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Weekly Political Update

Week ending 4 May 2012

Westminster

Deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Parliamentary Question on commissioning services for people with communication needs	Tom Blenkinsop MP (Lab, Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) asked the Department of Health what guidance and support he expects clinical commissioning consortia to receive to ensure that they commission an appropriate range of services for people with speech, language and communication needs.

Health/NHS issues

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
Parliamentary Question on effects of disability living allowance reform	Yasmin Qureshi MP (Lab, Bolton South East) asked whether the Government plans to assess the effects of reform of Disability Living Allowance on the health and social care system. Responding, Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) confirmed that there would be an evaluation of the introduction of Personal Independence Payments but stated that the scope of this evaluation was yet to be determined.
Department of Health report publication – personal health budgets	The Department of Health published a report titled 'Understanding personal health budgets', which can be read here .

Disability issues – employment and welfare

Click on link for full transcript

Item	Summary
<u>House of Commons Library report publication on ESA assessments and reassessments</u>	The House of Commons Library published a report titled 'ESA assessments and reassessments: Social Indicators article'. The report summarises outcomes data from the reassessment programme of Employment and Support Allowance recipients and also looks at the outcomes of Work Capability Assessments for new ESA applicants since the benefit was introduced in 2008. The report can be read here .
<u>Parliamentary Question on benefits and appeals</u>	Austin Mitchell MP (Lab, Great Grimsby) and Shadow Employment Minister Stephen Timms MP (Lab, East Ham) both asked the Government about Incapacity Benefit recipients who have been reassessed for Employment and Support Allowance and have subsequently appealed against decisions.
<u>Parliamentary Question on accessibility of DLA application process</u>	Simon Hart MP (Con, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) asked how many representations the Department for Work and Pensions has received on the complexity of the Disability Living Allowance application form. Disabilities Minister Maria Miller MP (Con, Basingstoke) acknowledged that the application form is long and complex and stated that the Government is seeking to simplify the application process.
<u>Parliamentary Question on effect of benefit reforms on disabled people</u>	Caroline Lucas MP (Green, Brighton, Pavilion) asked the Government about the cumulative effect of the planned reforms to benefits and services on disabled people and how far this enables the Government to meet their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
<u>Parliamentary Question on employment support for people in the Work Related Activity Group</u>	In response to a question from Richard Fuller MP (Con, Bedford) Employment Minister Chris Grayling (Con, Epsom and Ewell) outlined what training and support the Department for Work and Pensions provides for people in the Work Related Activity Group to help them into work.
<u>Parliamentary Question on Work Capability Assessment decisions</u>	Shadow Employment Minister Stephen Timms MP (Lab, East Ham) asked how many Work Capability Assessment decisions have been subject to compulsory reconsideration before appeal and what the outcomes of such reconsiderations have been.

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Medical research

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Item	Summary
Lords Question on budget of the Office for Life Sciences	Lord Laird (UUP) asked the Government what has been the resource budget of the Office for Life Sciences in each year since it was established and what it will be in each of the next three years.

[Parliamentary Question on commissioning services for people with communication needs](#)

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance and support he expects clinical commissioning consortia to receive to ensure that they commission an appropriate range of services for people with speech, language and communication needs.[106150]

Mr Simon Burns: As commissioners, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) will need to have strong relationships with a range of health partners to provide them with access to information, advice and knowledge to help them make the best possible commissioning decisions.

They will be under a statutory duty to seek advice in commissioning services from a broad range of professionals, such as those who are well placed to understand the speech, language and communication needs of local populations.

They will also be able to access advice from clinical senates and networks. The NHS Commissioning Board will have a duty to publish commissioning guidance to which CCGs must have regard.

In addition, CCGs will work with local authorities to develop a comprehensive analysis of health and social care needs in each local area, and to translate these into action through the joint health and wellbeing strategy and their own commissioning plans.

[Parliamentary Question on effects of disability living allowance reform](#)

Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he plans to make of the effects of reform of disability living allowance on the health and social care system.[102355]

Maria Miller: We will evaluate the introduction of personal independence payment. The precise scope of the evaluation is yet to be determined but results will be made publicly available. We will also publish a report to Parliament, two years after the introduction of personal independence payment, on the assessment.

[Parliamentary Questions on benefits and appeals](#)

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which contractors are undertaking work capability assessments in each region; what proportion of incapacity benefit recipients were deemed fit for work in the latest period for which figures are available; what proportion were found eligible for the employment and support allowance; how many appeals against decisions were made in the latest period for which figures are available; and what the average time taken was to settle such appeals.[105373]

Chris Grayling: The DWP contract with Atos Healthcare to perform Medical Services on behalf of the DWP commenced on 1 September 2005 and this is ongoing. On 15 March 2012 the Department for Work and Pensions published information on the reassessment of incapacity benefits claimants for employment and support allowance (ESA) on a national level for the first time.

The report can be found on the internet at the link as follows:

http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_ibr.

Information on appeals is not currently available.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of those previously on incapacity benefit who have been reassessed for employment and support allowance and (a) placed into the work-related activity group and (b) found fit for work have appealed against the decision.[106239]

Chris Grayling: The Department recently published official statistics on Incapacity Benefit Reassessment, covering all claims that started the reassessment process up to the end of July 2011. The publication can be found on the departmental website here: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_ib. Information on the number of appeals against IB reassessment outcomes is not available.

[Parliamentary Question on accessibility of DLA application process](#)

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many representations his Department has received on the complexity of the disability living allowance application form; and how many appeals against decisions taken have resulted from this.[106136]

Maria Miller: Disability living allowance (DLA) is a complex benefit and the claim form has been developed to ensure that all the necessary information is gathered to allow the correct entitlement

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to be assessed. DLA has, over the last five years, introduced a cycle of continuous improvement in the enhancement and development of its claim forms. Feedback and ideas are sought from the PDCS Advisory Forum, customer representative groups and staff. We do not collect data on the number of appeals that are received as a result of customers finding the claim form difficult to complete.

Where a customer is unhappy with a decision they are encouraged to seek a reconsideration prior to any appeal and at this stage concerns over claim form completion should be identified and resolved. We acknowledge that the DLA application form is long and complex and that is why as part of the introduction of personal independent payment from April 2013—we are seeking to simplify the application process, make it more accessible and easier to understand.

[Parliamentary Question on effect of benefit reforms on disabled people](#)

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make an assessment of the (a) cumulative effect of his planned reforms to benefits and services on disabled people and (b) extent to which planned reforms to benefits and services are enabling (i) government and (ii) local authorities to comply with their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement.[103080]

Maria Miller: The Government are limited in what cumulative analysis is possible because of the complexity of the modelling required and the amount of detailed information on individuals and families that is required to estimate the interactions of a number of different policy changes.

In addition, the Government's programme of welfare reform will not be fully implemented until 2017-18 and many policy details are still to be worked through.

Equality impact assessments are however carried out for individual policies where there is a requirement. The first UK Government report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, about implementation of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, was published in November 2011.

The report set out how the obligations of the convention are being met across the UK.

The Government's programme of reform across welfare, employment support, social care and education will build on the achievement assessed in that report, and help make the system work better for disabled people.

In addition, my Department is developing a new cross-government Disability Strategy, co-produced with disabled people.

The strategy will take the convention and its obligations as its basis.

The strategy will be monitored to assess its impact, and my Department is looking at how to achieve this, through various means, including for example, gathering information on the lived experience of disabled people.

[Parliamentary Question on employment support for people in the Work Related Activity Group](#)

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training and support his Department provides for people in the Work Related Activity Group to help them into work.[105491]

Chris Grayling: Claimants in the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) can access the personalised advice and support available through Jobcentre Plus, and the tailored support offered through the Work Programme. They may also be able to get support offered through Work Choice which is a specialist employment programme for disabled people, and Access to Work which provides additional support for individuals whose health or disability affects the way they do their job.

[Parliamentary Question on work capability assessment decisions](#)

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many work capability assessment decisions have been subject to compulsory reconsideration before appeal; and what the outcomes of such reconsiderations have been.[105859]

Chris Grayling: Work capability assessment decisions are currently not subject to mandatory reconsideration before appeal. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 will introduce changes to the appeals process so claimants must seek a revision of the disputed decision before making an appeal to the first-tier tribunal.

An increase in the volumes of social security appeals has led to a substantial increase in the Tribunals Service caseload and longer waiting times for appeals to be heard.

These measures aim to ensure timely, proportionate and more efficient dispute resolution. The Department proposes to begin implementation of the changes to the appeals process from April 2013. Regulations will set out the way in which the change will apply and the types of decisions to which it will apply.

[Lords Question on budget of the Office for Life Sciences](#)

Asked by Lord Laird - To ask Her Majesty's Government what has been the resource budget of the Office for Life Sciences in each year since it was established; what it will be in each of the next three years; what discussions (1) the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and (2) the Minister of State for Universities and Science, have had with HM Treasury Ministers about the Office since July 2011, and with what results.[HL16960]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

(Baroness Wilcox): The Office for Life Sciences (OLS) was established in January 2009 comprising officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), HM Treasury, the Department of Health (DH) and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI).

The OLS had a remit to work with the life sciences industry to build a sustainable and integrated industry in the UK in the future.

Its work culminated in the Life Sciences Blueprint, published in July 2009, followed by Life Sciences 2010: Delivering the Life Sciences Blueprint, published in January 2010. In May 2010, the OLS was restructured with all staff now funded by my department.

The OLS continues to work closely and collaboratively with the Department of Health to ensure the UK maintains and builds on its world leading position in life sciences. Given the cross-departmental working arrangements prior to May 2010, data relating to the resource budget are only available from that point, as follows:

Financial Year	Month	Budget £
2010-11	May	1,185.544

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2010-11	June	970,050
2011-12	April	692,700

In December 2011, the Prime Minister launched the Strategy for UK Life Sciences. This sets out an ambitious programme of activity designed to position the UK as the global hub for life sciences and the location of choice for investment, thus contributing to sustained economic growth. The OLS is currently undergoing a reorganisation to ensure the strategy implementation is properly supported.

The reorganisation will utilise vacant posts, and operate within the same staffing envelope and resource budget to ensure more focused responsibilities and greater efficiency. It is not possible at this time to confirm what the exact resource budget will be in 2012-13 but it is likely to remain broadly the same as for 2011-12. No discussions about the OLS have taken place between HM Treasury Ministers and BIS Ministers.

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

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- 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