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THE HOUSE
Parliament’s Magazine

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EXCLUSIVE
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Europe, PMQs, Lords reform, and the coalition’s future
Chartered status helps us to attract and retain the best people because it demonstrates the investment we make in them as well as in the business. It also opens doors to other companies who want to deal with a Chartered organisation as it differentiates us from those insurers with no comparable evidence of their professional status.

Stuart Payne, BA (Hons), ACII, ACILA
Chartered Insurer
Vice President, UK/Ire Underwriting Service Centre
Chubb Insurance Company of Europe SE
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YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT – the subject we just can’t ignore.
Baroness Sharp (p32) admits that we underestimated the impact of the recession on youth unemployment. What to do? Start by focusing apprenticeships on the under-25s, thinks Hilary Steedman (p29). Robert Halfon and Patricia Glass have a robust exchange of views on the subject (p35) without there being a meeting of minds. Maybe we should listen to Kumar Bhattacharyya more (profiled on p44). Long-term investment, focus on productivity and competitiveness. That’s what matters. If we get that right, then unemployment of young and old gets resolved. Every which way, we can’t lose an entire generation.

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The challenge for the coalition to show fresh thinking in this Queen’s Speech is immense, says Paul Waugh – but so are the potential general election rewards.

Like most rock-savvy fortysomethings, David Cameron and Nick Clegg are more than aware of the ‘difficult second album’ syndrome.

After a blaze of glory with their debut, a new band suddenly hits a creative block and struggles to maintain its momentum. Nerves abound as they prepare their latest release.

And as the coalition counts down the days to the end of this marathon first session of Parliament, the prime minister and deputy prime minister are confronting what you could call the ‘difficult second Queen’s Speech’ problem.

Like all box-fresh administrations, the government hit the ground running in 2010 with an eye-catching package of bills. The sheer size and controversy of the welfare reform, legal aid and the NHS bills meant that Her Majesty’s crimson velvet purse was full to bursting with legislative intent.

It’s been a long hard slog since then, and the challenge for the coalition is now to come up with some new tunes for the band. The Loyal Address is expected in May, after a possible reshuffle in the wake of the local elections. Yet work has gone on for months behind the scenes on what should actually go in it.

The cabinet was this week given an update on progress of the coalition committee, and the draft legislative programme. The number of bills is obviously smaller for a shorter session, but some key themes dominate: deficit reduction, social mobility, growth and ‘urgent operational issues’ (such as laws that need to be renewed). It’s unclear whether Tory policy chiefs’ desire for radical supply-side measures will win approval.

One big item in the package is Lords reform. With Tory peers (and even some Lib Dems) reluctant to act as turkeys voting for Christmas, some ministers fear the coalition could be distracted just at the key point in the calendar when it needs to focus on everyday concerns.

But in his interview with The House this week, Nick Clegg is adamant: “I don’t think there’s any question of me or anyone else getting bogged down. You can do more than one thing at once in politics.”

Having started on some of the trickiest reforms first, the DPM is convinced that there is enough time to deliver on a historic Liberal change to the constitution. He also gives his strongest hint yet that David Laws will be at his side to oversee the next phase of policy reform.

Laws is already a regular attendee in the Cabinet Office, but a ministerial job would formalise that informal role. As one of the architects of the Coalition Agreement, it would make sense if he was again involved in implementing what everyone will see as a ‘Coalition 2.0’ for the coming year.

Some cabinet ministers are relaxed about having a slimmer Queen’s Speech this time around. Tories like Sir George Young stress that Parliament need not be a ‘sausage factory’, while the Lib Dems say their ‘big stuff’ is not legislative at all: increasing the state pension, delivering free childcare and increasing the personal allowance.

Still, the Queen’s Speech matters for a sense of momentum, not least for ministers who need primary legislation to pin down and embed change. In some senses, this crucial session is the last chance to get serious laws in place with enough time to make an impact on voters before 2015.

The real problem for the coalition may come after this difficult middle period, especially if the economic bad news continues and it looks like it’s run out of steam. Amid cries of ‘lame duck’, pressure will increase from both parties for a possible early election.

Another age-old rock-related question will then surface: are the band splitting up?
Tuesday 31st: Knight to forget... Fred Goodwin, one-time CEO of RBS, is stripped of his title.

Sunday 29th: RBS CEO Stephen Hester declines his £963,000 bonus.

Monday 30th: David Cameron joins in the photoshoot for the latest EU summit.

Tuesday 31st: The Ministry of Defence announces that HMS Dauntless is to be deployed to the South Atlantic, but insists it is “entirely routine” and not due to rising tensions over the Falkland Islands.

Tuesday 31st: In response to Twitter-based questioning, Michael Gove reveals Moonraker’s Hugo Drax to be his favourite Bond villain.

Monday 30th: Ed Miliband takes a break from making a speech in Glasgow on the Union.

Tuesday 31st: Alistair Darling complains of something “tawdry” about stripping Goodwin’s title.

Wednesday 1st: Work and Pensions minister Chris Grayling sees government win benefits cap vote in Commons.

Tuesday 31st: Hair today... vocational courses like hairdressing are dropped from league tables.
undit after pundit is looking at the terrible Liberal Democrat vote share since the election and predicting the inevitable demise of the party; the current forecast on Electoral Calculus suggests Clegg’s party will be reduced from 57 to just 14 seats at the next election.

Yet Liberal Democrat strategists argue that the party’s overall share of the vote doesn’t matter – and that much as the election is always lost nationally, it can be ‘won’ locally in particular constituencies. It is not so much that the Lib Dems shift their positions to suit the political affiliations of Labour or Conservative-leaning seats (an exaggerated claim of their opponents), more that their style of localised paper-based ‘community campaigning’ is often seen as devoid of politics entirely.

Lord Ashcroft, who has published the most comprehensive study of Lib Dem voters since the election, found that 43 per cent of those who voted for the party in seats they won cast their vote because they ‘liked the candidate in their area’ or thought the party ‘did a good job locally’ (48 per cent in seats they hold against...
Whether they like it or not, the Liberal Democrat brand has developed a national identity. It will need to adapt to and even exploit this fact – simply relying on local factors will not be enough.

Indeed, while 43 per cent of Liberal Democrats in seats they won based their support on the local situation, 45 per cent cited belief in policy, values or what the Liberal Democrats could do on a national level. These groups will need to be identified and wooed in different, individualised ways.

Solutions to this are almost certainly technological and strategic, and it’s clear they’re looking across the pond for inspiration. Liberal Democrat HQ has recently purchased a state-of-the-art national campaign database, provided by the same firm used by the Obama campaign. They would also do well to look at voter modelling and microtargeting technologies used to great effect by the Obama and Romney campaigns. These are able to highlight the likelihood of each voter to support the party, what the basis is for that support, and what the best way is to communicate with them.

@tomwatson I sincerely apologise for the recent tweet. A lesson learned for a young intern. She’s also very sorry. I will deal with the matter offline.

@NadineDorries MP I think the real reason Diane Abbott has left the harmonious cross-party consultation committee is a crude attempt to ‘Divide and Conquer’.

@oakeshottm Cameron’s blood must have an unusually high boiling point! He waves thru Hester’s bonus while RBS breaks its small business lending pledge

@ivanLewis_MP Amazing day c/o @actionaiduk with Ngandali family in Tungutungu, Tanzania. In awe of family’s dignity, ashamed they have so little.

@ChrisPincher Asked PM to confirm he will pursue free trade agreements with emerging African markets. An important area of untapped potential. PM agrees.
EU STATEMENT

Ed Miliband put in a confident performance on Tuesday afternoon in the Commons, as the Labour leader tore into David Cameron following the prime minister’s less-than-grandstanding showing at the previous day’s EU summit.

“With this prime minister it just goes to show – a veto is not for life, it’s just for Christmas!” crowed Mr Miliband, adding a mischievous “calm down dear” as the PM protested his innocence. Behind him, however, Tory MPs looked agitated rather than calm, while Labour MPs were still recovering from a bout of well-coordinated guffawing over Mr Cameron’s boast that he had “vetoed that treaty”.

That, continued Mr Miliband, was a “phantom treaty”, as he lifted a phrase from his brother David, who watched from the bar of the House with an expression inching towards fraternal pride. “There is no treaty,” Mr Cameron insisted in a shrill voice. “I vetoed it – it doesn’t exist!” Cue more Labour hysterics.

Over 70 backbenchers followed, though an outbreak of angry Euroscepticism failed to materialise, with only Mark Reckless (C, Rochester & Strood) pointedly asking the PM to “explain what it is he has vetoed”. Tellingly, however, not to mention irritatingly for Tory backbenchers, Sir Menzies Campbell (LD, NE Fife) praised Cameron’s “re-engagement” with the EU, and Simon Hughes (LD, Bermondsey & Old Southwark) delighted in describing a “much more satisfactory and successful summit than the one in December”.

Labour MPs cheered, but an elephant-sized question remained firmly in the room. Would Ed Miliband have signed the treaty or not?

One by one they leapt up like meerkats to pronounce their support for government plans for a benefit cap.

that the NHS reforms were a “disaster”.

Perhaps inevitably, the moment of glory soon passed. First to ride, unwittingly, to Cameron’s aid, was Tony Blair. Any mention of their former leader’s name, let alone when a Tory prime minister is quoting his political philosophy, leaves Labour MPs suffering from a temporary but debilitating case of rabbit-in-the-headlights syndrome: Eds Miliband and Balls shuffled uncomfortably, while behind them all fell silent.

The Blair mantra is a simple one: “You will always find that there will be objections,” but if you think your policy is right, then “go with it”. In other words, you’re wrong, and I am right – and as the thought rattled through his brain the PM appeared to re-energise before us, as help came from a well-whipped battalion of Tory MPs.

One by one they leapt up like meerkats to pronounce their support for government plans for a benefit cap. David Nuttall (C, Bury N) grumbled about the “something-for-nothing” culture in Britain, while Priti Patel (C, Witham), Nadhim Zahawi (C, Stafford-U-Avon), and Marcus Jones (C, Nuneaton) all contributed well-rehearsed questions on hard-working families. Each mention of the benefit cap saw Mr Miliband – perhaps undecided on the whipping for the welfare reform votes which would follow PMQs – wince as the prime minister’s inner Flashman set out for a savaging.

“What we’ve had from the party opposite is a complete silence,” Mr Cameron began, as the two Eds sat in, well, complete silence. The PM was strutting – or as close to strutting as a man can get while leaning on the Despatch Box.

“Let me give them one more go: Are you with us in the lobbies tonight?” he asked, urging Mr Miliband to “nod” if he agreed. “Absolutely hopeless,” Mr Cameron snapped back after receiving an unblinking response. “One more go, one little nod, nothing,” he went on. A plaintive cry of “what an arrogant man” could be heard from the depths of the Labour benches, but they won’t pick that one up on the news bulletins.

“One more go, one little nod, nothing,” he went on. A plaintive cry of “what an arrogant man” could be heard from the depths of the Labour benches, but they won’t pick that one up on the news bulletins.

Clinical and cruel maybe, but this was bullying at its best. A PMQs of two halves, and for Ed Miliband, the warm glow of 12:19 had long passed.
Despite the popular view that MPs ‘don’t live in the real world’, many of those who were elected in 2010 brought rich and varied experience of the world outside politics to their new roles. I believe that the debates scheduled by the backbench business committee have helped to highlight this.

Many senior backbenchers could already rely on being called early in a debate, ensuring they were heard with respect. But for many new Members, expecting, at most, to play the role of ‘best supporting MP’ in a government, or opposition, set-piece debate, I believe the committee has been empowering. A huge proportion of the 2010 intake of MPs have taken part in backbench debates since their inception. Addressing areas of expertise or special interest, many new Members have been able to make an early mark for themselves but, more significantly, to move policy debates forward.

Take, for example, the high-profile campaign, supported by an e-petition, to improve the financial education of young people. Justin Tomlinson and Andrew Percy set up an APPG inquiry that took eight months of evidence from over 50 different organisations and hundreds of teachers. Their report deserved a timely airing; a successful bid for backbench time ensured that it got one, in the main Chamber.

There have been many other thoughtful debates; such was the topicality of the fish discards debate that an unusually high proportion of landlubbers stayed to listen and participate. Debates on a national review of congenital cardiac services for children and the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy also stick in the mind. All these debates show that a nudge can be as good as a shove in politics, offering, as they do, the chance for Members to speak frankly to ministers outside the confrontational atmosphere of a debate organised by ‘the usual channels’. I hope that some MPs will come back and bid for the time to review the promises made to them in such debates – and that the committee will look favourably on such bids, time permitting (the need for more ring-fenced time has been our consistent cry throughout the session).

Before being elected as our excellent chairman, Natascha Engel, balanced as ever, warned in June 2010 about “the transfer of power from one elite to another” if the proceedings were insufficiently transparent. ‘Dragon’s Den’ has proved a handy way to characterise the style of our weekly meetings, but unlike the ‘Dragons’ we are available to talk bids through beforehand. I understand a great deal more about parliamentary process – and timetabling! – as a result of being on the committee and, like all the members, am happy to share what I have gleaned.

Some of the committee’s most high-profile debates have involved a vote, but I am mindful that the backbench business committee is there to serve backbenchers and we must not get caught up in a drama of our own making. Some of the feedback we have received as part of our review asked us to be clearer about what makes for a successful bid. Topicality matters, but we must not be slavish to it. A proposed debate on assisted dying, for example, would be important whenever it took place.

It has been fascinating to have a ringside seat for this bout of parliamentary reform.

Words: Jane Ellison, Conservative MP for Battersea and member, backbench business committee

On Tuesday at the backbench business committee:

John Baron, Bob Ainsworth and Elfyn Llwyd asked for a debate on a motion calling on the government to rule out the use of force against Iran. Mr Ainsworth said he disagreed with the motion but he believed the issue “ought to be aired on the floor of the House”.

Stephen Mosley, Bill Esterson, Steve Rotherham and Louise Ellman asked for a debate on the circumstances surrounding the death of Hillsborough victim Kevin Williams, which is backed by an ePetition signed by more than 118,000 people. The MPs said the debate could be held in February or March.

Andrea Leadsom, Thomas Docherty, Chris Heaton-Harris and George Eustice asked for a debate on UK regional policy and the distribution of EU structural funds.

Graeme Morris and Steve McCabe asked for a “general debate” on professional, clinical and public opinion on government reforms of the NHS.

Charles Walker and Nikki Morgan asked for a debate on the government’s policies on mental health.

The BBBC has approved a debate on metal theft in the Chamber on February 7. It was requested last week by Chris Kelly, Graham Jones and Robin Walker.

Words: Tony Grew
Andrew Tyrie and his colleagues pulled no punches as Financial Services Authority bosses faced questions.

A bad week for former RBS CEO Fred Goodwin began on Monday, as the Treasury select committee met to pass damning judgment on his time in charge of the bank. However, under just as much pressure was the regulator charged with monitoring the former Sir Fred’s activity.

Hector Sants, chief executive of the Financial Services Authority, described Goodwin as “not fit to run a regulated institution”, though committee chairman Andrew Tyrie (C, Chichester) suggested to FSA chairman Lord Turner that his one-page report on the failure of RBS showed “how cut off the FSA had become”. Lord Turner (above) admitted he had “failed to focus” on the need for a public account of what went wrong. David Ruffley (C, Bury St Edmunds) expressed his “amazement” that there were no serious sanctions against individuals, and asked Mr Sants how incompetence was defined in “the more recent, 500 page, report”. Mr Ruffley went on to say that the regulation was “grotesquely ineffective”.

What is the purpose of the inquiry?
The key word is access. We want to ensure we are doing the right things in terms of the comfort of all the people who come to this House, but there are obvious congestion problems. People who have an appointment with an MP, or are coming to give evidence to a committee, are getting caught up with larger numbers here for educational purposes or tours.

Most of the entrances are below the capacity needed for the number of people we are trying to get into the building. We ought to recognise the different priorities.

Then there is the degree of welcome that they get. We have taken evidence that this place is forbidding. We are also looking at the line of route.

There is genuine interest from the public and we want to improve the income from visitors.

What about a new visitor’s centre?
Naturally a modern Parliament wishes to welcome visitors and the construction of a proper visitors’ centre/education centre is the ultimate question. I think this is something where we should be brave about the cost, because it is not remotely anything being done for the glory of MPs, it is being done to get members of the public into the building in an agreeable way.

It would be logical to build something in Victoria Gardens or an extension in Black Rod’s Garden, and without the extravagance of what has been built on Capitol Hill in Washington DC, which is a supreme example of really cossetting the public coming in.

Then there is income generation from greater access. We believe the parliamentary ‘brand’, if we may say it, is something that is very substantial and solid, and we don’t exploit it to the extent that august places such as Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace do.

It would help to defray the cost of running this Palace, which we get continually lambasted about on the catering and retail side.

I think there is genuine interest from the public and we want to improve the income from visitors.
A round-up of the latest developments on committee corridor

Words: Tony Grew, James Dwyer and Richard Welberg

The latest report from the Health Select Committee starkly highlights the scale of the financial pressure the NHS is under. Costs are rising due to an ageing population, spending growth is flat, inflation increases are not helping, and social care funding is broken in its current form.

Whilst NHS commissioners have managed the current year well, we are already seeing NHS providers of service get into financial difficulty.

If we are to keep the NHS sustainable, we agree with the committee that we need to start by being honest that this will mean fundamentally reorganising they way we deliver care in the best interests of patients.

We don’t want to see NHS services making unplanned cuts in response to crises caused by problems that have festered. Now is the time to explain the situation to the public and patients. Politicians, clinical staff and NHS leaders need to face these big issues together and to ensure that decisions are taken which are understood and supported by the public.

Some local hospital services will need to close or move into larger specialist centres. We also desperately need to strengthen care provided in the community.

This is so we can provide better care to the people who make up the vast majority of patients in today’s health service: older people with various long-term conditions.

We should be moving to a situation where the public define the success of the NHS on the basis of its ability to keep you out of hospital and not the number of beds it has.

I would urge all MPs to take on board the findings of their own committee’s report. MPs must back change where there is a persuasive case that it will deliver higher quality and sustainable services for patients. It is not always right to lead the protest march. At the same time, changes to the way we offer health care will mean little if there is not movement on social care funding. Health and social care are two sides of the same coin.

Much of the committee’s report makes the case for integrating health and social care. This is absolutely right but, both systems have to be funded on a sustainable basis if integration is going to work.

If we can make progress on changing the NHS and finding a solution to social care, I passionately believe that the overall impact can be positive for patients.

What we will need is some pragmatism and realism, along with the politics, if we are to steer the NHS through these incredibly choppy waters.

Mike Farrar is chief executive of the NHS Confederation

Pat McFadden (L, Wolverhampton SE) asked whether the FSA had been “asleep at the wheel”, while Andrea Leadsom (C, S Northamptonshire) questioned whether Mr Sants was “utterly blameless”.

Michael Fallon (C, Sevenoaks) asked why it had taken so long for Mr Sants to meet the chairman of RBS after he became CEO. Mr Sants argued the strain on the regulator had caused problems: “I think you underestimate the stretch that was placed on the organisation, and I made my judgment – which I think was a reasonable one – to place my resources where we had most risk. I can’t be everywhere at once.”

However, his defence seemed to fall on deaf ears, with Mark Garnier (C, Wyre Forest) saying there was a “staggering picture of institutional incompetence at the FSA” in the run up to the crisis.

Education secretary Michael Gove defended the government’s decision to scrap more than 3,100 vocational qualifications from school league tables.

Appearing before MPs at the education select committee on Tuesday, Mr Gove insisted that the changes would “add value overall” to vocational subjects, and provided an “opportunity for balance”. Pressed by committee chair Graham Stuart (C, Beverley and Holderness) to explain why the government had taken the drastic step, Mr Gove said that there were a “range of activities” outside of the league tables that could “encourage and help people to learn.”

He also insisted that the government’s wider education policies were focused on closing the gap between pupils from poor backgrounds and those from “more comfortable ones”, adding that it was unacceptable for schools to “write-off” children who were struggling. He said: “It is unacceptable we should write children off at any age and say they cannot get a C-pass in English or Maths. This government has extended the use of floor standards... and we are talking under-performance earlier. We are accused of having, on the one hand, a strong-arm approach to these schools, and on the other hand a neglectful approach. Our critics cannot maintain intellectual consistency in that regard.”

Labour committee member Alex Cunningham (L, Stockton N) also questioned the value of the Pupil Premium, and asked if there had been any measurement of its impact. Mr Gove admitted that he did “not have the evidence yet”, but stressed that it had been welcomed by the “majority of headteachers”.

Report review: Health Select Committee
Graham Allen rededicates himself to democracy – and early intervention

**WED 25 JAN**
Six months since the PM personally said ‘yes’ to me on an all-party early intervention foundation, yet still no delivery. And no sign of the tender document emerging from the DfE. ‘Enemies of enterprise’, coalition politics, departmental territorialism? Whatever the reason for the delay, babies and children are being denied the benefit of proven early-intervention policies that will enable them to develop.

So today, yet another fruitless meeting with yet another Whitehall official. The PM did mean it, didn’t he? Raising money to match the PM’s promised funding for the foundation is hard work. ‘Kissing frogs’ is the phrase, so off to Goldman Sachs, and to a household name in supermarkets, to pitch. A Burns Night supper with long suffering Mrs Allen restores my balance.

**THU 26 JAN**
MPs should be subject to recall, says that formidable legal company of Carswell and Goldsmith, “yes, but…” replies standards defender, Baron. My stakhanovite political and constitutional reform select committee, egged on not least by comrades Chope, Turner and Laing, also agrees to inquire into lobbying, publish a report into funding of political parties, throw in the ongoing work for and against a written constitution… soon we will have to forgo our afternoon naps!

**FRI 27 JAN**
Back to the patch: does being born in the constituency, as I am, make you more connected, or unable to see the wood for the trees? On to Home Start, whose volunteers keep so many families together on my local estates, then on to Venture for Life to see alternative education for 16 year-olds excluded from school. Lack of early intervention means wasting young lives – a personal tragedy for them, and a massive avoidable cost to taxpayers.

**SAT 28 JAN–SUN 29 JAN**
Between constituency duties and beating back the tsunami of emails, I find time to write a letter to George Young to ask what is happening to the plan to let Parliament, not government, set our own agenda through a House business committee over the next year. If it slips, it will show how rapidly the coalition has been incorporated into the warm embrace of the Establishment. Find time on Sunday to raise a glass to the birthday of Britain’s finest political reformer, Thomas Paine. All should be able to draw strength from his adage: ‘Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil.’

**MON 30 JAN**
In the morning, I host with the LGA the start of the campaign for independent local government, commonplace in western democracies but a threat to the constipated centralists of the UK. Whitehall should stop treating England, in particular, as the last country in the Empire and let our talented localities get on with their own affairs. Just time to draft a response to the misquoted comments of my friend and colleague David Lammy MP, on using violence on children. Doing the early intervention stuff has shown me that the problems of dysfunction can often be beaten into children, but they can never be beaten out of them.

Finally, on to give evidence to the Lords reform committee. I put to them the vegetarian option; it allows the Lords turkeys to vote for Christmas. In other words they should be left alone and an elected element added to the existing chamber, then let evolution and nature take its course. Getting the elected element is the key achievement which democrats should prioritise. Merry Christmas to all.

**TUE 31 JAN**
I welcome the latest new Hansard intern from the USA to the office. They are always staggered that we have no checks and balances on government, no real separation of powers between Parliament and Executive, and are subjects with no constitution in our back pockets to make us citizens. My US interns are a living reminder – if I need one – that not a week should go by without us trying to improve our democracy.
Now in their ninth year, the Dods Charity Champion Awards portray the positive social contribution made by politics.

The awards provide a platform for the voluntary sector to pay tribute to parliamentarians. They recognise a dedication to promoting charitable causes and campaigns in Parliament, to constituents and across the country.

In addition, the awards help charities to get their voices heard in the political arena and to promote their special contribution to improving places and lives.

In the Awards for 2012 the categories will be as follows:

- Animal Welfare Champion
- Health Champion
- Environment Champion
- Children’s Champion
- Society Champion
- Outstanding Achievement Award
- Local Charity of the Year
- National Charity of the Year

Nominations open online on Monday 13th February
www.charitychampionawards.com

For further information on the upcoming awards please contact Lizzie Roscoe on 020 7593 5670 or lizzie.roscoe@dods.co.uk
**CRUNCH VOTE**

**Health & Social Care Bill**

*The return of the Health Bill to the House of Lords for the report stage on Wednesday February 8th is eagerly awaited. Concerns about the Secretary of State’s (SOS) responsibility and accountability for promoting a comprehensive Health Service, outlined in Clause 1, threatened to derail the bill in the early stages of its passage.*

Defining the role of the SOS was critical to the debate, as the Health Act 2006 required him or her to ‘provide or secure the provision of services according to this act’. In reality the SOS has not provided a service directly since 1989, and delegates responsibility to others to do so. There was also the suspicion, much reported in the media, of a hidden agenda, to privatise the Health Service. In order to defuse the situation Earl Howe, the health minister, wisely referred Clause 1 and Clause 4 (a duty to promote autonomy) to a smaller committee with representation from the constitution committee and some legal peers to agree the way forward. It appears that the matter has been resolved and an amendment which confirms that ‘the secretary of state retains ministerial responsibility to Parliament for the provision of the Health Service in England’ will be accepted.

Amendments relating to the SOS’ duty to promote research were largely accepted by government and will cover all the bodies delivering health care including clinical commissioning groups and public health. The SOS’ duty as to education and training is a welcome addition to the face of the bill, and I expect support for amendments for providers of healthcare to co-operate with the SOS in the discharge of his duty.

Anxieties persist about the integration of clinical and social services, especially in the care of children, the elderly and disabled. Indemnity assurance for professional employees of private providers of NHS services is also important, as is the role of competition in the new NHS. While there is much support for the transfer of public health services to local authorities, the statutory regulation of those professionals without medical or dental qualifications, like the future training and regulation of healthcare assistants, will undoubtedly be debated, as will the essential requirement that public health doctors and dentists must have honorary contracts with the NHS.

Plainly, much is yet to be done before the bill ultimately emerges from the Upper House and returns to the Commons.

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**Lord Walton of Detchant**
Former neurologist and Crossbench peer

Like many doctors, I felt that the original bill was seriously defective and potentially harmful to the future of the NHS. Many of my concerns were fully ventilated in committee in the Lords, taking note of the helpful reports of the Future Forum, and amendments were tabled and debated. Happily too, a flurry of constructive seminars were held with the minister, Earl Howe. On the basis of assurances given, we eagerly anticipate the government amendments, to be tabled on Report.

First, it seems that concerns expressed about the responsibility of the secretary of state will be clarified, following upon a report of the Lords constitution committee. We also expect major amendments on the education and training of healthcare professionals. The NHS has a statutory responsibility to provide facilities for the undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational training of such individuals.

Health Education England must enshrine this responsibility, in collaboration with universities and other higher educational establishments and regulatory authorities. The continuing role and responsibility of the postgraduate deans, of the sub-national clinical senates and of the National Commissioning Board for highly specialised services, remains to be clarified, as does the duty of foundation trusts and ‘any qualified provider’ (hopefully confirmed by Monitor), for education and training.

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**Lord Ribeiro**
Conservative peer and former president of the Royal College of Surgeons

The independence of the chairman of the Health Education England, the Health Research Authority and Public Health England. The independence of the chairman of the Public Health England is the subject of an amendment, but given the SOS’ clear intention to take overall responsibility for public health, one suspects he would wish to have a say in who is appointed.

Areas where disagreements can be expected, relate to Part 3 of the bill and the role of Monitor and the impact of competition laws on NHS providers.

There will doubtless be many other amendments but I believe the way the House of Lords has dealt with the responsibility and accountability of the SOS with clarity and common sense bodes well for the future passage of the bill.
Next week the Lords turn their attention again to the Health and Social Care Bill. Using the silky political skills of the Earl Howe, the government will hope to secure a ping-pong-free passage for the Lansley legislative juggernaut. The respite since committee stage has been used for framing concessions that do little damage to the basic architecture of the bill, but soothe the concerns of peers. Despite BMA and medical Royal Colleges huffing and puffing and Labour’s ‘Drop the Bill’ campaign, the reform battlebus is too far down the road.

Peace should break out on the contentious issue of the health secretary’s statutory duty of ultimate responsibility for the NHS. The Lords’ constitution committee and Parliamentary Counsel used their legal skills to come up with some new wording that makes it clear that the health secretary cannot shuffle off his responsibilities for the NHS to an unelected quango. There will no doubt be much discussion about the merits of particular forms of words but for some, much of this will seem akin to counting angels on the head of a pin.

During the prime minister’s earlier pause, much of the sting was taken out of Lib Dem opposition to the bill by the Future Forum’s report, especially the emphasis given to improving integration of health and social care. Nobody can be against integration, which the public wants and which Stephen Dorrell and others have said could prove a panacea for some of the NHS’s financial problems. Their lordships will probably have another canter round the integration course and try to sharpen up the bill’s drafting on this issue. There may also be an attempt to make the bill live up to its title, which includes ‘social care’ in case the government gets cold feet about legislation on social care in the next parliamentary session.

Throughout this bill’s parliamentary passage much heat has been generated by the government’s allegedly cunning plan to open up the NHS to the dark forces of the private sector and competition red in tooth and claw. Some private sector advances are being made in diagnostics, radiology, pathology and healthcare at home but this would have happened without the bill. We can expect more rhetoric on the evils of competition and the bill’s proposals for raising the private patient income cap, but there are unlikely to be significant amendments, and there is little sign that the private sector is salivating at their prospects, given the constraints placed on the regulator to pursue competition.

There are likely to be government concessions on at least public health, NHS research, patient involvement and education and training. Some peers will continue to be annoyed by the plethora of new bodies and their governance and accountability; the tortuous bureaucratic layers and costs of the new NHS architecture; and the potential conflicts of interests of GPs as commissioners and providers of services.

The Lords’ scrutiny of this bill has exposed many legitimate concerns about how this legislation will work in practice, and its relevance to the financial challenges the NHS faces – £20bn of savings by 2015. Fresh impetus will have been given to pursuing these concerns by the health select committee’s recent critical report. Nevertheless, the government will get its bill through. Whether the NHS needs it or deserves it, we shall have to wait and see. 

February 8th: Health and Social Care Bill, House of Lords, report stage

The parliamentary timetable is rarely kind. After bruising weeks spent trying to make progress on its bills to reform both the welfare system and legal aid, the government will now hold its breath as the vast Health and Social Care Bill lumbers back into the House of Lords.

Next Wednesday, February 8th, sees peers assemble for the report stage of one of the most controversial pieces of legislation embarked upon by the coalition government. Already we’ve seen that dramatic pause in proceedings, the listening exercise, calls for health secretary Andrew Lansley to be culled from the cabinet, and Liberal Democrat heel-digging, not to mention an ever-growing literature of critiques from health professionals and medical experts. And yet the prime minister, in public at least, remains wedded to Lansley’s vision, while Lansley himself remains firmly in post.

Over in the Upper House, the impressive Earl Howe takes charge for the government, manfully refusing to let himself be overwhelmed by an daunting cast list of medically well-versed peers. Amongst those taking to their feet to demand changes to the bill have been Lord Ribeiro, the former president of the Royal College of Surgeons (see left), Baroness Williams, fertility pioneer Lord Winston, and the crossbench pairing of Lords Owen and Hennessy, who attempted to force through a fatal delay on the bill’s progress.

It survived, but questions remain over the role of the secretary of state in the reformed NHS, training, competition, and the integration of clinical and social services. It is going to be a busy time for Earl Howe; Andrew Lansley will be watching nervously.
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Policy Review

Housing

Housing minister Grant Shapps has been busy this week. In a speech on Wednesday, he announced details of the end of the “tax on tenants”, also known as the Housing Revenue Account. This rather Byzantine system will be replaced by one which allows councils to keep the rents from their housing stock, rather than surrendering them to the Treasury. He also promised that housing would take “centre stage” in the country’s economic recovery. Meanwhile his boss Eric Pickles accused Labour councils of pursuing a policy that would see council tax bills rise for those living alone. “There is clearly a well-orchestrated campaign being run by the Labour Party to target the elderly, single mothers and the most vulnerable.” CLG parliamentary under-secretary Andrew Stunell also unveiled changes to building regulations which will force landlords to take up the government’s Green Deal programme of energy efficiency improvements to homes.

Education

The government announced this week that it was taking more than 3,100 vocational subjects off GCSE league tables, in a move Michael Gove said would give them “more value” in the long run and provide “an opportunity for balance”. Announcing the changes, the education secretary said that the system had been “devalued by attempts to pretend that all qualifications are intrinsically the same”. Figures released by UCAS showed that applications had fallen by 8.7 per cent, a drop many attributed to the increase in tuition fees. David Willetts, the universities minister, insisted that school-leaver applications from the most disadvantaged areas had not been hit by the fees hike, adding there had only been a decline in this area of two per cent. Liberal Democrat Simon Hughes said that the figures showed young people had not been put off applying to university, and that the “serious effort” put in by the government had ensured that “each young person and their parents know all the facts about funding higher education”.

Communities

A Private Member’s Bill that seeks to open up public services to more charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises has passed its second reading in the House of Lords. Chris White, Conservative MP for Warwick and Leamington, introduced the Public Services (Social Value) Bill, while Lord Newby sponsored the bill in the Upper House.

In an article for PoliticsHome, Mr White wrote: “My bill proposes a change to the way that we commission public services. While it is more important than ever to consider value for money in the public sector, I want public bodies and local authorities to use the wider concept of value – one that includes the additional social, environmental and economic benefits that may be added to a local community over and above the specific service being commissioned.”

Lord Wallace of Saltaire told the Lords on Friday that the bill ensures that commissioners consider the full impact of services on the people they serve, and will enable them to “maximise the social, environmental and economic impact of public money”.

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**TREASURY**

After Labour announced it was going to force a Commons vote on the issue of Stephen Hester’s bonus, the RBS chief finally caved in and declined the £1m lump sum. Chancellor George Osborne said the decision was “sensible and welcome”, while shadow business secretary Chuka Umunna said RBS workers were effectively from the “public sector”.

The City’s own MP, Tory Mark Field, said Hester had been a victim of “lynch-mob mentality”. The shredding of Fred Goodwin’s title was announced on Tuesday, described by a committee of senior civil servants as an “exceptional case”. Financial secretary to the Treasury Mark Hoban addressed a Euromoney conference, where he said the UK has been, and will continue to be, at the “vanguard of regulatory reform”.

**WELFARE**

The row over the Welfare Reform Bill came to a head yesterday in the House of Commons, when MPs voted to overturn a series of amendments brought by peers. MPs voted by 324 to 265 in favour of overturning an amendment which would have ensured severely disabled children continued to receive contributory employment and support allowance.

They then voted 332 to 266 on a motion which called for the 12-month time limit on ESA claims to be scrapped, and 328 to 265 on amendment 18, calling for cancer patients still being treated to continue to receive ESA. They also defeated the Lords amendment on the benefit cap, 334 to 251.

The government confirmed it would apply for financial privilege to force through these changes, preventing the Lords rejecting the Commons votes. Labour’s Liam Byrne attacked the plans, saying it would prevent a debate on an amendment tabled by his party calling for regional variations in the cap. He called for an independent commission to decide regional benefit cap rates, saying: “We propose an independent commission to set the level of the cap... when it is left to politicians, they make a pig’s ear of it.” After the vote, Mr Byrne said Labour was “looking at how we can get this policy undone and how we can get a proper vote” on its amendment. He said the party’s lawyers were in discussion about the use of financial privilege.

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**TRANSPORT**

Government plans to make the Civil Aviation Authority responsible for air security cleared their first Commons hurdle this week, as MPs debated the Civil Aviation Bill. Ministers believe that devolving powers from the Department for Transport to the industry regulator would help improve passengers’ experiences at airports and on board planes. Aviation minister Theresa Villiers was down to present the second reading of the bill, but was unable to do so following an incident on her bike. In her absence, transport secretary Justine Greening told MPs she was watching the debate on BBC Parliament from her hospital bed, after breaking her collar bone. Greening added: “I am sure she is following matters from afar.”

For Labour, shadow transport minister Jim Fitzpatrick said the bill was to be welcomed but questions remained about security at airports. He called for measures to ensure consumers’ rights, especially during bad weather, while shadow transport secretary Maria Eagle called for the Office of Fair Trading to examine the takeover of ailing airline BMI by the owners of British Airways.
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The APPG on Youth Affairs is supported by a partnership between YMCA England, the British Youth Council and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services. It meets around three times a year and is currently co-chaired by Stewart Jackson MP, Stella Creasy MP and Simon Hughes MP.

If you like to join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs or find out more information please contact Jason Stacey at YMCA England on jason.stacey@england.ymca.org.uk.
Nick Clegg has finally sorted his left-right problem. More than 18 months into the coalition, the deputy prime minister has shrugged off the conflicting counsel from his team of experts on the vexed issue that's been bugging him since his first week in office: which way to look in PMQs.

"You would not believe the contradictory advice that I get. 'You should sit here, you should sit there. You should look up to the right, you should look to the left'," Clegg says.

"I have given up trying to work out what people expect me to do. So if I smile, some people say: 'You shouldn’t smile – you look as if you’re enjoying yourself.' If I grimace they say 'You look terribly sad and unhappy.' So then I try and sort of not smile, but smile. So I have basically decided to ignore all the advice and just sit and listen. It’s only half an hour a week."

PMQs is the one time in the parliamentary timetable when the DPM has to be literally mute, a silent presence on the front bench as David Cameron and Ed Miliband take lumps out of each other every Wednesday.

But as he holds forth in his large suite of offices overlooking Horseguards, the Liberal Democrat leader is clearly keen to be heard loud and clear, both inside and outside government.

And on his political left-right problem - looking like a one-man 'squeezed middle' in the overall debate – Clegg sticks firmly, resolutely to his line that his party's great prize of this Parliament is to combine its centre-ground roots with the hard-won credibility of being in office.

The Lib Dems are punching above their weight on Europe (as evidenced by the more 'constructive' approach by the PM this week), agitating for tougher lines on bonuses, and even recently trying to pre-empt the chancellor’s Budget on lower taxes for the lower-earners.

For Clegg, the differences of emphasis are now just part of the 'rhythm' of coalition.

"You should never look at the way coalition parties relate to each other, or indeed how the two kind of party leaders are seen alongside each other, in a snapshot way," he says. "You are always going to get a rhythm to this. It was absolutely right..."
“You should never look at the way coalition parties relate to each other in a snapshot way.”
The legacy of the Brigade of Gurkhas can be traced back as far as 1815, although the legitimate and official recruitment of Nepalis as Gurkha soldiers began in 1885 – a proposition that Nepal had resisted since 1816. The extraordinary levels of bravery, combating ability and serene discipline of the Gurkhas during the Anglo-Nepali War (1812-1815) were underlying reasons behind the proposed project.

Following the recruitment, the Brigade has since been actively involved, on behalf of the British people and the British crown, in major battles and conflicts with hearts of courage and optimum loyalty. The Gurkhas, being an integral part of the British forces, were fully engaged during the World Wars under British Command.

In the post war era, the Brigade undertook daring missions around the globe to secure the interests of the British Crown. From the jungles of Malaya and Borneo to the deserts of the Middle East; from the mountains of Afghanistan to the islands of the Falklands; and from European conflicts to African wars, the Gurkha have been unmatched. They continue to remain in the forefront in Afghanistan today with many lives sacrificed and gallantry awards mark their bravery.

Since their recruitment, the Gurkha soldiers on the home front had to tolerate unequal service provisions. However, with the gallant support of the great people of the UK, the movement for a fairer deal materialized in 2004. The movement manifested in the creation of the British Gurkha Welfare Society (BGWS) that functions as the nucleus for social welfare of the community in the UK and Nepal. Being the largest organization among the Nepalis living in the UK, it reaches out to the wider Nepali community as well as providing its services to the current and retired Gurkha soldiers. Our goal and mission objectives are open and clear – to aspire for civil, political and social integration.

The British Gurkha Welfare Society continues to strive for equal pensions a sensitive and long over due issue which remains the last hurdle to close the Gurkha Justice Campaign.

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for David Cameron and I to really pull the stops out at the beginning to show that this was a positive, workable arrangement. In the run-up to the general election, you may remember, the tabloids were screaming, saying that if there was a hung Parliament locusts would descend from the sky and the sun would be blotted out, you know… so we needed for those first few months to show the most important thing of all, which is this is a government that works, and actually works rather well.

“Of course, after that phase you then get [that] we’re different parties, we do have different instincts, we do have different values. I just think we are quite relaxed in government that we have our differences – sometimes they are played out in private, sometimes they are played out in public.

“But I personally think the country is quite relaxed about it as well. They kind of get that, just because we sit next to each other in the House of Commons on the government benches, [that] does not mean that we are identical. Far from it.”

Yet with the polls putting them in a poor third, not everyone in his party is convinced that the Lib Dems aren’t being made to look irrelevant, with Lord Steel recently telling this magazine that the main ‘wins’ by his party had been mere ‘details’ on legislative changes. Clegg gently rejects the analysis of his party’s first leader, and lists some ‘big, set-piece reforms… which are Lib Dem to their core’:

“New, never-done-before entitlements for two-year-olds – something I personally insisted on in government; Vince’s massive expansions of apprenticeships on a scale this country hasn’t seen in a generation – those are the big things. I think keeping more money that you earn, in your pocket, matters. I think having more money for kids at school who come from disadvantaged backgrounds really kind of matters. Those are things… they don’t play out, I agree, in the very, very sometimes mind numbingly detailed undergrowth of legislative battles in the House of Lords or the House of Commons, but they are increasingly going to make a difference to people’s lives.”

Activity in that undergrowth of the House of Lords is intriguing, however, with the government’s progress frequently stalled with the help of sceptical Liberal Democrat peers. Are their rebellions in any way licensed?

“No, no, it’s not licensed. I think it’s the nature of the kind of legislation we are introducing. When you are touching things as emotive as the NHS, what support you give to vulnerable people in society, what kind of aid you give to people when they want use the law to defend themselves, these go right to the core of what politicians care about – and in particular, what Lib Dem politicians care about.”

And with Tory peers reportedly unimpressed with their lordly coalition colleagues, Clegg pleads understanding.

“Let’s be blunt: I am asking, day in, day out, Liberal Democrat peers to vote on things that they wouldn’t do in a month of Sundays if it was a Liberal Democrat government. So I don’t think people should judge the Lib Dem peers too harshly. I think they should be judged on what is finally decided. So, for instance, on the health bill, frankly I am incredibly grateful that people like Shirley Williams dug her heels in on the health benefit cap.”

“I am asking Lib Dem peers to vote on things they wouldn’t do in a month of Sundays”

Clegg on... the House of Lords

“I don’t think the vast majority of people think about the House of Lords at all. I don’t think it impinges on their daily life at all. When it does, like it did this week [on the benefit cap], how can I put this politely? I suspect many people will think: ‘I am not sure this is a chamber in real touch with my everyday concerns.’”
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bill because it’s a whole lot better than it would have been otherwise, a whole lot better. On this latest one this last week [welfare reform], I think you will find that the concern they expressed about… the transition with which, the manner with which you implement the [benefit] cap, were totally legitimate concerns.”

Notwithstanding his gratitude for the likes of Shirley Williams, Clegg’s zeal for Lords reform remains sharp, despite claims that constitutional tinkering could distract the coalition. ‘I don’t think there’s any question of me or anyone else getting bogged down. You can do more than one thing at once in politics. As it happens I care much more about the pupil premium and a fairer tax system than I do about House of Lords reform, considerably more. I have written more books about it, I have put it on the front page of our manifesto. “But I just think that… there’s always an excuse not to finish a job of political reform. And when people say we are rushing, I’ve just got to say ‘How long are we going to take?’ This debate has been going on for 100 years.”

On another long-avoided reform, party funding, Clegg says he hopes to make an announcement ‘soon’. “I’m certainly not backing off from it, I just think the system stinks and it’s going to blow up in our face as a political class again, and we’ve got to try and do something about it, even if we can’t do it the whole way that Christopher Kelly and his colleagues recommended.”

One hot topic the DPM is keen to avoid, however, is Chris Huhne’s speeding fines affair. How personally let down would he feel if the energy secretary was charged? “I’ve no idea what the CPS is going to do. Chris has no idea. I’ve known Chris for how many years? Chris was one of the only Liberal Democrats at my wedding. Chris and I go back a long way. I keep reading that we are great rivals. Yeah, we were rivals [but] actually I’ve known him as long as I’ve known almost anybody in politics.”

But will he be damaged too if charges are laid? “I don’t have a crystal ball. The CPS, I don’t know how the CPS works, seems to be taking its time to decide what it wants to do. I can only tell you what I know: which is that Chris says that he didn’t do anything wrong.”

Speaking of possible ministerial reshuffles, would he bring back David Laws at non-cabinet level if needed? ‘I’m not wildly hierarchical and David certainly isn’t. It’s one of the many things that I like so much about David, he’s a sort of an unusual combination of being a politician but actually quite a modest character, which you don’t find very often in politics. David is not after status. What I would like to see David do is to be close to the centre of power in one shape or form with, ideally, quite a broad view of government policy, because I think he’s got an ability to see the connections between policies – which is quite unusual.”

Clegg is equally bold about his foreign policy priorities. Recently, he nudged the coalition towards what seemed a more pro-Palestinian stance in the Middle East, declaring that Israel was ‘doing immense damage’ to peace with its West Bank settlements. Iran is, of course, the other big issue in the Foreign Office in-tray. Does he worry that there will be a pre-emptive strike by Israel against Iran?

“Of course I worry that there will be a military conflict and that certain countries might seek to take matters into their...
own hands. That’s why we have been very much at the forefront of demonstrating to the world that a) there’s a big problem – Iran appears to want to illegally or illicitly arm itself with a nuclear weapon – and secondly, there are very tough things we can do which are not military steps in order to place pressure on Iran.”

On more domestic matters, Clegg is just as firm in asserting the Lib Dem approach to taxation, with married tax breaks very low down his list. When asked recently, Downing Street sources stressed that the Tory policy was ‘absolutely safe and unchanged’. What does he think of that?

“I think the Coalition Agreement is very clear that the precedence on tax cuts is the [personal] allowance and we haven’t come anywhere near to delivering what we set out we would do. So there’s a very clear chronology to which tax cuts are most important.”

It’s a question of tone, but the difference is clear. As it happens, another area where Clegg and Cameron are similar but not identical is in their battle against the forty-something waistline bulge. While the PM goes running, Clegg gets up at the ‘ungodly hour of six in the morning’ to hit the rowing machine in his local gym. He also still regularly uses his rowing machine in the Cabinet Office. With a hint of competitive dad syndrome, he says “I still use it regularly, thus” – pointing to a waist that seems trimmer than his prime minister’s. (Sadly, he kills off one the Whitehall urban myth that he sweats and gives orders to staff at the same time.

“I’ve never had a meeting on the rowing machine,” he smiles).

Still, the DPM is not keen on one particularly ambitious form of differentiation currently being punted by some Lib Dems: the idea of their ministers pulling out of the coalition six months before the 2015 general election, while still supporting the government in confidence votes. The plan is seen by some as a way of helping boost both parties ahead of polling day. Clegg is robust: “I don’t think we should play silly buggers with the country. We’ve said that we are going to govern for five years. We should govern for five years. I think endless faffing about what we might do in this or that month, I think it would be completely lost on people.”

The message is clear: this coalition has to go the distance, even if its motto turns out to be ‘different strokes for different folks’. Cameron may run and Clegg may row, but they both have to pull in the same direction – no matter which way the DPM looks in PMQs.

“I don’t think we should play silly buggers with the country”
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Bucks New University and HP have announced an innovative work-based Foundation Degree in IT Services Management to drive new careers in technology. The course is aimed at students wanting to remain in the workforce at the same time as developing their IT skills and improving their career prospects, and admissions begin this month.

The new two-year, work-based qualification will be taught through flexible learning both at Bucks New University in High Wycombe and at HP Bracknell.

The course has been designed for IT professionals who are seeking opportunities for learning and development in their careers, or anyone wishing to facilitate a career change. It is part-time and based around three important themes: Personal and Professional Development; Technology; and Business.

Dr Kevin Maher, Principal Lecturer, New Media & Technologies at Bucks, explains: “People working in IT services management are concerned with the effective management of IT systems for providing quality services to clients. Developed in partnership with HP, this new and innovative course, thought to be the first of its kind, provides students with the opportunities and insights that will ensure they develop the technical and business skills to help them secure long-term employment.”

The course will be delivered via concentrated blocks of teaching, supported by online and distance learning and assessment.

“HP is committed to working closely with universities in the UK to develop the vital technology skills we believe the nation needs to secure long-term growth and prosperity”, commented Nick Wilson, vice president and managing director of HP in UK and Ireland. “This new course will provide students with the skills to unlock the potential that technology offers enterprises and government bodies.”

Prof Chris Kemp, Pro Vice Chancellor at Bucks New University, said: “We are very pleased to announce the launch of this new Foundation Degree. To have the support of HP as a leading technology provider is excellent and will help to ensure that the course remains at the forefront of the industry going forward. As the course is delivered part-time and by flexible learning, the opportunities to study are broad.”

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Since the Coalition Agreement was signed in the aftermath of the 2010 election, how closely have ministers adhered to its pledges in key policy areas? This week we ask three experts to scrutinise progress on its plans for:

**apprenticeships and youth unemployment**

*Since 2009, young people have been progressively ‘crowded out’ of apprenticeship by older apprentices, usually already in employment***

**Dr Hilary Steedman**
Research associate, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics

Section 31 of the Coalition Agreement commits the government to ‘seek[ing] ways to support the creation of apprenticeships, internships, work pairings, and college and workplace training places as part of our wider programme to get Britain working’.

The most high-profile policy outcome of this commitment is the increase in the number of individuals starting apprenticeships in 2011. In this period there were close to 500,000 apprentice ‘starts’ as they are called – the highest number since the current data series began in 2000.

This was not, however, the only record broken on the coalition’s watch. Youth unemployment hitting one million young people was also a BBC headline late in 2011. So how many young people were helped into employment and training by the government’s record achievement in boosting apprenticeship starts?

In fact, in 2011, there were fewer young people under 25 starting an apprenticeship – 267,000 – than started an apprenticeship or other government-funded training for young people in 2004, when the number was 280,000. In 2011, 40 per cent of those starting an apprenticeship were over 25; of these, more than a third were aged 35 and over.

"Since 2009, young people have been progressively ‘crowded out’ of apprenticeship by older apprentices, usually already in employment"

Since 2009, young people have been progressively ‘crowded out’ of apprenticeship by older apprentices, usually already in employment, whose employers benefit from government-funded apprenticeship training programmes.

Some commentators, notably the Economist, have welcomed the emphasis on training older employees,
education. They are also right in trying to reposition Level 2 apprenticeships as the first stage in what should be a predominantly Level 3 programme.

The creation of the Technician Council in July 2010, the attendant revitalisation of terms such as technical education, and the valuing of craftsmanship, help send strong messages to the general public that attention is being paid to the ‘squeezed middle’ of our education and training system.

The coalition needs to accept the fact, however, that not enough British employers have themselves experienced good quality training and technical education and that, as a result, their approach to workforce development continues to be inadequate.

To date, however, there is little sign of real change. The starkest indication of that lies in the continued rush to expand apprenticeship numbers, but without improving the quality. Although Britain has some world-class apprenticeship provision, our international reputation is for the increasing misuse of the term.

The coalition remains fixated with achieving its self-imposed targets which bear no relationship to employer demand or the growth areas of the economy. This means especially since all must now work longer and perhaps change occupation more frequently than in the past. This view ignores the unique role played by apprenticeship in providing work experience and skills which smooth the transition to work for young people, who inevitably lack both skills and experience.

Older workers do not lack work experience and are more likely to have other ways of financing their own retraining than young people.

Older apprentices (over 25) are the exception rather than the rule in other European countries. In Switzerland and Austria most apprentices are aged 16-18, while in Germany and France roughly half are under 19 and the remainder under 25. Only Australia has a larger number of apprentices over 25 than England, and it can be argued that this can be justified by the skill and retraining needs of a country with large inward migration.

The government should put the brake on apprenticeships for the over-25s and ensure that employers have the incentives they need to provide work and skills for young people.
Better Value, Better Services, Better Outcomes:
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subsidising employers to convert existing employees into ‘apprentices’, allowing induction-type training lasting a few weeks to count as apprenticeship, and taking a minimalist approach to the content of training, including restricting off-the-job opportunities in colleges which develop deeper occupational knowledge and expertise.

“Although Britain has some world-class apprenticeship provision, our international reputation is for the increasing misuse of the term”

As other countries continue to demonstrate, and as we know from our own history, high-quality apprenticeships, and other forms of work-based training, sit at the heart of dynamic regional skills systems because they are a key vehicle for connecting employers with schools, further and higher education, and other stakeholders such as local authorities. These relationships were highlighted in the Sharp Commission’s 2011 report on ‘Colleges in their Communities’. We ignore the importance of these relationships at our peril.

The coalition government promised on the one hand to create more apprenticeships, internships, work placements and training places, and on the other to foster links between universities, colleges and industry.

How far have we delivered? Central to developments has been the re-direction of Labour’s £1.5bn Train to Gain budget into apprenticeship places for both young people and adults. Research suggests that for every £1 invested in apprenticeships, the wider economy gains £40 – so much is gained and the record is good. Between September 2010 and September 2011 442,700 signed up for apprenticeships compared with some 279,000 for the previous year.

There have inevitably been some glitches – the well-publicised Asda apprenticeships completed by existing employees within six weeks, for example. But that loophole was rapidly closed – in future all apprenticeships will have to last for a minimum of 12 months – and generally the programme has gone from strength to strength, fuelled by new incentives which include a £1,500 subsidy to SMEs (something Richard Layard and I had argued for on many an occasion), a new outcome-based payment to large employers and the establishment of the Higher Apprenticeship fund which paves the way to a much-needed expansion of higher level qualifications.

Work experience is important because for those seeking jobs, especially for the first time, the barrier is often lack of experience. The Youth Contract, introduced in November, offers young people on Jobseekers’ Allowance up to six weeks’ work experience, with the possibility of another 12 weeks if the employer is considering an apprenticeship.

In the pilot phase between January and August 2011, some 16,000 young people were given the opportunity of similar work placements and over half of them were off
benefits within three months. This is now being expanded to 50,000 for 2012 and another 25,000 are being put through training programmes at the sector-based (and industry-linked) work academies.

For colleges the emphasis has been on paring back the money (FE has taken a £1bn cut in its funding) and the bureaucracy but at the same time giving them greater autonomy to decide their own priorities.

Given this, the gainers will be those colleges which actively reach out into their communities and form partnerships with local employers and public sector organisations.

There are some excellent examples where colleges are being innovative, entrepreneurial and serving their communities splendidly. The new world of competition, however, means that the much needed collaboration between higher and further education has taken a backward step.

Where have we failed? Well, very obviously we have underestimated the impact of the recession on youth unemployment – apprenticeships and work experience only begin to scratch the surface. This is a huge challenge, but perhaps we should recognise that if we mobilise the FE sector there is an opportunity to make a once-and-for-all onslaught on Britain’s skills deficit.
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IfL champions the value and importance of high quality vocational education and apprenticeships and the contribution that the development of these skills makes to economic growth and society as a whole. IfL is committed to a professional workforce in further education and skills by supporting over 85,000 members through:

- Supporting continuing professional development (CPD), with a focus on improving skills in new technologies, which teachers and trainers can apply in their own practice
- Conferring the professional status of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS)
- Succeeding in our campaign for QTLS to be recognised as equal to QTS. This was achieved with strong support from our senior patrons across the three main parties and both Houses of Parliament. IfL also drew upon input and evidence from over 5,000 members who contributed to our survey for the Wolf Review.
- Highlighting debates on vocational skills, including leading work for the independent commission on vocational pedagogy and adult learning

Teachers and trainers within the further education and skills sector are dual professionals: highly qualified teachers who are also experts in their vocational or subject specialism.

From hairdressing to hospitality and catering, from engineering to accountancy and mobile robotics, IfL members are delivering high-quality teaching and learning for young and adult learners alike, for the benefit of the economy and society more widely.
Robert Halfon < @parliament.uk
Sent: Thu 26/01/2012 14:32

Hi Pat

I hope that you are really well. I am pleased to discuss this with you, as I know that you are very active on this issue in Parliament. When I am out and about talking to constituents in Harlow, there is – rightly – a lot of worry about youth unemployment at the moment. They are right. This is a huge problem. No-one should be complacent about this. Statistics show that there are slightly over one million people young people, today, who cannot find work.

However, as David Miliband said to the Times last year, the coalition government did not “invent the problem of youth unemployment”. In Labour’s 13 years of economic growth, a mountain of young British people joined the dole queue. Figures from the Department of Education show that youth unemployment has actually been stuck in the range of 0.8 million to 1+ million now for more than six years, i.e. since the autumn of 2005. This is well before the Great Recession, and the banking crash.

The reasons for this are difficult to fathom. Clearly there has been a conveyor belt from broken families, to broken schools, and a dependency culture. Over the last decade, half a million children left primary school unable to read or write. But there is also a skills deficit. In big European economies such as Germany – where youth unemployment levels are much lower – one in four private firms offer apprenticeships to young people. But in England it is just one in 10.

Pat Glass < @parliament.uk
Sent: Mon 30/01/2012 10.01

Hi Robert

Hope you are well. Really happy to have this email conversation on youth unemployment, skills and apprenticeships with you, as I know it is something that we are both very passionate about. A record number of young people are out of work – 1.4 million. That’s more than one in five 16-24 year-olds. Long-term youth unemployment has more than doubled since January 2011. In my own constituency of North West Durham there are 13 unemployed people chasing every job vacancy and long-term youth unemployment has increased by 68 per cent over the last year.

This is a personal and national tragedy. These are real young victims, and lives that are being wasted. I know that youth unemployment is not something that was created by the current government, but even you must accept that your government’s policies are making the situation worse. We are now in a state of emergency with fast-rising unemployment, especially youth unemployment. Youth unemployment has reached damaging levels as a result of this government cutting too far and too fast. In America, Germany and Japan unemployment is either flat or falling. This is clear proof that this government’s policies are not working and need to change. My constituents do not understand that while young people are left without hope, multi-million pound bank bonuses are set to be paid out to rich fat-cats in the city. Given the announcement last week on Stephen Hester’s £963,000 bonus on top of his £1.2m salary, from a bank that was bailed out by the taxpayer, David Cameron’s promises to rein in excessive bonuses ring hollow. Hester has since decided not to accept his bonus but the incident shows how feeble and out of touch David Cameron is. He failed to do the right thing and stand up for the interests of the British people. We need a government that will tax bankers’ bonuses and bring responsibility to the boardroom.
Robert Halfon < @parliament.uk  
Sent: Mon 30/01/2012 16.03

Hi Pat

I agree that our banks need to make a bigger contribution to our society. Of course, Stephen Hester signed his contract when the Labour Party were in power. But one area of common ground that should unite us is the new bank levy, which the chancellor introduced. This is raising £2.5bn a year for the taxpayer.

On public spending, Labour fought the last election proposing cuts to departmental budgets of 2.2 per cent a year. The coalition has increased this marginally to 2.8 per cent. I accept that the picture does vary across the country, but in my constituency of Harlow, the number of young jobless is lower now than its record high of 2009, and it has fallen further in recent months.

The truth is that whichever party won the 2010 election, sadly they were going to inherit a structural problem of around one million jobless young people. A few days ago the employment minister told the House that when Labour left office 18 months ago, youth unemployment stood at 940,000. Since then, it has risen by 100,000: half of that increase coming from students in full-time education looking for part-time work.

Pat Glass < @parliament.uk  
Sent: Mon 30/01/2012 17:51

Hi Robert

You say Stephen Hester signed his contract while Labour was in power but that was almost two years ago. A lot has changed since then, but not, it seems, David Cameron’s approach to fat-cat bankers. The government must change course and adopt a plan for jobs and growth. A tax on bankers’ bonuses to fund 100,000 jobs for young people, and a temporary VAT cut to help people struggling with rising prices and kick start the economy, would be a good place to start.

You try and pass the buck to the previous Labour government, but when Labour left office the economy was growing and unemployment was falling. I accept that having people who are not in education, employment or training is nothing new. We had them at the time of the last Labour government. The difference is that we did something about it. We did not sit back and just let it happen. In the period between its implementation in 2009 and its abolition in 2010, the future jobs fund reduced the NEET figure by more than 200,000 – that is nearly a quarter of a million young people who were given hope and the possibility of a future. A recent answer to a written parliamentary question I tabled revealed that in my own constituency 210 young people were placed in employment through the Future Jobs Fund between October 2009 and April 2011.

Robert Halfon < @parliament.uk  
Sent: Mon 29/01/2012 18:21

Hi Pat

I accept that the last Labour government and many Labour Members were genuinely concerned about youth unemployment. But the truth is that ministers were shuffled too frequently. Policies rarely had time to take effect, or were ineffective to begin with. The Future Jobs Fund, which you mention, cost up to £6,500 per placement. Most placements were temporary six-month internships in the public sector. Half of participants ended up back on the dole. This contrasts hugely with what the coalition government is doing. The new work experience scheme, for example, works better than the Future Jobs Fund – and at a much smaller cost of about £300 per placement. There is also the Youth Contract and the Work Programme, with proper payment-by-results. In the last 20 months, apprenticeships have increased by over 50 per cent to 442,700, with increases across all age groups. In addition, ministers are bringing in wage subsidies of up to £1,500 for small firms to take on an apprentice.

Pat Glass < @parliament.uk  
Sent: Mon 30/01/2012 19:19

Hi Robert

Can I start by reminding you again that you are in government and have been for nearly two years.

I am glad that the value of apprenticeships is clearly something we can agree on. Labour in office rescued apprenticeships from the scrapheap, boosting the numbers of places and the status of apprenticeships. The number of apprenticeship starts rose from 65,000 in 1996/97 to 279,700 in our final year in office. Since May, the Tory-led government have sought to present apprenticeships as a success story. However, when the rhetoric and self-congratulatory statements are stripped away, there are clear failings with your government’s approach.

The government has been relabelling in-work training as apprenticeships while increasingly apprenticeships have had shorter durations. This has been highlighted in a recent Guardian investigation that raised particular concerns over ‘the increasing number of existing employees in the programme.’ Last month the government was forced to announce that they would be launching ‘A new review into the standards and quality of Apprenticeships’ to report in Spring 2012.’

You are right, we cannot be complacent and that is why we need the government to act now and change course.
Independent training providers have welcomed the latest record apprenticeship success rates as a clear indicator that the apprenticeship programme is in rude health despite recent adverse publicity.

The 2009-10 completion rate put the UK among the best in Europe and the confirmed overall rate for 2010-11 of 76.4% has cemented that position still further. In the Data Service’s own words, success rates ‘have risen dramatically since 2006-07, increasing by 17.4%’.

Training providers, who deliver in excess of 70% of apprenticeships in England, have been in the vanguard of a major drive over recent years to improve the quality of learning for apprentices and the level of service for employer customers. Recently published official employer and learner satisfaction data showed that the providers’ significant investment in improving quality is paying off.

The official figures show that apprenticeship provision for young people is not suffering at the expense of the recent growth in adult apprenticeships.

Training leaders have also welcomed the increase in success rates for advanced apprenticeships at a time when the government is championing them alongside higher apprenticeships.

Select committee inquiry

There have been some legitimate concerns raised about some ‘short-course apprenticeships’ which the authorities have dealt with swiftly, but the number of cases needing investigation in a market served by over 1,000 providers and colleges has been very small.

The latest official statistics show that right across the board, apprenticeships are playing a key role in lifting skill levels in the UK workforce and giving thousands of young people a successful start to their careers in manufacturing and service sectors. I am confident that when they review all the evidence in their new inquiry, MPs on the BIS select committee will conclude that government funding of the apprenticeship programme is proving to be good value for money.

Amidst all the doom and gloom surrounding the economic outlook, employers and providers deserve major credit for significantly increasing the number of apprenticeship places and for offering quality training when they have to contend with higher costs on their businesses.
Ed Davey – Employment relations, consumer and postal affairs minister

Words: Philippa Silverman

Bravery

In 1995, before his election as an MP, Davey won a police commendation and a bravery award from the Royal Humane Society after he rescued a woman who had fallen onto a railway line in the face of an oncoming train.

Political history

Davey’s career with the Liberal Democrats began just six months after graduating from university, when he responded to an advert in the Guardian for an economic researcher. He was elected to the Commons in 1997 at his first attempt, turning much of south west London yellow with the new Kingston and Surbiton seat. With a big notional swing, but a tiny majority of 56, Davey defeated the Conservative MP in the area for the first time in history. By 2001, Davey was in the Lib Dem shadow cabinet as shadow chief secretary to the Treasury. Following Nick Clegg’s election as party leader, he was awarded the foreign brief.

Royal Mail

In a surprise move, following the 2010 election Davey was appointed as a minister at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, led by fellow Lib Dem Vince Cable. The role has been more prominent than first expected, with responsibility for employment relations, consumer affairs and postal affairs. According to an article for a subpostmasters’ magazine, Davey has long wanted to be a postal affairs minister, with past experience as a consultant for post offices around the world. The MP even claimed that one of his proudest achievements was securing a new post office for his constituency. Just last month, Davey presided over a 10-year deal with Royal Mail to continue to provide postal services after it is separated from the Post Office in April. The “essential deal” was welcomed by postmasters, who said it would provide certainty after many years of decline. It means that the post office network will have a guaranteed level of income from the work of Royal Mail. With that success under his belt, should a Cabinet post arise then Davey is widely tipped as the Lib Dem minister in line for promotion.

Ed Davey

– Employment relations, consumer and postal affairs minister

Words: Philippa Silverman

Full Name: Edward Jonathon Davey
DOB: 25 December 1965
Education: Nottingham High School (1974-84); Jesus College, Oxford (BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics 1988); Birkbeck College, London (MSc Economics 1993)
Elected as MP for Kingston and Surbiton in 1997
Ministerial responsibilities: Postal affairs (Royal Mail and Post Office Limited); employment relations (including ACAS); consumer policy and consumer affairs; competition policy; corporate governance; company law (including Companies House); social enterprise; Insolvency Service (including company investigations); general oversight of Shareholder Executive and its portfolios; co-ordination of European business, multilateral trade policy.
Interests: Music, walking, swimming, Notts County FC

Europe

As Lib Dem shadow foreign secretary, Davey threw himself into promoting the party’s policy of a referendum on continuing membership of the European Union. In 2008, he was ordered to leave the Chamber after protesting that the Speaker had not selected the Liberal Democrat amendment for debate. At the time, he complained he was being “gagged” and added: “We need to know when we will debate this issue. It’s a debate the British people want.” He was suspended from Parliament for one day for ignoring a warning from the then deputy Speaker, Michael Lord.
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Clegg on the Lords: If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it

The relationship between the two Houses of Parliament is something that can be left to future governments, deputy prime minister Nick Clegg has told a Lords committee.

Mr Clegg also refused to rule out the appointment of more party political peers in his annual appearance before the Lords constitution committee.

Questioned about whether a Lords reform bill should specify that the Parliament Acts would continue to apply if the upper House was fully or mostly elected, Mr Clegg said the “assumption” was that they would.

But he added that it was a “great virtue” of this country that constitutional change happened in an incremental way without “great Napoleonic blueprints”.

He said it was “ironic” that people who in general advocated a cautious, gradual approach wanted the government to envisage “every possible evolution in decades and generations ahead”. And he said it was “for future governments to continue the debate about the relative roles of the two houses”, adding: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Mr Clegg was responding to suggestions that a reformed House could increasingly challenge the Commons. But he said he was dealing primarily with “an issue of composition”, and that if this government tried to solve other issues, “nothing will change”. He said the composition of the House had changed considerably since the 1958 Life Peerages Act and at the moment there was “the worst of all worlds”, in that the Lords now showed “greater partisan assertiveness without the legitimacy”.

Mr Clegg faced questions on the issue from peers including Lord Pannick (Ind), who earlier in the week told the joint committee on Lords reform that it was “vital” for the reform bill to specify whether the Parliament Acts would continue to apply. He said it was his view that the Acts would not apply if the House were fully or mostly elected, but it was “extremely undesirable” for the issue to be left up to the courts rather specified in legislation.

Lord Pannick, who as a QC acted for the League Against Cruel Sports in arguing that the Hunting Act was valid, despite having been forced through with the Parliament Acts, said it was to his mind “very plain indeed” that the same procedure could legitimately be used to introduce Lords reform.

Asked about suggestions of the imminent appointment of 60 new party political peers, Mr Clegg said: “I have long given up trying to follow the rumours and counter rumours that circulate in our press. That sounds like an absurdly large number.” But he said he did not “see the case for a prohibition of further appointments”, and claimed that though the number of Members had “waxed and waned a bit” over the decades, the number of “really active” Members had remained “fairly constant”.

Energy minister Lord Marland denies the solar panel industry is in crisis

“I received an email on 18 January. It read: ‘Start a lucrative new career as a solar panel installer. At present there is big demand for skilled solar panel installers in the UK, there is a great opportunity for you to retrain and have a rewarding new career.’”

Words: Nicholas Randall
Welfare reform marathon continues

The Welfare Reform Bill finally cleared the Lords on Tuesday night – but not before peers had inflicted a seventh defeat on the government.

After six defeats at report stage, ministers suffered the final reversal during third reading, when they lost by 246 votes to 230, majority 16, on the issue of payments to the families of disabled children.

Baroness Meacher (Ind), who moved the amendment, said that parents of less severely disabled child stood to lose £1,400 a year as lower rate top-up benefit was halved.

“One hundred thousand or so children affected by this loss of benefit are very likely to live in poverty, and recent research by the Children’s Society shows that once the additional costs of disability are accounted for, four in every ten disabled children are actually living in poverty, so a loss of some income really does matter,” she said.

Tory Baroness Browning also called for the government to rethink the issue. She said: “What do we mean by ‘disability lite’, because that is what we are really talking about? It might be presumed it is like comparing a light head cold to a really nasty bout of flu, but it is not.”

Lord McKenzie of Luton, for Labour, backed the amendment as a “clear marker on the issue of proportionality”, and warned against “downgrading” the needs of disabled children. Welfare reform minister Lord Freud said that “every single penny” saved from the payments would go to help disabled adults. He said the aim was to “smooth the cliff edge” of support for disabled youngsters moving into adulthood, and urged peers to look at the overall impact of the introduction of universal credit.

There were two Tory rebels – Lord Campbell of Alloway and Lord Swinfen – and seven Lib Dem rebels – Lord Avebury, Lord Carlile of Berriew, Lord Fearn, Lord Smith of Clifton, Baroness Doocey, Baroness Linklater of Butterstone and Baroness Tonge. Crossbenchers split 61-16 in favour of the amendment.

Last Wednesday the bill suffered its biggest defeat when Lord Mackay of Clashfern (C), a former lord chancellor, led a massive rebellion on the issue of charging parents for access to the Child Support Agency. Peers voted by 270 to 128, majority 142, to waive the charges – £100 up front and up to 12 per cent of any maintenance payments agreed through the CSA – where a parent had taken “reasonable” steps to reach a settlement without recourse to the agency. There were 34 Tory rebels and 16 Lib Dems.

The amendment was backed by 57 crossbenchers with just Baroness Murphy opposing it. But, with the government expected to overturn most, if not all, of the defeats, as the legislation cleared the Lords, Lord Freud said: “I don’t think we have seen the last of this bill.”

ALL WORK, NO PAY

When Lord Howell of Guildford, who at 76 is the oldest member of the government, answered three of the four oral questions on Monday, he won praise for his work rate.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (L) commended him for dealing with all three issues – Hungary, EU treaties and Pakistan – “in such detail”. And, in apparent reference to bankers’ bonuses, he asked: “Will you confirm that you still receive only your basic salary and not a performance bonus? Is that not an example to others?”

“I cannot confirm that,” Lord Howell replied, “because I do not receive a salary.” In the Lords he is in good company among the ranks of the unpaid. Ministers Baroness Warsi, Lord Marland, Lord Howell of Guildford, Lord Freud and Lord Astor of Hever are also unsalaried, as are whips Baroness Garden of Frognal and Baroness Northover.

It is an issue that has consistently concerned Lord Jopling (C), who has asked written questions wondering why there are only three unpaid ministers in the Commons when, unlike their Lords counterparts, they receive salaries as MPs.

Lords leader Lord Strathclyde’s standard answer has been to point out the number of paid ministerial positions is limited to 109.

Too pricey to answer

When Lord Kennedy of Southwark (L) asked which parts of Defra legislation passed in the last Parliament had not been enacted, answer came there none.

Junior minister Lord Taylor of Holbeach told him in a written reply on December 6 that, in the old phrases, the information was “not centrally held” and could only be obtained at “disproportionate cost”.

But when former cabinet secretary Lord Butler of Brockwell (Ind) asked how many sections of Acts passed from 2005 to 2010 had not been brought into force, Lord McNally provided him with not just a number, but an eight-page answer detailing all provisions not yet fully enacted – including Defra ones.
WED 25 JAN
The day begins with the inevitable emails and correspondence. It is always helpful to review with colleagues the aftermath of the business of the previous day.

The publication of ‘Forthcoming Business’ is a must in preparation for weekly meetings, first with the government chief whip and later with the leader of the opposition. The value of these meetings is enhanced by the high regard, both personal and professional, I have for the holders of these posts. I am very pleased that my meetings with the leader of the House are now to be put on a regular basis, as he is always generous with his support and time.

Lunch in the office allows for detailed preparation for the weekly meeting of the crossbench group where information is freely exchanged. The role of the convenor is that of a facilitator and conduit of information. The members jealously guard their independence, so voting intentions are never part of the agenda.

Today we have a visit from Brendan Keith, Registrar of Lords’ Interests. Then to the Chamber for questions to ministers, followed by the final day of the report stage of the Welfare Reform Bill. During debate and before divisions I slip out to sign the Holocaust Memorial Book with the hope ‘we must never forget’.

THU 26 JAN
Thursdays are often devoted to general debates that draw on the range of expertise across the Chamber. But today, after questions, the House moves on to the committee stage of the Scotland Bill – not lacking in controversy. So debates in the Commons, legislation in the Lords!

I have the benefit of helpful briefings on forthcoming items to be considered by domestic committees that in due course will form detailed reports to the House. There follow some very welcome discussions with colleagues who are to contribute to a Private Member’s Bill tomorrow. I need to clear up administration, finalise my speaking notes and do some background reading.

FRI 27 JAN
In early, as the House sits at 10.00. I have the privilege to introduce the second reading of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims (Amendment) Bill. This Private Member’s Bill was so ably steered through the Commons by Sir Paul Beresford.

It felt a daunting prospect, but the outstanding speeches by the other contributors relieves my apprehension. It was clear that the House strongly supports this proposed change in the law to hold to account householders who deliberately harm or fail to protect children and vulnerable adults.

SAT 28 JAN
My aim, to keep the weekend free from House business, yet again eludes me. But the generous comments about the quality of the speeches on Friday were welcome.

MON 30 JAN
The quieter start to the week is most welcome, as I am always amazed by the volume of e-mails and letters that accumulate over the weekend.

Then a most useful meeting with office colleagues, who take me through the diary and matters of administration. As in most organisations, the unplanned informal chats around the building are essential to successful everyday work.

The House continues the consideration of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill whilst I attend the procedure committee.

TUE 31 JAN
Potentially another late night for the House as it considers the third reading of the Welfare Bill and Report of the Protection of Freedoms Bill. Divisions are expected on both. The House is most conscientious in the scrutiny of legislation. Any review of the amendments accepted by government demonstrate so well the capacity of the House to improve the laws that affect each of our fellow citizens. Long may the Lords continue to do so.
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Registered charity nos 1089464 and SCO41666
He’s seen them come and go, seen them misunderstand manufacturing and fail to follow good practice abroad, yet Lord Bhattacharyya still believes ministers can put long-term national interest over short-term expediency.

When Kumar Bhattacharyya first came to Britain in the early 1960s, it was a powerhouse of manufacturing, supplying the world. He is confident it can be again.

“Britain was still the apex in the early 1960s because Germany and Japan were still re-equipment and our industry was growing, everything was growing and in the Midlands you had lots and lots of small manufacturing companies… the vibrancy was there,” he recalls.

Bhattacharyya was born in Bangalore in 1940 into an eminent Brahmin family. His father served as Indian ambassador to the United Nations, but young Kumar was on a different path, into the world of building, designing and making.

“In the 1960s Britain had everything – the aerospace industry was also going well, and you have to understand it was only in the 70s that our power was disappearing. Germany and Japan hit Britain’s industry very hard.

“There were a series of things, and the most fundamental thing was that Britain didn’t invest. You know it’s always a temptation – the market is there, saying ‘why should we invest’, and that really caused the productivity problem. It wasn’t the fact that workers were not working, it was a sheer management ineptitude and lack of investment.

“When you went to the Japanese and the Germans they were investing; the technology was giving them a leap ahead and they were leapfrogging everybody.”

Lord Bhattacharyya saw the way things were going. He was already innovating by bringing manufacturing systems in an academic context, “so that one can deal with industry in a very structured way”. “We combined technology with manufacturing, so it is finance, technology, management all put together.”

In 1980 he founded the Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) at the University of Warwick with just an office and one secretary. Today it has more than 300 staff, an annual turnover in excess of £36m and collaborative centres in India, China, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore and Thailand.

But the UK’s manufacturing base was in a parlous state by the start of the 1980s. “I remember going to Japan and then coming back and telling British industry, ‘look, your time is very limited’. There was a great degree of arrogance. Money was coming in and its big problem was that the majority of British industry were insular. Having had the power for so long, they didn’t realise the...
world was moving and they were going to be hit with competition.”

As Britain stagnated, the emerging economies were surging and innovating. “They got complacent, they didn't have the quality of people, the management structure was very arrogant, we had this big divide between labour; blue collar and white collar.”

Disillusioned with the culture of the times, Lord Bhattacharyya saw that the UK had “golden nuggets there, but they couldn’t capitalise on it”.

“When Thatcher came to power she did a lot. I mean she wasn’t anti-manufacturing, people said that she was anti-, she wasn’t. She put in a lot of money for BA and Rolls Royce and British Aerospace and things like that. What she was concerned about was a lack of profitability.” Lord Bhattacharyya is too modest to mention that he advised Margaret Thatcher on manufacturing policy. If we had to make a change then we needed strong government who understood things and understood the long-term aspects of it because nothing can happen with the flick of a switch.”

He also advised Tony Blair, and explains that he supports Labour, “because I believe that if you don't have employment, then we are going to have a huge division in society”.

“I come from a country where it’s caste-ridden but when it comes to major issues, the (Indian) government has got positive rules to remove the caste system. Here we end up in a broken society. I don’t mean broken in the sense that David Cameron talks of, but we’ve become divided; young kids not finding jobs, you can see the whole of the Midlands, where I come from, cities barren and no jobs.”

He praises Ed Miliband’s emphasis on “long termism”. “He talked about an industrial bank, and things like that are the kernels of regeneration of Britain.” The Blair government, however, “did not understand manufacturing – there was a tokenism but really, if they did any intervention, it was just to maintain employment.”

However, he acknowledges that if Blair’s government had attempted to intervene with some sort of over-arching industrial policy, they would have been accused of ‘old Labour’ thinking. “There was this complacency because we came in with a lot of loot in the bank and taxes were coming in and then, right at the end in 2008 when we were in trouble, people started talking about investment and rebalancing the economy.”

Lord Bhattacharyya has been lauded by his academic peers as well as prime ministers. In 2004 the institution where he began his academic career, Birmingham University, awarded him an honorary doctorate. His approach may have been too radical for some academics there at the time.

When he began at Warwick, “everybody said to me, ‘hey what is he doing – he’s getting industry involved, he’s training people, he’s allowing industry to participate and even developing structure, he’s doing part-time education, there are all these companies and he’s bringing them in and training them’ – now everybody’s trying to do that.”

Kumar Bhattacharyya’s contribution is now recognised worldwide. He has numerous honorary degrees, and in 2011 alone he was awarded the American Society of Manufacturing Engineers’ highly prestigious Honorary Membership. He was made a CBE in 1997, awarded the Padma Bhushan by the President of India in 2002, knighted in 2003 and elevated to the Lords in 2004. He chose the title Baron Bhattacharyya, of Moseley in the County of West Midlands.

He clearly enjoys the unique atmosphere of the Upper House. “It’s a fantastic place, lots and lots of people have got tremendous knowledge, and you don’t have the infighting [of the Commons]. The people here, their intellectual bases are so high and diverse that if you want to find something out, you can always go to them, so I find it very interesting. At the same time I have a very good relationship with MPs. I have no problem with MPs!”

He adds: “I don’t believe in government money just going anywhere, I don’t believe it is government that has to pump more money into the system. I believe in having a strategy which takes into account policy – consistent policies, skills policies, research policies – everything put together and to create a climate in this country for industry to flourish.”

He argues that the UK now faces both a skills problem and the curse of short-term thinking. “Every time I was in industry and we had to invest in something, they said to me, can you get a return within 12 months? “So you couldn’t really invest long term and until we invest in capital you are never, never going to get your productiveness and competitiveness right. Because now technology moves so fast, you need to be on the front end all the time.

“Most companies will say it’s the banks, most banks will say it’s the companies. But the interesting thing is when Japan was investing, the actual interest rates were very, very low and the banks would invest in companies. In Germany it’s all long term. We need to invest long term and say, ‘right we’ll go for broke we’ll do this, we’ll be competitive but you’re not going to get it in

“We have the English language, we have benign industrial relations, we are a hub for Europe”

Lord Bhattacharyya argues that short-termism is part of the culture of the City. “If you are a chief executive of a company you are incentivised to improve the stock so within two or three years, if you don’t get it, you’re kicked out. So they think short term. Within a few years you’ve restructured your way out of existence, and that’s happened to the majority of British companies.”

So how to reinvigorate manufacturing? “What you need is open borders. Get inward investment going. It would be fantastic if we could capitalise on it. We have the English language, we have benign industrial relations, we are a hub for Europe. We have everything going for us.”

Lord Bhattacharyya’s enthusiasm and belief in Britain, infectious enough to engage both Thatcher and Blair, continues to shine through the current economic gloom.
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Instead of hours spent amending poorly drafted legislation, Lord Butler suggests a way in which bills might be prepared to better standards in the first place.

It seems to be a truth, universally acknowledged, that British governments produce too much, too poor quality legislation. The Lords are currently swamped by scrutinising and amending this session’s legislation, while the Commons are sitting on their hands. It is reported that the prime minister has told his cabinet that the next session should contain fewer and better laws.

This is not a new complaint. Successive governments have been subject to the same criticism. It seems to be a besetting sin of British government that bills are introduced in a hurry; they are heavily amended and added to; and they emerge in a very different form from that in which they started. They are then frequently amended in succeeding sessions or not brought into effect at all. According to an answer to a Parliamentary Question I received this week, the whole or part of 77 Acts passed by 15 Departments in the 2005-10 Parliament have never been brought into force; and that does not include legislation subsequently repealed.

Why does this happen? And can Parliament help to prevent it?

It happens because departments always have a waiting list of ‘reforms’ for which they want a place in the legislative programme. It is a competence test for each secretary of state to obtain such places. In the cabinet shoot-out, despite everyone’s best intentions, the programme becomes too full, and drafting resources are overstretched as departments race to get their bills ready in time.

It is not that anyone wants this to happen. Governments do not want to introduce poor legislation, let alone pass it. The business managers and the law officers do their best within the government to restrain their colleagues and insist on good pre-legislative scrutiny.

At a reception in the Attlee Suite, Portcullis House last week, a portrait of the Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP was unveiled.

The portrait was commissioned by the Speaker’s advisory committee on works of art, chaired by Frank Doran MP.

Mr Doran said: “The committee was unanimous that Margaret should be represented in the House’s collection. She has had a long and very distinguished parliamentary career over many years. We endeavour to find portrait painters who are a good match for sitters and Antony Williams has proved the perfect choice. His consummate skills are clear for all to see and this is a very significant addition to our Contemporary Collection in Portcullis House.” Mrs Beckett said: “I felt it would be best if the portrait showed me in one of the familiar wood panelled interiors of the main House of Commons building where I have had the privilege of working for so many years. It’s quite an experience sitting for a portrait. I don’t think I have ever been so still for such long periods!”

The artist Antony Williams took over a year to complete the portrait, which is painted in egg tempera on panel.

“I wanted to achieve a heightened sense of realism where every surface detail in the painting was given almost equal consideration,” said Mr Williams. “It is a painstaking and exacting medium which allows me to express a deep feeling about the look of the world.”

Margaret Beckett’s parliamentary career began in 1974 when she was elected Member of Parliament for Lincoln. She served as a whip and then as parliamentary under secretary of state in the government of Harold Wilson and then of Jim Callaghan.
Although she lost her seat in 1979, she was returned to the House of Commons in 1983, going on to become a senior member of the Labour Party. Following the sudden death of John Smith she was chosen to be leader of the Labour Party, the first woman to do so. After the 1997 general election, she became a member of the cabinet. She was made President of the Board of Trade, the first woman to hold the post.

She served as leader of the House of Commons from 1998 and, after the 2001 general election, became secretary of state at the new Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In 2006, she was appointed British foreign secretary, again the first woman to hold the position, and, after Margaret Thatcher, the second woman to hold one of the great offices of state. She is currently the Member of Parliament for Derby South and chair of the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy.

Can Parliament do anything to help? Recently the Leader’s Group on Working Practices in the Lords, following reports from the Hansard Society and the Better Government Initiative, recommended that, when bills are introduced, a legislative standards committee should report on whether the preparation of the bills has met proper standards. Has the government explained what the legislation is meant to achieve and why legislation is necessary? Has there been pre-legislative scrutiny and consultation, and, if not, why not? What is the estimated cost of implementing the bill? What is its relationship to existing legislation? The purpose of the committee would be to carry out a check-list on information presented to Parliament about these preparatory steps: it would not be concerned with the content of the bill.

Such a procedure could be carried out by each House for the bills starting in its own House. Even better, it could be done by the two Houses in cooperation. The Leaders’ Group on Lords Working Practices has recommended it for the Lords; and the Commons liaison committee has asked the Commons political and constitutional reform committee to consider its application there. If such a gateway for legislation was introduced, I believe that its very existence would improve preparation in government and that is surely a proper role for Parliament.

Lord Butler of Brockwell was a member of the Leader’s Group on Working Practices in the House of Lords and is on the executive committee of the Better Government Initiative.

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Industry and Parliament Trust

**Gordon Birtwistle** reports on a recent Industry and Parliament Trust visit

Last Thursday I was a guest of one of the UK’s leading retailers, Morrisons, visiting their headquarters (Hilmore House), ‘store of the future’ (in Kirkstall, Leeds), and the Farmer’s Boy manufacturing site in Bradford.

The visit was part of the Industry and Parliament Trust’s (IPT) ‘Made in Britain’ programme, a series of site visits and briefings examining different aspects of Britain’s manufacturing sector. The programme is a great initiative that provided the opportunity for a group of cross-party MPs to see the amount of work that goes into creating a supermarket shop floor.

Morrisons is estimated to be the second-largest fresh food manufacturer in the UK with 15 manufacturing sites across the country and one manufacturing site in Holland. I could not fail to be impressed by the scale of the operations.

Since October 2010, there has been continual innovation to demonstrate how good quality fresh food can also be affordable. I witnessed a devoted team of professional chefs working closely with suppliers and the public to create new menu ideas. The team was led by Own Brand executive chef and head of innovation, Neil Nugent, at the MKitchen – an in-house professional kitchen based at Hilmore House. At the 40,000 square foot ‘fresh lab’ store in Kirkstall they have created a space dedicated to showing off the new ranges, and I was keen to witness an area of the industry of which I had little experience. In Kirkstall, walls have been ripped out to expose the butchers at work and provide buyers with accessibility to production. Earlier this month, Morrisons pioneered a new scheme which they titled the ‘pop-up’ restaurant, where the celebrity chefs took the M-Kitchen to London’s West End. Over three days, 300 diners enjoyed wonderful cuisine and wines, with 83 per cent rating the experience as excellent and 64 per cent saying their dishes were worth more than £30. This food is available to buy in store.

UK manufacturing has always been a topic of interest to me, and something I feel we can be proud of during these difficult economic times. Companies such as Morrisons are at the forefront of design, creating stores that are as innovative in style as they are in the service provided.

Global Disease Prevention

The mission of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is more important than ever, say a trio of MPs

Last week the world marked the tenth anniversary of the launch of one of the most successful global health efforts in history – the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Through the investments of the Global Fund, more than 100,000 lives are saved every month. Thanks to the momentum generated in the last decade, even greater progress is on the horizon. Yet, astoundingly, the future of the Global Fund’s success is currently under threat. Ten years ago, we were in the middle of a global emergency. AIDS was spreading across the world at an alarming rate. Few people in developing countries had access to medication. Despite being curable, tuberculosis and malaria continued to kill millions of people each year.

Now, thanks in no small part to the stimulus of the Global Fund, remarkable inroads have been made in efforts to tackle all three diseases. In fact, it’s the Global Fund that accounts for more than two thirds of all international funding for TB and malaria, and half for HIV/AIDS.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the achievements of the Global Fund over the past ten years: more than three million people have gained access to AIDS treatment; almost nine million people have been treated for TB, and 230 million insecticide-treated nets have been distributed to prevent malaria in the developing world.

Significant strides have been taken in the fight against these three diseases. However, rather than scaling up and turning the tide against these epidemics, the Global Fund has been forced to cancel all applications for the next round of funding – just as science is telling us we can end AIDS in a generation and break the back of the TB and malaria epidemics.

The cancellation of the next round of funding grants from the Global Fund, which effectively postpones the scale-up of interventions for the three diseases until 2014, is a serious blow.

But it is one that can be remedied. All those concerned are urging donors to meet their commitments and fill the financial shortfall so that the Global Fund can continue its fight against AIDS, TB and
During a period of uncertainty for many it is encouraging to have areas of business on which we can rely. But it is important to acknowledge the effect that hard work can have, that we all have skills that can be put to practical use and that should be encouraged.

I am also undertaking an IPT Fellowship, a programme of 18 days of visits in industry in which I chose to examine the engineering challenges to the oil and gas industry. This has given me the opportunity to see UK industry first-hand and see the many positives that make me confident that industry in this country can boom again. Gordon Birtwistle is Lib Dem MP for Burnley.

To find out more about IPT Fellowships and industry site visits please contact Talal Rajab, parliamentary officer on 0207 839 9405 or via email talalrajab@ipt.org.uk

malaria. Not to do so would set us back and be counterproductive in terms of prudent use of public funds. The government has shown leadership in its support for the Global Fund, which was rated as “very good value for money” for UK Aid by the Department for International Development (DfID). We would also echo the words of the Secretary of State for International Development, Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell (left), that we will not balance the books on the backs of the world’s poorest people. We’re proud that Britain will keep its promise to them. Other governments need to follow suit and keep their promises to the Global Fund.

Andrew George MP is chairman of the APPG on Global Tuberculosis, Pamela Nash MP is chairman of the APPG on HIV and AIDS and Jeremy Lefroy is the chairman of the APPG on Malaria and neglected tropical diseases.

**DEFENCE RESERVE FORCES**

The value of reservists to the UK armed forces must not be underestimated, warns Colonel Tim Weeks

The West Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association recently held a briefing at the House of Commons to inform parliamentarians about the role of the Reserve Forces (the Territorial Army, Royal Naval Reserves and RAF Reserve), following the Future Reserves 2020 report (FR20), published last year.

The origins of the Reserve & Cadet Force Associations (RFCAs) date back to 1908. Today, there are a total 13 of them, covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. RFCAs are autonomous bodies established by Act of Parliament. They offer advice and support to the Defence Council on behalf of the Reserve Forces and Cadet movement and help to promote the image of all three services within the community through liaison with local authorities, employers, trade unions and other influential groups.

They are mandated to support the Army’s recruiting effort and act as a bridge between the Reservists and their employers, and also have particular responsibility for all Reserve and Territorial Army Centres. The Associations also maintain thousands of cadet centres across the UK, and provide full time staff for the Army Cadet Force.

While recognising the challenges facing our Reserve Forces, the FR20 report made recommendations to set the Royal Naval Reserves, Territorial Army and Royal Auxiliary Air Force on a new course. Importantly, the strategy will see the full worth of the Reserve Forces to the nation’s defence and security recognised.

Reservists already make a significant contribution to current operations, serving with dedication and commitment alongside our regular forces. UK reservists are currently deployed on operations all over the world, including in Afghanistan, serving on tasks ranging from fighting on the front line to troop protection and medical support. Some 18,000 have been deployed from across the UK to operational theatres since 2003.

The fresh package of investment for the Reserve Forces announced alongside FR20 will amount to approximately £1.5bn over 10 years and is designed to stabilise and revitalise the current Reserve Forces, placing them on a stronger footing to tackle future challenges. The commission pointed to the excellent value for money offered by a properly resourced, motivated and employed Reserve Force. Crucially, however, FR20 identifies not only the need to use more of the nation’s talent on a part-time basis, but also the requirement to employ them in critical roles, where the strengths and skills that reservists bring from civilian life come to the fore.

The committed individuals who serve in the Reserve Forces come from widespread areas of employment and this brings a richness of additional knowledge and life experience to the Armed Forces. FR20 recognises that the country requires ready access to specialist skills that do not necessarily exist within the regular Armed Forces. RFCAs across the country have a key part to play in making all this happen. They are committed to providing local support to reservists, their families and employers; acting as regional advocates for change; and contributing to the governance process which will oversee the changes recommended by FR20.

Colonel (Retd) Tim Weeks OBE is chief executive of the West Midland Reserve Forces & Cadets Association.

Andrew George MP is chairman of the APPG on Global Tuberculosis, Pamela Nash MP is chairman of the APPG on HIV and AIDS and Jeremy Lefroy is the chairman of the APPG on Malaria and neglected tropical diseases.
When journalists talk about politicians “showing some leg”, they don’t often mean it literally. So, it’s somewhat of a surprise when Nigel Farage rolls his left trouser leg up to show what remains of his shin after a violent encounter with the front of a Porsche in the late 1980s.

The leader of the UK Independence Party agrees that he’s led something of a charmed life. “Remarkable, isn’t it… remarkable, can’t believe my luck… can’t believe it, I should have been wiped out a couple of times.”

It was also almost all over for Farage during the 2010 general election, when he narrowly avoided death in a plane crash. Not that that has stopped him naming his autobiography, *Flying Free*. With his self-deprecating candour, there’s not much danger of Farage becoming one of the “cardboard cut-out identikits masquerading as modern-day elected politicians” whom he reviles.

He’s an intriguing character, with some views one might not expect. On Scotland, for instance, he confesses to becoming a convert to the cause of self-determination. This is one federation he feels comfortable to support.

“I’m very happy for Scotland to have greater autonomy. I have no problem with that at all. I think it would be better for all concerned if we kept together in a union, but a redefined union. In fact, I’m going to use the ‘f’ word. How about that? Not in the context of Europe, but in the context of the United Kingdom. I’m happy to have a federal United Kingdom.”

Farage is also happy to admit that Ukip has “an image problem”, but insists they are doing their best not to be seen as “disgusted of Tunbridge Wells”. He sees great potential in new
media – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and the like – to get the Ukip message across, particularly in the face of what Farage sees as a hopelessly biased BBC.

“Obviously my little speciality has been YouTube, that’s been my niche. I had five last year that had between 500,000 and a million views, and the exciting thing about those is, as each one goes up, the proportion of UK viewers has got higher and higher, so I’m quite excited about that.

“I think all of this new media is a fantastic way of getting round the back of the Establishment media, and I think we as a party up against the Establishment have to be fairly nimble.” His reference to the “Establishment” speaks to Farage’s view of himself as an outsider. And it’s a mark of his combative style that he considers “consensual” a pejorative term. It’s a charge he aims at both David Cameron and George Osborne, though he insists he holds no personal animus against either.

“Perfectly nice people, very decent human beings, very genuine, very sincere, I don’t doubt any of that. You’d never hear me slag them off as human beings, but they are part of the ruling classes by birth. They are consensual, status quo figures, and the situation this country is in today doesn’t need the status quo; it needs a bit of radicalism, and I don’t think it’s going to come from them.” Unsurprisingly, he was underwhelmed by Cameron’s ‘veto’ at the end of last year, the reaction to which he sees as “extraordinary”.

“It showed how desperate everybody on the Conservative side is; desperate to want to believe in David Cameron; desperate for some eurosceptic gesture of some kind, after now nearly two years of total and utter let-down.” He expects the eurozone to push on with an agreement regardless, and warns starkly about the poisonous attitude towards the UK that the prime minister’s move has engendered.

“If we thought that as a result of that, the City of London was being protected, my goodness me, it’s more vulnerable now than it was before that summit, because there is now a mood, an air of retribution in Brussels; such hatred of the City of London and the Brits amongst the European political class has never been greater.”

It’s a feeling Farage knows only too well from his fellow MEPs, some of whom treat him with “real vitriol”. But does he deserve it after his withering personal attack on Herman van Rompuy?

“I think if you look at most of the rest of my speeches, I’ve tried to use a bit of humour. I’ve made a few people smile, I’ve teased a bit. Crikey, look at the barrage I’ve had back from them, absolute barrage.

“So, no, I don’t think, other than the Van Rompuy speech, I don’t think I’ve been disparaging, I think I’ve been fairly straightforwardly honest.”

“When he talks about Europe, defence or the abolition of grammar schools (“one of the biggest social disasters in this country”), he sounds like a textbook Thatcherite. He once was one – he joined the Tories aged 14, inspired, he tells me, by Keith Joseph – only to leave when a Conservative government took Britain into the Exchange Rate Mechanism.

However, he insists he is “not in politics for tribal reasons”, and cheerfully lists a few Labour MPs – Kate Hoey (“absolutely wonderful”), Austin Mitchell and Frank Field – whom he particularly admires.

He also suggests, intriguingly, that there may be as many as 100 Tory MPs who share his views on the EU. He claims many have been privately agreeing with Ukip for some time, and have only been able to make their views more publicly known because of his party’s “softening the ground” for them. And the likes of Douglas Carswell and Daniel Hannan would be very welcome in Ukip, he adds.

“I think a lot of these people would benefit Ukip; they’d benefit the cause. They wouldn’t be able to act as decoy ducks taking votes away from where they ought to be going.” This is a fear for Ukip, that certain MPs will be “cynically used” by Cameron to present the Conservatives as more Eurosceptic than they actually are.

“Actually what may happen, brave though some of these people have been, is they will actually act to gain more votes for a party that has completely the opposite agenda to the one they do, rather than that vote coming to Ukip.”

There are, perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of politicians who leave him “cheesed off”. He reserves particular disdain for former Europe minister Denis MacShane, who assailed Farage over his expenses, only to then find himself under investigation.

Chris Huhne, the MP for Eastleigh, where Farage fought his first campaign, is another target for a verbal whipping. “I mean, Huhne, the more you hear about all this, the Theresa May business, the Michael Gove… he just strikes me as the sort of guy who wouldn’t know how to play a straight bat if you paid him. He sort of embodies, doesn’t he, what people distrust and dislike about politics, and that’s how I feel about him.”

Despite his occasionally vituperative tone and railing against “nonsense” of various kinds, Farage insists he is not an aggressive character. “My job is not to hate people, I’m not made that way.” He pauses briefly.

“‘I’m contemptuous of many’.”

John Ashmore is assistant news editor of PoliticsHome
A clear failure

Tony Wright retired from the Commons in 2010. His book, Doing Politics, will be published shortly.

Government efforts to bring transparency to lobbying remain inadequate, warns Tony Wright

Language is always the giveaway. I used to go to considerable circumlocutory lengths to avoid describing myself as a politician. So too with lobbyists. Notice how they never call themselves what they are. Instead they have invented a Sunday-best language of ‘public affairs’ and ‘government relations’ to dress up what they do.

This is quite unnecessary, since what they do is perfectly respectable (just like politicians). Whether it is worth all the money spent on it is another matter. In fact it is more than respectable; it is necessary for democratic politics and good government. It enables interests and opinions to have a voice, and decision-makers to learn from those with direct experience and expertise.

So what’s the problem then? Why has David Cameron described lobbying as “the next big scandal”, and why has the government now started consulting on a proposal for a statutory register of lobbyists?

A bit of history is needed at this point. At the beginning of 2009 the public administration committee, which I then chaired, produced a report on lobbying after a major inquiry, and recommended that a statutory register should be established. We showed from examples elsewhere how this could be done in a way that was effective without being excessive. We also said that it would be sensible to do this before a new lobbying scandal erupted.

A bit of history is needed at this point. At the beginning of 2009 the public administration committee, which I then chaired, produced a report on lobbying after a major inquiry, and recommended that a statutory register should be established. We showed from examples elsewhere how this could be done in a way that was effective without being excessive. We also said that it would be sensible to do this before a new lobbying scandal erupted.

There is no real sense of belief or purpose behind the register for lobbyists

The last government was not persuaded that a statutory register was needed and looked to the lobbying industry for better self-regulation. Then came the inevitable scandal, in the shape of a sting operation on departing ex-ministers, and suddenly our proposal found itself in the Coalition Agreement. The next scandal, at the Ministry of Defence, has now propelled the proposal into a consultation on implementation.

This is to be welcomed. There is now a clear legislative commitment to a register for lobbyists. What is not to be welcomed is the minimalist and half-hearted way in which it is being done. There is no real sense of belief or purpose behind it; rather a sense that this is a commitment they are saddled with and that it will be done in the least demanding and effective way possible. So the consultation document proposes that it will cost nothing (being funded by the industry), will cover only lobbyists who lobby for a third party (thus justifying the nature of the funding), and will not cover the subject matter of the lobbying.

This is not only inadequate, but runs directly contrary to the thrust of the PASC report which it claims to be building on. In that report we said: ‘The key… is transparency. There is a public interest in knowing who is lobbying whom about what’. We shall not know this if the definition of lobbyist is confined only to those who work for third parties. A company like Tesco has a clutch of in-house lobbyists and it makes no sense to exclude these from the scope of a register that is intended to shine a light on lobbying activity, and not just on the multi-client lobbying companies.

There was unanimity on this point in the evidence we received, with campaigning charities demanding to be included too.

Then there is the important matter of ‘about what’. Transparency requires that we know what any lobbying activity is about, at least in outline terms (and with established FOI exceptions). It is not enough to know that a lobbying encounter took place and who was involved, without also knowing what the subject was.

So let there be genuine consultation on this lobbying proposal, so that we get a register that does the job. Just as one select committee started this process, I hope another will ensure that it delivers what it says on the tin.
2 Tony Blair
“Am I bovvered?” In 2007, former prime minister Tony Blair put aside his mounting troubles to play the fool for Comic Relief. Blair appeared alongside comedienne Catherine Tate to utter teenage tearaway Lauren’s famous catchphrase. And in 2003, donning a blue suit and tie, he was turned into a cartoon to feature in an episode of US cartoon comedy The Simpsons.

3 Harold Wilson
Probably the first politician to realise the power of popular television, former prime minister Harold Wilson appeared in an episode of Morecambe and Wise. In the 1978 Christmas special, Wilson played on Morecambe’s habit of not recognising the guest stars, when he referred to them throughout as “Morry-camby”.

4 Clement Freud
With a career as an MP, broadcaster, writer and celebrity chef, Sir Clement Freud is also remembered for his appearances with a bloodhound called Henry, which shared his hangdog expression, in a TV advertisement for Minced Morsels. Sir Clement later complained to his family that he was famous for a commercial which amounted to three days’ work.

5 George Galloway
Respect MP George Galloway was considered a “laughing stock” by his rivals in the Big Brother house in 2006. He also came under fire for missing a Commons vote during a challenge to see whether “humans can communicate with animals”, in which he impersonated a cat before actress Rula Lenska.

6 Diane Abbott
After failing to make her mark in the Labour leadership elections in 2010, the television sofa regular tried her luck in a celebrity edition of cooking show Come Dine With Me. To accompany her Caribbean-themed menu, the shadow health minister served up a six-litre jug of pink rum punch to her diners.

7 Tim Loughton
The children’s minister is still best known for his participation in Channel 4’s version of ‘Wife Swap with PMQs’. In 2010 he exchanged the safety of his Sussex seat for inner city Birmingham, as one of five MPs plucked to participate in the 2010 series Towerblock of Commons. Loughton donned a tracksuit and learnt how to rap and cagefight.

8 Vince Cable
Having confessed his love for ballroom dancing on Desert Island Discs, the business secretary appeared in the 2010 Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special. Paired up with the glamorous Erin Boag, Cable impressed judges with his tango. However, the appearance was rumoured to have caused a rift with Nick Clegg.

9 David Lammy
Former higher education minister David Lammy came bottom of the class when he appeared on Mastermind in 2008. Referred to as the “13-point Mastermind”, his appearance was described as “stunningly bad” and he is reported to still be teased about it when he tries to make a speech in the Commons.

10 Gordon Brown
He may have got the ‘no-no’ from Simpsons creator Matt Groening, but Gordon Brown did follow’s Blair’s tracks with an appearance for Comic Relief. In a star-studded sketch on the charity show, Gordon Brown appeared with top celebrities including George Michael, Keira Knightley and Rio Ferdinand. The former prime minister – called ‘big dog’ by James Corden – proved to be a brilliant sport, dancing and singing along with JLS.
Where are they now?

Peter Kilfoyle (MP for Liverpool Walton from 1991 to 2010)

How did you adapt to life after standing down?

Peter Kilfoyle: I was not simply leaving Parliament; I was retiring at the grand old age of 64. Whilst I did not need to worry about finding a job carrying the tag of ‘ex-MP’ (and there is no-one more ‘ex’ than a former MP), I did need to find a way to use my time constructively.

How does it compare to being an MP?

Peter Kilfoyle: There is only a limited number of domestic chores to catch up on – a broken fence here, a room to decorate there – before boredom kicks in. Likewise, one can read those books that have lain unopened for so long; or take that long-awaited holiday. There remains, however, a gap where once parliamentary life provided intellectual and social stimulus.

What are you up to now?

Peter Kilfoyle: I have been lucky. Currently I am a visiting fellow in politics at Liverpool University, with a whole new world opening up before me. I have also undertaken the challenge of establishing a think-tank with a difference. I’ve finally read Jack Kerouac’s On the Road.
Guess who?

Can you guess who the future MP is? Try and win a bottle of champagne, email your answer to editorial@housemag.co.uk

Here’s a clue: From St Joseph’s Convent in Aden via Latymer Upper School in Hammersmith, this fresh-faced school boy was to make a home of his own in the Commons.

Previous winner: Meg Munn MP for identifying Fabian Hamilton. A bottle of champagne is winging its way to you.

Caption competition

Try and win a bottle of champagne by emailing the funniest caption for the photo below of George Osborne and Christine Lagarde to editorial@housemag.co.uk by Tue 7 Feb

Caption competition (below) previous winner: Keith Potter
“The night shift on Psychiatric were not fazed by patients who thought they ran the country”
Reawakening Cromwell?

There’s no insulating Westminster from Scotland’s independence vote, says Iain Martin – even ‘devo max’ precludes the status quo

Tam Dalyell is often credited with coining the famously boring yet important West Lothian Question. But as the great man points out: it wasn’t him, it was Enoch Powell.

In one of the many fraught debates in the Chamber on Scottish devolution in the late 1970s, Tam was trying to explain that there was a flaw in home rule that disadvantaged those living south of the border. How could it be right that his constituents in Blackburn, West Lothian, Scotland, would be entitled to send their MP to Westminster to continue voting on matters which impacted on English voters but the MP representing voters in Blackburn, Lancashire, would be denied a say in what happened in Scotland?

Powell, by then an Ulster Unionist MP, rose to his feet: “We have finally grasped what the Honourable Member for West Lothian is getting at. Let us call it the West Lothian question.” The name stuck and became a by-word for concerns that the asymmetric nature of devolution would lead to English resentment.

Home rule fell in the late 1970s, but the West Lothian Question resurfaced in the late 1990s when Labour returned for another go at constitutional reform. In the event, one of the most surprising aspects of devolution since then has been Tam Dalyell’s question turning out to have been a damp squib.

Opinion polls show that the English do not like the unfairness which comes with devolution. Tory MPs report that all they have to do when speaking to a gathering of English members of their party in the country is mention the subject and the applause will take the roof off.

However, it has never become a first-rank concern. Perhaps tolerant English voters are used to the British constitution being flawed in other respects and simply greeted the drawbacks of this latest innovation with a weary shrug.

Scottish independence would be much more difficult to ignore. In 2014, Scotland’s first minister Alex Salmond will ask Scots whether they want to leave the Union entirely. If the answer is yes, that would mean no more Scottish MPs at Westminster, and a significant change in the character of the place. The United Kingdom is even embedded in the architecture of the Palace of Westminster. Over the four doors of Central Lobby are large mosaics, each representing one constituent part of the UK: St George for England, St David for Wales, St Andrew for Scotland and St Patrick for Northern Ireland.

As the first minister of Wales has pointed out, if Scotland goes independent Wales and Northern Ireland would feel even more overshadowed by England at Westminster.

But there is another more likely outcome from Salmond’s constitutional wrangling. Polls suggest the Scots don’t want full independence but are prepared to settle for ‘devo-max’, meaning major new powers for Edinburgh over taxation and welfare. Labour’s biggest Scottish beasts at Westminster are ready to endorse this idea as a compromise.

They should be careful what they wish for. It was one thing to devolve power over areas such as education and health where the old Scottish Office had run policy anyway. But it simply isn’t tenable that Scotland could have its own income tax system and somehow continue to send MPs south to vote on English taxation and welfare. In those circumstances the already strong case for an English parliament or English-only voting would become unanswerable.

Could Scottish MPs remain to vote on common areas of interest such as foreign affairs? Yes. Might Britain have to move to a fully federal set-up? Possibly. Would English MPs need a new home? Of course not; they would use the historic House of Commons.

Far from the complications that constitutionalists such as Dalyell and Powell wrestled with in the 1970s being ancient history, they may soon be contemporary concerns again.

Iain Martin is a political commentator
Coming Up...

Wolfson Research Institute for Health and Wellbeing
Public Health and Primary Care Event
Tuesday 7th February, 12:30 – 14:00, Dining Room B, House of Commons

The Wolfson Research Institute conducts multi- and interdisciplinary research on health and wellbeing across the fields of medicine, the sciences, the social sciences and the arts and humanities. This event is an opportunity to meet some of the senior researchers from the Institute who focus on public health and primary care in the UK and internationally, and to discuss in more detail the work of the Institute in relation to policy development and planning.

This event is open to all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

Better Value, Better Services, Better Outcomes:
How technology can help GPs deliver
Tuesday 21st February, 16:00 – 17:30, Strangers’ Dining Room, House of Commons

Over the past year, the Dods Healthcare Dialogue has looked in detail at the importance of investment in technology to improve access, quality and efficiency in patient centred healthcare. They have undertaken a range of research into attitudes and perceptions around technology and healthcare. This reception will be the launch of the final report arising from the publication of these findings.

This event is open to all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

Encouraging Sustainable Transport Choices
Tuesday 6th March, 08:30 – 10:00, Dining Room D, House of Commons

The Dods Sustainable Transport Dialogue is delighted to invite you to their second roundtable in this ongoing research programme. The event will focus on making greener journeys easier for the public through measures such as integrating transport systems.

Join the partners of this dialogue to discuss what can be done to help the public use public transport and how government can help achieve this.

This event is open to all parliamentarians.

Paralysis – Determining the Future for the Spinal Cord Injured
Wednesday 7th March, 16:00 – 18:00, Strangers’ Dining Room, House of Commons

Spinal Research is the UK’s leading charity funding medical research around the world to develop reliable treatments for paralysis caused by a broken back or neck.

Dods, the House Magazine & PoliticsHome are delighted to invite you to attend an afternoon reception in partnership with Spinal Research. The reception will be an important opportunity to review and discuss the latest developments in the progress towards successful treatment of spinal cord injury.

This event is open to all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

For further information on our upcoming events, please visit www.dodsevents.co.uk
Alternatively you can contact us on 020 7593 5667 or events@dods.co.uk
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