her fellow citizens are now going to discover and to enjoy for real, is simply stated. In a democratic system, at the point at which you have the vote—we can argue the toss about the voting age and

frequently have done so—you can choose who represents you and, critically, if, after a period, you believe that the person you voted for is no longer the right person to represent you, you can change your choice.

That is the joy, the essence, the beauty of our system, of which you are going to be crucially important parts, as informed citizens who vote and take a modest interest, as very active campaigners for a cause or series of causes, as people who sit on these Benches in the future yourselves as Members of Parliament or, as Rob has done today and as he hinted you might do, because you come to speak from the Dispatch Box as a member of the Government. I do not know which it is to be, but I do know that you have made a huge stride forward for yourselves and for the Youth Parliament by the way in which you have conducted yourselves today.

To those frustrated because you could not speak or whose topic did not triumph or prevail today, let me just offer you what I hope will be a comforting thought and is certainly a necessary one. In politics, quantity, persistence and, above all, repetition are at least as important as the quality of your argument. That does not mean that the quality of your argument, Members of the UK Youth Parliament, does not matter. Of course it does. Of course it must be high quality. Of course it must be

resilient. Of course it must pass muster against the examination and attack, but it is a great mistake to think that if you have got the right answer once, and you make the argument once, it will immediately prevail. Sadly, it is often not the case: there are people who disagree, there are constraints of resources and delays from the conception of the plan to its acceptance and execution. That is why persistence, quantity and repetition are so incredibly important. I hope you will keep going at it with vigour.

In closing what has been a very auspicious and hugely inspiring occasion, I just want to conclude with you, because this event is about you, and would not have happened without you. It should conclude with a focus on you. Thank you for the work that you do, the commitment you make and the prowess that you demonstrate. All of that is hugely to your credit individually and collectively to the institution of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament as a whole. Notwithstanding your extreme courtesy, you will be immensely relieved now to know that my vote of appreciation to you is definitively at an end. Thank you.

4.16 pm

Youth Parliament adjourned at 4.16 pm.