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Weekly Political Update

Week ending 27 April 2012

Westminster

Deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
<u>Parliamentary Questions on universal access to video relay services for BSL users</u>	<p>Shadow Minister for Innovation Chi Onwurah MP (Lab, Newcastle) asked the Government what steps it is taking to ensure that all British Sign Language users have access to broadband of sufficient speed to use video relay services and whether the Government's target of universal broadband coverage by 2015 will help video relay users in rural areas.</p> <p>Ms Onwurah agreed to table these questions following engagement with the Government Relations team on the issue of equal access to telecommunications for people with hearing loss.</p>
<u>Parliamentary Question on sign language for parents of deaf children</u>	<p>David Morris MP (Con, Morecambe and Lunesdale) asked the Government what assistance is available to parents and guardians of deaf children to undertake adult education courses in sign language.</p> <p>Education Minister Sarah Teather MP (Lib Dem, Brent Central) stated that it is for local authorities to decide what support they will make available to parents who wish to study sign language. She referenced the development of an online family sign language curriculum developed by NDCS as part of the I-Sign project. Action on Hearing Loss continues to be a partner in the I-Sign project, which aims to increase the provision of BSL to families of deaf children.</p>
<u>Parliamentary Question about young people with communication needs</u>	<p>Sir Bob Russell MP (Lib Dem, Colchester) asked the Government what progress they have made on implementing the recommendations of the Bercow Review on support for children and young people with communication needs.</p>

Health/NHS issues

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Department of Health – report publication	The Department of Health published a report titled ‘The Government’s strategic objectives for the NHS Commissioning Board Authority’. The role of this Authority is to make the necessary preparations for the successful establishment of the NHS Commissioning Board, following the successful passage of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The report can be read here .

Disability issues – employment and welfare

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
House of Commons Library report publication – time limiting Employment and Support Allowance	The House of Commons Library published a briefing for parliamentarians titled ‘Time limiting of contributory Employment and Support Allowance from 30 April 2012’. The report can be read here .
Parliamentary Question on Disability Living Allowance appeals	Shadow Disabilities Minister Anne McGuire MP (Lab, Stirling) asked the Government how many people are waiting to have an appeal tribunal hearing as a result of withdrawal of disability living allowance and what the average waiting time is.

Disability issues

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Parliamentary Question on disability hate crime	<p>Yasmin Qureshi MP (Lab, Bolton South East) asked the Government what discussions have been held with disability organisations about recent trends in the levels of abuse and harassment of disabled people.</p> <p>Disabilities Minister Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) confirmed that there had been a 21% increase in the level of recorded disability hate crimes since 2009. She referred to discussions with a range of organisations and noted that ‘changing attitudes and behaviours’ had been part of the consultation on developing a new cross- Government disability strategy. Action on Hearing Loss has submitted a response to this.</p>

Medical research

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Parliamentary Question on research and development spending	Esther McVey MP (Con, Wirral West) asked the Government if it would increase publicly-funded research and development. Economic Secretary to the Treasury Chloe Smith MP (Con, Norwich North) responded that as part of the 2010 Spending Review the Government had ring-fenced the science and research budget and within this a commitment had been made to real terms increases in spending by the Medical Research Council. She noted that further decisions on public spending would be a matter for the next spending review.
Science and Technology Select Committee inquiry into commercialisation of research	Continuing its enquiry into the difficulties of commercialising research, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee heard from representatives of small technology companies about their experiences of the state of innovation in the UK.

Work and Pensions

Deadline: 30 April 2012

[Parliamentary Question on sign language for parents of deaf children](#)

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assistance is available to parents and guardians of deaf children to undertake adult education courses in sign language and other skills related to the care of their child. [103444]

Sarah Teather: It is for local authorities to decide what support they will make available for parents or guardians of deaf children who wish to study sign language. This could include support for the costs associated with further education courses or direct support to the family through the local hearing impairment service.

Some families may also be able to claim disability living allowance, carer's allowance or other state benefits to help with the care of their child.

The Department for Education funded the I-Sign project between 2009 and 2011. As part of this project the National Deaf Children's Society developed an online family sign language curriculum that is specifically intended to support families to communicate using British Sign Language:

www.familysignlanguage.org.uk

[Parliamentary Questions on universal access to video relay services for BSL users \(1\)](#)

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of British Sign Language users who are unable to access video relay services due to a lack of high-speed broadband; [105291]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that all British Sign Language users have access to broadband of sufficient speed to use video relay services.[105292]

Mr Vaizey: A minimum bandwidth of approximately 2 Mbps is needed for an effective video relay service (VRS) and according to Ofcom's Communications Infrastructure Report 2011, which was published last summer, the percentage of homes across the UK then receiving download speeds of less than 2 Mbps was 14%.

No assessment has been made of what proportion of these homes include British Sign Language (BSL) users. However, I continue to press business, telecommunications companies and third sector organisations to improve access to VRS for BSL users.

[Parliamentary Questions on universal access to video relay services for BSL users \(2\)](#)

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the effect of reaching his target of universal broadband coverage by 2015 on the availability of video relay services for British Sign Language users in rural areas.[105290]

Mr Vaizey: One of the key factors that will help to increase access to video relay service is broadband with sufficient bandwidth to handle video streaming. The Government's aim is to have the best superfast broadband network in Europe by 2015, with 90% of premises having access to superfast broadband and universal access to at least 2Mbps.

Whilst no assessment has been made of the number of British Sign Language (BSL) users in rural areas, achieving the above aim will be a significant step forward in helping BSL users gain access to video relay services. In this respect I also welcome and support Ofcom's proposed consultation on options for improving the availability of video relay services.

[Parliamentary Question about young people with communication needs](#)

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made on implementing the recommendations of the Bercow Review on speech therapy for children; and if he will make a statement. [105240]

Anne Milton: The Government has taken forward the recommendations in the "Better Communication Plan", the Government's response to the Bercow Review. This has included: the appointment of a communication champion; the establishment of a communications council; commissioning a programme of research through the Centre for Educational Development and Research at the university of Warwick; a programme of grants to support the alternative and augmentative sector; a commissioning support programme; and support for voluntary sector led national year of communication in 2011.

We are also taking action to support the delivery of universal services that promote language development. For example, we are committed to growing, by 2015, the health visitor workforce by 4,200 through a four year transformational programme of recruitment and retention, professional development and improved commissioning linked to public health improvement.

In addition, on 26 January 2012 the Government launched the children and young people's health outcomes strategy. The strategy will identify a set of measurable outcomes that are meaningful to children, young people and families and that have the potential to drive real improvements in the system, including services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

Parliamentary Question on Disability Living Allowance appeals

Mrs McGuire: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people are waiting to have an appeal tribunal hearing as a result of withdrawal of disability living allowance; what the average waiting time is; and what the (a) shortest and (b) longest times are in each local authority area.[103946]

Mr Djanogly: Data for the Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) Tribunal cannot be provided by local authority area.

All appeals to the tribunal are registered in the processing centre in the region where the appellant lives, and data can be broken down to the level of these processing centres. Claimants can appeal to the tribunal on a number of different grounds, such as the rate of benefit awarded or refusal of benefit.

The tribunal does not record the issue under appeal and, therefore, cannot isolate data relating to appeals on the basis of having been refused disability living allowance (DLA). The total number of 'live' DLA appeals (appeals at various stages of the process before hearing or decision) nationally at 31 December 2011 (the most recent period for which statistics have been published) was 43,200, down from 44,500 at the end of June 2011.

The following table shows the estimated breakdown of live DLA appeals at each SSCS Tribunal Processing Centre.

Disability living allowance caseload outstanding by processing centre as at 31 December 2011	
Processing centre	Number of live DLA cases
Birmingham (East and West Midlands and East of England Government regions and part of London Government office region)	16,000
Cardiff (Wales and SW England)	4,200
Glasgow (Scotland)	3,800
Leeds (Yorkshire and Humber)	5,600
Liverpool (NW England)	6,100
Newcastle (NE England)	3,100
Sutton ¹ (London and SE England)	4,400
Total	43,200
<p>(1)Covers whole of Government office region London, except Hillingdon, Harrow, Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Hackney which are covered by Birmingham.</p> <p>Note: The data, while the best available, are estimated management information.</p> <p>The proportion of the current caseload at each processing centre has been applied to the total caseload at 31 December 2011.</p>	

The following table shows the average time from receipt at Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) to hearing for DLA appeals for the area served by each processing centre. The information covers 1 April 2011 to 31 December 2011, the latest period for which figures are available.

Disability living allowance appeals average waiting time by processing centre	
Processing centre	Average waiting time in weeks December 2011 year to date
Birmingham (East and West Midlands and East of England Government regions and part of London Government office region)	31.3
Cardiff (Wales and SW England)	20.3
Glasgow (Scotland)	20.5
Leeds (Yorkshire and Humber)	27.2
Newcastle (NE England)	28.4
Liverpool (NW England)	26.8

Sutton(1) (London and SE England)	22.3
Average across all centres	25.5
(1) Covers whole of Government office region London, except Hillingdon, Harrow, Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Hackney which are covered by Birmingham.	

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 the percentages of appeals disposed of within four weeks and longer than 52 weeks.

During the period 1 April to 31 December 2011, 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 following table shows the percentage of DLA appeals cleared within four weeks and in 52 weeks or more at each SSCS Tribunal Processing Centre, during the period 1 April to 31 December 2011.

Clearance times of disability living allowance appeals		
Processing centre	Percentage of DLA appeals cleared in less than four weeks	Percentage of DLA appeals cleared in 52 weeks or more
Birmingham (East and West Midlands and East of	5.7	19.2

England Government regions and part of London Government office region)		
Cardiff (Wales and SW England)	5.5	7.4
Glasgow (Scotland)	8.2	1.6
Leeds (Yorkshire and Humber)	8.4	3.2
Newcastle (NE England)	7.2	8.4
Liverpool (NW England)	8.5	3.1
Sutton ¹ (London and SE England)	6.2	3.0
National average	6.9	7.9

¹ Covers whole of Government office region London, except Hillingdon, Harrow, Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Hackney which are covered by Birmingham.
Note: The national figures are not calculated from the figures given for the individual processing centres but are calculated using national data from all processing centres.
As the sets of figures are calculated in different ways there may be slight discrepancies between them.

HMCTS is working hard to increase the capacity of the SSCS Tribunal and reduce waiting times. It has implemented a range of measures including recruiting more judges and medical panel members; increasing administrative resources; securing additional estate; increasing the number of cases listed in each session; running double shifts in its largest processing centre; running Saturday sittings in some of the busiest venues; and setting up a customer contact centre to deal with telephone enquiries. All of this is having a positive effect.

The number of disposals has increased significantly from 279,000 in 2009/10 to 380,000 in 2010-11 and the tribunal planned to dispose of around 435,000 appeals in 2011-12, with the capacity for half a million disposals in 2012/13.

Disposals outstripped receipts for the 12 months between January 2011 and December 2011, and the number of cases waiting to be heard reduced by over 44,000 between April and December. The average waiting time has stabilised nationally, and is beginning to fall in many venues.

[Parliamentary Question on disability hate crime](#)

Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with disability organisations on recent trends in the levels of abuse and harassment of disabled people. [102357]

Maria Miller: I have met a range of organisations, including ACPO as well as ministerial colleagues on the matter of disability hate crime.

We know from research that disability hate crime is hugely under-reported. Figures published by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in 2010 show that 1,569 disability hate crimes were recorded. This is an increase of 21% compared to reports made in 2009. This is a positive step as it suggests that more people are coming forward to report incidents. We know that there is still more to do, as some disabled people's organisations tell us that half of all disabled people have experienced hate crime at some point in their lives.

We are working hard with voluntary sector partners, including disabled people's organisations, to encourage more victims to come forward and report disability hate crime. We have developed and published with Disability Rights UK 'The Let's Stop Disability Hate Crime' Guidance which will enable disabled people to recognise hate crime and report it. I have also visited Blackpool Centre for Independent Living's Disability First project and saw first-hand how partnership working can successfully tackle disability hate crime.

It is important that we work with disabled people and the wider community to change negative attitudes and behaviours towards them. That is why changing attitudes and behaviours was one of the key areas we asked about as part of the 'Fulfilling Potential' consultation on developing a new cross-government disability strategy. We have received over 500 responses from disabled people and their organisations and we will be using their practical ideas on changing attitudes and combating hate crime to formulate the strategy which will be published later this spring.

Parliamentary Question on research and development spending

Esther McVey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase publicly-funded research and development for the purposes of promoting growth in the UK economy. [103831]

Miss Chloe Smith: In order to promote economic growth in the UK economy, spending review 2010 (SR10) maintained the Department for Business Innovation and Skills ring fenced resource budget for science and research in cash terms from 2011-12 to 2014-15 at £4.6 billion per annum. Within this, the Government committed to real terms increases in spending by the Medical Research Council. SR10 also committed to real terms increases in health research spending from within the Health budget.

The Ministry of Defence also supports a significant amount of research and development (R and D) in the economy—spending around £1.5 billion to £2 billion per annum on external R and D historically.

Since SR10, funding decisions to allocate more than £800 million to further support R and D have been made. Decisions on post SR10 public funding for R and D will be a matter for the next spending review.

Science and Technology Select Committee inquiry into commercialisation of research

Part one

Continuing its enquiry into the difficulties in bringing new technology from inception to the marketplace, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee heard from representatives of small technology companies as to their experiences of the state of innovation in the UK.

The Committee heard from:

- Dr Peter Dean, Cambio;
- Dr Richard Worswick, Cobalt Light Systems ;
- Dr Trevor Francis, Byotrol Technology Ltd

Valley of Death

Labour Chair Andrew Miller MP asked for experiences regarding the so-called "Valley of Death".

In response, Dr Worswick said he had not experienced the problem, and had in fact been unfamiliar with the term before the announcement of the present enquiry.

He added that the toughest part for his company had been its initial growth. Expansion had been funded from revenue generated from good early sales, as well as from bank loans and “modest” regional development funding from the Regional Development Agency, he added.

There had been a “relatively small” injection of equity funding, he went on.

Dr Francis said that for his business, “we are in the valley of death”. He said that money had been found initially through family sources, and then had been provided from listing on AIM. This meant that his business was tied to certain sales targets at the same time as looking to build capability, he went on.

He could see “light at the end of the tunnel” with a joint development agreement involving a Fortune 150 company, he added.

Dr Dean added that the patent system in the UK was “appalling” and “not a level playing field” compared to the rest of the world. Within British universities, there was no “patent strategy” to guide an inventor through the whole process, which led to other countries taking over valuable ideas.

He added that it took three or four months to cash cheques from overseas due to time spent taking necessary checks for fraud and money laundering, which was “hell” for small companies, he added.

There was no UK public database of relevant patents that could be exploited by companies, Dr Dean added.

Business model

Conservative MP Stephen Metcalfe asked whether access to major clients or access to finance was more important for hi-tech SMEs.

In response, Dr Worswick felt that initial capital was very important, and pointed out that early sales gave an advantage as to seeing how the market worked. He added that his company had also been fortunate in receiving early Government investment.

Dr Dean said that “customers were more important than capital”. He added that selling a technology was difficult, but selling a “problem-solver” was easy.

He additionally criticised the NHS for being slow on the uptake of new technologies, saying it took “seventeen years for a small technology company to get an innovation into the NHS”.

Dr Francis said that “customers had always been first”. He felt the comparison was “pointless” as “you need to get proof of concept before you go anywhere near a customer”.

Small Business Research Initiative

Asked by Mr Metcalfe if the Small Business Research Initiative(SBRI) was a good way of supporting businesses, Dr Francis said that he felt “there are probably better schemes that are more relevant for us”, praising a grant received from a RDA.

Dr Worswick agreed that a grant from an RDA had been “quite important”. He noted a recent grant from the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), adding that their procedures had been “not very helpful”.

The TSB had been unhelpful in saying whether a grant was to be awarded, and did answer its telephone calls, he added.

Rules were “very complicated” and “unclear”, Dr Dean added. He added that for his company, “we just haven’t got the time to apply”.

Demise of RDAs

Given the demise of LDAs, the Chair asked where parallel information and support could be found.

In response, Dr Worswick supposed it was the TSB. However he felt that this was insufficient, and that small companies would have to make a decision as to whether they put a greater amount of investment into research in this area.

UK banks

In answer to a question by Conservative MP Sarah Newton, Dr Worswick said it was “deeply frustrating” that banks were refusing to lend money, or being more reticent in lending it, though he could understand the context of their decisions.

Dr Francis said that his company had listed itself on AIM as venture capitalists were not interested in his company. AIM was “really the only place to go”.

He did not wish to “knock AIM too heavily”, however, adding that there were difficulties in committing to sales targets too early. It was a case of “managing expectations”, he added.

Expertise and advice from investors was “absolutely vital”, Dr Dean added. Dr Francis agreed with this assessment.

Clustering

Mr Metcalfe asked how important clustering of similar industries was in technology development. This was “quite important”, Dr Worswick responded. Other interested scientists were “just across the road”, he added.

Dr Dean added that “you need a critical mass around the inventor”, and praised the importance of networks.

Clustering was “completely vital”, felt Dr Francis. He added that universities “don’t know how to interact with really small technology companies”.

Government investment

Mr Metcalfe asked whether the Government should invest more in funding capital projects, or invest in support structures and networks for self-development.

In response, Dr Worswick said this was not an “either-or” choice, and felt that it was a very complicated question. This latter point was agreed on by Dr Dean.

Dr Francis said that the bigger question was the total amount of money available.

Location

Asked by Plaid Cymru MP Hywel Williams how important location of industry was in determining business success, Dr Worswick said proximity to London was not “hugely important”, but being close to “some centres and having good transport links” was.

Networks were more important than location, he added.

Location didn’t “matter at all” for his company, Dr Francis added.

Part two

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee then heard from representatives of venture capital groups which financed technology startups, as part of its enquiry into the “Valley of Death” faced by small technology companies in bringing a design from conception to the wider marketplace.

The Committee heard from:

- Anne Glover, Amadeus Capital Partners Ltd;
- Katie Potts, Herald Investment Management;
- Matthew Bullock, Venture Capitalist;
- Stephen Welton, Business Growth Fund

Small firms

Labour Chair Andrew Miller MP asked how small hi-tech firms generally obtained their money.

Money tended to be initially laid out by owners of the company, Ms Glover responded. Venture capitalists and corporations would provide money later on in the process, as well as receiving grants from various Government bodies such as the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), she added.

Mr Bullock said that it was more common for businesses to sell “competencies as a service”. This produced early cashflow, but required a large lead company or possibly the Government. This was described as the “soft” startup model, in contrast to the “hard” startup model described by Ms Glover.

Receiving venture capital was “the first best solution” but was not readily available, he added. Choosing a model depended on the competitive framework, Ms Glover said. The softer model could not respond quickly enough to a business that needed to move fast, she added.

Non-equity money

The Chair asked why more non-equity money could not be provided to small firms.

In response, Mr Bullock said this was to do with Government’s attitudes to procurement. By contrast, he said the US had historically supported small firms.

Asked by the Chair why the biotech industry had been so successful in the US, Mr Bullock said that US companies tended to be “tool companies” rather than investing heavily in new drugs.

Mr Welton added that the knowledge of how to deal with Government tendering processes often lay beyond the capacity or time of small firms.

Ms Glover felt that in the US “the financing chain that exists all the way up the ladder” including presence of exit markets and capital exits encouraged investors to finance small companies even if they were making a loss.

Recent changes to US law had increased the possibility of returns for venture capitalists, which would leave Britain “left behind”, she added.

UK capital

Asked by Conservative MP Sarah Newton why there did not seem to be much equity money available for investment in the UK, Ms Potts said that the UK equity market was shrinking “month by month” and investment managers would tend to invest in things promising quicker returns.

Ms Glover said that there had been a risk averse view held by equity companies in the UK because they were unsure whether the next stage of funding would be secured.

In the energy market, there was an issue in persuading conservative energy companies to procure new technologies, Mr Bullock added.

Mr Bullock gave the example of graphene, saying that pumping money into it when there was no consensus on its use was “quite risky”. He added that there was a rush to create a product before all its possible uses were known.

The Ministry of Defence had “resolutely refused to deal with small companies”, he added.

Mr Bullock additionally praised soft startups, as entrepreneurs were given an education in how to become businesspeople.

Mr Welton added that there were structural issues in the way that capital was raised in the UK.

In answer to a question by Plaid Cymru MP Hywel Williams, Ms Glover noted that location of industry was not as important as getting profile, mentioning a “world-leading” medical technology startup in Mr Williams’ constituency.

Local authority pension funds could become a medium for investing in technology SMEs, Ms Potts later stated. With incentivisation, a “win-win” situation could be produced, she added.

Limitations of soft model

Asked by Conservative MP Stephen Metcalfe whether the use of the “soft model” was precluded in certain sectors, Mr Bullock said that it was very difficult to use in the medical sector, particularly for designing new drugs.

He added that there was some potential in the soft sector to develop “pharmaceutical tools companies”.

Regarding biotech, Mr Bullock said there had been a rush to start new companies, which had produced very little.

Soft companies were good “when the money’s there”, he added.

Entrepreneurship

Mr Williams asked whether the Government did enough to promote entrepreneurship.

In response, Mr Welton said that entrepreneurs should be seen as “heroes”. He felt there needed to be a greater effort by government to promote entrepreneurs.

SMEs were now net depositors to the banking sector due to bank’s willingness to invest, he said. Government should make a greater effort to encourage investment by banks, he added. Ms Glover said that she felt that the problem with a lack of entrepreneurs had now largely disappeared. “It’s not the people that we’re missing”, she added.

There had been problems with fraud committed by some entrepreneurs, Mr Bullock added. He accepted that “we’ve come on a long way”.

Raising venture capital was impossible in 96 per cent of cases, Mr Bullock pointed out. The Government was the biggest customer in many cases, but Government purchasing was not used as an “engine of growth”, he said.

Mr Welton said that small companies needed to ensure they were “soundly capitalised and could raise the right kind of finance”. Banks needed to lend, but companies also needed to be prepared to accept their terms for borrowing, he added.

Bank lending

Asked by Liberal Democrat MP Roger Williams whether it was unrealistic to expect banks to change their lending terms to small companies, Mr Bullock replied that banks were “continuing to lend in this way”, though at reduced rates.

He added, however, that banks needed to have a “commitment” to invest in this area, and he did not see many of them doing this at present.

Mr Welton talked about the history of the Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation (ICFC). He pointed out that the gap ICFC had been set up to address, helping small companies to raise capital, had been forgotten as ICFC changed its’ practices and became a normal private equity firm.

Ms Potts later stated that less than 20% of the funding for small firms came from venture capital. This was to do with regulation, particularly at the European level, she added.

Business Growth Fund

Asked by Roger Williams if the Business Growth Fund (BGF) now took the place of ICFC, Mr Welton said there were “direct parallels”, though stressed that one institution could not “plug the gap”.

A greater issue was how organisations such as the BGF worked with banks in general to increase lending to SMEs, he added.

The BGF was “confident” that there were a lot of companies which were currently growing, even during the current recession, Mr Welton added. These would be the “really good quality companies” of the next 5-10 years, he said.

“There is not a recession” in UK technology companies”, Ms Potts claimed.

Innovation and Investment Fund / Germany

Labour MP Graham Stringer asked why half the UK’s Innovation and Investment Fund was directed overseas, and asked “what are we not doing as well as the Germans”.

In response, Ms Potts said she was unsure, saying the decision-making processes for the Fund had been “extraordinary”. Ms Glover added that Germany was “not innovative”, and pointed more towards the US and Israel.

Mr Welton added that Germany was good at making large companies which stayed around for a long time. Germany used their commercial power to support SMEs. He added.

The role of trade associations was more important in Germany, Mr Bullock added.

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