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Weekly Political Update

Week ending 18 May 2012

Westminster

Deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Parliamentary Question on Augmentative and Alternative Communication	<p>Charlotte Leslie MP (Con, Bristol North West) asked what steps the Government is taking to include augmentative and alternative communication within specialist services for the purpose of funding by the National Commissioning Board.</p> <p>Health Minister Simon Burns MP (Con, Chelmsford) stated that no final decisions have yet been taken on which services will be directly commissioned by the NHS Commissioning Board but Ministers expect to be in a position to confirm the list of services in the summer.</p>

Health/NHS issues

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Department of Health publication – personal health budgets	The Department of Health has published a revised version of the information leaflet ' Understanding personal health budgets ', designed to be used by healthcare professionals, commissioners, and support organisations.

Disability issues – employment and welfare

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Government response to Work and Pensions Select Committee report	The Government published its response to the Work and Pensions Select Committee Report on government support towards the additional living costs of working-age disabled people.

<p>PQ on Government response to Personal Independence Payments Consultation</p>	<p>In response to a question from Stephen Gilbert MP (Lib Dem, St Austell and Newquay), Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) stated that the Government expects to publish its response to the consultation on the Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria and thresholds in the autumn.</p>
<p>Parliamentary Question on Work Programme referrals to charities</p>	<p>Gareth Thomas MP (Lab, Harrow West) asked how many referrals were subcontracted by each Work Programme prime contractor to charities, third sector or other voluntary and community organisations in each month since the programme's inception.</p> <p>Pensions Minister Steve Webb MP (Lib Dem, Thornbury and Yate) stated that this data was not available but referred Mr Thomas to a one-off DWP report on the flow of referrals within supply chains, particularly to voluntary sector organisations.</p>
<p>Parliamentary Question on careers advice for disabled young people</p>	<p>Gordon Marsden MP (Lab, Blackpool South) asked what the Government was doing to ensure that schools continue to provide careers advice for disabled young people and how the effectiveness of the careers advice would be monitored.</p>
<p>Parliamentary Question on appeals against DLA decisions</p>	<p>In response to a question from Andrew Griffiths MP (Con, Burton), Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) provided a recent estimate of the average length of time from the date of an appeal against the removal of Disability Living Allowance to the date of the appeal hearing.</p>

Equalities

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
<p>Written Ministerial Statement on the outcome of the Equalities Red Tape Challenge</p>	<p>Minister for Women and Equalities Theresa May MP (Con, Maidenhead) made a statement on the outcome of the Government's 'Red Tape Challenge' spotlight on equalities. She announced that there will be a review of the equality duty in the Equality Act and the Government will delay commencement of the Act's dual discrimination provisions.</p> <p>The Government has also launched consultations on the removal of provisions relating to employer liability for the harassment of an employee by a third party e.g. a customer, the power of Tribunals to make wider recommendations in a successful discrimination case, and the statutory mechanism by which individuals can obtain information where they think</p>

	<p>an employer, or service provider, has acted unlawfully towards them. Both consultation documents can be found here.</p> <p>Ms May also announced that the Government has responded to the consultation on the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which can be read here.</p>
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[Parliamentary Question on Augmentative and Alternative Communication](#)

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to include augmentative and alternative communication within specialist services for the purpose of funding by the national commissioning boards.[106464]

Mr Simon Burns: The Health and Social Care Act 2012 sets out our intention that the NHS Commissioning Board (NHS CB) will take responsibility for directly commissioning a number of services including specialised services, which are currently commissioned at both a national and regional level.

We are working with national health service colleagues who currently commission specialised services to provide a list of services using the Specialised Services National Definition Set as a solid basis. This list will be subject to consultation with the board and then will be set out in regulations.

No final decisions have yet been taken on which services will be directly commissioned by the NHS CB. Ministers expect to be in a position to confirm the list of services in the summer.

[PQ on Government response to Personal Independence Payments Consultation](#)

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when his Department expects to publish the responses to its consultation on the personal independence payment assessment criteria and thresholds; and when he expects to publish the Government response to the consultation.[106694]

Maria Miller: The consultation on the second draft of the assessment criteria for personal independence payment closed on 30 April 2012. We have received approximately 1,000 responses to the consultation from both individuals and organisations.

We will now carefully consider all of the responses we have received, along with feedback from stakeholder meetings held during the consultation period, before reaching conclusions on the changes that need to be made to the criteria. We plan to publish our response to the consultation in autumn 2012.

[Parliamentary Question on Work Programme referrals to charities](#)

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many referrals were subcontracted by each Work programme prime contractor to (a) charities, third sector or other voluntary and community organisations and (b) private sector subcontractors (i) in total and (ii) in each month since the programme's inception; and if he will make a statement.[107002]

Steve Webb: The data requested on referrals to the Work programme that have been subcontracted is not available. Administrative data is only held against prime providers; hence Work programme statistics are only reported against the prime contracts.

To understand the flows of referrals within supply chains particularly to voluntary and community sector organisations (VCS) within the Work programme information was collected from each prime provider in a short one-off exercise.

The results of this exercise are published in a document entitled 'Information on Voluntary and Community Sector organisations' at:

http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc_analysis/2011/vsc_org_within_wp.pdf

Official statistics on referrals and attachments to the Work programme were released for the first time on 21 February 2011 and are available at the following website:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=wp>

Parliamentary Question on careers advice for disabled young people

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to ensure that schools continue to provide careers advice for disabled young people. [106761]

Mr Gibb: The Education Act 2011 places schools under a duty from September 2012 to secure access to independent, impartial careers guidance for their pupils. Statutory guidance has been published recently to support schools in planning for the introduction of the new duty. This makes specific provision to ensure that disabled young people receive advice about all the mainstream education, training and employment opportunities on offer, regardless of their individual circumstances, as well as information on the full range of specialist provision that is available. The statutory guidance also places a clear requirement on schools to secure face-to-face careers guidance for pupils where it is the most suitable support for young people, particularly those who have special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities.

Schools will be expected to work, as appropriate, with external and expert careers providers. The Government is working with the Careers Profession Alliance and other sector organisations to implement the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force. The 14 recommendations include the development of common professional standards, a code of ethics and initial training and continuing professional development to ensure careers advisers can carry out their role effectively, including when working with disabled young people.

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how he plans to monitor the effectiveness of the careers advice schools provide to young disabled people. [106762]

Mr Gibb: From September 2012, schools will have a legal obligation to secure access to independent and impartial careers guidance for their pupils. The effectiveness of schools in supporting the successful transition of all young people, including those with disabilities, into appropriate and sustainable education or training will be demonstrated by new education destination measures. Information will be published showing the percentage of students progressing to further education or training in a school, further education or sixth form college, apprenticeship or higher education institution.

Statutory guidance for schools on the new duty makes specific provision to ensure disabled pupils receive independent and impartial advice about mainstream and specialist education and training

options available to them. A thematic review of careers guidance, reporting in summer 2013, will allow Ofsted to look at how well schools are responding to this and other aspects of their new responsibilities. The review will establish a baseline for future improvements in the quality of provision. School inspections will also provide an opportunity to consider the extent to which pupils have a good understanding of the options open to them as they move through school and on to the next stage of their education or training.

[Parliamentary Question on appeals against DLA decisions](#)

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has for the average length of time from the date of appeal against the removal of disability living allowance to the date of the appeal hearing in the most recent period for which figures are available.[107883]

Maria Miller: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are responsible for the preparation of appeal submissions with Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) being responsible for the scheduling and hearing of appeals.

The average actual clearance time (AACT) within DWP for submitting disability living allowance (DLA) appeal submissions to HMCTS during the period from April 2011 to March 2012 was 30 days.

The SSCS Tribunal does not hold information on the shortest and longest waiting times for an appeal hearing. The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost by manually checking each individual case file.

It is possible to provide, from management information, the percentages of appeals disposed of within four weeks and longer than 52 weeks. During the period 1 April to 31 December 2011 (the most recent period for which statistics have been published), 65,200 DLA appeals were disposed of nationally. Of these, 6.9% were disposed of within four weeks and 7.9% were aged 52 weeks or more when disposed of. Those appeals that take longer than 52 weeks to be disposed of are likely to be complex cases which may have more than one hearing, for example a first hearing may have been adjourned for further evidence to be gathered.

The average time from receipt at Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) to hearing for DLA appeals in the period 1 April 2011 to 31 December 2011 was 25.5 weeks.

[Written Ministerial Statement on the outcome of the Equalities Red Tape Challenge](#)

Secretary of State for the Home Department (Theresa May): I am today announcing the outcome of the Red Tape Challenge spotlight on Equalities, alongside the Government response to the consultation on the reform of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The Equalities Red Tape Challenge package balances the need to provide important legal protection from discrimination with identifying which measures in the Equality Act 2010 are placing unnecessary or disproportionate burdens on business.

The package aims to reduce these burdens through delaying or repealing the law.

We have today published consultation documents on the removal of provisions relating to:

- employer liability for the harassment of an employee by a third party e.g. a customer;

- the power of Tribunals to make wider recommendations in a successful discrimination case; and the statutory mechanism by which individuals can obtain information where they think an employer, or service provider, has acted unlawfully towards them.

We will:

- proceed with the repeal of the socio-economic duty;
- delay commencement of the dual discrimination provisions in the Equality Act 2010;
- delay commencement of reasonable adjustments to common parts provisions.

We have also looked again at the public sector Equality Duty (PSED). This Government has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. But we also have a strong desire to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy where it exists and consider alternatives to legislation. We committed last year to assess the effectiveness of the PSED specific duties. We have decided to bring forward that review and extend it to include both the general and specific duties to establish whether the Duty is operating as intended.

A proportionate approach to legislation goes hand in hand with our plans for the EHRC.

We want the EHRC to become a valued and respected national institution. To do so, we believe it must focus on the areas where it can add value – as an independent equality body and ‘A - rated’ National Human Rights Institution. And, it must be able to show that it is using taxpayers’ money wisely.

Taking account of the views expressed in our consultation: Building a fairer Britain: Reform of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, we have decided to scrap vague, unnecessary and obsolete provisions from the Equality Act 2006 to focus the EHRC on its core functions.

In parallel, we are implementing a strong package of non-legislative measures, including:

- recruiting a new Chairman, to succeed Trevor Phillips who is standing down, and a new smaller Board;
- conducting a comprehensive review of the EHRC’s budget;
- implementing tighter performance and financial controls set out in a new Framework Document.

We consider that this package has the potential to deliver the change in the EHRC’s performance that we all want to see, but we will review the EHRC’s progress at its next triennial review in Autumn 2013.

Copies of the consultation documents on removal of specific provisions in the Equality Act 2010, and the Government response to the EHRC consultation will be placed in the House Library and can also be found on the Home Office website at the following link www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities

Parliamentary terms

Early Day Motion (EDM)

Early Day Motions are formal motions for debate submitted by MPs in the House of Commons. There is usually no time available to actually debate an EDM, but they are useful for drawing attention to specific events or campaigns and demonstrating the extent of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view. MPs register their support by signing individual motions.

Parliamentary Question (PQ)

Parliamentary questions are oral or written questions to Ministers in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They are used to seek information, and Ministers are obliged to explain and defend the work, policy, decisions and actions of their departments. Parliamentary questions are a vital tool in holding the Government to account. The Prime Minister answers to the House of Commons every Wednesday at midday.

Debates

Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords hold debates in which Members discuss government policy, proposed new laws and current issues. All debates are recorded in a publication called 'Hansard' which is available online or in print.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal groups composed of politicians from all political parties. They provide an opportunity for cross-party discussion and co-operation on particular issues. All-party groups sometimes act as useful pressure groups for specific causes helping to keep the Government, the opposition and MPs informed of parliamentary and outside opinion.

Select Committees

House of Commons Select Committees exist to scrutinise the work of government departments. Most committees have about 11 members and reflect the relative size of each party in the Commons. They conduct enquiries on a specific issue, and gather evidence from expert witnesses. Findings are reported to the Commons, printed, and published on the Parliament website. The Government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

Select Committees in the House of Lords concentrate on four main areas: Europe, science, economics, and the UK constitution.

Written ministerial statements

Government ministers can make written statements to announce:

- The publication of reports by government agencies
- Findings of reviews and inquiries and the government's response
- Financial and statistical information
- Procedure and policy initiatives of government departments

Private Members' Bills

Private Members' Bills allow backbench MPs or Peers to introduce their own legislation. There are three types of Private Members' Bills:

- **Ballot Bills:** A ballot is held at the beginning of each parliamentary year the 20 MPs whose names come out top are allowed to introduce legislation on a subject of their choice.
- **Ten Minute Rule Bills:** The sponsoring MP is given a slot in which they may make a speech lasting up to 10 minutes in support of his or her bill
- **Presentation Bill:** a Member is not able to speak in support of it and it stands almost no chance of becoming law