



HOUSE OF COMMONS



United Kingdom Youth Parliament Debate

14th November 2014

House of Commons

Youth Parliament

Friday 14 November 2014

The UK Youth Parliament, sitting in the House of Commons, met at Eleven o'clock.

[MR SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr Speaker: Welcome. I hope you have a great day. This is the sixth annual sitting of the UK Youth Parliament here in the Chamber of the House of Commons. I have had the pleasure and privilege of chairing your proceedings each time, and I hugely look forward to doing so again today. I think I can say with confidence that you will have fun and find the whole experience very rewarding. We are grateful to you for taking an interest, for treating this place with respect, and for wanting to be here. We want you to be here.

The issues to be debated today were, as you know, chosen by the annual Make Your Mark ballot of 11 to 18-year-olds. Last year I remember reporting with some pride—pride on your behalf—that the number of votes cast had almost doubled from the previous year. The British Youth Council reports that this year the number has almost doubled again, with 875,000 young people casting a vote. We say the words “thank you” and “congratulations” too rarely, so I want to be the first here in the Chamber to say thank you and congratulations on everything you have done, not only by showing your own interest, but by engendering interest among other young people. That is enormously to your credit, and you ought to give yourselves a big round of applause. [Applause.] Good, I am glad that you are getting into the spirit of the thing at a very early stage.

I said that you would choose, and have chosen, the topics for debate. In doing so, you are also, of course, choosing what are to be your priority campaigns, friends, for 2015. There is another element to the proceedings today. This year's Youth Parliament marks the introduction of the Paul Boskett memorial award. That award will go to someone who makes the speech as debate lead that is thought to be the best, and a speech from another Member of Youth Parliament will also be recognised. Paul Boskett MBE very sadly died this year, suddenly, aged 59. As huge numbers of people gathered here today, and many outside this place will know, Paul was one of the driving forces behind the UK Youth Parliament at the British Youth Council. He was passionate about the organisation, full of enthusiasm, and an example for others to follow. He is very much missed.

Today's proceedings will be broadcast live on the internet. I know you have had some preliminaries so I will keep them to an absolute minimum, but I want to say two things. First, MYPs who wish to speak should stand in their place. In that sense you will be following the practice in the House of Commons—when people stand constantly it is because they are trying to catch the Speaker's eye, so that is what I ask you to do as well. I hope you will not mind if I ask you please to speak only once. Once you have spoken, although your enthusiasm is respected, please do not try to get called again, because I might accidentally call you again, which is a bit unfair on people who have not had a chance to

contribute. You may have to stand a great deal before getting called. I am afraid that it will not be possible to accommodate everybody, but I will try to get in as many contributors as possible, but once only for each person please.

Secondly, MYPs should always say their name and region at the beginning of their speech, otherwise *Hansard*—those taking the *Official Report*—will not know who they are. Before starting, perhaps you can remember to pause for a moment to enable the microphone to be activated.

Without further ado, and with huge appreciation from me and, I am sure, from you, I call someone who has now served in this House for 25 years, who has previously led his party, who has served as Foreign Secretary of our country and who is now a hugely respected Leader of the House of Commons. MYPs, please give a very warm and appreciative welcome to the right hon. William Hague. [Applause.]

Leader of the House of Commons (Mr William Hague):

Thank you. I am delighted to add my welcome to the Members of the Youth Parliament, and I thank you, Mr Speaker, and all the officials and Officers of the House who have helped to make today possible, as well as the many staff who have volunteered their time to welcome Members of the Youth Parliament this morning. They all deserve a round of applause, too. [Applause.]

As Leader of the House of Commons, it is my absolute pleasure to welcome you all to Parliament. As Leader of the House, I am a representative of the Government in the House, but, importantly, I also represent the House to the Government. I will make sure that the relevant Government Ministers are sent the transcript of your debates and everything that you say today so that they can read it, and I assure you that they are going to read it whether they like it or not.

This Chamber has a unique atmosphere and an extraordinary history, and you will become part of that history today. We often hear that people are bored or disenchanted with politics in our country, and many people are, but it is here that laws are passed that affect every aspect of our lives and will do so throughout your lives: how much students pay when they go to university; what sort of national health service we have; and how we meet our future energy needs and the impact that has on our countryside and our planet. Those are all issues debated and decided here, and we need some of the best and brightest minds among us to be attracted into politics for the common good. In here we deal with fundamental questions of our identity, of our rights and responsibilities, of the nature of our society and of the future of our country and the world.

I am standing down from the House of Commons in a few months' time at the general election, when I will have served 26 years as a Member of Parliament. I started off in politics, as some of you may know, as a 16-year old, when I gave a speech at the Conservative conference that is still, rather embarrassingly to me, played on television from time to time—[Laughter.] I can tell that you have seen it. The video of that speech is embarrassing for many reasons: I had a lot of hair—I did have hair in those days—and clothes that went out of fashion 30 or so years ago. I got involved as a young person, as you are doing, and if someone asked me today, 37 years later, whether I would do it again, I

would say yes. My experience in here over the past quarter of a century shows to me that you can achieve things in Parliament and in politics that you cannot achieve in any other way.

In 1995, for instance, I took the Disability Discrimination Act through this House. I wrote that Act and passed it through Parliament, and over the past 19 years it has helped to improve the lives of tens of thousands of disabled people in this country. I am proud of having been able to do that, but I could not have done it if I had not been a Member of Parliament. Those people who tell you not to bother, not to vote or not to take part can never achieve anything like that, or achieve positive change of any kind, without getting involved.

The other thing I want to tell you is that, given comments in the media, you would sometimes think that you have to go to a particular school or come from a particular part of the country in order to succeed in politics. Take no notice of that whatsoever. I came from a comprehensive school in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. I have just met one of your fellow MYPs who comes from Rotherham—[*Interruption.*] There he is, and there is another one, on the back row, where the Members for Rotherham often sit. I came from that comprehensive school in Rotherham, and I have been Leader of the Opposition and Foreign Secretary, and I have never found any door closed to me or any barrier placed in my way. You can go to the top, and don't let anybody ever tell you that you can't.

In this Chamber, many of the great advances in human rights and democratic government have been made. It was in the House of Commons, which then sat just down the corridor in St Stephen's chapel, which you probably came through this morning, that the Bill of Rights was passed in 1689—the foundation stone of parliamentary sovereignty and the freedoms of British citizens. It was here in the House of Commons that the slave trade was abolished in 1807, after 20 years of effort and campaigning by William Wilberforce. It was here that all women in our country finally won the right to vote when the Equal Franchise Act was adopted in 1928, and today you will debate the principle of whether suffrage should be extended to all 16 and 17-year-olds in our country. More recently it was here, in this Parliament, that we passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act so that marriage is open to everyone equally.

And it was here, as you will recall in a moment, that the House solemnly weighed the case for war on 3 August 1914, on the eve of the first world war, in which many MPs went on to serve and more than 800,000 of our countrymen perished in battle. Matters of war and peace continue to be one of the most serious and difficult subjects debated in the House of Commons. During my time as Foreign Secretary, we won the support of the House for military intervention in Libya, but we lost the vote on responding with military force to chemical weapons in Syria. These democratic decisions of the highest importance are made in here.

The issues I have mentioned are just a few of the reasons why politics matters and why your involvement in the Youth Parliament today is so important. The fact that 865,000 young people voted in the annual Make Your Mark ballot to choose the subjects for debate today is testament to how much you have to say. So this Chamber must be just as relevant today as at any time in the past. These days, we have topical questions, more

urgent questions and the Backbench Business Committee, chaired by Natascha Engel, from whom you will hear in a moment. They all help to keep this House at the centre of debate in our country. Parliament continues to evolve, and democracy evolves also. Running during Parliament Week, which starts today, is the campaign to “Do Democracy”, and I encourage you all to be involved in that and in the many events that will be running, up and down the country, over the next few days.

I thank you all for being here. Many of my MP colleagues will come in and out of the Chamber during the day, and one or two will be able to stay throughout the proceedings. I will be here for a little while, and then I have to go to my constituency in North Yorkshire, as MPs generally do on Friday afternoons.

Today, the Floor of the House is yours. You will be debating the issues that have been debated in this Chamber many times before—the constitution, education, employment, mental health. You will bring to these debates your own views, your own experience, your own ideas. As Edmund Burke, one of the greatest parliamentarians in our history, said 200 years ago:

“Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests...but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole...the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole.”

In that spirit, I wish you an excellent day's debate. I look forward to your contribution here today, and we all look forward to the contribution you will all make in the future.

Mr Speaker: William, thank you very much indeed.

Next I call, in her capacity as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, and today representing the Opposition, Natascha Engel.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I start by sincerely thanking you, Mr Speaker, for not just chairing this sitting but making it possible. We have had six years of the UK Youth Parliament, and it has been such a privilege to hear all of its members in the Chamber and to participate in it once a year. That would not have been possible without all your work, so thank you very much.

I also wish to say a big thank you to the Principal Doorkeeper, Robin Fell. I had no idea that this was your last Youth Parliament. Things will not be the same without you. The speech that you make before the sitting is so deeply moving, and we will miss it. The person who follows you has very large boots to fill, so thank you very much, Robin.

I normally do the winding-up speech at the end of the sitting, which is much easier as I get the chance to listen to all of you, steal all your best ideas and then use them in my speech, but this time I am standing in for Angela Eagle, who is William Hague's opposite number. She is not able to be here today, and sends her great apologies. She has been present every year, and is, I know, a great supporter of the UK Youth Parliament. It is a privilege to stand in for her. Actually, I am quite glad to be speaking at the start of the sitting, because at the end we will have heard all your fabulous speeches. This is your first time, William, and you will find that you are stunned by the contributions. They are short, polite, to the point and always, always a pleasure to listen to. We are looking forward to a very high standard of debate today.

I wish to say a few words about the Scottish referendum. Just like in this Chamber where we will hear speeches of such a high standard from you, we saw 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland taking their franchise very seriously. Now that the door has been opened, it cannot be closed. It is unfortunate that we will be going into the next general election without 16 and 17-year-olds, but I sincerely hope that it is the very last time that we do so.

William spoke of his famous 1977 conference speech at the age of 16. I had a very different path into politics. While William was wowing his party conference, I was busy parting company with my school on not very good terms. These days, people call it a difficult transition to adulthood. In those days, we just called it being expelled from school. Although William and I have taken very different paths in getting here, both of us know what a privilege it is not just to be here but to serve, and to serve our constituents in the best way that we can.

Every year I come here, I am struck by how different you all are and what different walks of life you represent. As William has said, it does not matter from which school you come. You can come from all sorts of different schools and all sorts of different backgrounds. I have been worried that, over the past few years certainly, the type of people who become politicians has narrowed very significantly. We now have many people who went to school, studied politics at university and became researchers and advisers to MPs and Ministers before eventually becoming MPs and Ministers themselves.

Having some people in Parliament who know what they are doing is a good thing, but it would be nice to widen the spectrum. We need to widen the field of candidates and the kinds of life experiences that people have. Politics is about not just making speeches in this absolutely amazing Chamber, but the people we meet and the people who influence our lives.

When you go back to your constituencies, I hope that you use the experience that you have gained here today to enrich the lives of not just yourselves but all the people around you, because that is what politics is about. With that, I wish you all very good luck, and I hope that you can live up to the very high standard that the UK Youth Parliament has set in previous years. I will sit down now as I am absolutely dying to hear your speeches. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Natascha, thank you very much indeed for what you said.

MYPs, during the day I will alert you to the presence of Members of Parliament. A moment ago—I think she has just slipped out of the Chamber—we were joined by Tessa Munt, the Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Wells. It is great that she has come here today. I will mention others during the course of the day.

We shall move on in a moment, but I want at this stage to mention the presence in the officials' box, to which we do not normally refer in day-to-day proceedings, of Stephen Benn. Stephen, put your hand in the air, please. Stephen Benn is the son of the late, great Tony Benn, who served in Parliament for the best part of half a century. Stephen is regularly in and out of this place, campaigning on behalf of causes dear to him, and he loves Parliament as his father loved Parliament. His father served Parliament with great distinction and without fear or favour throughout his parliamentary

career. Stephen, it is a pleasure to be joined by you. Thank you for coming and showing your interest in and respect for young people.

Now, without further ado, I call Ms Ellie Emberson, from the South East of England, to come forward and read a message from the Prime Minister. Ellie, welcome.

11.20 am

Eleanor Emberson (South East): The letter is as follows:

Welcome to the House of Commons, and congratulations to you all. This year, you have engaged a record number of young people in voting on the topics you will debate here today. Over 870,000 votes were cast through the Make Your Mark ballot—a clear demonstration that young people across the country want to have a say on the issues that matter to them.

This is an historic building, and the debates you are holding in this Chamber today will be recorded by *Hansard* alongside the thousands of debates that have taken place here over the years. 2014 is of course a particularly historic year, as we are commemorating the centenary of the start of the first world war. It is absolutely right that you have chosen to start proceedings by paying your respects and marking the occasion. It is our duty to remember those who have given their lives for our freedoms.

What you are doing today is important. You are the future. It is vital that your voices are heard. Today is an excellent opportunity for you to make your views known and for politicians to listen. Rob Wilson, the Minister for Civil Society, who has responsibility for youth policy, is very much looking forward to hearing from you. I have asked him to report back to me on today's debates. I wish you all the best for a great day in Parliament and I hope that the experience will inspire at least some of you to go on and become more permanent residents of this House in the future.

Mr Speaker: Ellie, thank you very much. We have also been joined by the Conservative Member of Parliament for Romsey and Southampton North, Caroline Nokes, who is up in the Gallery. Caroline, again, thank you for showing your support for the UK Youth Parliament; it is much appreciated.

Members of the Youth Parliament will now make speeches to commemorate the centenary of the start of the first world war. At the end of all the speeches—I think there will be about 13—there will be, as I hope you will agree is appropriate, a minute's silence. First, I call from the East Midlands Mr Eddie Fenwick.

Eddie Fenwick (East Midlands): I am from Nottinghamshire in the East Midlands.

Without doubt, world war one was one of the most terrible, abhorrent and significant events ever to have affected Europe's history. First, I pay a special tribute to my great-grandfather, Walter Hopcroft, who bravely fought for our country in the first world war. He was in Ypres when he was gassed, but luckily he survived. He lived on and later became the clerk of the peace to my village.

There can hardly be a city, street or village in the east midlands that did not provide men to serve in the Sherwood Foresters Regiment. Altogether, 140,000 men, mainly from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, served in that regiment, and 11,409 of them did not return. It is almost unbelievable that, aged just 16, my great-grandfather went to war. Can you imagine someone aged just 16—a teenager, just like you and I—being faced with a world war? It seems unimaginable. We must remember that these brave men forsook their lives so that we could live ours freely today. For that reason, we will always remember them.

Mr Speaker: Eddie, thank you. Next, from the East of England, is Mr Brandon Minichiello.

Brandon Minichiello (East of England): I am from Hertfordshire in the East of England.

The first world war was war on a colossal and previously unimagined scale. Those who fought did so for King and country, and we should never forget them or their sacrifices. The east of England, in common with all of the British isles, was devastated by the first world war. The two regiments of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire lost in total 6,075 soldiers, fighting in 37 individual conflicts, including Ypres and the Somme. That is only a fraction of those who were lost in the east of England.

Many families lost more than two members because of the war. In Hertfordshire, one family sent off six brothers, two uncles and a cousin; only one of the brothers and the cousin returned alive. Again, that is just one example of the devastating effect the first world war had on families.

As I said at the start of my speech, the first world war was the most devastating war of its time. It left in its wake a nation bereft and families grieving. However, the soldiers did not die in vain. Because of their sacrifice and the sacrifices of successive generations, we live in relative peace. One of their enduring legacies, which will never end, is our enduring liberty. War must never be repeated on such a scale.

Hannah Morris (London): “Get the kettles boiling and brew up some tea.” That is what Leonard Parrington used to say on the battlefields. What could be better to lift the spirits? Leonard was part of the heavy artillery. Four officers and 100 soldiers had the duty of firing four ginormous guns that were too heavy to be pulled by horses.

Leonard fought in many battles including Ypres and the Somme, where he watched the disastrous British advance from his position. “The Germans had constructed deep shelters 30 feet under the chalk, where they remained during our bombardment,” he recalls. “As soon as the barrage lifted, they brought up their machine guns and mowed down our supporting waves.” Leonard’s war diaries are not poetic or descriptive; the emotion lies beneath the surface of their simplistic style. On receiving news of his best friend’s death, he wrote simply, “Such a good fellow.”

Leonard was born in 1890 and was 24 when world war one began. He was sustained by the dream of running a farm. With a wife and children, he died at peace at the age of 89 on his own farmland, where my grandmother and great-aunt live today. Leonard Parrington was by great-grandfather.

By the end of the war, Leonard had been promoted to major and had written a series of lessons, which were recorded at the end of his diary. No. 1 is my favourite: “There is nothing men will not do or put up with, provided there is good object in it.”

Mr Speaker: Hannah, thank you. These are very moving speeches indeed.

Annabelle Cooper (North East): I would like to start by saying how proud I am to represent the north-east in paying our respects to those who served in world war one.

The great war had a major impact on life in the north-east. Factory workers and miners joined the Northumberland Fusiliers, the Durham Light Infantry or the Green Howards. The Northumberland Fusiliers raised more than 51 battalions for service during the great war, 29 of which served overseas in places such as Italy and Egypt, which are now everyday places to go on holiday. It was the second largest regiment in the UK.

The Northumberland Fusiliers earned five Victoria Crosses, including one that belonged to Frederick Dobson, who repeatedly risked his life in the midst of battle to rescue wounded comrades. The regiment achieved 67 battle honours, but world war one struck more than 17,000 of its men from this earth—17,000!

The sixteenth of December 1914 is scarred on people’s minds because the lives of 112 civilians and nine soldiers were claimed, and 340 buildings destroyed, in Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool.

The society that we live in would not be here if it were not for those people. They gave their tomorrow for our today—lest we forget.

Rose Warburton (North West): In every generation, there are those who stand apart. They step up, they raise their hand, they put on the uniform and lay their lives on the line. During world war one, thousands were recruited from the north-west. In one street in Altrincham alone, 160 men signed up from just 60 houses. Some of them joined the other quarter of a million boys who were under 19. In this centenary year, as we remember their stories, we should remember those who left home barely even boys and who became men and returned home as heroes.

Women in the region were mobilised and took on the job of supplying our soldiers with the goods they needed. As men were fighting on the battlefield, women were fighting in the munitions factories in Bolton, entering the coal mines of Wigan, making gas masks and tyres in Manchester or producing glass in St Helens for the portholes of submarines. They too witnessed this country threatened and they too stood up to protect the nation.

To our veterans, to the fallen and to their families, there is no commemoration, no tribute and no praise that can truly match the magnitude of your service and sacrifice. On the behalf of the whole north-west and every person in this Chamber, I say two simple words: thank you.

Niamh Haughey (Northern Ireland): One of the greatest war poets, Wilfred Owen, spoke of the old lie, “Dulce et Decorum est Pro patria mori” or “It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country.” Like Owen, I believe that the first world war need not be commemorated in rose-tinted retrospect. I see no glory or honour in the needless death of millions. Instead, I see an irreplaceable loss of fathers and sons, thinkers and visionaries. They were cannon fodder for a ruling class whose stark jingoism and tales of “our boys” will never make up for the deaths that they caused. It fills me with sadness to think of the countless lives lost for the unnecessary cause that is war, the grief-stricken families, the innocent civilians, and the ordinary people who picked up the pieces of a mess that they did not create.

On this centenary, it is time to learn from the past and not to repeat it in Iraq or Afghanistan or to sit idly by as thousands are slaughtered in Gaza. It is time to stop looking for heroes and to start looking for peace.

Eilidh Collins (Scotland): When talking about world war one, I always find it difficult to comprehend casualty figures. For example, I could tell you that as many Scottish soldiers died as there are grains in a square inch of sand, but that is not much use, because now the only image that you have in your head is that of a square inch of sand.

Who do those grains of sand represent? Who are the people behind the poppies? They are ordinary people who did extraordinary things. They represent Piper Daniel Laidlaw VC, who bravely went over the top to pipe his troops, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, into action and refused to stop piping even when severely injured. They represent former Celtic footballer William Angus, who was shot 40 times while rescuing an unconscious comrade from the battlefield and yet remarkably survived. They represent young Walter Sinclair Smith of the 5th Cameronians Scottish Rifles, who, while just a teenager, was tragically shot by accident during the Christmas day truce. The grains of sand do not only represent the soldiers; they represent those left behind: people like Elizabeth Cranston, who would visit her local railway station every single day, waiting for the return of her four sons. None of them came home.

For a small nation like Scotland, the war was devastating. We suffered twice as many casualties per head as England, and over a quarter of our servicemen died. But when you put on your poppy, I urge you not just to think about those tens, hundreds and thousands, but to think about the Walters, the Williams, the Daniels and the Elizabeths—because, remember, those individuals are what wearing a poppy is all about.

Angel Layer (South East): Kent and the rest of the south-east were heavily involved in the first world war. On 14 April 1917, Edward Oliphant, a lance-corporal in the Household Division lost his life fighting for our country. Known to my family as Uncle Ted, my great-great uncle—my hero—was one of the millions of other heroes who lost their lives in the first world war.

If I were to ask you what you were doing on 6 August this year, what would be the first thing to pop into your mind? I was interested to learn that on 6 August 1914 in my local town, the mayor organised an action committee to protect civilians in the event of an invasion. On 18 November 1914, The Mount hospital in Faversham, Kent was opened. It was supported by local donations and provided accommodation for 52 patients. Next Tuesday, 18 November, when you are getting ready for a long day ahead, I would like you to reflect on the generosity not only of those Kent citizens but of south-east citizens and citizens all over the country who donated money, food or shelter, as well as the mayors who did their best to keep their towns safe, the citizens who cared for the wounded, and the heroes who fought for our country. God bless them all.

Ellie James (South West): Imagine you're on a train platform and saying goodbye to someone you love. You'll say, "See you next week", but during world war one there was no "next week". Indeed, you never knew

when or if there would be a return at all. My granddad, a serviceman, and his wife of 53 years have had countless goodbyes, each and every one ending in rivers of tears. But imagine the tears fallen, knowing your man was going to war, a war being fought on a scale no one had ever seen before—world war one. Then imagine this thousands of times over—something that the Great Western Railway was a witness to time and time again. These trains moved not only troops but horses, ammunition and medical supplies—the driving force of war.

Not only that, but many of the 80,000 employees volunteered to fight, so the women of Swindon had to step into many of the male positions, often coping with their own grief and continuing to maintain the war effort. Swindon became one of the largest railway manufacturers in the UK, thanks to the women, who, a little like my nan, were left behind fighting on. The Great Western Railway formed the heartbeat of a community—a heart torn apart by the human cost of war. The iconic image of the train pulling away from the station with troops waving out of the window is often associated with world war one, but the more humbling image is the train pulling into the same station with hundreds of wounded soldiers on board. Lest we forget.

Joanna Stallard (Wales): I am from Denbighshire in north Wales. 'Dwi mor falch i sefyll yma heddiw yn cynrychioli Cymru—I am so honoured to be standing here today representing Wales.

So many events affected the social history of Wales during the first world war. One impact was the linguistic legacy left behind by a young soldier called Ellis Humphrey Evans. He is known by many in Wales by his *ffug enw* or *nom de plume*, Hedd Wyn. Under that name, he won the prestigious *cadair*, or chair, in the Welsh *Eisteddfod* festival for his outstanding contribution to the Welsh language through poetry. Unfortunately he was not able to claim his prize, because he passed away before the ceremony took place.

Eisteddfod culture is massive in Wales. It is a fundamental, long-held tradition. People enrich themselves culturally in music, recitation and the arts through the medium of Welsh. Today it is crucial in Wales for promoting bilingualism and creating a fairer society in which the Welsh voice is amplified. Hedd Wyn not only contributed to that but gave his life for his country and his people. Today, many people pay homage to him by visiting the home in north Wales in which he was raised to see the chair that the *Eisteddfod* dedicated in his honour for his outstanding contribution. Many in Wales value and spend much time engaging with his poetry. He was an outstanding influence both for Wales and for Britain.

Josh Carpenter (West Midlands): Irreparable damage is an understatement, loss of life is an understatement, and "It will all be over by Christmas" was the understatement of the century. When Britain entered the first world war, just hours after Germany's attack on France, all the regions of the UK were pulled together for a common goal: to support the war effort and help troops from their own and other regions.

A maternal great-great-grandfather of mine, George Marks, served in world war one in France and Belgium, at the battles of Ypres and the Somme, earning a good conduct badge and victory medal for his efforts.

At 32 he was at the higher end of the age spectrum for most of the soldiers who signed up to serve, but, filled with a feeling of patriotic duty, he signed up to fight for the country that he called his own. A farm labourer by trade, he enlisted at the Ludlow military office and on Christmas eve 1915 he was deployed to the western front. Thankfully, he returned home safely—with the flu and pneumonia, but safe none the less. Unfortunately not every soldier's story ended with a welcome home, because for at least 800,000 servicemen, the last sight they saw of the country they were prepared to die for was its white cliffs as they departed from Dover.

A little closer to home, the midlands had a powerful and resonant effect on world war one and just how it was fought. A company based in Witton, Birmingham, produced just over a third of the ammunition used by the allies during the whole of the war—just over 2.4 billion rounds in total. A little less exciting, but still vital, were eggs: 500,000 eggs were requested weekly by soldiers on the front lines and egg collection points, including one by my home town, Much Wenlock, provided them with said eggs, collected from farmers and sent to the front lines.

There are many other factories and services in the midlands that helped the allies and pushed them to beat the axis powers—too many to name. One thing is for certain, however: the midlands and every other region in the UK were absolutely instrumental in helping the allies to win the war.

Aysha Ahmed (Yorkshire and Humber): I represent Doncaster.

The first world war affected all corners of the UK and impacted different communities across Yorkshire. The South Yorkshire steel industry grew massively during world war one. In Kilnhurst, the steel works site of John Baker & Co. was converted to make ammunition, and the company produced over 6 million shells. In addition, the national projectile factory at Templeborough, Rotherham, started production well ahead of schedule, unlike others in the country, which faced delays because of shortages and labour disputes. By the end of the year, the factory had produced over 2.5 million shells; by 1918, the work force were 87% female and had expanded to employ 5,693 people.

At the other end of the spectrum, on 16 December 1914 the German navy attacked Whitby and Scarborough, causing 137 fatalities and 592 casualties, many of whom

were civilians. That was not just an isolated incident: the great war lasted four years, 14 weeks and two days, and in that time the Doncaster area lost over 1,000 men to the war effort.

On the 100th anniversary of world war one, we should all strive to never forget the events that happened. They are more relevant today than ever before, especially given the current combats going on. The men in service during world war one fought and died to protect our civil liberties, and so we should honour them by enshrining them in our memories for generations to come.

Mr Speaker: Members of the Youth Parliament, I ask you now to give an especially warm and heartfelt welcome to Miss Anne Marie Downes, who will speak on behalf of the Army Welfare Services.

Anne Marie Downes (Army Welfare Services, Germany): I represent British Forces Germany, through the Army Welfare Services. As a young person of the British Forces, I find it really hard when my dad or a friend is deployed to a military war zone for half a year. I cannot begin to fathom what families felt during the first world war, with their parents and friends deployed for its entire duration.

Many misunderstand the poppy as a glorification of war. I wear it out of respect for those who died in unimaginable horror. But I also wear it as a symbol of hope for peace. The relative peace we live in today means that I can go to school in Germany and count young German and Turkish people among my best friends. Due to this very respect and hope, the Army has launched the initiative Operation Reflect, encouraging military units to commemorate the first world war in a variety of ways. For example, there was a football match between British and German children, as a reminder of the famous football match between British and German troops.

For me, the poppy is also a symbol of gratitude. It is not just about our great-granddads and granddads: it is about our dads on tour as well. I will be forever grateful that when so many millions did not, my dad came home.

Mr Speaker: Members of the Youth Parliament, we will now observe a minute's silence.

A minute's silence was observed.

A Living Wage

Mr Speaker: To move the first motion of the day, I call Mr Vikram Patel from the West Midlands. I ask you to give him an enthusiastic welcome.

11.49 am

Vikram Patel (West Midlands): I beg to move,

That the national minimum wage should be raised in line with the living wage, as calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy, in order to guarantee workers the decent standard of living they deserve.

Poverty is something you normally associate with people and families who are heavily reliant on the state. However, for the first time in British history, the majority of families who now live in poverty are in fact working households. For the first time in generations, we are seeing a new class emerging—the working poor. Some 5.3 million workers earn less than the living wage of £7.85 an hour—that is 22% of our country's entire work force—only to live in poverty.

The importance of the living wage is not simply that it is a £1.35 increase on the minimum wage. It is the amount at which it is calculated that people can maintain a basic standard of living. Since 2008 the cost of essential items has gone up by 28% and in the same period the minimum wage has increased by a mere 14%. These might all be just numbers, but it means that the amount a couple with two children need just to make ends meet has risen by £5,000. The living wage reflects the changes in the cost of essential items and is much more about what it actually costs to live.

Children and young people in these families are bearing the brunt and the punishment of the minimum wage—3.6 million children today live in poverty. That is one in four children, and the majority of them live in households which work. With limited, if any, support from the Government, are these young people getting the best start in life? They have to live in families where it is a daily discussion whether they can afford a hot meal that night or their child's school uniform. This is a reality not only in Birmingham, but in every one of our four nations, from the cities to the countryside.

We must stand up for the millions of young people being short-changed by their employers because the law currently makes a baseless distinction on the grounds of age. A 16-year-old cashier gets exactly half the wage of someone 10 years older, but they do the same job. It should not matter whether you are 16, 18 or 21. Merit, not age, should be the factor in difference in wages. The living wage is £7.85 nationally and £9.15 in London. It is equal for all, no matter if you have a disability, no matter your gender or your age.

The living wage is not a fairy godmother who can wave her wand and wipe away all the social inequalities that we face today as a society, but it goes a long way towards starting to solve these problems. We must be a driving force in a campaign which brings equality. We must be a driving force in a campaign which brings prosperity. We must be a driving force in a campaign which brings hope to the millions, and we must be a driving force in changing the lives of millions of young people whom we represent, who will never receive the best start in life unless we make a stand today and vote for the living wage.

Mr Speaker: Vikram, thank you for getting us off to a cracking start. Now I call to oppose the motion Miss Avery Hubbard from Wales.

Avery Hubbard (Wales): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Diolch yn fawr. Today, as we sit in this hallowed Chamber, thousands wake in fear. They wake knowing that today, like yesterday, is another day of decline, a day when they and all they stand for is questioned, and a day closer to eventual judgment. Today bankers quake. Yet 733,000 young people wake conscious of their reality, helpless in the face of a life where opportunity is limited and where bonuses cannot hide fact. Life is tough. Young people are faced with poverty and a culture of unemployment.

A living wage does not address this. It does not challenge the complacency that has led to this once great nation becoming increasingly unequal. It aids it, as young people are being forced to sacrifice integrity for fundamentals. The proposition speaks of increased opportunity and chance, yet in truth opportunity is not bread on your table or milk in your fridge. Opportunity is freedom, and this motion does not provide for that. The living wage does not address that, nor does it tackle the culture of unemployment that our young people exist within. Does this, a statement rather than a winnable campaign, promote the place of young people in work and prepare us for life? A living wage will further disadvantage the 733,000 young people who are currently out of work and it will lay the foundations for a further broken economy.

The economists say—and yes, they are right—that the economy is too weak and too unstable to handle such change, but that does not absolve them of guilt. It does not force us as young people to accept poverty. However, MYPs, wages must reflect productivity. The living wage immediately outsources young people. Small businesses, the fundamentals of our fledgling economy, will no longer be able to survive, as many firms that can only make a profit using labour paid less than the living wage will go bust. The worst thing of all is that these small firms will now have to compete further with big business. To pay it will slash their profit levels, damage their ability to compete, and threaten their viability. Have Boris Johnson or Ed Miliband ever run small businesses? Have either of these two men ever gone without food in order to feed their children? Cross-party support does not suggest a correct campaign, MYPs.

I call for you to vote for a campaign that promotes the young person rather than serving as a direct detriment to them. The issue of the living wage is much bigger than this Parliament, bigger than the Government and bigger than economists, and it represents a fundamental issue with society. This, ladies and gentleman, is an issue you should direct with your democratic vote.

Mr Speaker: Avery, thank you very much indeed. The general debate is now open. I start by calling a speaker, if one is willing to contribute, from the East Midlands—who have we got from the East Midlands? You are not obliged to contribute if you do not want to; you can wait for another subject. If not from the East Midlands, does anybody want to speak on the subject, on either side of the argument, from Scotland?

Nicole Dempster (Scotland): I am here representing East Renfrewshire in the west of Scotland. I want to give you a Scottish perspective on things, because it is not easy being a young person there, with one in five of our children and young people living in poverty. Over 61% of those children in those families are from a working-class family.

As of November 2012, a full-time worker earning the adult national minimum wage would earn almost £2,300 less a year than they would if they were earning the living wage. The money could go so far and it could mean so much to young people. Youth unemployment is currently at 77,000 in Scotland—that is 77,000 young people too many, and I believe that if we put a living wage in place, we are going to tackle the problem.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. Can we have a contributor from the south-west?

Thrinayani Ramakrishnan (South West): Coming from a rural area where employment opportunities are very hard to get to, day in and day out, I see in my constituency of Sedgemoor, Somerset, inequality, oppression and disparity because of the fact that some people need to work harder and harder just to survive—not even to live. Listening to young people and people of all ages in my area, my gut is telling me that now is the time to back the living wage. Now is the time to give socially disadvantaged people who work their fingers to the bone—they may be working two or three jobs just to make a living—the chance to live more comfortably as well as to aspire to so much more. Let us not forget that we as the UK Youth Parliament represent those hard-working people, so let us weave our powerful influence into the very threads of this Chamber and back this motion.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Do we have anybody from the North West who wants to take part in this exchange? We have one from the North West—let us hear your voice, please.

Emily Kay (North West): I do not dispute the fact that a little bit of extra money would make people more comfortable. However, we have to look at this from a financial and practical point of view. Increasing a wage could result in fewer jobs being available, as employers would have to finance the individual wages. Representing Bury in the North West, where unemployment is quite high, I feel it is more important to ensure that as many job opportunities as possible are available for all, especially young people. That builds character and communities in an area, a county and our four great countries.

Mr Speaker: Who have we got from the East of England who is interested in contributing? What about the young man here? I caught your eye first.

Michael Ita (East of England): A compulsory paid living wage would ensure that everybody had enough to get by. Over the past 30 years, people on low pay have been getting less and less. That is especially true of women, part-time workers and younger workers.

The main employment sectors for young people are retail and hospitality, which pay less than the living wage to 41% and 69% of their respective workers. We are getting the short end of the stick. Some may argue

that we have fewer needs and benefit from our parents. However, the Government's current aim is to get 50% of people to university, which will result in a huge amount of debt. Surely the earlier we start saving, the better. Perhaps more importantly, a study of young people who work has shown that more than 65% of them have parents who earn in the 25th percentile, so those young people who work have the least well-off parents. To help our younger people and to reduce the tide of lower living standards, we need to raise the minimum wage now.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Can we have a speaker from Northern Ireland? Does anybody from Northern Ireland wish to take part in this debate? No? Okay: there will be other opportunities, I am quite sure. What about a contributor from the South East?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: We have loads from the South East. What about this young man here?

Harry Elphick (South East): I am Harry Elphick from Wealden and Lewes. We have discussed how this could affect small businesses and potentially destroy them, but that completely overlooks how much good large businesses do for people. Because chains have the ability to support themselves regardless of whether they are successful in a given area, they can do so much for the local people they employ. If a particular branch is not as successful as other branches, it will not necessarily shut, whereas a small business definitely will. If a business cannot support itself, it will not get support, but, if it is part of a chain, funds can be moved around so that it stays open, thus sustaining employment. I think that is brilliant. We should not overlook the benefit of having a large company in an area, and we should not say that a small business is necessarily better just because it is a small business. When we say that the costs for small businesses would be too great, we should not overlook large businesses.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. What about a contributor from London?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: We have a wealth of people from London. *[Interruption.]* Yes, very demonstrative; we will bear you in mind for later. I am very impressed: all sorts of new techniques are being deployed to try to attract attention. We will not forget you, sir—you cannot be forgotten—but, for now, we will hear from this young lady here.

Vikita Khetani (London): I am Vikita Khetani, and I represent the London borough of Brent. I would like to give you an example of the living wage in practice. In Brent, our council leader has agreed to pay everyone in the council the living wage, as opposed to the national minimum wage. This has worked really well, and I believe it should be implemented throughout all local authorities and the private sector. It will benefit all.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Now, do we have a contributor from the North East?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Yes, this gentleman.

Ewan Kirk (North East): My name is Ewan Kirk, and I am from Northumberland. I believe that, ultimately, it is the state's responsibility to provide a basic level of welfare and to ensure that people are able to sustain themselves. By not bringing in the living wage as the minimum wage, we ultimately allow the state to fail, because we do not allow people to flourish. Financially, the living wage could work, because it would allow people to buy more things, and businesses would be able to afford to increase their prices slightly, so this would all ultimately work out.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. Is there anyone from Yorkshire and Humberside who wishes to contribute to the debate?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Wow, there is a wealth of people from Yorkshire and Humberside. The first person I saw was the gentleman nearest the door—yes, you buttoning up your very smart jacket. We are grateful to you: you are a model of sartorial elegance before you have even started. Let us hear from you, sir.

Minhaz Abedin (Yorkshire and Humber): I am Minhaz from Leeds, representing Yorkshire and Humber. MYPs, I have a simple thought: why are we leaving it to businesses to look into their corporate hearts to help young people? Why are we leaving it to chance? If there is a minimum wage and a living wage, why are we allowing businesses to dictate which one people receive? Surely, MYPs should support giving young people the same opportunity as others. Getting rid of inequality in business allows young people to strive alongside older people. We have heard from all over the Chamber that we are equal to them. We are sitting on these green Benches—lots of us are getting nice profile pictures, I hope—but we should remember what we are supporting. Surely, the motion is clear that we should support the living wage. The motion allows equality for young people, and that is what we stand for.

Mr Speaker: Well, once or twice I have not had takers, so I am going to try again. Who on the right-hand side of the Chamber has not contributed to the debate, but would like to do so?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Okay. The woman in the back row narrowly missed out earlier. It is a pleasure to have you. Let us hear from you.

Lauren King (Scotland): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am Lauren King. I am from Wishaw, and I represent central Scotland. I want to give you a perspective from the Scottish Youth Parliament. We led a campaign last year called “One Fair Wage”, which led to the introduction of a living wage recognition scheme in the Scottish Government. All Scottish Parliament staff are paid the living wage, and so are all local authority staff in Scotland, which is a true example of how to lead the way. In a rich country in the 21st century, how can we justify any child living in poverty?

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much for your speech. You said that you come from Wishaw. I must just tell you—this is proof of the importance of persistence in politics—that I stood as a candidate in 1987 for Motherwell, South, which included Wishaw, but, sadly for me, Wishaw fought back.

Can we have another contributor from the left-hand side of the Chamber? I know we have not had anybody from the East Midlands.

Eloise de Sousa (East Midlands): If people are working hard day in, day out to earn a wage that does not cover the basic necessities, why are we shocked when they would rather be unemployed? I think raising the minimum wage to the living wage will, in fact, encourage people to find a job and contribute to society.

Mr Speaker: We might be able to squeeze a couple more in, but first let me welcome my parliamentary colleague the Conservative Member of Parliament for Hexham, Guy Opperman. I think he thinks—and I think—that he is still quite a young person.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I am ageing fast.

Mr Speaker: You probably think we are all incredibly aged! Now, who on the right-hand side of the House would like to contribute? Have we others?

Several MYPs *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Gosh, yes. This young man here has been quite persistent. Let us hear from him.

Thomas Moorhouse (South East): We need to look back to when our parents and grandparents were our age. How many people in this Chamber today have been told “You’re not trying hard enough. It’s easy to get a job: just go down the shops”? Back then—50 or, say, 70 years ago—it was easy to go down to the fish and chip shop and get a job, although it did not pay quite as much. That was a privilege that you had as a young person, because you did not have to pay for quite as much, but times have changed. Now we have more automation, more immigration and more labourers who are willing to be paid less to do the same job as young people would do. The jobs that were reserved for young people are now taken by machines and by other people.

Before we try and push for 16-year-olds to be paid the same as 20 or 25-year-olds to do the same job, we should remember that we have the privilege as young people of not having to rely on that wage to live alone. Young people have other people to depend on in most circumstances, although I know that there are exceptions. To be a young person and to be paid a lower wage is an advantage in getting a job. It would be much harder for any young person to achieve the same level of employment if they were paid the same wage as someone who was 10 or 15 years older.

Mr Speaker: Now, I teased the young gentleman whom I might call “The Great Gesticulator”—he waved his arms around in a flamboyant manner—that if he waited for his moment, he might get his chance. His moment has arrived.

Jack Lewis (London): I am from Richmond upon Thames, in this great city of London. Why do we work? We work to live. But why should we work if we cannot afford to live? There are people in this country who are relying on benefits rather than seeking the minimum wage, because they get more money by doing so. Is that right? It most definitely is not.

One of the things about this campaign is that it is most certainly just. The moral arguments and the political support are there, but the economic sense is not. Imagine it as a cycle: your wages improve; you spend more money in the economy; businesses have higher profits; and, as a result, wages go up. That is the circular flow of income. The research I have done over the past couple of months has changed my opinion. While raising wages will cause economic growth, it may also cause inflation, and we need to be very aware of that. However, the most important argument to consider today is this: one of the main reasons employers employ young people is that we are cheap. Yes, we have vitality, yes, we have energy, but the minimum wage for young people below the age of 18 is £3.79 an hour, and that is the reason we are employed. We are employed because we are cheap. It is a fantastic way for young people to find part-time work. Thank you, Mr Speaker—and please vote for this campaign!

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. To conclude the debate I call Miss Ciara Brodie from the North West of England.

Ciara Brodie (North West): It is a simple idea: every working person should be paid enough to live decently and to provide adequately for their families; it is a wage that is enough to live on. At the moment, 5.3 million working people live on less than the living wage. We are living in the sixth wealthiest country in the world, but we cannot pay one in five working people an acceptable wage to live on. What is going on?

Although it may seem simple, the implications of a higher wage may not be so straightforward. Quick fixes to the economy do not always work, and perhaps this campaign is too idealistic. Would we achieve anything by the end of the year by telling businesses to pay their employees at this higher rate? There may be only one way to make ends meet—laying off staff and creating fewer jobs. Such pay rises add up to what could have been someone else's wages. What does a living wage mean to a young person who has no job at all? Is this a question of job creation or of wage inflation?

Young people may not think this issue affects us much, perhaps because we are not working—yet. This campaign is for a better future for us all—not a hopeless future, but a prosperous one, where we can go to work assured that our wages will allow us to live and not just to survive. Our futures are bright, not bleak; they are happy, not sad; and with the living wage as our campaign, the future is ours.

The Opposition talk about inflation and the value of the supposed pay rise in real terms. If employers pay their workers more, their costs will go up. It will cost you more to get to school, to play and to eat. “Happy Meals” won't be so happy when they are a fiver! Prices will go up at an even faster rate with the living wage, and we will find ourselves endlessly campaigning for a higher wage. Where do we stop? Fairness: the living wage is the fair price of a person's labour. In order to trade, businesses have to pay a price for all sorts of goods and services—it is non-negotiable; that is just business. Perhaps we are too scared to tamper with the economy because it might do more harm than good, but are we too scared to allow young people to have breakfast in addition to a warm home? Would our campaign achieve that? MYPs—it's all eyes on you. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Ciara, for such a passionate conclusion to what I hope you will agree has been an excellent first debate. I listened to all the contributions from both sides of the argument—as I do every day in the House of Commons—with great interest and respect. About a year ago, or possibly just over, I asked the most senior official in the service of the House whether everybody who worked on the parliamentary estate was paid at least the London living wage. He said he did not know, so I asked him to check. It turned out that a small number of people were not being paid the London living wage, and I insisted that everybody who works here—not just every employee but every contractor—should be paid at least the London living wage. That is now the case, and I am very pleased that the House of Commons is—not before time, I must say—a living wage employer accredited by the Living Wage Foundation. I hope that others around the country will follow suit. *[Applause.]*

To move the last motion of the morning session, I call Lucy Boardman from the East Midlands. Once again, I ask you to give her an enthusiastic welcome. *[Applause.]*

Exam Resits (English and Maths)

12.20 pm

Lucy Boardman (East Midlands): I beg to move,

That we believe that re-sits should be reintroduced for both Maths and English qualifications. This will allow pupils to achieve the highest grade they are capable of."

No matter where you are heading in life, qualifications are vital to progressing in society. However, were you aware that last year 41% of young people did not achieve the five A* to C grades, including English and maths, necessary to continue pursuing education via college, sixth form, employment or an apprenticeship? Sixteen-year-olds who previously failed their English and maths GCSEs can resit the following year, but the Government have made several reforms to the way those resits are managed. One of those reforms is that any grade achieved via a resit does not count towards school league tables. We live in a society in which Ofsted reports have become more important than pupil well-being, in which a school's appearance is focused on more than the education being delivered and in which league tables are more significant than a student's final grade. That is unacceptable.

As the UK Youth Parliament, it is our duty to campaign for a change to the system that has led to the majority of schools in England discouraging or entirely forbidding resit opportunities. I am not suggesting that resits should be used to excuse a lack of effort the first time around, but that is uncommon. On the whole, severely limited resit opportunities are affecting the most vulnerable young people whose circumstances at the time of their first exam, such as the sudden death of a family member or a severe, unexpected illness, have affected their grade.

Voting yes to the motion is not a vote to reintroduce resits in maths and English, which are already available; it is a vote to say that you support our need to campaign for a motion that will encourage every school across the nation to prepare its young people by encouraging resits where necessary. When casting your vote today, you need to consider which motion will produce countrywide positive change. This motion will, at some point in their life, affect every young person in the country. This is a motion worth fighting for. Resits are a necessity, a right, to which every young person should be entitled in order for the future generation, our generation, to achieve the highest grades possible and to ensure that every young person can reach their full potential. William Edward Hickson once wrote:

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again."

That is the message that we need our Government to hear.

Mr Speaker: Lucy, thank you for that very robust start to the debate. We are not quite on track, but we are having a great time. To oppose the motion we are going to hear from Mr Thomas Soud.

Thomas Soud (South East): This campaign is proposing that the UK Youth Parliament spends the next 12 months slamming its head back and forth against a bureaucratic stone wall.

We face two major challenges with this campaign. First, we are putting ourselves in complete opposition to a wide variety of legislation that the present Government have fought hard to erect. If we choose this campaign, prepare for the long haul, please, in going completely against the Government's current stream of thought.

Secondly, we face a lack of direction in this campaign. We argue for the reintroduction of exam resits in English and maths, yet only nine days ago our peers retook their maths GCSE in order to get a better grade. If that is not a resit, what is?

That creates a very real possibility that in voting for this campaign, we are voting to enter a black hole of confusion for all those who will work on the campaign on the ground. The amount of confusion that surrounds the issue will only lead to a lack of engagement in actually campaigning. I presume that all here have at some point worked on a misguided campaign with no real aim, finding it tiring, confusing and poorly organised. I plead with you not to have 2015 as a year when this is the case.

However, I can see the audience. I am sure that there are people poised to retort, "As Members of the Youth Parliament, we should have faith that we can organise our own campaign. As representatives, we should not place difficulties in front of what the people we represent want." But let us consider where the support for this campaign has arisen. At least from my personal experience, it was not worried sixth-formers, anxious about their grades, who voted for exam resits in maths. Instead, the support came from a younger group of people who are yet even to sit an exam. Post-GCSEs, the concept of resitting becomes more and more foreign, quickly sliding down the agenda after that dreaded envelope is opened in August.

Instead, the support for this campaign comes from a fear that is embedded through all five years of secondary education, when we are constantly bombarded with the prospect that life will end if the required grades are not achieved, and that the worth of a human being is based on the letters by their name. This is untrue, and we all know it, and it is our responsibility as the UK Youth Parliament to tackle this fear, which has inspired many under-16-year-olds to put exam resits on the ballot. They put them there not out of their love of education but out of the deep-rooted fear of failure—a fear that will not go away with resits but must be tackled at its very heart.

Mr Speaker: Thomas, thank you very much indeed.

Last week I was giving a lecture in Halifax, and I met a young person who I know was keen to contribute today. I cannot see her at this moment—[*Interruption.*] Ah, there you are. Sorry, I don't wish to embarrass you in front of 300 people, but there you go. Do you want to speak now? No, I understand that you would prefer to speak on votes at 16. We will see what we can do.

Does anybody from Yorkshire and Humber wish to contribute to this debate?

Olivia Newton (Yorkshire and Humber): With maths and English resits being taken away from us, our potential is also being taken away from us. Why are we denied our future because one day, for one hour, we messed up a bit? We were distracted, or the roof was dripping on us, or the person in front of us wouldn't stop tapping their

feet, and we just messed up. Why is our potential being completely destroyed and disregarded? We will be forever known as the person who got the E in maths or English.

Why is our potential being taken away? That is my underlying point. It is necessary that resits are brought back and that it is easier to be able to take them.

Jai Bolton (West Midlands): First, 16% of my constituents voted in the Make your Mark campaign that we should bring back English and maths resits. Let me now give you my view. This motion should be about not merely bringing back English and maths resits but the whole culture of education and what it has turned into. Our worth is now measured on a piece of paper. If we get five A* to C grades or the English baccalaureate we can get a good job, but should that really be the case? I know a lot of people who are not necessarily academically gifted but are brilliant mechanics and do loads of vocational work, so why are they being mistreated because they did not get five A* to C grades? They can contribute as much to society as anyone else, so why, if they did not get those five letters on a piece of paper, should they not have their say and not be represented fairly in this society?

Portia Berry-Kilby (East Midlands): So, resits are said to allow pupils to achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. How many years does it take to achieve this potential? At GCSE age, they have already had at least 10 years in education, with many assessments where they have had ample opportunity to pull their socks up and work a little harder to achieve their goals. However, on results day, suddenly realising that they might not have applied themselves as diligently as they could have done, they then expect to be allowed multiple resits. One resit is already permitted. How many more do you want—another two, three or four attempts? The line must be drawn somewhere. Instead we should campaign on issues affecting a wider proportion of people who genuinely cannot help themselves rather than investing time and money in something that might not be necessary if people put in the effort earlier and took greater responsibility for their future.

Conall Corr (Northern Ireland): I will speak in my native tongue, Irish, first and then translate it into English.

Cén fáth a mbeadh grád ag cinntiú cad é atá i ndán duit i do shaol? I dtaca le TGMOanna de, níl tú ag foghlaim; níl tú do fhorbairt féin mar dhuine. Níl tú ach ag foghlaim de ghlanmheabhair; níl tú ach ag forbairt an chumais atá agat dátaí a chuimneamh agus a gcur síos ar pháipéar. Ní foghlaim sin.

Cé nach n-aontaím leis an chóras, tá mé go huile agus go hiomlán i bhfabhar an rúin seo. Is smál é ar ár sochaí go bhfuil sé riachtanach agat grád a fháil le post a bheith agat.

Why should a grade determine your life? GCSEs are not about learning. They are about your ability to memorise dates and put them on a bit of paper. If you cannot do that, well, that's you; you are away. I do not agree with that system; it should be totally scrapped. It is a stain on our society that it is compulsory to have maths and English to get a job. It does not determine who you are as a person.

Cat King (South West): I am Cat King from the south of Somerset. I was that person who was predicted a D. They basically said to me: "Yeah, you're going to fail." And I did the first time round, even though I worked hard. I just did not get there. Then I spent four hours of every day leading up to my resit exam with my parents and my maths teacher. That stone wall to which the opposition referred is what they were all banging their heads against when I could not understand algebra. But I worked hard and I got there because of a resit. It is hard to achieve that, and I think we should give that opportunity to all young people.

Mr Speaker: Can we have a speaker from Wales?

Tabitha Cook (Wales): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am from Anglesey. I agree with this proposal; I think we should pick this topic. I will give my personal view and describe my experience. I am dyslexic—a lot of people probably know what that means—so I struggled in school. Unfortunately, my school did not catch the fact that I was dyslexic until I finished school. A lot of people who are dyslexic need a reader for their exams. Unfortunately, I did not get a reader for my exams, so in maths and English, I got a D. But when I went to college, I was lucky and the tutor recognised that I was dyslexic. They gave me the opportunity to resit my English and maths, and now I have a C. So coming from Wales—I do not know what things are like in England—I agree that everyone should have the opportunity to do resits. It is not the case that you just do all the reading and writing and straight away you have learned everything and should get an A*, because not everyone is like that. Everyone deserves a second chance to succeed in life.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. We have now been joined by the hon. Member for Nottingham North, who has been the representative of that constituency for the past 27 years. He is a huge champion of the rights of and opportunities for young people and is the Chair of the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform. Mr Graham Allen. [*Applause.*]

Just to demonstrate to you that I am being completely fair, I point out that we have a Liberal Democrat Member present in Tessa Munt, an excellent representative; a Conservative Member present in Guy Opperman, an excellent representative; and, from the Labour party, Graham Allen, an excellent representative. Let anyone say that that is not impartiality!

Can we now have a speaker from the East of England?

Emma Flude (East of England): At some schools, you would be entered for an exam as many times as it took for you to reach your potential. At some schools, an A-grade student would keep being entered for the exam until they got an A*—that perfect grade. But that does not go for every school. At some schools, you would have to fail before being allowed to resit your exam to get a C. That is not fair. It is not every student reaching their potential; it is students getting the best they can based on their circumstances. That is not fair. People say that we should reintroduce resits because that would mean that everyone would be able to get the best they could, but clearly they would not.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. What about a speaker from the South East of England?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Wow! Wild gesticulation. We shall try to get as many of you in as possible. We will hear from this gentleman at this stage.

Patrick Stewart (South East): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am Patrick Stewart—yes, like the actor—from East Sussex. I do not have a piece of paper in front of me, but that does not mean that I am not passionate about this topic. It is definitely something that we need to focus on, because young people can be very vulnerable around the time of exams. I know that I have gone through a couple of controlled assessments thinking, “What am I going to write?” Yes, I can fail at them, but resits will help us. As the MYP from Wales said, not everyone is going to achieve an A* every time. We are not all super-brains—I’m definitely not. So resits will definitely help us. This is one of the most vital points in all our lives. We need the ability to do resits to help us to get through, because we are the future and our future is determined by this, so please vote for it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. How about a contributor from London?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Okay, we will hear from you—I was slightly worried about your health if you were not called.

Michael Sookhan (London): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am an MYP representing Croydon, and I have a dream, but I also have a nightmare—that young people will sit in class and bang their head against a wall or a table until they die. They will be listening to a teacher moan on and groan on: “BIDMAS! Factorise! Formulas. Don’t forget.” Those things do not really stick. It makes me sad to know that young people have to sit in a classroom that they do not want to be in. The education system that we have at the moment does not provide for certain people. Yes, there are BTECs and other opportunities—there is work—but if people want to be educated, the system needs to change.

It is irrelevant whether English and maths resits are brought back because the education system is not providing what young people need so that they can work in the world that we will be going into. The world is changing. Soon, we will be in a time when you do not have to write—you just type. Soon, we will be in a time when e-mails are more important than writing skills.

I heard that the Government want 50% of people to go to university. I don’t think that will happen, because if you don’t get the grades, universities won’t accept you—they won’t want you. Without resits—without that chance to do it again—we are throwing away young people who want to go to uni, who want to study and who want to contribute to the society we live in.

Elisha Stephens (North West): No matter what subjects you are passionate about or excel in, maths and English are vital if you are to progress in life. Exam resits provide a stepping-stone to success for young people.

The removal of exam resits for maths and English has created and promoted inequality within the education system. Only young people who can cope with 20-plus

exams will achieve what they truly deserve. Those who need more chances have been done a disservice—they have had the opportunity to reach their full potential snatched away from them.

Mr Speaker: I believe that a young person from the east midlands who is seated near the Serjeant at Arms would like to contribute.

Arshad Daud (East Midlands): You come home and tell your mum or dad that you have exams coming up. They say, “Right, you’re going to go to boarding school.”

It used to be that 30% of students had to pass the exams. That has been increased to 40%. However, 407 secondary schools fail to meet the 40% level.

One in five students has an undiagnosed illness. For example, I have epilepsy and I failed most of my exams. From some of my mock exams, I know for a fact that I am going to get low grades. The reason is that some schools cannot see that we are suffering.

We are the faces of the future. We should be standing up for our rights. We should be the people who get everyone in a good position.

Mr Speaker: To wind up the debate, I call, from Yorkshire and Humberside, Miss Simran Jandu.

Simran Jandu (Yorkshire and Humber): Simon Cowell, Lord Sugar and Drake the rapper are some of the most iconic, influential and rich people of their generations. And guess what? Not one of them went to university. Not one of them has a degree. You could say that they:

“Started from the bottom now we’re here.”

However, they are true rarities. Education is what makes the world spin around. We go to school, we learn, we pass exams—you know how the cycle goes, MYPs.

The current Government have completely revamped the resit system for English and maths. There are pros and cons to their argument. Last year, 400 pupils resat their maths GCSE seven times. Does that fit the stereotype of young people being lazy, unmotivated and irresponsible? Well duh, of course it does! Some argue that this generation lacks a work ethic and motivation, and the evidence proves that right. But, guys, look around and pinch yourselves. We are still human. We make mistakes. We do not have the slightest idea of what is happening in the lives of our young people, who are struggling, who may be unmotivated and who are not doing so well. Who are we to judge? Who are we to point a finger and say, “You’re not good enough?” We should be passionate and so damn inspiring.

However, the campaign only affects a certain number of us. Hang on, am I missing something? I am sure that our elected role is to represent all 11 to 18-year-olds. Not everyone is destined to be a nine-to-five, coffee-drinking, briefcase-lugging office worker. Let your creative juices flow, people! Some like to paint. Some like to dance. These resits will not be a second thought for them, just as they weren’t for the millionaires I mentioned at the start. However, even vocational courses require a decent grade in maths and English, which is becoming a major concern for Britain’s employers.

The core of the problem, however, is that pupils are being made to take their exams before they are 100% ready, therefore damaging their performance. Michael

Gove said that young people must be able to demonstrate their understanding of maths, which is quite right. As future leaders of this country, we should be striving to get to the very top. If that means using the helping hand of a resit, so be it.

Fellow Youth Parliament Members, do you think this campaign is achievable? That is the question that we should be asking ourselves. Turn to your friend beside you and ask, “Can we push this campaign to reach its full potential?” Pretend that I have someone next to me—[*Laughter.*] Petitions, demonstrations, protests, for God’s sake change the record! We’ve been there, we’ve tried it and we’ve got the T-shirt. Can we really delve into the thickness of the education system and make such a change? We need an achievable target. Is a year really enough for us to make a dent on the resit shield? I will let you decide.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. That concludes the morning sitting. The Youth Parliament will now adjourn until 1.30 pm. I am afraid that lunchtime is slightly truncated, as we overran. We must be back at 1.30 pm. I invite you all to return to Westminster Hall for lunch.

12.47 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.31 pm

Sitting resumed.

Work Experience and Careers Advice

Mr Speaker: Welcome back, colleagues. The Youth Parliament will now consider the third motion of the day, on better work experience and careers advice. To move the motion, I call Miss Chloe Stevens from the east of England.

1.32 pm

Chloe Stevens (East of England): I beg to move,

That we believe that all young people, between the ages of 13 and 18, should have the opportunity to participate in work experience, in an external working environment, or a minimum of one week in a field of their choice. Each school should ensure all students can access a professionally trained careers adviser for impartial and personalised careers advice. Careers advice services should also do targeted work to engage those on t in education, employment or training.

Richard Branson, Alan Sugar: both started work at the age of 16. Tesco guru Jack Cohen started an apprenticeship at 14. All were successful because they immersed themselves in the world of work at an early age, acquiring teamwork and communication skills. Do we have these skills? The Government claim that our education is more diverse and better prepares us for life than ever before, yet 76% of employers say we are not ready for work. Schools want us to quote Shakespeare, but employers want us to have soft skills. If the aim of education is to prepare us for work, how have these two things become so detached?

In 2012, work experience was made optional, burning the bridge between education and work. Now, 57% of companies say that young people lack communication and teamwork skills. Why is this? School is structured so that you are surrounded by people of your own age. Life is not like that. In the workplace, you must work with people of all ages and all backgrounds to get the job done. Would you learn to drive a car through theory? Would you learn to play football from a book? No, you learn these skills by actively using them, so why do we not learn work skills through active work experience?

The UKYP needs to accept the battle to release young people from the classroom to taste the world of work, and do this by working with schools and businesses to create a programme around acquiring skills, goals, and networking. Work experience has the capability to inspire young people and give them a goal at an early stage. When shopping, we try before we buy, making us making more excited about buying the product. The same principle can be applied to work experience. If we get a taste of the career we dream of having, we will be more motivated and work hard. If we have no goal, we have no reason to strive to achieve our potential. Without work experience, the vast majority of young people are unable to break into a work environment network. Work experience would give all young people the chance to start building their own networks and their own futures.

Next year is election year. MPs are looking to define what they stand for, and we need to make sure that work experience is part of this. With effective work experience, everyone’s a winner. Young people get good quality experience, employers have experienced workers, and schools have inspired students. These factors make the campaign achievable. We need our education to prepare us for our working life. We may be able to quote

Shakespeare but if we cannot communicate and work as a team, thou shalt not have a chance. *[Laughter.]* So the question is: to be or not to be? You decide. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: Chloe, thank you very much. That was a dramatic start to our debate and I hugely enjoyed it. To oppose the motion, representing the British Forces Overseas Youth Service, please welcome Ms Ellen Chard.

Ellen Chard (Army Welfare Services (Germany)): Truthfully, how many teenagers have had quality work experience? Were your expectations met when you entered the workplace? No. And the reason? We have set our expectations too high. Owing to the shattering reality we face when taking part in our placement, we are disappointed. We do not know what to do in the future and are confused about what we have taken away from the placement.

In the past 12 months youth unemployment rates have fallen drastically. Between June and August this year, 468,000 young people were recognised as out of work. Where have we gone wrong? It is not a lack of work experience: over 95% of people today have had some sort of work experience, however minuscule.

Work experience used to be compulsory in schools, but since September 2012 there has not been a legal requirement for schools to offer it to their students. The law was changed only two years ago—should we really change it back so soon? The Government want our schools to do well. They want us all to leave school equipped for the rest of our lives but, first, they want us to focus on building up our education and understanding of the world before we are set free to start a career for ourselves.

We leave work experience having spent days on end making teas and coffees and filing paperwork, rather than doing what we expected to do. You may find that useless, but you need to open your eyes and realise that we can experience things only to a certain point. Honestly, what else can we do?

There is a really fine line between work experience and a company overstepping the mark and taking advantage of free labour. Those sorts of organisations are hindering the quality we crave. That is a nationwide issue that leaves the real truth surrounding working life concealed from us.

We complain about work experience, but what actually defines it? What do we want out of it? Does everyone really know what they want out of this campaign? We need specifics before we can move on in a direction that will be beneficial and enable us to make a great change.

Companies feel stuck with and burdened by the prospect of a young person entering their workplace. Could a UKYP campaign really change that so soon? As Chloe said, 57% of companies believe young people lack communication and teamwork skills. We leave school feeling unprepared for and unaware of the world that surrounds us. That problem does not revolve around work experience. It is a problem with the way in which schools prepare us for working life and with how we achieve the skills we need—skills gained through education and workshops.

Work experience is an issue within the UK—we all know that—but is it a big enough issue to be our main issue and our campaign? What could we do, and how

could we go about it? We cannot ignore the issue, but before we strive for achievements and embark on our journey together, we need direction and a clear path to focus on.

Mr Speaker: Ellen, thank you very much indeed for that. The general debate is now open. May we have a speaker from Scotland?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: The gentleman with the red tie.

Mason Rowan (Scotland): I am MYP for South Scotland.

I have been lucky enough to have two great work experience opportunities but they were not relevant to what I want to do in the future. I did not have a careers adviser to help me out when I was selecting those opportunities. That is what we need—someone to offer careers advice before and after work experience. Otherwise work experience is useless.

Mr Speaker: May we have a contributor from the south-west? Let us hear from the woman who is waving her paper in the air.

Shannon Kowalski (South West): I have noticed that a lot of people asked beforehand whether this motion is achievable. Yes, it is achievable—I have done it on my own, and if I can do it on my own, we can do it all together. I want to be a clinical psychologist, and when I started my A levels, I went to my local hospital and I was refused work experience because I was under 18. There is no better work experience for me, but I could not get what I needed. I was refused because of risks such as being around drugs or patients.

When you do work experience, even if it is filing paperwork and getting coffees, you are in the environment that you want to be in, rather than being offered work experience in primary schools or homes for the elderly, which do not coincide with my aspirations. I worked really hard when I became a DMYP last year and I put a lot of determination in, and I am proud to say that I gained work experience for under-18s in my local hospital. If I can do that single-handedly, imagine what greater things we can do together.

Harry Kay (North West): One of the concerns that I have about the lack of work experience is the effect of launching young people into the world of work almost unprepared. They will, of course, get some preparation from their parents—a quick pat on the back, “You’ll do well in the interview, nod, smile and wave—just smile generally.” Or in my case, “Don’t smile at all, or do a Victorian smile.” *[Laughter.]*

This could eventually leave young people with a hostile outlook on work. If they have a hostile outlook from the very beginning, they will have a hostile outlook till the end. They will see other ways to get round doing work, and that is not what we want. This needs to be reversed. As the opposer of the motion said, young people should go out and look for work ourselves, so what we achieve is our own. That is right, isn’t it? If we build our own house, we expect to live in it ourselves, and sod anyone who comes round expecting a free life. They must work for it themselves. That is fine, but surely we must all be prepared and have a way to get

that experience. It is that experience that enables us. We should all be given the foundation. What we do from that foundation is up to us, but right now, we are not even being given that foundation, and that is a major cause for concern.

Lewis Shearwood (East Midlands): The process of work experience and internships is nearing corruption, with people being exploited as a free source of labour. More than a quarter of businesses pay interns nothing or less than the minimum wage, but 82% of senior business decision makers admit that interns perform useful, necessary and vital tasks for their businesses. Is it fair? Are we just going to watch our peers complete tasks for free that employers would otherwise pay people to do? I read just last week that even in Parliament a young lady performed duties here for six months and was only paid £2. The burden is passed to us, with our power of persuasion, our power as a pressure group and our power as future Members of Parliament, to make Westminster know that we are not okay with the exploitation of our colleagues, our peers and our friends.

Rowan Ibbotson (South East): I don't think it is going to be hard for me to imagine what fear feels like. I am speaking, as quite a small person, in a big room that is the House of Commons. Of course I'm afraid. Even an experience like this, which is great, is something I'm afraid of. What about people who are going into life? That is our purpose—to live—and we are going to be afraid of it. Don't we deserve a chance to see what it is going to be like? Thank you.

Mr Speaker: You may call yourself small—I would use the word “short”—but you stood tall speaking in this debate. I have said this many times: I have always been short, I am 51 years old, and I remain short. Given the known impact of the ageing process on physiognomy, the great likelihood is that I shall be, inexorably and irrevocably, shorter still in future. It doesn't matter a damn. We short people should stick together.

Katie Turner (London): Everybody's work experience is different. Sometimes it is absolutely great and you leave feeling inspired and encouraged to go forward and work really hard to succeed in your chosen career. Other experience, however, might not be so good. Do you think that are always going to enjoy work? Are you always going to get the best opportunity you can? No. Everybody reacts differently to different situations, and these good or bad experiences are what mould you into becoming employable. These experiences are what you talk about in interviews, and you can say that you have learned from them and gained from them, the good ones and the bad ones. That is why this motion should be chosen.

Christopher Harkin (Northern Ireland): I want to speak on behalf of Youth Action NI, who had some great ideas on this topic but unfortunately could not be here to share them with us today. They feel that one week's work experience is great. Sorting them out and getting some good experience in work is good, but Youth Action NI think it should be more than that. They think one week is not enough to truly represent what working life is like, so they thought that either you could have two block weeks where you see the development of projects across the time, or you could try having a

few hours a week for a period of several months or even a full school year, which would allow you to see the full development of projects and all the different aspects of working life, which would truly allow you to see how the job is done.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. I would now like to hear from a representative of the East of England. The lady in the pink dress, who has been famously patient. Your moment has arrived.

Ejaay Manalastas (East of England): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have had two lots of work experience. My first was in secondary school. They gave me a piece of paper and said, “Go out and find work experience.” I ended up in a sports academy. I want you all to look at me and think of me in rugby, getting tackled. That is not my aspiration in life.

My second work experience was given to me in college. I was a bit hesitant, but then they gave me advice, they gave me connections, they gave me the right people, and those 10 days were the best 10 days of my life. They had an impact on me. I got my foot in the door. Businesses that I did not know were contacting me—I was like, “Hello? You heard my name?” People were acknowledging that I was a young person who had the right work experience, because people took time with me. They said, “You know what? You are a young person and you deserve that inspiration. You deserve to be given that sparkle back in your eyes”—and we all do. We are here representing young people and we need to give them that stepping stone between education and employment, and this is our chance to do that. *[Applause.]*

Mr Speaker: I can assure you that you were worth waiting for, and the reaction testifies to that.

Matt Walker (Wales): I am from Conwy in north Wales. One of the main issues in Wales is obviously that we are a very rural nation. Geography is a massive factor in work experience. Sometimes the opportunities are plainly not there to make the work experience better in the first place. I do not believe that the UKYP can solve that issue in a year, which is why I am not going to be voting for work experience.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a contributor from Yorkshire and Humber?

Several MYPs *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Wow, that is as demonstrative as it gets!

Hannah Berzins (Yorkshire and Humber): I am from North Yorkshire. Work experience is vital to us. We need to become accustomed to the advantages, disadvantages and atmosphere of our career choices. We do not want to be in education for one, two or even three decades of our lives, only to walk blindly into a job. We should not need to rely on internet research to decide our career choices. We need to rely on physical, real-life experience to enhance our lives so that we can live to the maximum of our potential.

Mariam Pamsm-Conten (North East): I am from Newcastle upon Tyne, and I am here to say that work experience is not just for work; it is also to get into universities. In the north-east, Newcastle university is

amazing for medicine and other sciences, but you need at least four weeks of work experience to get into university and to study for the profession that you want to do. Work experience is not just important for jobs, but to get into university to get those jobs in the end. It is like a domino effect, and work experience is the first place that you have to start.

Mr Speaker: Do we have anybody else from London?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: Wow, this is something else! It is going to be difficult to accommodate everybody.

Frankie Walker (London): First and foremost, I believe work experience is crucial; in conjunction with good grades, we need work experience. We are the future work force—how can we go into work without any idea or any path into it? It just does not make sense. We also need to criticise the education system. Why is it not equipping us well for work? If we have no work experience, why are you not directing us towards work and giving us all the knowledge and skills that we need—why? We also need good grades for work experience to be sufficient and good enough. Some employers will say, “Yes, you have work experience but you do not have good grades.” Why is the education system, after we spend 10 years in school, setting us up for failure? Why do we go into exams with 10 years of knowledge and get an E, or a U? Work experience is crucial and so is the education system. They should be linked together so that they can create an amazing work force, and so that we can be the future work force.

Mr Speaker: I must say that today has been characterised by lots of pithy, punchy contributions. Actually, my parliamentary colleagues and I could probably learn from that. It is really good: you have got your point across in a very limited time. Thank you and well done.

Katie Bexley (West Midlands): I am an MYP for Worcestershire. We all leave education and enter the world of work for about 50 years of our lives. At 16 and 18, we make choices that affect us for longer than we have even been alive. For a young person to do that without suitable guidance or experience, and without an understanding of or even small exposure to the world they are entering, is simply unfair. To take our chances based on factors that are not equal for everybody, such as parental support and school support, is unfair, and work experience and careers advice should be compulsory.

Mr Speaker: To conclude this debate—do not forget there are a couple of further debates to come—I call Mr Ife Grillo from London.

Ife Grillo (London): Amir is a 22-year-old who, despite having a first-class degree, has been unemployed for 12 months. Daniel is a 16-year-old who has A-grade qualifications but U-grade interpersonal skills. Alice is a 10-year-old who does not believe in the beauty of her dreams, so she will never be sure who she wants to be. I do not need to stand before the House and tell you why work experience would have helped every single one of those young people. This debate is about whether it should become our next campaign.

This could be a phenomenal chance to work with businesses. We can get businesses to help us develop a national framework for quality work experiences and explain why every young person should be entitled to them. The same goes for careers advice. But can we have that as a campaign when different areas have completely different circumstances? I am lucky enough to be the MYP for Hackney, where there are loads of things for young people to do. But not every area can say the same, so how can we make this into a national campaign? Maybe that is the point: no young person should feel held back because of where they are from. That is something we champion as a Youth Parliament, so why can't we champion this beautiful message of equality through a campaign?

However, even if we did manage to get work experience for all young people, doing the tea run for two weeks is no one's idea of being productive, and if we push for work experience in all schools, we would also be condemning young people to simplistic, logistic, pessimistic tasks that do not even benefit them. But remember: although photocopying, filing and using Microsoft Excel may seem mundane, that can be the dull reality of the workplace. Not everyone will come out of work experience feeling motivated and inspired, in the same way that not everyone finishing a day of work will feel motivated and inspired. That is life! [*Interruption.*] I knew that would get the support of the staff! That is life and it is essential that we are honest with young people.

When I was five, I was cool, stylish and wanted to be the next James Bond, but there were no work experience opportunities related to that. So I decided I would become the next Speaker of the House. Young people are the future, but they have the power to change their present. That is something we epitomise as a Youth Parliament. Could we epitomise that through a campaign? Can a UK Youth Parliament campaign help Amir, Daniel, Alice and the rest of our young people? Chloe, Ellen and I have shown you the paths; only you can decide which way your vote goes. Choose wisely.

Mr Speaker: Thank you for that highly charismatic contribution. I think it was much appreciated and very well received indeed.

Mental Health Services

Mr Speaker: We will now consider the motion entitled, “Mental health services should be improved with our help”, as printed on the Order Paper. In that context, I should perhaps mention to you that I have received a letter from the Minister of State for Care and Support at the Department of Health, Norman Lamb, who regrets that he is not able to be here today, but who tells me that it is “brilliant” that the Youth Parliament is focusing on this important agenda. Without reading out the entirety of his letter, I can tell you that he says he will

“be following your debate with interest”

and that he would like to

“invite those...involved in the mental health motion to attend a meeting”

with him

“at the Department of Health where we can discuss the outcomes of your debate today.”

So that is a first direct result. [*Applause.*] I thank the Minister for that. I ask Miss Francesca Reed, from the South West, to move the motion.

2 pm

Francesca Reed (South West): I beg to move,

That 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.

“You’re crazy”, “You’re emotionally unstable”, “You’re depressed”, “You’re retarded”, “You’re mental”—these words used to fill my head daily, as I faced every social situation with dread, fear and anxiety.

With one in four young people experiencing a mental health issue at some stage in their life, surely you will agree that it is vital that we dissolve the stigma surrounding mental health and campaign for better support and better education. If you break your leg, the first thing you do is go to the hospital. If you have toothache, you go to the dentist. So why should seeking support for mental illness be any different?

We are living in a society which is dominated by social media. No, I am not denying that social media has improved our lives dramatically, but with pro-anorexia and pro-self-harm sites just a click away, we cannot let mental health education stay under the radar. Young people are being influenced by websites which say, “Your bones are aching to breathe”, and tweets such as, “A few extra cuts tonight, because I deserve it.”

A Government report highlighted that 75% of adult mental health problems start before the age of 18. So why is it, then, that the Government allocate only 6% of the mental health budget to young people? This lack of funding means young people’s mental health services are terribly overstretched. Ultimately, young people are not receiving the help they deserve.

I believe it is our duty, as the Youth Parliament, to tell the Government we need more. It is our duty to be a voice for every young person who is suffering, and it is our duty to make sure that every young person who needs help gets it.

The bottom line is that mental health issues affect every single one of us, whether directly or indirectly because we are supporting a friend. Therefore, we need mental health education to be a compulsory part of the curriculum. We need to be consulted on how mental health services should be improved.

Now, you may be sitting here thinking, “Yes, this is all true, but how on earth are we going to make a significant change to such a huge issue?” My answer? Even if we do nothing more than raise awareness of mental health, we have achieved something great. After all, how did votes at 16 end up in two of the leading parties’ manifestos? Through young people’s persistence, persistence and persistence. Yes, mental health is a big issue, but we need to start somewhere: we need to start by making it our campaign.

Over 840,000 young people suffer from mental health issues, but that is just a number. I am so proud to be here on behalf of every young person who suffers from mental health issues. We have the power to make a difference in their lives. We have the power to improve their futures or even our own.

You’re not crazy, you’re not depressed and you’re not mental, but we need this mental health campaign—now.

Mr Speaker: Francesca, thank you for that impassioned plea. To oppose the motion, I call, from the North West, Miss Eleanor Gleeson.

Eleanor Gleeson (North West): Eighty thousand young people in the United Kingdom live with depression, 95% of young offenders have a mental health disorder, and 195,000 young people have an anxiety disorder. I think everyone who is here today can agree that those are truly shocking and damning statistics. So let me make this clear. I stand here today to oppose the motion, not because I do not believe that mental health is important; I stand here today because I believe our campaign will just not go far enough to help those affected by mental health problems.

There are groups up and down the country campaigning on this exact issue. There are youth councils trying to make our mental health services better, charities attempting to get rid of the stigma around mental health, and organisations working to get mental health education on to our national curriculum. Just look at Youthforia in the north-west—we have representatives from all over the region coming together to campaign on this issue; the NHS Youth Forum, whose main aim is to improve awareness of mental health issues; or YoungMinds, which has countless campaigns around mental health. How much more can we actually do?

The Government are finally beginning to listen to the pleas of such groups. In February this year, the House of Commons Select Committee on Health launched an inquiry into children’s and adolescents’ mental health, and in July this year, the Minister for Care and Support, Norman Lamb, announced a new taskforce to examine how to improve child and adolescent mental health services. So is this the right issue for UKYP to campaign on for the next 12 months? I do not believe it is. All three major political parties have committed themselves to improving mental health services after the next general election.

So I have to ask the question: is it really worth putting all our efforts into a campaign on an issue that is going to be dealt with anyway? There are other campaigns where we can really make a difference—achievable campaigns with clear-cut aims. We can give every single young person an opportunity to experience the world of work. We can make sure that the 5.3 million workers who are earning less than the living wage finally earn enough to survive. We can allow young people to fulfil their potential by giving them the option of re-sitting exams. We can transform British democracy by allowing the 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in elections. Or we can spend our time and effort on a campaign that will show few results, and will duplicate many campaigns that have come before.

So today I urge you to oppose this motion, to represent the young people of your constituency, and to vote for a campaign in which we, as the UK Youth Parliament, can really make a difference.

Mr Speaker: The general debate is now open.

Suzie Richter (British Forces Overseas Youth Service (Cyprus)): Just because you cannot see a disease or an illness, it doesn't mean that it is not there. Why should people feel that they have to go into school and frequently face other people making fun of them because they have an illness that you cannot see? They walk into school and people say "Oh, look at them! They think they have an illness, but they haven't." They have; it is just that those other people have not been educated about it. Education is very important when it comes to mental health. Why should others bully and make fun of those who are ill?

Negative stereotypes have recently come about, and being depressed or having anxiety has become almost fashionable. That is just not right. There is a lack of understanding of mental health, and people are ignorant about it. That is not fair, and it should be faced.

Rhys Hart (West Midlands): First of all, could we call it "mental well-being" instead of "mental health"? That has a more positive connotation.

I want to tell a story about one of my constituents. He has had mental health issues for quite a while, and has been close to suicide. He has been referred to CAMHS for one year, but it turns out that no referral was actually made. I was once contacted by a friend who self-harmed and did not know who to contact or call. Many young people do not know who to call or where to go for mental health issues. If you have an emergency—let's say you break your leg—you call 999, but who do you call if someone has a mental breakdown and goes to commit suicide? Who knows.

This is not a new issue. Earlier we commemorated world war one. How many people died after being shot for cowardice because they had shell shock? People did not understand. There is no argument about whether there is a problem because there clearly is. The problem concerns the solution. The NHS is underfunded and cannot fund mental health services, and schools do not have the correct people to solve mental health issues. But it is a massive task.

I have heard twice from Opposition speakers that we should not take something on because it is too big, and I want to quote Martin Luther King:

"Out of a mountain of despair, a stone of hope."

We are that stone. We are the great young people who can take on this task throughout our lives and improve it. When it comes to mental ill health, every day is a life lost. Is that something we want to wait around for? Should we go, "No, we can't deal with it so we'll leave it until next year or the year after that"? How many people will die or become hateful towards society because they have been left, or because society has moved on and we have turned our backs on them? Turning your back on this motion is turning your back on people.

Georgina Hands (East Midlands): I am Georgina Hands, like jazz hands—[*Interruption.*] I've just embarrassed myself there.

Mental health will affect one in four young people in the future. I'm sorry guys—wake up! We could not be more representative here. People say, "Oh, this motion will not achieve that much" or "The campaign is too hard", but I'm sorry—what are we doing here? We are the UK Youth Parliament. We are here bringing change and progress for our generation. We are here because we are the dreamers, but we also work damn hard for what we believe.

This mental health campaign can affect so many young people. Mental health is underfunded and there is so much stigma around it. Do you not see that if we show there is national support, politicians will have to listen? Young people and teachers will listen. If just one young person in my constituency feels less stigma because her representative, her UK Youth Parliament, or her British Youth Council are talking about mental health, then the campaign has been a success. Whether one person, 10, 100 or 1,000 people are affected, this is a win-win campaign. We may not make too much of a change to statistics, but we are people, not statistics. Please, I beg, have a heart and represent those in your area. Vote for this motion!

Mr Speaker: I must say that I love the passion in these speeches. I think it is terrifically encouraging and certainly far superior to anything that I, or any of my fellows as far as I can remember, was capable of at your age. We are always seeing negative stuff written about young people, but today is about accentuating and celebrating the positive, and we have just heard an excellent example of that.

Nicola Bruley (Mid Scotland and Fife): Through my local work and during my Make your Mark consultation, and through engaging with a variety of constituents from young carers to LGBT groups, I found that this issue was a key headliner. On behalf of a passionate constituent who feels that it is vital for young people to be listened to, I have brought some key points. Mental health should be taken more seriously and acknowledged more. It is a very prominent problem for thousands of people. I agree with the motion: mental ill health can be stigmatised, but people should be educated on the subject so that they receive the help they need to achieve their full potential.

May I please urge every MYP present in the House of Commons on 14 November 2014, as we debate the motion on mental health, to think about the one in 10 children aged between five and 16 who suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder? Just remember that these are the people you represent.

Pegah Moulana (Yorkshire and Humber): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I know it is hard to spot me because, like you, I am so short. I never get noticed anywhere I go, so it is amazing that I should be noticed in this Chamber.

I represent Barnsley, and people might think, “Barnsley? Hmm.” I am from one of the country’s most deprived areas, and it is an area with many mental health problems. Young people come to me and say, “I need help. Help me.” How can I do that when my local authority cannot afford to help? I see scratches on their arms, but I cannot do anything. Today is my day, and today I can make a change. When I see the scratches, I refer them to CAMHS, because that is the only thing I can do. What do CAMHS say? “Sorry, but the line is too long. We cannot do it.” When I see my friends go into hospital after attempting suicide, what does the hospital say? “Sorry, no funding.” How long do we want to hear that, guys? How long do we want to see our young people suffering?

I have personal experience of a school that does everything it possibly can for its young people, including one-to-one sessions. If only every school was like that. The coalition Government and the majority of the big parties support mental health services, and it is in their manifestos. Why shouldn’t we have this? This should be our campaign, guys. Go out there and vote.

Dylan McAughey (North West): I am the MYP for Oldham, which is where the first test-tube baby was created—bear with me on this one, because there is a point. *[Interruption.]* You’re welcome.

I am also the campaign officer for Youthforia, which was so kindly mentioned by Eleanor. At Youthforia, we already have mental health services as one of our priority campaigns. When we first debated the question whether we should campaign on improving mental health services, we heard a lot of the opposition that we are hearing in this Chamber today: “No, we cannot do anything,” and “Things are already being done.” We came to the same conclusion that was mentioned by a previous speaker. If we can save one person’s life by raising awareness or creating a better offer, we will have achieved what we needed to achieve. We cannot put a price on that one life. We cannot say, “Sorry, but £10,000 over budget is too much to save one life.” Life is priceless, which is why I urge you all to vote.

I cannot say often enough how much of a postcode lottery there is in this country. I am lucky that where I am from we have a fantastic youth council and a fantastic youth service, which unfortunately is about to experience drastic cuts. The postcode lottery is not fair. I get a great service because I am from Oldham, but my colleagues from other places in the North West and other places across the country do not receive a great service and do not have the same opportunities or the same services as I do. That is not fair, so I urge you all to go out there. We can be the little dog behind Parliament that is barking and biting their heels until they make the changes that they have promised by saying that they can and will make these changes. Let’s do this, Youth Parliament.

Zak Wagman (London): I cannot say that mental health is not a huge issue, but today we are picking our national campaign. The Government are putting a lot of emphasis on mental health, and without doubt the next Government will do so, too. A huge number of

MYPs here today will be carrying out either personal or local campaigns on this topic. Most importantly, in the majority of cases, councils and local authorities run their own mental health services, so how can we even begin to make a difference when there is a completely different situation in each area? What have been our previous campaigns? A curriculum for life and votes at 16 are clear and concise: they are campaigns for young people and, as young people, we know a lot about them. Sure, mental health is a big issue. Does the campaign have a clear aim? No. Is the campaign directly for young people? No. Can we put our stamp on it as the Youth Parliament? Probably not.

Mental health is a great topic, but unfortunately a national campaign is not about what we need, it is about what we can do. So let us vote for something else—something that we can make a huge difference on and that is equally important, so that the young people of this country can say, “That’s what our Youth Parliament did. That’s what we stand for, and they’ve made a change.”

Rebecca Moore (North East): You were saying, Zak, that you don’t feel as though we can do anything to make a change on this. I personally know people who suffer from depression and people who cannot go into school because they are too anxious, and I even know a girl who attempted to overdose on sleeping pills. To me, that is a massive issue, and I am seeing it around me every single day. It makes me so upset to see that those people are getting turned away from services that they so desperately need. That is wrong.

Imagine watching a friend deteriorate into a spiral of self-doubt and negativity. It is horrible, and it hurts so much to see that and know that you cannot do anything because the Government and the local authority are not doing enough. That is not fair. Please support this motion so that we can break the stigma earlier and put in early intervention, which will save so many lives and help so many young people.

Vishal Mamgai (South West): As soon as a person hears “mental health issues”, instantly there is a negative thought and image. We cannot keep discouraging people with mental health issues. We need to promote a positive image and ways to keep people mentally healthy. This can be done by talking to someone who you are comfortable with, such as a friend, a teacher, a colleague or whoever it is; exercising the mind as well as the body; or listening to your favourite music, if that is the solution—just doing what you want. Let’s vote for it, guys.

Emily Peters (Wales): If you are sat on a bus going to school, there will be some people on that bus with mental health issues, and you’re not going to know it, and maybe they don’t either. Maybe we should encourage people to speak out and say that it is okay to do so, and that they don’t need to hide away how they feel. They might feel like they will be judged, or that they will be bullied for speaking out. We need to make sure that people know it is okay to feel the way they do, and let them know that there are people they can trust and speak to, who can help them to stop feeling how they do, and that it is not their fault.

Jaymey McIvor (East of England): According to a study in Geneva, one in four people will be affected at some point in their life by problems of mental well-

being—as was rightly pointed out, that is a much better way to phrase it. That means that across the world at the moment, 450 million people are suffering from a mental well-being disorder. That is unacceptable, but what is even more unacceptable is the fact that our education system does not equip us with the knowledge that we need. We can accidentally offend someone, but quite frankly we will not know we are doing it. Surely if our Government can spend thousands of pounds on biscuits via MPs' expenses, they can afford to put extra funding into our schools to equip young people with the education they need on mental health issues. This is our chance, and if something is not achievable, then as the UK Youth Parliament, let's make it achievable.

Mr Speaker: What about a speaker from the South East? Who do we have? There seems to be a competition over who is the most excited.

Zoni Asif (South East): A young person who is a good friend of mine was on a waiting list to get some support for nine months. For nine months, he suffered in silence without any support or any education. By the end of the nine months, it was too late; I do not want to imagine what that "too late" meant to him. But with ever-increasing mental health problems in our generation, it is time that we step up and, for once, as young people, be selfish and fight for our own mental well-being. This suffering that so many young people face is not something that we choose. For all we know, it could happen to our friend, someone we represent, our brother, our sister or even ourselves. It is time for us to be selfish and to fight for this.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. According to my records, the only part of the UK from which we have not heard in this particular debate is Northern Ireland. If anybody wants to speak from Northern Ireland, they can.

Lauren Sloan (Northern Ireland): I am Lauren Sloan and I represent South Down in Northern Ireland. A previous MYP said that this campaign was not relevant to young people and asked how we could make it so. An organisation in Northern Ireland has carried out surveys and compiled statistics—I am sorry that my statistics are exclusive to Northern Ireland, so they may not be relevant to the whole of the UK but they will be reflective. It said that one in three young people between the ages of 11 and 18 will have, at some stage, come under some sort of stress, anxiety or depression in their life. Since 2012, the suicide rates from 11 to 18 have increased by 120%. I do not know how some people can sit here and tell me how we, as representatives of these young people, should not campaign on this issue. It is completely relevant, and we should all vote for it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. We have one further debate to follow, but first let us conclude this one. As I call her to do so, I hope that you will give Miss Jessica Belch from the North East of England a warm welcome. *[Applause.]*

Jessica Belch (North East): Does my dress make me look fat? Well, I was hoping for an encouraging no, so thanks, guys! For many young people, mental ill health can lead to insanity, insecurity and inferiority. Am I normal? Is there a cure? One in 10 young people aged

five to 16 suffers from a diagnosable mental health disorder. That means that 30 young people in this Chamber will have a diagnosable mental health disorder. You never ever hear the phrase, "Oh, it's just cancer. Get over it." So why are some people deluded into thinking that mental ill health is not a real illness? Some 750,000 young people are living in the UK, feeling as if they have nothing to live for. Like cancer, mental ill health can kill. How would it be if we stepped into the shoes of trained doctors? Our egos would have to be pretty high for us to think we might be the next Edward Jenner, but there is not a vaccination for mental ill health. Dealing with it is not as simple as a GP appointment, a referral to your local councillor or a box of magic pills. Severity varies. Like every human, each and every case is unique. Is this campaign realistic? I say it is idealistic.

Is the time right for a mental health campaign? Some aspects of the media are massive on young people's mental health. Fantastic organisations already exist to help young people: YoungMinds, Rethink and CAMHS—to name but a few. How would we drive our mental health manifesto so that it differs from existing campaigns? We could argue that a mental health campaign is needed. We are all in the same game, but at different levels. We face the same hell, with different devils: anxiety, addiction and anorexia. It doesn't seem real enough to some of you, but it is a reality that if we aided other organisations and campaigned together, we would be able to prevent the growth of mental health problems.

Let's take a step back. Are our efforts worth putting elsewhere? We could invest our time in better work experience, so that people like you have a better chance in the working world, or we could empower young people, as we do daily, to stand up and have their voices heard. Look around. Come on, we've had plenty of practice. We fight for the ignored. We fight for their voices and we fight for what is right.

However, our Government do not give students a chance. Our Government deny 16 and 17-year-olds the chance to vote in general elections. Some parts of our society are not even earning a decent living wage. It is the common denominator of life that we are all human and all fallible. I have only three minutes at the Dispatch Box, but our mental health can last a lifetime.

Mr Speaker: Jessica, thank you for a wonderful conclusion to the debate. There were some outstanding and unforgettable speeches during it; indeed, there have been outstanding and unforgettable speeches all day.

Members of the Youth Parliament, we must now move to our last debate. We shall consider—*[Interruption.]* I know: all good things come to an end. Personally, I would love to have this event over two days. *[Applause.]* Who knows what might be possible in the future? I really mean it. Every day in the House, there are lots of people attending—Natascha, Rob and I all know this—who are not necessarily seeking to speak, but of course it is in the nature of things that most people who have come here today want to speak. My pain—I know it is your pain as well—is in the fact that only a small proportion actually get to make speeches. I am genuinely sorry about that, but we do our best.

Votes for 16 and 17-year-olds

Mr Speaker: We will now consider the fifth and last motion of the day, entitled “Votes for 16 and 17-year-olds in all public elections”, as printed on the Order of Business. To move the motion, and from Scotland, we are about to hear from—with your huge enthusiasm, I hope—Mr Junaid Ashraf. [*Applause.*]

2.32 pm

Junaid Ashraf (Scotland): I beg to move,

That 16 and 17-year-olds are long overdue the right to vote in public elections in the UK.

MYPs, this year is the centenary of the start of world war one. That was 100 years ago. However, did you know that it has been only 96 years since women over 30 gained the vote, 86 years since women gained equal rights with males to vote at the age of 21, and 45 years since the voting age was reduced to 18? Women achieved the right to vote and attain a voice through a collective fight, battle and, for some, death. We, thankfully, have not had to endure the same struggle. We now have the word of several major political parties that they will support votes at 16 if they are elected to Government. However, we still have to see to it that those parties deliver on their promise.

In the past one year, while it has been our national campaign, more has been done for the votes at 16 campaign than has been achieved in the past 15 years of the UK Youth Parliament's history. On 18 September, Scotland put its faith in its young people, giving all 16 and 17-year-olds a democratic vote, a vote in one of the most crucial decisions affecting Scotland's future, and, in return, 81% of 16 and 17-year-olds registered to vote in the Scottish referendum. Truly, that number reflects a level of maturity and seriousness that is, undeservingly, not attributed to many 16 and 17-year-olds in our society. So today I call on you, Members of the Youth Parliament, representatives of young people, drawn from the four nations of the United Kingdom, to put your heart, mind, soul and vote, as we enter into our 16th year of campaigning, into ensuring that votes at 16 become a reality in all UK elections and referendums, allowing all 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in the 2016 Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly elections, to make a tangible change to the British democratic process.

Today, let us continue to move forward with votes at 16, striking when the precedent has been set and the momentum is on our side. We have the proof that 16 and 17-year-olds are willing to engage. MYPs, I urge you to put your faith, one more time, for one last push, for one more year, in the issue of votes at 16. Let us ensure that, over the next year, we do not lose the momentum that has been built up. Let us ensure that we see through the cause that we all hold so dear in our work in the UK Youth Parliament.

MYPs, I envisage a Youth Parliament a year from now in the House of Commons—this magnificent House of Commons—standing proud and saying, “Our work on votes at 16 is finally complete.” I hope that you all believe in my vision too, and that you will stand with me today to keep votes at 16 as our national campaign, so that our dream can, at last, become a reality.

Mr Speaker: Junaid, thank you very much indeed for opening the debate in such a spirited and compelling fashion. To oppose the motion, I ask you to welcome warmly Mr Neil Reilly.

Neil Reilly (Northern Ireland): Mo chairde—my friends—some of the arguments for votes at 16 that we hear time and again are truly uninspiring. People rhyme off a list of well-rehearsed rights such as getting married, joining the Army—et cetera, et cetera. That does not begin to constitute an argument. It does not begin to engage with the question of whether giving 16-year-olds the vote now would benefit them or society at large. That is the question we should ask ourselves.

Many argue that having votes at 16 would increase the dismal turnout figures that we have seen in recent elections. It would not. Just because 16-year-olds could vote does not mean that they would. I am not saying that we do not know enough to vote. It is clear from everything we have seen today that we do. However, young people up and down these isles do not believe that our political process can represent our opinions. I have met people from the Shetlands to Derry to Plymouth and it is clear that we have opinions. But when it seems that all a vote does is to change the colour of the Prime Minister's tie from blue to red and back again, it is clear that there is disillusionment. That is the problem. That is what we need to address—the fact that the vast majority of young people see politicians as 50 shades of beige and not worth their time.

This policy does not begin to address the political disengagement. All it does is extend a broken and mistrusted franchise. Talk about tokenism! MYPs, let us address the mistrust, let us address the misunderstanding, let us address the disgust at our political system, and then let us consider lowering the voting age to 16.

Voting for this policy again would be a mistake. We have already campaigned on it. We have fought this fight. Realistically, what more could we do? Come 2015, if you believe the polls, we will have a party in government that will give us the vote almost immediately. Why should we waste a year campaigning on something that is very likely to happen anyway?

Surely our resources, our time and our very limited money would be better spent fighting for the living wage for the most disadvantaged in our society. When people working three minimum-wage jobs struggle to pay the bills; when young people in all our constituencies have to choose between a warm meal and a warm home, it is evident that there is a problem. It is evident to me that as the UK Youth Parliament, it is our duty to address that. I therefore urge each and every young person in the Chamber to vote not for votes at 16, but for something that truly needs our support—for something that will help the most vulnerable in our society and serve the people who elected us.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed for that, Neil.

John Gillies (Scotland): I agree with a number of the points that have been made, but Neil Reilly asked what we could do for something that is likely to happen. That does not mean that it will happen. We could use our time to see the proposal through, to push it and to ensure that it happens. We do not know that it will

happen, and we could be sitting here four years down the line with it not having happened. We could only blame ourselves for not encouraging and following the matter through.

Mr Speaker: How about a speaker from Yorkshire and Humber? I call the young woman whom I identified earlier.

Ella Beevers (Yorkshire and Humber): I am ever so proud to represent the constituency of Calderdale. May I begin by outlining the fact that 94% of young people use social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. That means that 94% of young people witness some form of political activity every day, whether through pages, statuses, pictures or videos. Therefore, 94% of young people are engaged in some form of political activity.

Actually, scrap that! I am going to go as far as saying that 100% of young people are engaged in some form of politics. It is inevitable that the whole world revolves around politics. Every single decision that we make involves some form of political process, so why not trust these people? Why not trust 16 and 17-year-olds? When witnessing all this political action, we form morals, principles and opinions that can easily be applied to a general election.

As Mr Speaker kindly pointed out not that long ago, I had the honour of listening to him speak at Halifax minster, where he outlined engaging young people and modernising the House of Commons, so that more young people are engaged. Mr Speaker himself said that young people are not disengaged with politics and that that is a myth. I am sure that all of us sitting in this room would agree with that.

Let's eradicate the enormous social divide between young people and adults in this nation. Let's get everyone together. Let's get people voting. Let's show the world that 16 and 17-year-olds are capable and responsible and deserve the vote. Get behind votes at 16.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I think there is someone from the West Midlands who took the great trouble to write to me called Hazeem Arif. Let us hear your oration.

Hazeem Arif (West Midlands): In this country, young people can marry at the age of 16, but we cannot elect our representatives, who can also marry each other. We can join the armed forces at 16, but we cannot choose the Government who choose our battles. We are eligible to pay taxes at 16, but we have no influence over how they are spent. We are citizens and, as such, we should be allowed to vote at 16. Not allowing us to do so puts us in the same category as prisoners. If we give the 1,545,382 16 and 17-year-olds in this country the vote, it will improve voting turnout, which is imperative for our country.

Finally, a fellow MYP said that votes at 16 has never happened and never will happen, but there is nothing that the UKYP cannot achieve, so I urge people to vote for this motion.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Hazeem. I think another person from British Forces Overseas wished to contribute. Shona Henry, let us hear from you.

Shona Henry (British Forces Overseas Youth Service (Cyprus)): At the moment, 1.5 million people are denied the vote because they are under age. Being born one month after someone else means they cannot have a choice in how this country is run. You are allowed to join the Army at 16. You are allowed to go and fight for our country—to fight battles to protect us all—but you do not have a choice in how this Government is run. You do not have a choice in how our education is run. Of course, voting at 16 will not solve youth disengagement overnight, but it can definitely help to solve the problem. Many teens probably feel disenfranchised from society, which is perhaps why they are causing riots. Over 100,000 16 and 17-year-olds voted in the Scottish referendum, which shows the level of interest in this. We are the next generation—that is why we should have a choice.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Who have we got from the north-west?

Several MYPs *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Let us hear from the first person I saw, smiling at me in an original way, with the benefit of his owl. Is it an owl? That is a wonderful display of what I will describe either as ingenuity or personal enterprise in order to catch my attention.

Noah Aldous (North West): This is going to be a hoot. *[Laughter.]* I'm glad you laughed at that, because I would have looked an absolute idiot if you hadn't.

I am 6 foot 6 inches. My hand can't fit in the backside of an owl puppet. I can grow a fairly solid beard. To most people, I look like an adult. I think like an adult, so why can't I vote like an adult?

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Now what about us hearing from somebody from London?

Several MYPs *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I am sorry—I would love to hear everybody, but there are so many of you. I call this young lady here.

Benie Bopeno (London): At 16, you can leave home. You can have sex. You can get married. You can even join the Army. All these things apply to adulthood. If you are an adult at 16, why are the Government refusing to lower the voting age to 16? We are old enough to have a baby but not old enough to vote. It makes no sense.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. Now, how about somebody from the south-east?

Several MYPs *rose—*

Mr Speaker: We are going to hear from the woman in the dark blue dress who is waving something. Good heavens! Abandoning my impartiality just for a moment, I hope you don't hero-worship Mr Putin. *[Interruption.]* Good. I would have some worries about you if you did.

Charlotte Tosti (South East): We cannot be defeatist about adopting votes at 16. People think that we require political education before being enfranchised at 16, but what is the value in education when there is no way of putting what we have learned into practice? How can

you then justify the thousands of adults who may have left school in their teens casting their ballot at a general election? Would you deny them their vote? Do you really think that a first-time voter at the age of 22 would vote because of a citizenship lesson? We cannot delay this campaign by pandering to the prejudices of people who already have the vote and use that vote against us, because, as John Stuart Mill argued, the vote that is held by some people and not by others is a form of power that can be used against others. This campaign is about giving the silenced a voice. This campaign is about stopping cases such as those that happened in the Iraq war, where British soldiers who were under 18 died without ever having the chance to cast their vote in a general election in the country that they died for.

Mr Speaker: What about the South West of England?

Several MYPs rose—

Mr Speaker: There is a gentleman jumping up and down in a mildly eccentric manner—the David Beckham lookalike. *[Laughter.]*

Keiran Curtis (South West): I am from Devon, in the South West.

We are all young people here today, and young people deserve the vote. I would have loved to choose the Government I would grow up under, but I am not going to get to do that. We need to take the initiative that is at hand now. Have you ever heard the phrase, “Nothing is impossible”? Well, this is possible. We can do it—we have done many things before. How many people would love to be able to turn round to their children and say, “If it wasn’t for us, you wouldn’t be able to vote at the age of 16 or 17”? That is why I am 110% for this motion.

Danny Brown (North East): I am from Darlington, in the North East.

We have all heard the arguments, as has been pointed out, so I am not going to repeat them—we all know them. There are so many great campaigns, but think how many people have said to you, “What you do is pointless. You are not going to make a change.” Your sitting here right now is making a change. As you are here, why don’t you make a change for the 1.5 million young people who cannot vote?

On Wednesday, I turned 15. My question is: will I have to wait a year to vote or another three years? Let’s do this for all the Lukes, Maddies, Scotts and Jameses. Let’s have a revolution—let’s make Britain great again.

Adam Hoyes (East Midlands): Votes at 16 is an issue that has received much attention from us and from other organisations in the past few years. It has become obvious that it is an issue that many people, young and old, are passionate about. However, do we really feel that by voting for it as our national campaign for a second year we could contribute significantly to making progress towards achieving our end goal? Given that the Youth Select Committee only recently finished its report on the issue, would restarting the process really be beneficial, especially when we could concentrate efforts on another issue, one that has received much more support in Make your Mark over the past year?

Rebecca Connelly (Northern Ireland): I am from South Antrim.

I have no doubt in my mind that the time will come when the voting age is lowered. With the recent success in Scotland—the phenomenally high percentage of 16 and 17-year-old voter turnout—as well as the urgent climate for change in Northern Ireland, voting at 16 is inevitable. As Francesca stated, proposals for votes at 16 are now in the manifestos of two of the leading parties. We need to ask ourselves how much good we can do for something that has progressed beyond the reaches of our democratically elected grasp. MYPs, I urge you: please do not fall into the same trap as we did last year. Vote for something on which we can make a real difference—vote against this motion. Go raibh maith agaibh.

Lea Garrett (East of England): I represent St Albans, which is in Hertfordshire.

At the age of 16, you can have sex, start a family and join the Army—I am sorry to cite your stereotypes, Mr Reilly. Imagine if you had a baby and you could not vote for its future. I would be distraught because I would want the best for my child and I would not want someone else deciding its future. I completely agree with those who say that 16-year-olds are too immature to vote, but what about those who are mature enough and politically minded? Think about those people and vote for this motion.

Gemma Williams (Wales): Article 12 of the UNCRC states that young people are entitled to have a voice. Not being entitled to vote takes that right from a young person. At 16, they can commit to marriage and sexual relationships. Surely if they can do that, they can put a little tick in a box of their choice.

Hamza King (London): The main idea is that this issue affects every single person sitting in this room. I shall quickly skim over some of the other points. As teenagers, we like to state what is unfair. Well, it is unfair that we can work and contribute to the output of the country, but we cannot vote on where the money goes. It is not fair that we can join the Army and fight for our nation, but we cannot decide how our political affairs are run. It is not fair that you can have sex with your local MP, but you can’t vote for them.

What do they say? They say we are not mature enough. So on my 18th birthday will I wake up and say, “Oh, I’m 18 now, so I’m mature and I know who I want to vote for.” Does that really happen?

I have heard a lot of people say that we cannot make a big enough difference, but look at where we are and look at what we are doing. We are making a difference already. Just because we do not have a voice now does not mean that we will not have one in the future. It is important that we push for this because we represent young people. This is likely to happen in the future and we need to push it through to the end. Let us unite together as young people and show the world that we are more than just kids.

Hollie Morrison (Northern Ireland): I know that my opinion will probably be unpopular, but I believe that 16-year-olds are not ready for the vote just yet. We are very impressionable at this age. We vote how our parents

vote as we know no other way. We are just beginning to become our own independent persons. How can we expect to vote for someone when we do not know what they value except at election time? They bring out all their promises, but they never actually act on them. If we take those at face value, we could end up altering the system in a way that would not benefit any of us.

It is true that voting increases with age, but that will not happen if younger people simply do not want to vote. We could become complacent. If we have the vote, we could just say, "Yeah, we can vote": it does not guarantee that we will actually go out and vote. It is all well and good for MYPs to support votes at 16, because we are interested in politics, but go out into the street and ask people who they would vote for. I can guarantee that a lot of them will have no clue.

We do not have enough education on and knowledge of the parties. At school, political education does not happen until A-level. You can be very misinformed and spoil your vote. In the recent election, my mum and brother were picking their candidates and I had no clue how to vote. They asked me, and I had no idea, but I am 16 and that is the age we are proposing we should be able to vote. We may not be ready for the vote just yet, but we have set the ball rolling and we should not campaign any more on this issue. Another generation may be able to do more, but we need to set this issue aside for a while and campaign on something more worth while.

Mr Speaker: To conclude this debate, Mr Aidan Ray from the North West of England.

Aidan Ray (North West): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The first thing I want to say is, "London, chill!" I don't want to die before I make my speech.

This is far from the first time we have heard this debate, and I know that many here have strong feelings about whether 16-year-olds should have the vote. Last year we decided to make this our campaign, based on our passion and duty towards the young people we represent, with a Youth Select Committee formed to act on this. This month its findings were published in a report that I can barely scratch the surface of.

Four main points stood out to me. First, Putin does not approve. Secondly, current public opinion supports the current voting age of 18. Thirdly, there are a lot of issues surrounding a reduction in the voting age which would have to be addressed either prior to or alongside a reduction to 16 to make the transition as smooth and democratically beneficial as it should be. The fourth point is a direct quote from the report:

"We are very proud of the democracy in which we live, and of its history and traditions. We are absolutely convinced that 16 and 17 year olds have the aptitude and the appetite to take a full part in that democracy... not only to include a new cohort of citizens in decisions about their lives and communities, but to ensure a better-informed, more engaged generation is equipped to take our democracy into the future."

However, I must emphasise that the question being asked here today is not whether or not we support lowering the voting age to 16. It is whether we truly believe that spending another 12 months actively pushing for it will be in the best interests of those we sit in this very Chamber to represent. Would 12 months mean more to this campaign, whose roots go back decades, or

to backing mental well-being, a previously ignored realm that is now at the centre of discussions on health, or to giving young people a stable foundation to build not only their own futures but the futures of us all, with the return of a practical work experience system, or the ability to resit the exams in our most core subjects?

Or are we going to see this through and show the drive and determination that I know each and every one of us here is capable of? Last year we were told to strike while the iron is hot, but it is we who have made the iron hot by striking. When votes at 16 were first proposed here in 1999, the motion was defeated—36 votes for, 434 votes against. Now, the backing of two major political parties, as well as support in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, is proof of a monumental change, achieved by the hard work of young people and organisations across these isles.

So is this mission accomplished? Is it time to move on to pastures new, to lead yet another glorious crusade to stick it to the man? Perhaps. No matter what we decide to campaign for, we can feel secure in the knowledge that if this Youth Parliament has but one lasting legacy, it will be one of democracy and innovation, adhering to a proud tradition of progress that has made Britain truly great.

Mr Speaker: Aidan, thank you very much.

I fear you know that I am going to tell you that that, sadly, must conclude the debates for today. We have had our five debates. It is never possible to accommodate everybody and I say a heartfelt sorry to people who wanted to contribute but weren't able to do so. I would love to hear from every single one of you, but time simply does not allow. They have been superb debates, fun, invigorating, informative for you, but also hugely valuable to Members of Parliament and to civil society as a whole. The more people hear from you, the more impressed they will be.

The Youth Parliament will now divide to vote on which of the five subjects debated today to select as its national campaign issue. Members of the Youth Parliament, in the Lobby you will be given two ballot papers: one for the two reserved, or UK-wide, subjects and one for the three devolved issues—for today's purposes, I believe that is England only. You should place a cross in the box next to the subject that you would like to vote for on each ballot paper and hand the completed ballot papers to the Doorkeepers in the Lobby. They will be visibly obvious to you—in fact, just in case anybody does not know who they are, would the Doorkeepers care to identify themselves? I think you can see who they are.

Afterwards—that is to say, when you have voted—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 House of Commons staff will be on hand to assist you. I shall disappear for a short period while you are voting, and then I look forward very much to returning, when we will have further observations in store for you. I now declare that the Division Lobbies are open.

3.6 pm

Division.

3.26 pm

Mr Speaker: Throughout the day we have had the pleasure and benefit of the presence of my parliamentary colleagues from across the House, and we welcome that. It has been invaluable, and is a mark of respect for you. There is still a little bit to go, however, and I would like to invite to address us the new junior Minister at the Cabinet Office, and Minister for Civil Society. He has a keen interest in young people, and is responsible for engagement with them. Please give a warm welcome to Mr Rob Wilson.

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): MYPs, it is a privilege to speak to the UK Youth Parliament, although I fear that my contribution may be a bit more sedate than some of those I heard earlier. A famous oil painting hangs not far from here in Portcullis House, and it shows this Chamber exactly as it was in 1986. Despite the blue-suited figure of our first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, both sides of the House are almost entirely full of greying, middle-aged men.

That was the case through the centuries, with just a few notable exceptions. William Pitt the Younger was an MP by the age of 22, and Prime Minister by 24—a pretty impressive start to a political career by anyone's standards. He went on, however, to drink rather a lot of port, and it was believed that he died of gout aged 40 on reflection, perhaps he is not the best role model for a Youth Parliament. Lady Astor was the first female MP to take her seat. I have been dipping in and out of a fairly lengthy biography of her over the past six months, and one of her legislative achievements was to raise the legal drinking age in pubs from 14 to 18, so her legacy still very much affects your lives today.

I am pleased that the scene before me now is about as far removed from that painting as can be. The House of Commons is steadily becoming more diverse, but you really show us how it should be done and how a picture of modern Britain should look. I hope that I last long enough to welcome some of you here as full MPs in the future. Until the emergence of the Youth Parliament a few years ago, we never had young people involved so closely or directly connected with Parliament. Today we have seen Britain's young people at their best: informed, articulate and passionate. By debating with such eloquence and conviction, you have also demonstrated what Parliament and politics can be when at their very best.

I remember the first time I entered the House of Commons as an MP back in 2005. The building is designed to be slightly intimidating and to remind people of the history of those who went before us. One of the things I was shown on my first day was the ribbon hook in the Members' Cloakroom where I could hang my sword, should I wish to bring it. Incidentally, 19 MPs were killed in duels between 1590 and 1822. St Stephen's Hall is filled with statues of our former statesman. Pitt the Younger and Charles James Fox stand opposite each other in marble, as they once did in this Chamber. You cannot escape history in this building. As a new Member, it is clear that you have an awful lot to live up to. You will all have felt a slight chill of anticipation as you came into the Chamber. Churchill called this room the "cockpit" of the nation. Well, after 10 years as an MP, I can promise you that that feeling never goes away.

Today is about the future not the past, the young not the old or the passed on—impressive though Pitt, Churchill and Thatcher were in their time. You do not have to look far to find examples of fine young people doing some pretty impressive things. Look at Stephen Sutton, the fantastic young man who raised more than £5 million for the Teenage Cancer Trust, or Malala, a powerful advocate for education and an inspiration to young women across the world. Those are just examples that we see on the news, and I know that young people are doing incredible things all the time such as caring for loved ones or volunteering in their local community.

In the summer I met young people taking part in the National Citizen Service in my constituency of Reading East. I learned about the local projects that they were developing around issues such as organ donation, body image, mental health and self-harming, some of which you have discussed today. Across the country more than 100,000 young people have now taken part in the NCS. They have given some 2 million hours of service to their communities. Young people are making a fantastic contribution to our country, and it is about time they were heard.

As the Minister with responsibility for youth, I have heard many people say that young people are not interested in politics. I think they are wrong. Generally, it is party politics in which young people are less interested. My own political involvement began when, at the age of 22, I ran to be president of my students union at Reading university. I remember it very clearly to this day because one of the three other candidates was a pot plant—*[Laughter.]* You may laugh, but it was very cultured and particularly herbaceous if my memory serves me well. The pot plant reminded me of Groot from Marvel's "Guardians of the Galaxy" movie, but with a slightly smaller vocabulary. Sorry for wandering off the topic, Mr Speaker. I had better return to the point.

I did not run in the election because I wanted to represent a political party; I did it because I wanted to change and improve things for students at Reading university. From there I caught the politics bug, as some of you will today, and I stood for my local council and, eventually, for Parliament. That you have all started engaging at an even younger age shows that those who write off young people's interest in politics are wrong. It serves as a sign that politicians ignore young people at their peril. Young people look at the world and want to make it a better place. Sometimes that might be through party politics, but most often it is through getting involved with a cause or campaign.

We all saw how young people in Scotland debated the future of their country just a few months ago. Earlier this year more than 865,000 11 to 18-year-olds voted in the Make Your Mark ballot. I congratulate Shay Miah, who will be delivering the vote of thanks in just a moment, for his work to make Hartlepool top of the table for the highest turnout in that election. Shay is a deserved winner today of the Points of Light award from the Prime Minister. Give him a round of applause. *[Applause.]* That is the first time I have ever done that in here, and it is incredible. Across the country, turnout was up 81% on last year. It was a powerful way of highlighting the issues that you care about most, and it is a powerful message to the rest of us that you deserve to be heard.

You have now debated these issues at length, and it has been absolutely fascinating at times and certainly electric to watch. You can be very proud of what you have done today. I would like to note some of the terrific contributions, all of which were of a very high standard, although all of you from all four corners of our nation can be proud of your individual contributions. I will pick out a few Front-Bench contributions and a few from the Back Benches.

Chloe Stevens, from the East of England, gave a real tour de force of a speech, although at times, sitting alongside her, I was expecting one of her flailing arms to smack me in the face. Ciara Brodie, from Liverpool, gave a fantastic summary of the living wage debate and got the balance absolutely right.

Ife, from Hackney, even got the Gallery clapping. Can you imagine how many MPs in this place have tried to do that? If we had a clapometer, he would certainly be top of the league. Francesca Reed made a really impassioned contribution, although I was slightly concerned at one point when she pointed at me rather ferociously and shouted, "Retarded!" Francesca, have we met each other before?

Junaid was the first person I have ever seen delivering a speech at the Dispatch Box wearing a kilt. I will have to check with Mr Speaker, with his photographic memory, whether it is actually the first time. Jessica Belch gave an exciting speech full of drama.

Turning to some Back-Bench contributions, Rhys Hart made a thoughtful speech. "Jazz Hands"—brilliant! Pegah, from Barnsley, I was impressed with the way you caught Mr Speaker's eye—squealing "Please!" in a high voice obviously works, and I will be telling my colleagues that that is one way of doing it. If not, we can always use an owl.

We heard from Lauren Sloan from Northern Ireland—always a pleasure to listen to such a wonderful accent. Ella Beevers' speech was clear and well crafted, and Hazeem Arif was a very popular choice, judging by the round of applause that went around. Danny Brown, congratulations on standing up here at the age of 14 or 15 and declaring a revolution. So close to 5 November, as well.

None of the issues that you have discussed this afternoon is simple. There are no easy answers, and that is the thing about democracy, really—it is about juggling competing priorities and finite resources, and it is about taking the tough decisions. That is why politics can quite often be unpopular, and sometimes it is quite easy for young people to lose heart. But it is really important that you do not lose the faith.

That raises some pretty big questions for Government, such as, how do we meet the needs of an ageing population without placing an unfair burden on your generation? Or what kind of pension will we be able to afford when it is your turn to retire? The answers to these kinds of questions will shape the world that you live in, yet the number of people aged 18 to 24 who are absolutely certain to vote at the next election is about 12%. If young people do not speak up or get involved, politics will continue to be dominated by older people. So it is more important than ever that young people enter the adult world equipped, informed and encouraged to play their part in the democratic process.

I would like to thank Mr Speaker and the Leader and shadow Leader of the House for their ongoing support for the UK Youth Parliament, and I would also like to thank the British Youth Council for all the hard work that goes into organising an event on this scale. These debates mark the start of Parliament week, and I look forward to meeting and hearing from more young people in the next few days. But listening to young people should not be a one-off exercise. We need to ensure that young people's voices—your voices—continue to be heard. It is also important that we allow young people to play a role in shaping the services they use, both at local and national level, because listening should not just be a gesture. It is a way of ensuring that our policies and services meet your actual needs, as opposed to what adults sitting in Whitehall or town halls think you need. So I have asked my officials to explore ways in which Government can get better at listening to young people and getting them involved when developing policy.

I want to conclude by saying how fitting it was that the Youth Parliament paused this morning to acknowledge the centenary of the first world war. It was a conflict that swept away an entire generation. Many of those who died were not much older than the people sitting on the Benches here today. Among so much grief and heartache, one of the legacies was that after the war all men over 21 were given the vote and it was extended to women for the first time. I was pleased and delighted to see the two MYPs representing for the first time ever the British Forces Overseas Youth Service (Cyprus). It was Shona and Suzie leading the way for Cyprus.

Time and again, previous generations have laid down their lives in the name of democracy, or risked everything to see it improved. Around the world, other countries still strive for the same basic freedoms that we enjoy. Think about the ink-stained fingers of people in Afghanistan and Iraq, putting themselves at risk to exercise their hard-won right to vote. It is a reminder of how precious our democracy is. It is not a default setting; it does not come about by chance. Democracy is something to be respected, cherished and encouraged. It works only if we all play our part. Everything I have seen and heard today suggests to me that the future of our democracy can be strong in your hands.

I will report back to the Prime Minister on today's proceedings, as he requested in his letter that you heard earlier. It was read with such energy and enthusiasm by MYP Eleanor Emberson who, like me, represents Reading. As Minister for Civil Society I will champion the contribution that young people make to society, and I will continue to ensure that your voices are heard in Whitehall and well beyond.

Mr Speaker: Members of the Youth Parliament, on your behalf I want to thank the Minister for his contribution and for all the forethought and perspiration that were devoted to it. I think that it is appreciated by everyone present. Colleagues will have noted that the Minister for Civil Society has been with us since the start of our proceedings and he has, as he referenced in his oration, been keenly taking notes on the contributions, and that was evidenced by the remarks that he made. That studious and attentive approach is what you would want. He has got very important responsibilities resting upon his shoulders. He talked about how he will report back to

the Prime Minister, which I am quite certain he will, and in deriving great satisfaction from the discharge of his duties, he will know that his success will depend on hearing young people and taking young people with him and with the Government. Rob, thank you for your presence and for everything that you have done today.

We are now going to hear some remarks from Tessa Munt, who was elected at the last general election as the Liberal Democrat Member for Wells and who is—I think I can without fear of contradiction say—a daily presence in the Chamber of the House, speaking up for her principles, constituents and party. Tessa, let us hear from you.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): MYPs will not know this, but standing at the Dispatch Box is a huge treat for me because I am not a Government Minister, and you are not normally allowed to stand here—apart from you lot.

Yes, indeed, I have been here for four and a half years, and it is the best job in the world. I will talk to you just a very little bit. This is the sixth time the Youth Parliament has met in the House of Commons Chamber, and it is the fifth time that I have been present—I have been here every year since I was elected. It is one of the most special days of the year.

I wish to mention some of the people whom we must thank today for enabling us to be here, because a lot of work goes into a day such as this, and I will ask you to clap at the end. First, we thank Mr Speaker, who allows us to use the Chamber and who encouraged everybody to come here in the first place. Lurking at the back there are Peter and Ian who help him run his office. They are always present, keeping him on track. The same is true of the wonderful Clerks. I saw this morning three women in the position of Clerk. Forgive me, sir, but it is quite rare for that to happen and it is lovely to see those changes being made throughout the House.

I must also thank Tom O’Leary, head of public engagement and learning for the House of Commons. He oversees Parliament week and this event. There’s Paul Harvey and, of course, Lawrence Ward, who is here. Lawrence is the Serjeant at Arms, and Paul works with him in the Serjeant’s office. They co-ordinate all the departments involved in putting this event together.

There is the British Youth Council, which looks after the Youth Parliament and organises these events. I thank it particularly, on my behalf and that of Team South West, for the regional events that it organises as well. I have been to three of the regional events in the south-west and listened to young people there, so thank you.

Then there’s the Doorkeeper, Robin, who said not to thank him, but I’m going to. I thank Robin and all his team, because they ensure that we are all in the right place and doing the right thing and they guide us very nicely.

There are the police cadets who have been stewarding today. There are the people who prepare *Hansard*, which is the official report of everything that you say in the House of Commons and everything that we say on normal sitting days. They work very hard. Everything is usually online about three hours after it is said, and it is all beautifully corrected and punctuated properly.

There are also the broadcasters and Westminster Sound. They do all the technical stuff. Not quite last and certainly not least are the catering team, who prepared all our lunches—that’s very important.

There is one other group of people—all those amazing people who do all the youth work and support you lot to get here. It is work that they do every single day of the year. It is not just today, although we are enjoying it today.

I would like you to say thank you to all those people.

As has been said, we have had amazing debates today. We have had debates about the living wage, resits of English and maths exams, better work experience and careers advice, mental health services and votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. I would like to remind you that people were listening to the points that you made in today’s debates and in past debates, and changes do happen. I can look back through some of the debates that I have listened to before. There was the debate about equal marriage. A debate on votes at 16 has happened before. There were debates on raising the school leaving age and taking troops out of Afghanistan. All those arguments have been made. Whether the argument made in a debate wins or not, people are listening, and you make changes through everything that you say and everything that you do, so it’s well worth coming here. You are making a difference. I look forward to hearing more from those of you who, having had some feedback from Norman Lamb and from the Minister for Civil Society, are able to impart your comments about mental health and the changes that you would like to see in that respect.

Members of the Youth Parliament, we are terribly fortunate. Your debates are chosen so democratically. Hundreds of thousands of 11 to 18-year-olds have helped you to come to the point today at which you choose the issues that you want to raise. As I said, everyone was listening.

I have enjoyed today. Mr Speaker was right to say that you have made pithy and punchy contributions, but I would like to make another point. Today is slightly different from the average day in the Chamber—you show great respect, which is not always the case here. You listen; we don’t always listen. Sometimes while people are making contributions, there is chatting going on or a bit of heckling or even yelling, which is not good either. It is really nice to see how this Chamber could and should be. Politics is an exchange of ideas. Your points are well made and everyone has something to offer. Several times today people have said that there is nothing in this country that an MYP cannot do. Someone was pleading for the campaign to be pushed to its full potential. I would say, “Yes, and push yourselves to your full potential.”

I wanted to be an MP from the age of 17, when someone came to my school. I just thought, “That’s the job for me.” I did not go to university. I had 30 years at work before I got here. My grandfather said, “You can change the world, child.” I say that to my children, who are 20 and 21. I have said it all the way through their lives. My father said, “Will you stop shouting at the radio, get off your backside, and go and do something about it.” And I did. The other thing he said was, “Don’t get to 70 and think, ‘I wish I could have done something about that. I think I might have been able to change something.’”

When I was young, there were no MYPs. You can change the world. The MP's role is absolutely fantastic; it is about changing people's lives and changing the law. I hope your day in the Youth Parliament has been enjoyable. Someone said that work experience is a bridge. I could not agree more. I hope that the day you have had is a bridge to your taking your political careers further. I look forward to seeing some of you here working with me. I am going to stand again and hope to get here again. If you cannot be here as a Member of Parliament, I hope to see you here as an MYP next year, perhaps for the two days of debate that Mr Speaker referred to. Congratulations and thank you all for a wonderful day.

To finish, I will borrow some lines from Robert Kennedy, which he adapted from a play by George Bernard Shaw:

"Some people see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say, why not?"

Please, live your dreams. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Tessa, thank you for the tributes that you expressed and, as always, for the good grace with which you expressed them. It is hugely appreciated by everyone here.

We are going to hear a vote of thanks. I shall then announce the results of the vote. Finally, I shall offer a few concluding remarks of my own.

Shay Miah (North East): First, I thank the Prime Minister for awarding me the Points of Light award. It is an honour. I dedicate the award to the young people of Hartlepool.

Members of the Youth Parliament, we are here not to represent ourselves, but to represent young people across the country and in our constituencies. Those 876,488 people are the reason why 300 Members of the Youth Parliament have come together today to represent the views of young people—it is a number that is engraved in our hearts. The fourteenth of November 2014 is the date when 876,488 young people's voices were heard in this Chamber. It is a memory and a legacy that will go on for generations. Every one of you should be proud and honoured to have had the opportunity to sit on these extraordinary green Benches, where decisions for the whole country are made. Together, we amplify the voices of young people.

Today, you have offered excellent points of view, improvements, opinions and, most importantly, the feelings of the young people you represent. Every single one of you should go back to your local authority and the young people you represent, knowing that you have done them proud by expressing their views nationally and in this Chamber.

The UK Youth Parliament is run by dedicated, charismatic staff who work exceptionally hard to make it the powerful and respected national organisation for the voice of young people that it is. I am sure that I speak on behalf of everybody involved in youth democracy when I give a massive thank you to the British Youth Council, the youth workers and the local support staff for the tireless hard work they have put in over the past year. As a Member of the Youth Parliament, I am proud to have had the chance to be part of an amazing organisation. There may be 300 Members of the Youth Parliament here today, but let us not forget our fellow

MYPs and deputy MYPs, and all the other young people who are involved in youth democracy across the country, who unfortunately cannot be here, but who have contributed so much to our local campaigns and to making the voice of young people heard. We could not have done it without them.

On behalf of everybody here, I give huge—massive—thanks to the House of Commons staff, who have made us feel most welcome. We thoroughly appreciate your accommodating us. I give special thanks to Robin Fell, Principal Doorkeeper, as this will be his last UKYP session. On behalf of the Youth Parliament, I want to give him a gift of appreciation for his support for the UKYP and for making us feel so welcome.

I would also like to give my sincere thanks to the Members of Parliament who have come to witness the Youth Parliament and who help, support and advise us at a local level. I give a special thank you to the former Foreign Secretary and now Leader of the House, the right hon. William Hague, MP for Richmond, for taking the time to speak to us. His support for the Youth Parliament has been valued and we wish him good luck in the future. I thank Natascha Engel MP, Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, and Rob Wilson MP, Minister for Civil Society, both of whom addressed us today and believe in the UK Youth Parliament. Their continued support has been recognised and inspires us.

I also thank the procedures group members, who have done a remarkable job in organising and delivering regional and national events. Their incredible voluntary commitment makes us proud and helps the Youth Parliament to function. On behalf of everyone here and those at home, I thank them for all their work over the past year.

Each year, one person makes this debate possible and memorable. Without him, this day would not have worked. The Speaker of the House of Commons, the right hon. John Bercow MP—[*Applause.*] Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Youth Parliament, I would like to present you with a token of appreciation for your support over the years. Thank you for chairing what has been a phenomenal debate and for your continued support for the Youth Parliament. I hope that you have gained as much as we have from the event.

Not everyone has had the chance to thank those who have helped in their local areas. I want to give a personal thank you to the Hartlepool sixth form college, the Hartlepool participation team and all the schools involved in Make your Mark for their incredible support, which has led me to gain the highest turnout in the UK. Most importantly, I thank the young people in my constituency for voting. Without them, I would not be making this speech.

Members of the Youth Parliament, I leave you with this. Last year, we heard the voices of almost half a million young people. This year, we heard from 876,488. Next year, let's make it a million. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Shay, thank you on behalf of everyone who you have so generously and graciously thanked.

I have a few words to say in a moment, but before I do, I know you will be keenly anticipating the results of the votes, and we now come to those results. As I indicated, there were two sets of votes. I will deal first with the vote on the one reserved UK-wide issue which

you feel the youth campaign should campaign upon. There was a choice of two in this category. “Votes for 16 and 17-year-olds in all public elections” received 117 votes. “Everyone should be paid at least the living wage” received 156 votes, so that is your campaign choice in this category. I wish you every possible success with it, not merely on your own account, and for the strength and vitality of the UK Youth Parliament, but on behalf of the people whose interests you are championing. That is incredibly important to you and even more important to them.

Secondly, there was the ballot on priority campaigns, where you had to put across the one devolved—that is to say, England-only issue—on which you feel the Youth Parliament should campaign. “Bring back exam resits in English and maths” received 33 votes. “Better work experience and careers advice” received 78 votes. “Mental health services should be improved with our help” received 167 votes. [*Applause.*] Just in case you did not hear the figure in your joy and ecstasy at the outcome: 167 votes. That will mean an enormous amount to the people who are experiencing and living with those challenges. In our own Parliament, colleagues on both sides who have spoken up about the issue, often with reference to their own experiences, will be heartened and fortified by the way in which you are offering leadership on this important issue. I thank you, and I wish you well with your campaigns.

Very properly, tributes have been paid to people who have made our proceedings possible. Tessa did that, as I said a few moments ago, with good grace and style. The Minister for Civil Society, in the course of his contribution, rightly acknowledged the efforts of those who facilitated our event. Of course, Shay, in his fitting winding-up speech, graciously acknowledged all those who, in a team effort, have enabled you to enjoy and experience what you have enjoyed and experienced. I thought there was a special piquancy about his thanks and your gift to the Principal Doorkeeper, Robin Fell, who, for the vast bulk of his adult life, has worked in different capacities—first in the police service and subsequently as a Doorkeeper—here in the House of Commons. He has worked here, throughout my time, consistently and efficiently, with common sense, with good humour, and, above all, with a passion for Parliament and public service. Robin, as you know, I will be sorry when you go, and I know I speak for hundreds, if not thousands, when I express that sorrow and our appreciation. You will be missed. [*Applause.*]

Several references have been made to others who have facilitated you. I think of teachers, parents and youth workers—youth workers are assembled in significant numbers today—whose contribution is precious. I am of course particularly grateful for the thanks expressed to the people in the Speaker’s Office, who daily oil the wheels of parliamentary operations. They expect no thanks or recognition, but certainly deserve it. They are terrifically efficient administrators, and are discreet, wise and competent. Again, they are characterised by the ethos of public service. Peter Barrett, who is on my left, Ian Davis and many others are part of that loop.

The Clerks at the Table have been characteristically industrious and effective. Again, they seek no praise but certainly deserve it. Tessa was right to note the presence of female Clerks at the Table, of whom I wish to see more—it has been a little mission of mine over the past

couple of years to give more of the middle-ranking but rising young Clerks the chance to serve, as we call it, at the Table in the Chamber. For too long, it has tended to be a privileged, male-dominated Table. That is starting to change and there is every good reason for it continuing to change—certainly if I have anything to do with it—in the period ahead.

I am always appreciative—literally, day to day, day after day after day—of the input of the most personable Serjeant at Arms I have known the House of Commons to enjoy, Lawrence Ward. Come on, Lawrence, put your hand in the air! [*Applause.*] You will remember, MYPs, that at the start of the day, in his wonderful and uplifting opening contribution, the Leader of the House, William Hague, said that he had gone to a comprehensive school in Rotherham—Wath-upon-Deane comprehensive, if memory serves me correctly—and nothing had ever got in his way. No barrier had prevented his advance in the political system. He was saying, “Don’t think it can’t be done. Don’t think it’s not for you”, or that “People like me can’t reach these positions.” Well, there was a time when the Serjeant at Arms tended to come from a certain stratum. It was, I have to say, very much a public school-dominated terrain. ’Tis not now so. Lawrence is brilliant at his job. He shoulders very onerous responsibilities in his service to the House. Like me, he is a state school boy, he has a public service ethos, he gets on with people, and he works incredibly hard. He has reached where he has on merit, and nothing has stopped him doing so. The same can go for you. [*Applause.*]

Some of you may have heard me recall—and I should say that today it was only really to demonstrate how much progress has been made—that when first Members of Parliament on both sides of the House of Commons voted, more than five years ago, for you to have the right on a non-sitting Friday to debate the issues of your choice, there were significant numbers of objectors. They were in a minority. They had a right to be heard and they were heard, both in the debate and through their votes in the Division Lobby.

One of the most vociferous of the objectors came up to me a little while after I was elected Speaker because he had heard that I intended to chair your debates. Originally, they were going to be chaired by the senior Deputy Speaker, but when I became Speaker I thought, “No, that’s not right. The Speaker should be here to chair the debates. It will be good for the learning curve of the new Speaker and a mark of respect for you individually and as an organisation.” This senior Member—he is no longer a Member as he has retired from the House—came up to me, stood right next to me and, with his face puce, he said, “Mr Speaker, I gather that you are going to chair the debates of the UK Youth Parliament.” “I am”, I replied. “Let me tell you”, he said, “it will be an absolute and unmitigated disaster.” I said to him, “I do not know what causes you to say that. I do not agree with that view at all, but tell me your reasoning and the basis of your view.” “I know what I am talking about”, he said, “I have been here for 39 years.” I said, “No, I know exactly how long you have been here and I know when you came into the House. My question is what is your argument.”

Eventually—and it took a while because he was in a state of almost uncontrollable rage—he said, “You mark my words, Mr Speaker, sir. I have been here a

great deal longer than you have. If those young people come to this Chamber, chewing gum will be left all over it and at the worst pen knives will be used and damage will be inflicted on these Benches that I love.” I said, “Well, in one respect only, I thank you, and that is for telling me candidly, face to face and straightforwardly what you think, but in every other respect I utterly deprecate what you have said to me, because I believe that is a gross calumny upon the young people who belong to the Youth Parliament and the young people of our country as a whole. I predict to you”, I said to him, “that when those young people come to the annual sitting in November this year”—this was in 2009—“three things. First, they will be privileged and proud to come. Secondly, for the most part they will speak well, and thirdly”—and I said this with a particular insistence—“they will behave a darn sight better than we do.”

Members of the Youth Parliament, although in general terms it is unpopular to say, “I told you so” or “I was right”, I say—not in any tribute to myself but in tribute to you—I was right on all three counts. You are proud and privileged to come, you speak well and you behave much better than we do. [*Applause.*]

I stand by what I have always said—and reference was made to it earlier—about disengagement. I accept, the Minister acknowledged, Natascha knows and other colleagues across the House are aware, that there is a widespread disengagement from the political system, and a large number of young people express a sense of disengagement or alienation. But my feeling is that although young people may even be repelled by the formalities, rigidities and unattractive features of the formal political process, I am absolutely not prepared to accept that you are uninterested in what politics is about. Wherever I go across the country, I ask young people, “Do you care about the job you will get? Are you interested in the sort of home you will occupy? Does it matter that we should have decent health services, including mental health services? Are you bothered about the plight of the 1 billion people around the world who are eking out an existence—no more—on less than \$1 a day?” The answers, without fail, are yes, yes, yes and yes. That is really what politics is about—the resolution of conflicts, the arbitration of conflicting interests and the funding within limited resources of services that cater to the citizens of a country. All those things are things that concern you, as reflected in the speeches that you have made. So I believe that you do care about politics. You might just get a bit fed up with politicians from time to time.

My two favourite events of the year outside the parliamentary system—obviously, I love chairing debates in the House of Commons, otherwise I wouldn’t serve as Speaker—and outside the context of chairing debates by my colleagues are this sitting and my annual visit to

the UK Youth Parliament conference, wherever in the UK it takes place. I find these the most inspiring moments of the year.

The reason why I have always wanted you to be here is, I guess, threefold. First, your views matter and they are as much an integral part of a rounded political process as those of any other segment of the population. Secondly, I think that by coming here you nurture your skills and you improve your self-confidence. I often ask much older audiences, “What would it mean to you if your son or daughter, or grandson or granddaughter had a chance to speak on a non-sitting day from the green Benches of the House of Commons?” and they all, almost to a man and a woman, agree that it would be a great thing.

The third reason why I think it is incredibly important is very simply stated. I have always believed, and I think my colleagues share this view, that if we parliamentarians are to be respected by young people, we must show our respect for young people. Respect is an earned entitlement, not a natural right of ours, and respect is a two-way street. If we want to receive it, we have to show it. That’s why I always make a point of being in the Chair for your proceedings.

I think you are change-makers. In my own small way, I am trying to be a change-maker. That is why I am grateful to my colleagues across the House for supporting me in the decision to establish an education centre which will open by the middle of next year, adjacent to the House of Lords—an education centre which will be state of the art, a cutting-edge facility which will chart the journey to rights and representation, and which will enable us to double the number of young people who can come through Parliament and learn from it, imbibe it, come to appreciate it, feel a desire to contribute to it. That change-making is incredibly important.

You are potential change-makers on a grand scale, whether as local councillors, as parliamentarians, as Members of the European Parliament, or as civil society or pressure group campaigners on causes near and dear to you. I hope you have been fortified and encouraged by your experience here today. Words cannot express how welcome and appreciated you are. For so long as you want to keep coming here, I am quite certain that Parliament will want you to be here. For so long as I remain Speaker, I will always want to chair your proceedings, and for as long as you invite me to your annual general meeting/conference, wherever it is in the UK, I will keep coming, just as I have always done.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Enjoy your journey home; I hope it is safe, have a great weekend, a great campaigning year ahead, and great careers and lives in front of you. Thank you very much indeed. [*Applause.*]

Youth Parliament adjourned at 4.19 pm.

