



British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill Update

The Education and Culture Committee

The Committee held an oral evidence gathering session on Tuesday 24th February 2015. There were three panels giving evidence on the day.

The first panel members were:

Alan Drew, Deaf BSL user and Member of Scottish Deaf Youth Association;
Heather Gray, Director, National Deaf Children's Society;
Avril Hepner, Community Advocacy and Development Officer, Central and Southern Scotland, British Deaf Association;
Frankie McLean, Social Care Manager, Deaf Action; and
Nicola Mitchell, Deaf BSL User and BSL Tutor.

The second panel members were:

Katy Hetherington, NHS Health Scotland;
Nigel Firth, Equality and Diversity Manager, NHS Grampian;
Lorraine Vallance, Disability Adviser at Heriot Watt University and Member of Scottish Universities' Disability Services Group;
Robert Nicol, Chief Officer, Education, Children and Young People, and
Maria Dick, Sensory Services Team Manager, Forth Valley Sensory Centre, COSLA.

And the third and final panel members were:

Carly Brownlie, Development Manager, Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters;
Clark Denmark, BSL Broadcaster;
Professor Rob Dunbar, Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities, University of Edinburgh; and
Professor Graham H Turner, Chair of Translation and Interpreting Studies, Heriot Watt University.

To watch the evidence session with a BSL translation, go to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAsFZ0Veizc>

To read the English transcript, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9799#.VPW73vmsUmM>

The Committee will be taking evidence from the Scottish Government on the 17th March 2015.

Finance Committee 4th February 2015 **British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill: Financial Memorandum**

The Convener:

Our next item of business is evidence on the financial memorandum to the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill from Mark Griffin MSP and Joanna Hardy of the Parliament's non-Government bills unit. I welcome our witnesses to the meeting and invite Mr Griffin to make an opening statement.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Thank you, convener. It is good to be at the Finance Committee.

The bill will impose on the Government the responsibility to produce a national plan on British Sign Language and to promote use of British Sign Language in public life in Scotland. There has been a gap in provision in Scotland when it comes to people who use BSL; it is their main language and they do not have the opportunity to learn any other language. The bill should start to make improvements in recognition of BSL, in the culture of the language and in access to services.

I will be happy to take questions on the financial memorandum.

The Convener:

Thank you very much.

I know that you have not been to the Finance Committee before, so I will tell you what will happen. I will ask you some opening questions, then I will open up the session to colleagues around the table and we will take it from there.

My first question is about the overall cost estimates. Paragraph 11 of the financial memorandum seeks to explain why the cost estimates that it provides “involve such large margins of uncertainty.”

There are cost variances of several million pounds and there are significant annualised variances. I take it that your view is that what the bill proposes should be funded fully by the Scottish Government.

Mark Griffin:

Yes. At first glance, the estimate of £6 million, which lies at the top of the range, seems to be a large amount of money, but it should be borne in mind that that expenditure will be across 117 public bodies and will be spread over five years. Indeed, under the amendments that the Government has suggested, that would be spread over seven years. I think that the Scottish Government has already committed to providing £2 million of funding, which leaves a gap of £4 million that would need to be made up.

In response to the committee’s call for evidence, some public bodies have said that they would be able to absorb the costs of the bill within their budgets, but it will ultimately be for the Government and ministers to choose whether to provide funding in addition to the £2 million to which they have already committed.

The Convener:

An issue would arise if the Scottish Government was not able or willing fully to fund the bill’s costs. East Lothian Council has said that

“there is a risk of plans having no substance, because local authorities are not in a position to allocate new monies to new activity and do not themselves see that BSL should be championed over other inclusive means of communication.”

How do you respond to those concerns?

Mark Griffin:

That goes to the heart of the reason for the bill. There is postcode-based provision of services across Scotland, so the bill’s aim is for the Government to set out its priorities for BSL through a national plan and for public authorities to draft their own plans and report to Parliament on their progress. That would allow BSL users in all of our constituencies to scrutinise what public bodies are doing.

As I said earlier, for many people, British Sign Language is the only language that they will ever know. It is not like any other minority language, whose speakers have the opportunity to learn English, Gaelic or another language. For most BSL users, it is the only language that they will ever know or learn. There is a responsibility on public bodies to recognise that and to provide the level of service that you or I would expect in English.

To read the full evidence session, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9766#.VPWz2fmsUmM>

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

S4M-12220, Marco Biagi, The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill.

Supported by: Alex Neil

Debated in the Chamber on 3rd February 2015 – to read the debate, go to <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9761#.VPWwlvmsUmM>

S4O-03977 Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):

To ask the Scottish Government how it will support and develop the third sector across the South Scotland region.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):

The Scottish Government recognises the critical role that the third sector plays in addressing issues of inequality and the needs of disadvantaged communities, and it is committed to supporting the sector across Scotland, including in the South Scotland region. The 2015-16 Scottish Government budget will enable us to continue to invest significantly in the third sector as a key social partner, and we will maintain funding of £24.5 million towards direct support of the third sector.

Jim Hume:

The cabinet secretary may be aware that funding difficulties that have been encountered by Action on Hearing Loss Scotland have meant that the excellent hear to help initiative is coming to an end across Ayrshire and Arran and the Borders in March. We know that service users potentially face isolation without the support of the initiative. Does he agree that, as we move towards integrating health and social care, health boards need to look at their services to ensure that best use is made of the extra reach and resource that third sector organisations such as Action on Hearing Loss Scotland provide in supporting people with hearing loss in their communities?

Alex Neil:

The health boards and the new partnerships need to take care of the priorities, and assisting people with hearing difficulties must be a priority. However, I say gently to Jim Hume that if his colleague Danny Alexander had not sliced the Scottish Government's resource budget by 10 per cent, we would have far more money to help the third sector not only in South Scotland but throughout the country.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9764#.VPWysfmsUmM>

S4M-12093 Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland)(Con)

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's outstanding support for survivors.

That the Parliament recognises what it considers Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's outstanding support for stroke survivors; understands that it provides information and support through its Communication Support Services (CSS); notes that there are six CSS coordinators in its Central West area, who in turn support 17 communication stroke groups, such as the Young Stroke Survivors group, which meets fortnightly in Coatbridge; understands that this group believes that GPs need to be more aware of the signs that might be an indication of a patient either having had a minor stroke or of being at high risk of a stroke; understands that all of the groups raise awareness of the common effects of strokes, including what can be hidden conditions such as tiredness, memory loss, lack of concentration and communication difficulties, and highlight the availability of physiotherapy and speech therapy for survivors, and commends Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland on its community-based services.

To read the debate, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9779#.VPW4PfmsUmN>

S4O-04022 Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on the average length of time taken to process applications for protecting vulnerable groups scheme membership for people seeking employment in the care sector.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod):

Mr McDonald asked specifically about the care sector. Information about the sectors from which PVG applications are submitted is not gathered by Disclosure Scotland. PVG applications are processed as they arrive and no application is given priority over any other. Disclosure Scotland's service level agreement is to produce 90 per cent of all types of disclosures, for correctly completed applications with no further inquiries, within 14 calendar days. That is measured from the day when the application is received to the day of dispatch. For the week ending 15 February 2015, Disclosure Scotland processed 99.9 per cent of applications within 14 calendar days.

Mark McDonald:

Some organisations in the care sector in Aberdeen, which I represent, have indicated that the length of time that is being taken to process PVG applications can lead to individuals seeking alternative employment, perhaps in an area where a PVG is not required. Will the minister examine whether there are issues that are affecting the care sector specifically and whether some form of fast tracking may be appropriate, particularly in areas such as Aberdeen, where there are difficulties in recruitment and retention in the care sector?

Fiona McLeod: In some instances, it is necessary for Disclosure Scotland to contact other agencies to determine whether there will be any inclusions on the individual's PVG scheme record from those sources. When that happens, the period of time to process a PVG disclosure can be longer. Disclosure Scotland closely monitors the performance of external information suppliers and works to ensure that such requests are fulfilled as quickly as possible in the interests of both the applicant and the prospective employer.

If Mr McDonald wants to get in touch with me with the numbers from particular organisations in his area, I will inquire further.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9784#.VPW5AfmsUmM>

S4T-00945 Scottish Parliament Election 2016 (Votes for 16 and 17-year-olds) Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the comments in the recent House of Lords committee report regarding extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds for the 2016 Scottish election.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney):

The Scottish Government does not accept the views expressed in the House of Lords committee report. Both Parliaments have been asked to consider the transfer to the Scottish Parliament of the power to lower the voting age, as recommended by the Smith commission. Section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998 is a tailor-made process for doing that. That process has been used many times, including to enable the Scottish Parliament to legislate to hold the referendum on independence last year.

The Scottish Government's proposal to extend the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds in Scottish Parliament and local authority elections will be the subject of a bill that will be scrutinised in detail by the Scottish Parliament. Many of the points in the report will be considered as part of that process and need not affect the consideration of the order.

Bruce Crawford:

Is the Deputy First Minister aware that the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee has now met more than 150 high school pupils from across Scotland and surveyed more than 1,000 online, and that the vast majority support voting rights at 16 for elections in Scotland? Does he agree that, before coming to its conclusion on voting rights for 16 and 17-year-olds, the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution should have engaged in a real and meaningful discussion with young people on this important matter, however remarkable that idea might be to it?

John Swinney:

That would have been helpful. I think that the participation of 16 and 17-year-olds in the referendum, which the Scottish Parliament legislated for, is viewed across the board as one of the most successful elements of democratic participation that we have seen in many years in Scotland and one of the key democratic triumphs of the referendum campaign. I think that those of us who witnessed the engagement and enthusiasm of young people in exercising their democratic rights saw their value and impact on the process. Crucially, we all saw that young people were able to express their views and contribute in a substantive way in the referendum process. The concerns and views that the House of Lords committee report expresses are therefore unfounded.

Mr Crawford made a point about the extensive engagement that the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee has undertaken. In a sense, that opens up the awareness and scrutiny of this important area of activity. I am glad that that engagement by the committee has had such a positive response.

To read the full session, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9794#.VPW6vfmsUmM>



www.parliament.uk UK Parliament

House of Lords Mental Health Services: Sign Language Users**Question for Short Debate**

Asked by Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of mental health services for deaf people using British sign language.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, the current provision of mental health services for British Sign Language-using deaf people is poor and it is likely to get worse if the Government do not wake up to the problems which will be caused by the move towards using co-commissioning groups for specialised services within the NHS.

Last March, I held a similar debate on the physical health of deaf people. This debate is about mental health services for BSL-using deaf people. It draws on similar research, namely that 40% of deaf people are likely to experience mental health problems in their lifetime, compared to 25% of the hearing population. Indeed, recent research by the Sick Of It campaign suggests that the figure for deaf people could be much higher than 40%.

What makes deaf mental health different? The incidence of schizophrenia among the deaf population is about the same as for the hearing population, but for more common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety the incidence is much higher. This is believed to be due to

a variety of factors but particularly to social isolation and also difficulty communicating with parents when deaf people are growing up. I find it interesting that deaf people who have deaf parents are less likely to experience mental health problems.

A deaf person with a broken leg should be able to receive good care at their local hospital, provided a BSL interpreter is used. However, for mental health provision a deaf or signing clinician is needed. A therapeutic relationship needs to be established one-on-one and not via a third party. A specialised therapist would be in a much better position to spot visual clues that are relevant to diagnosis and treatment—for example, pressured signing and alternative signs, where some signs have a double meaning.

Unfortunately, access to specialised support is not available in most parts of the country. This leads to a second-rate and sometimes dangerous service. The current tiers of service within the United Kingdom are as follows: for in-patient services there are currently three units, in Manchester, Birmingham and London, as well as secure private units. This means for most deaf patients that their nearest in-patient unit is a considerable distance away.

Community provision is supposed to be commissioned by NHS England, but in practice there is a postcode lottery. Deaf people in most parts of the country have no access to a specialised community service. The result is that deaf people are dependent on assessment and treatment from non-signing hearing professionals. This frequently leads to misdiagnosis, which can in turn exacerbate the initial problem. The lack of community teams also means that, when deaf people are in-patients, they often have to stay longer than necessary in hospital as discharge is difficult because of the lack of community support.

For psychological therapies, the national Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, or IAPT, programme worked with strategic health authorities and primary care trusts to train deaf IAPT therapists. These therapists were employed by the charity SignHealth and commissioned by PCTs to provide a regional and/or local service. However, since the transfer of commissioning, these contracts have started to come to an end as co-commissioning groups have not been renewing the contracts. As I speak, the BSL IAPT service in Bristol, B&NES, South Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire has announced that it will close at the end of March. It seems that the CCGs are going back to commissioning IAPT services individually. As a result, there is no mechanism for them to join together again to commission a BSL service as part of IAPT.

In this situation, deaf people are usually told by their IAPT provider that they can book an interpreter if needed. This is a retrograde step, akin to offering an English speaker therapy with a foreign-speaking therapist, with an interpreter if needed. While the BSL component may be a minor issue for commissioners and providers, it is a huge issue for deaf people. Most will now go back to suffering in silence. This step backwards also means that deaf people can no longer self-refer to IAPT services and must go through their GP, who in practice is often a barrier to accessing the service. It is interesting and revealing that SignHealth's IAPT service had a recovery rate of 76% compared to the 44% achieved by hearing mainstream IAPT services. Adding an interpreter to a therapeutic dynamic lessens the chance of a good therapeutic relationship and adds to the cost.

I understand there has been a meeting between SignHealth and the Minister, Norman Lamb, in recent weeks. It is not yet clear whether a solution to this problem can be found by the Department of Health or NHS England. The important thing—and the purpose of this debate—is for deaf people to have access to a BSL service wherever they live in the country.

I also mention the pilot service dealing with dementia in deaf people. The Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre works in partnership with the National Hospital for Neurology. This service is threatened with closure as it appears it does not fit in the commissioning structure we currently have. This is another example of services being so specialised and niche that co-commissioning groups, even clustered ones, have too few patients to make it viable. The problem is that the number of patients in each co-commissioning group is too small to commission effectively

and there is no mechanism for the groups to co-operate nationally. There has never been national success in commissioning deaf mental health services at a local or regional level. Deaf mental health services have always been considered a low priority, no doubt because deaf people are a largely silent minority. Co-commissioning would be a backwards step from where we are now, which is bad enough. If anything, psychological therapies need to move up to a national approach, with responsibility remaining local. Moving specialised services down would leave them in the same poor position as deaf IAPT services.

I gave the Minister notice of a couple of questions. First, what progress is there with moves to commission a BSL IAPT service? Secondly, would the Minister commit to addressing the problem I have outlined with BSL community and secondary services available to all BSL-using deaf people? It has been suggested that a working party be set up as appropriate to address the issues I have raised today.

Every BSL-using deaf person deserves a care pathway. Currently, the pathway is broken and getting worse, and this would not be acceptable for any hearing person in the United Kingdom. There is wide acceptance among experts as to what is needed. I hope the Minister will use this opportunity to set out the Government's plans for addressing the mental health needs of BSL-using deaf people. I beg to move.

To read the full debate, go to

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150202-0002.htm#15020233000097>

Early day motion 815 Disabled Students Allowance

Primary sponsor: George Howarth

That this House notes the importance of support for students with disabilities to enable them to access education; is concerned with the proposed changes to the disabled students' allowance (DSA) announced on 7 April 2014 and updated in regulations laid on 16 October 2014; believes that the Non-Medical Help (NMH) aspect of DSA is an important means of support for students with disabilities to achieve and prosper in higher education; further notes the results of a survey by a specialist support provider which found that 42.4 per cent of survey respondents said they would be more likely to drop out if cuts to the DSA fall whilst they are at university; is alarmed that many potential students stand to be affected by the proposed changes to the DSA; further notes with concern the funding and support disparities that would result from the proposed changes; and calls on the Government to review the current proposals to ensure that any student, regardless of disability, has fair and sustainable access to support whilst studying.

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/815>

Universal Credit: progress update - Public Accounts

Summary:

The Department for Work & Pensions has spent £700 million on Universal Credit since the programme began in 2010. Very little progress has been achieved on the front line with fewer than 18,000 people claiming it by October 2014, although the Department expects this to rise significantly by February 2016. The Department 'reset' the programme in early 2013 following a Major Projects Authority review which expressed serious concerns about the programme lacking detailed plans, and it has now put Universal Credit on a sounder footing. HM Treasury has approved the 'strategic outline business case', the first of three stages in developing a full business case for the programme. The Department has adopted a "twin track" approach which it expects will bring forward the anticipated benefits of the programme compared to waiting until the long term systems are ready and which should allow the Department to implement a contingency plan at later date. The twin-track

approach is complicated, as the Department is running two separate systems in parallel. In the short term, the Department is using IT systems developed before the reset to accept simple claims in an increasing number of locations. At the same time, it is developing and testing a new digital service, which it intends will deliver Universal Credit to all types of claimant in the long term. Since the reset, the Department has already fallen a further six months behind schedule for developing the digital service.

For the full report, go to

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmpublicacc/810/81002.htm>

Employment of People with Disabilities (Reporting)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require listed companies, public bodies and voluntary agencies to report annually on the number and percentage of people they employ who have disabilities; and for connected purposes.

In the UK today, more than 11 million people are living with a disability, impairment or limiting long-term illness, and nearly 7 million of them are of working age. That is nearly one in five of the working population. People with disabilities continue to face many barriers in accessing work, whether they have a visible or invisible disability or illness. The barriers may be physical but they are also cultural. That is the situation despite the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Equality Act 2010, which provided a legal platform to challenge discrimination based on disability. Even before that, the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 and the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1958 prohibited employment-related discrimination against disabled people. Although some progress has been made, only 47% of working age disabled people are in employment, compared with nearly 80% of non-disabled people, and the figures vary considerably for different disabilities. So there is a disability employment gap of more than 30%, and it has widened slightly in recent years.

Although 4 million people with disabilities are working, another 1.3 million are available to and want to work but are currently unemployed. The vast majority of disabled people used to work, so this is such a waste of their skills, experience and talent. Attitudes, perceptions and judgments can get in the way of identifying someone's talent or skills, and for people with disabilities that can be magnified, particularly in a job interview or at work.

A man in his 40s from Oldham told me that after an operation to remove a benign tumour left him disabled, he applied for hundreds of jobs but kept being knocked back. His experience was ignored and instead he was made to feel like a liability. He said:

"I'm ex-army, disciplined and driven to work like millions of other disabled people. I just need a chance."

Adrian, from Saddleworth, who is in his 50s, left work in 2013, suffering from severe depression as a result of bullying. Now fully recovered, he is desperate to get back to work. He said:

"I think many employers look at mental health issues in your medical records and see it as a weakness."

Working-age disabled people are twice as likely to be living in persistent poverty as non-disabled people, and that has implications for disabled people's families, too. Families with one disabled member make up one third of all the families living in poverty. With the recent changes to social security support introduced by this Government, including nearly £24 billion to be cut from 3.7 million

disabled people by 2018, the poverty and inequality experienced by disabled people are set to get worse. There are also implications for the economy and society as a whole; research from the Social Market Foundation has estimated that halving the disability employment gap and supporting 1 million more disabled people into work would boost the economy by £13 billion a year.

There are many reasons for the disability employment gap, including a lack of information and advice for employers. Discrimination against disabled workers is still prevalent. A recent survey showed that 15% of disabled people felt they had been discriminated against when applying for a job, and one in five felt that they had been discriminated against while in work. Information is not enough to address this—leadership is needed.

Governments set the tone for the culture of society explicitly, through their policies and laws, and more subtly, through the language they use and what they imply, which collectively tells us who they think are “worthy”—or not. This Government have made their views abundantly clear, from their swingeing cuts to social security support for disabled people to their overhaul of the work capability assessment process, which managed to be both dehumanising and ineffective. Their new sanctions policy has targeted the most vulnerable, bringing people to the brink, and people have died under it. We must also not forget their closure of Remploy factories for disabled people and their replacing them with—well, nothing. The chaos and inadequacy of the specialist employment support programme, Access to Work, which last year supported only 35,000 disabled people into work and at work, and the jobcentres’ disability employment service, with one adviser providing support to 600 disabled people, again reveal this Government’s priorities.

But what I, and many others, find so deeply offensive is the pejorative language that has been used by this Government, as they refer to people receiving social security as “shirkers” and “scroungers”—and that includes people with disabilities and limiting illnesses. The Government and anyone else who wilfully misrepresent the facts should be ashamed of themselves.

My Bill is a very modest step to help address that prevailing culture. People with disabilities should be able to access the same opportunities that everyone else can, including being able to use their talent and skills to the best of their ability. No one should feel they are unable to reach their full potential or that their hopes and dreams do not matter. By requiring employers with more than 250 employees to report the number and proportion of people with disabilities they employ, my Bill seeks to raise their awareness of the disability employment gap in their own organisation, prompting them to consider this information and what they may do about it. As we know, what is not measured or reported is rarely acted on. This is not about red-tape; it is about what sort of society we want.

On its own, reporting will do little to address the disability employment gap. In addition to leadership from Government, we need leadership from organisations to shift attitudes to disability in the workplace. Training for employers, and more widely, can help develop empathy and change attitudes and behaviour. We also need practical measures to support disabled people at work, enabling them to thrive and protecting them from prematurely leaving the labour market. Some disability charities have recommended more flexible leave arrangements, as well as extending the Access to Work programme, which currently supports only a tiny minority of disabled people.

Although a number of employers do exceptional work in recruiting and retaining disabled employees, how does this apply to their procurement policies and supply chains? Of course more also needs to be done to help disabled people into work. As has been reported in recent Select Committee on Work and Pensions inquiries, the work capability assessment needs replacing with a more holistic, whole-person assessment. Instead of the increasingly punitive sanctions system, more appropriate support needs to be provided. One employment adviser helping 600 disabled people will just not cut it.

It is more than 70 years since legislation was first introduced to prohibit employment-related discrimination against disabled people. Sadly, we are still fighting to address this discrimination and

the inequality in employment that people with disabilities still face. Changing attitudes and behaviour needs cultural change—it needs leadership. My Bill takes another step along this path for fairness.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Debbie Abrahams, Dame Anne Begg, Sheila Gilmore, Glenda Jackson, Teresa Pearce, Alex Cunningham, Mr Peter Hain, Mike Kane, Caroline Lucas, Alison McGovern and Grahame M. Morris present the Bill.

Debbie Abrahams accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 March, and to be printed (Bill 178).

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150225/debtext/150225-0001.htm#15022591000001>

Early day motion 822 Citizens Advice Scotland's Fair Enough? Employment Campaign

Primary sponsor: Katy Clark

That this House welcomes Citizens Advice Scotland's Fair Enough? employment campaign which aims to help employees assert their rights and remind them of the laws which protect those rights; commends the detailed report accompanying the campaign which outlines the common unfair employment practices that Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) clients have faced including unfair dismissal, problems with entitlement to minimum wage levels, annual leave and sickness payments, contract problems including zero-hour contracts, parental rights and bullying; notes that CAB dealt with 46,540 new issues of unfair treatment at work in 2014, an increase of 5.5 per cent on the previous year; and urges all those who have an employment problem to seek advice from their local CAB or trade union.

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/822>

907735 Disabled People (Access to Work)

Tom Greatrex (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op):

What assessment she has made of the effects of Government policies on disabled people's access to work.

The Minister for Disabled People (Mr Mark Harper): Over 3 million working-age disabled people are now in employment. There are 141,000 more disabled people in work than a year ago, and the employment rate has risen, demonstrating that disabled people are benefiting from the Government's long-term economic plan.

Tom Greatrex: In September last year, the Minister published statistics showing that only 206,000 of 529,400 personal independence payment applications had been cleared. When he published those statistics, he said:

“By the end of the year we expect that no-one will be waiting for an assessment for longer than 16 weeks.”

Yet when the updated figures were published in January, they did not include the number of those who had waited longer than 16 weeks. Will the Minister now ensure that those figures are published so we can see whether the anecdotal evidence we get from our constituents is correct?

Mr Harper: I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman that I published statistics just ahead of my appearance at the Work and Pensions Select Committee. Last year, when I got this job, the average wait for a claimant was unacceptably high, at around 30 weeks. After sustained effort from my Department and our assessment providers, we had more than halved that by the end of the year. I am very pleased, and we will continue that focus.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab):

Recent figures have shown that only 7% of disabled people on employment and support allowance gained sustained employment through the Government's Work programme, which is worse than if there were no programme at all. In Sir Bert Massie's report on the link between disability and poverty, he highly recommends replacing this clearly failing programme with one of locally controlled specialist support for disabled people. A Labour Government would commit to do this, so can the Minister tell us his Government's position on this issue? If they do not believe that change is necessary, how can they justify those figures?

Mr Harper: I do not need to justify those figures. If the hon. Lady had used more up-to-date figures, she would know that performance has significantly improved and that more people are being helped into work through the Work programme, work choice and access to work. Yes, more disabled people are being helped than before. As I said in response to an earlier question, 141,000 more disabled people are in work now than last year. I think that is a record to be proud of. There is more to do, but good progress is being made.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150226/debtext/150226-0001.htm#15022646000030>