



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2019/0138, 4 June 2019

# General Debate on Invisible Disabilities and Accessibility Challenges

By Doug Pyper  
Sue Holland  
Bess Jap  
Steve Haver

## Summary

On Wednesday 5 June 2019 MPs will hold a debate in the Chamber on invisible disabilities and accessibility challenges. The debate was allocated by the Backbench Business Committee, following representations by Martin Whitfield MP, who will open the debate in the Chamber.

## Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Media articles</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Press releases	4
2.2	Articles and blogs	4
<b>3.</b>	<b>Parliamentary material</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1	Early Day Motions	6
3.2	Written Statements	8
3.3	Debates	8
3.4	Parliamentary Questions	9
3.5	Select Committees' material	14
<b>4.</b>	<b>Organisations and further reading</b>	<b>15</b>

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Background

On Wednesday 5 June 2019 MPs will hold a debate in the Chamber on invisible disabilities and accessibility challenges. The subject of the debate was decided by the Backbench Business Committee, following representations [on 14 May 2019](#) by Martin Whitfield MP:

This application dates back to work I have done with a young student in my constituency called Grace Warnock, who suffers from Crohn's disease. She created an invisible disability sign to go on toilet doors because she had a horrible incident when she was young, when people treated her very badly because she had no apparent disability. Grace has continued with her campaign in Scotland, supported by the Scottish Parliament and her MSP, and my colleague, Iain Gray, so that her sign appears in schools, airports, and train stations around Scotland.

Since my election, we have carried on advocating on invisible disabilities and the challenges that people face. I had the great pleasure of having an Adjournment debate when Grace won an award from the Prime Minister for her work. The stage has been reached that the sign has gone through different changes; indeed, we would like now to move towards it becoming the British standard. If it can become the British standard, there is very good reason to believe that that would then roll out across Europe, irrespective of changes in relationships with Europe, because the British standards are regarded very highly across the world, and this would be an example of a sign that has been tested, that works and that delivers what it says.

This is an opportunity to bring that before the House. I have frankly been overwhelmed by the support I have received from colleagues for this debate. It has fallen into three categories. There are people who want to raise invisible disabilities because they have constituents who face that issue. There are people who want to raise the issue of education—that some able-bodied people feel empowered by these signs to use toilet facilities and accessible facilities when they perhaps should not. It becomes a question of the empathy that society has towards people.

Finally, there is a group of people who have visible physical disabilities who, in the main, are completely supportive of this. Again, it files into that educational need for people to accept that... As a society, we should accept that they have a place and a right and that the facilities are there and should be used.<sup>1</sup>

The *Equality Act 2010* defines disability as a “mental or physical impairment” that has “a substantial and long-term adverse effect” on a person’s “ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.<sup>2</sup> The term “invisible disability” or “hidden disability” is generally understood to mean any disability without obvious physical outward signs or the use of equipment such as wheelchairs or crutches. Examples include mental health impairments, sensory impairments, fibromyalgia, lupus and chronic fatigue syndrome.

---

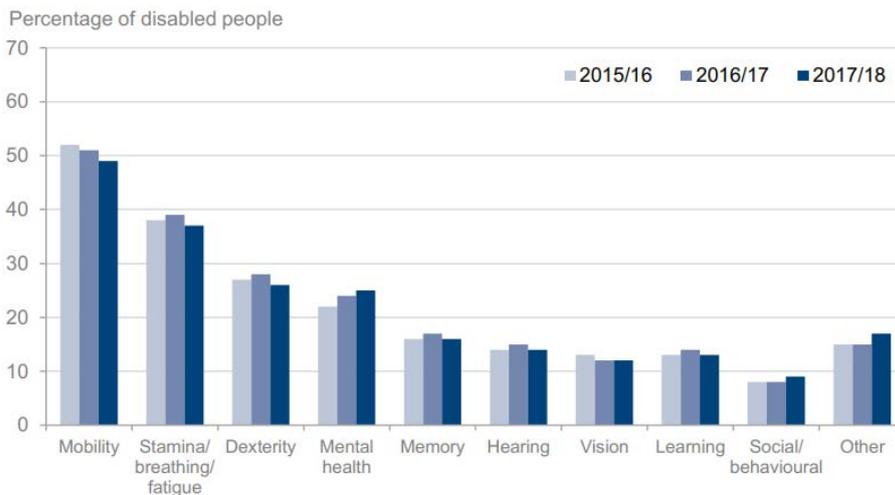
<sup>1</sup> [Backbench Committee Representations: Backbench Business Tuesday 14 May 2019](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Equality Act 2010*, [section 6](#)

The Department for Work and Pension’s Family Resources Survey, which estimates the number of disabled people in the UK, adopts the *Equality Act* definition of disability and found:

**Twenty-one per cent (13.3 million) of people reported a disability in 2017/18**, an increase from 18 per cent (10.9 million) in 2007/08. The change came from increases in the percentage of working-age adults (14 to 18 per cent) and children (six to eight per cent) reporting a disability, but the period has seen the percentage of State Pension age adults with a disability decrease, from 46 to 44 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

Respondents to the survey identify the specific impairments they have, from a standard list, the results of which are shown in the chart below.<sup>4</sup>



The DWP Family Resources Survey 2017/18 report notes:

Of those who reported a disability, 25 per cent reported a mental health impairment in 2017/18, up from 22 per cent in 2015/16. In each of the three years to 2017/18, mobility was the most prevalent impairment reported, however it has decreased from 7.0 million in 2015/16 to 6.5 million in 2017/18 and also as a proportion, from 52 per cent in 2015/16 to 49 per cent in 2017/18. The percentage of people reporting ‘other’ types of impairment increased from 15 per cent to 17 per cent (an increase from 2.0 million to 2.3 million) over the same period.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> DWP, Family Resources Survey 2017/18, 28 March 2019, p7

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Media articles

### 2.1 Press releases

Disability Rights UK

[New Transport Solutions Must Make Accessibility Top Priority, Government Says](#)

16 May 2019

Department for Transport

[Accessibility must be at the heart of new transport tech](#)

14 May 2019

Disability Rights UK

[We welcome the extension of the Blue Badge Scheme to those with hidden disabilities](#)

7 January 2019

### 2.2 Articles and blogs

Shaw Trust Accessibility Services

[Accessibility Myths: Invisible Disabilities](#)

2019

Financial Times

[‘Purple Tuesday’ puts disabled shoppers at the fore](#)

11 November 2018

Design Week

[Why the wheelchair symbol should be rethought to include “invisible disabilities”](#)

1 August 2018

Times

[Parking logo ‘suggests all disabled people are Paralympians’](#)

26 April 2018

Guardian

[Disabilities are not always obvious. Don't judge us without knowing the full story](#)

11 January 2018

BBC

[Hidden disabilities: Pain beneath the surface](#)

5 July 2017

Monarch Mobility

[What happens when you change the disabled icon?](#)

26.June.2017

Times

[Girl signs way for 'invisible disability'](#)

27 November 2015

## 3. Parliamentary material

### 3.1 Early Day Motions

#### [CHANGING PLACES TOILETS CAMPAIGN](#)

welcomes the Government's response to invest £2 million to build Changing Places toilets in motorway service stations...further notes that overwhelming majority of Government and local authority buildings, hospitals, GP surgeries, sporting venues, restaurants, pubs, train stations and large shops do not contain a Changing Places toilet; and calls on the Government to raise awareness by providing Government guidance on the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, undertaking a public information campaign and calling on all owners and operators of buildings used by the public to install Changing Places toilets.

27 Nov 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1881  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Jones, Graham P

#### [LET US IN CAMPAIGN](#)

That this House notes the duty placed on businesses by the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable readjustments to remove barriers to disabled people; regrets that it is up to the individual to bring court action against business owners who are in breach of these provisions; recognises that such action is way beyond the realms of affordability for the many disabled people whose only source of income is social security payments;... further notes the findings of a survey of 130 business properties in western Edinburgh, undertaken by Shirley Todd, which found that 72 per cent were not wheelchair accessible; notes that transport providers in particular often make no provision for disabled passengers

18 Jun 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1411  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Jardine, Christine

#### [HEALTH INEQUALITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND AUTISM](#)

That this House recognises the health inequalities that exist for people with learning disabilities ... notes that Dimensions' research shows that 98 per cent of GPs believe they would benefit from learning disability and autism training; and urges the Government to introduce mandatory learning disability and autism training for all primary healthcare professionals led by the experts

11 Jun 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1365  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Lamb, Norman

#### [I AM ME QUEEN'S AWARD FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE](#)

That this House congratulates the Renfrewshire-based charity I Am Me for winning the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in recognition of I Am Me's dedicated volunteers... notes that I Am Me is a charity that aims to change attitudes and behaviours so that disabled and vulnerable people in Scotland feel safe

07 Jun 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1358  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Newlands, Gavin

#### [EHLERS-DANLOS AWARENESS MONTH 2018](#)

That this House supports Ehlers-Danlos (EDS) Awareness Month 2018 which takes place throughout May 2018; thanks all of the charities and organisations which work to support those living with EDS and their families and those who raise awareness...

21 May 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 1286  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Linden, David

#### [HIV AND UK AVIATION](#)

That this House welcomes the decision by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to allow applications for Class 1 Medical Certificates to people living with HIV, which previously prevented otherwise capable pilots from taking up employment as Commercial Airline Pilots... notes that under the Equality Act 2010, HIV is recognised as a disability and protected characteristic which should protect people living with HIV from employment discrimination

18 Jan 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 827  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Grady, Patrick

#### [BLUE BADGE SCHEME AND NON-PHYSICAL DISABILITIES](#)

That this House notes with concern that Blue Badge applications are regularly refused for people with mental health conditions, including those who suffer from severe agoraphobia and panic attacks ...further notes that non-physical disabilities can be profoundly debilitating and traumatic, and that failure to offer appropriate support and assistance can result in people becoming housebound and isolated

31 Oct 2017 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 478  
(session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Lamb, Norman

## 3.2 Written Statements

### [Access for All](#)

Made by: Baroness Sugg (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport)

08.04.2019

### [Access to Work Scheme](#)

Made by: Baroness Buscombe (The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions)

20.03.2018

## 3.3 Debates

### [Mental Health of Children and Young Adults](#)

HL Deb, 16.05.2019, cc1656-1695

### [British Sign Language Users: Access to NHS Services](#)

HC Deb, 15.05.2019, cc133-152WH

### [Acquired Brain Injury](#)

HC Deb, 09.05.2019, cc700-731

### [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#)

HC Deb, 25.10.2018, cc498-524

### [Disabled People](#)

HL Deb, 28.06.2018, cc297-334

### [Toilets \(Provision and Accessibility\)](#)

HC Deb, 27.06.2018, cc913-5

[Accessibility Challenges: Invisible Disabilities](#)

HC Deb, 18.06.2018, c154-160

[Autism](#)

HC Deb, 29.03.2018, cc972-1014

[People with Autism: Public Building Access](#)

HC Deb, 31.01.2018, cc399-418WH

## 3.4 Parliamentary Questions

[Employment: Disability](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to help ensure that employers provide reasonable adjustments to the workplace so that people with hidden or invisible conditions are able to (a) access and (b) stay in employment.

22 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 250748

**Asked by:** Lewis, Mr Ivan | **Answered by:** Victoria Atkins |

**Department:** Women and Equalities

[Public Transport: Disability](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent steps he has taken to improve the accessibility of public transport for disabled passengers.

21 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 255291

**Asked by:** Wiggin, Bill | **Answered by:** Ms Nusrat Ghani |

**Department:** Department for Transport

[Employment: Autism](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 28 November 2018 to Question 193498 on Employment: Autism, over what time period was the Neurodiversity Toolkit was developed; what processes were used to develop that toolkit; and what

assessment she has made of the effect of that toolkit on closing the autism employment gap.

17 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 252853

**Asked by:** Debbonaire, Thangam | **Answered by:** Justin Tomlinson |  
**Department:** Work and Pensions

#### [People with Disabilities: Employment](#)

Employment prospects for young people with hidden disabilities or who are on an education, health and care plan are much lower than the mainstream average. Supported internships offer a way through, but the take-up from employers is painfully low. Given that the Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for overall targets, may I ask the Minister to work across

the Government to ensure that we can use the apprenticeship levy to fund employers to enable them to take up more of these excellent opportunities?

13 May 2019 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 660 c4

**Asked by:** Huw Merriman | **Answered by:** Justin Tomlinson |  
**Department:** Work and Pensions

#### [Blue Badge Scheme](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 13 February 2019 to Question 218834 on Blue Badge Scheme, on what date the guidance to local authorities on changes to the Blue Badge scheme extending eligibility to those with less visible conditions will be issued.

24 Apr 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 245912

**Asked by:** Pennycook, Matthew | **Answered by:** Jesse Norman |  
**Department:** Department for Transport

#### [Autism: Health Education](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans the Government has put in place to mark world autism awareness week between 1 and 7 April 2019; and what steps the Government is taking to ensure that people with autism have equal opportunities in all areas of society.

11 Apr 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 240514

**Asked by:** Hendrick, Sir Mark | **Answered by:** Caroline Dinéage |  
**Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

[Blue Badge Scheme](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 March 2019 to Question 231515 on Blue Badge Scheme, which disability organisations his Department has consulted with on developing the guidance on the expanded eligibility criteria for Blue Badges; and on what date he plans for people with non-physical and hidden disabilities to be able to apply for Blue Badges.

04 Apr 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 237698

**Asked by:** Debbonaire, Thangam | **Answered by:** Jesse Norman | **Department:** Department for Transport

[Engagements](#)

Grace Warnock is a young East Lothian constituent of mine who has Crohn's disease. Using accessible toilets, she has faced negative comments and abuse from adults, but this has inspired her to create Grace's sign to remind everyone that there are people with invisible disabilities, who have every right to use accessible toilet facilities, and that society should have a heart. Will the Prime Minister join me in endorsing Grace's campaign to standardise toilet signage to ensure that anyone—anybody—with a disability feels able to use accessible toilets without abuse?

03 Apr 2019 | Prime Minister's questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 657 cc1031-3

**Asked by:** Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab) | **Answering member:** The Prime Minister | **Department:** Prime Minister

[Railways: Autism and Learning Disability](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that train companies have effective accessibility plans for passengers with (a) learning disabilities and (b) autism.

06 Mar 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 226509

**Asked by:** Davey, Sir Edward | **Answered by:** Ms Nusrat Ghani | **Department:** Department for Transport

[Jobcentre Plus: Autism](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what training has been provided to Jobcentre Plus staff in the (a) UK and (b) Easington Constituency to support (i) people with autism and (ii) family carers

looking after a child with autism to ensure they can access all necessary services.

04 Mar 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 226654

**Asked by:** Morris, Grahame | **Answered by:** Sarah Newton |  
**Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

#### [GP Access: Learning Disabilities](#)

There are shocking health inequalities between people with learning disabilities and the general population, and that is recognised by GPs: 60% say that they have received less than a day's training in how to meet the needs of patients with learning disabilities and autism, while 98% say that they would appreciate more training. The Government are clearly failing people with learning disabilities. Will they commit themselves to ensuring that every new GP who is trained in England is also given training in how to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities and autism?

27 Nov 2018 | Oral answers to questions | House of Commons | 650 c139

**Asked by:** Marsha De Cordova | **Answered by:** Caroline Dinenage |  
**Department:** Health and Social Care

#### [Mental Illness: Equality](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to extend Equality Act 2010 to include people with episodic and fluctuating mental health conditions.

23 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 181354

**Asked by:** Sherriff, Paula | **Answered by:** Matt Hancock |  
**Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

#### [Aviation: Sign Language](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether assistive technology for users of British Sign Language is planned to be part of the aviation strategy.

17 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 177676

**Asked by:** Esterson, Bill | **Answered by:** Jesse Norman | **Department:** Department for Transport

#### [Employment: Disability](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to support people to (a) disclose a disability and (b) ask for reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

17 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 176353

**Asked by:** Cameron, Dr Lisa | **Answered by:** Sarah Newton |  
**Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

#### [Hearing Impairment](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what Government support is available to people with hearing impairments in respect of a) assisted access to public buildings and b) financial support for assistive products.

04 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 168189

**Asked by:** Smith, Royston | **Answered by:** Caroline Dinenage |  
**Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

#### [Disability: Advocacy](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the capacity of community advocacy services for people living with disabilities, including hearing loss.

04 Jun 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 146930

**Asked by:** Streeting, Wes | **Answered by:** Caroline Dinenage |  
**Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

#### [Railways: Disabled Passengers](#)

My Lords, some disabilities are hidden. I declare an interest as I wear two hearing aids and hear very little. Such people have great difficulty coping with train and bus announcements made audibly to passengers who do not suffer in that way. What progress have the Government made in ensuring that the provision of visual and audio announcements on buses and trains is obligatory?

24 May 2018 | Oral questions - Supplementary | Answered | House of Lords | 791 c1081

**Asked by:** Baroness Randerson | **Answered by:** Lord Young of Cookham

#### [Autism: Equality](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to ensure people who have autism are given equal opportunities in employment.

23 May 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 143720

**Asked by:** Simpson, David | **Answered by:** Victoria Atkins |  
**Department:** Women and Equalities

#### [Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what proportion of assessment centres have no (a) disabled parking and (b) disabled access.

21 Mar 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 132400

**Asked by:** Morris, Grahame | **Answered by:** Sarah Newton |  
**Department:** Department for Work and Pensions

#### [Accessible Stations](#)

What steps are being taken to increase the number of stations that are accessible to disabled people.

18 Jan 2018 | Oral answers to questions | House of Commons | 634  
c1034

**Asked by:** Dr Lisa Cameron | **Answered by:** The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani) | **Department:** Transport

### 3.5 Select Committees' material

Women and Equalities Committee, [Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment](#), 25 April 2017, HC 631 2017-19

## 4. Organisations and further reading

Department for Transport, [Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy](#), March 2019

Purple Tuesday, [Not every disability is visible](#), 2019

Crohn's and Colitis UK, [New 'Not Every Disability is Visible' campaign targets restaurants and pubs](#), 16 April 2019

Farrer & Co, [Hidden disabilities - responding to the known and the unknown](#), Blog by Sophia Coles, 11 March 2019

Virgin Atlantic, [Hidden disabilities. How can we help?](#), By Dave Gunner, 13 February 2019

Dorothy I Riddle, [How Far Can You Walk? Hidden Mobility Disabilities and Community Participation](#), Hidden Mobility Disabilities Alliance, 2019

Department for Transport, [People with hidden disabilities to benefit from Blue Badges](#), 29 July 2018

Department for Transport, [The Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People](#), 25 July 2018

Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee, [DPTAC position on 'shared space'](#), 13 June 2018

Revo website, [Our Accessible Places campaign highlights invisible disabilities](#), 21 May 2018

Wales TUC Cymru, [Disability and 'hidden' impairments in the workplace](#), 2018

The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, [Understanding and meeting the needs of travellers with hidden disabilities](#), 2017

CILT Accessibility and Inclusion Forum, [“Out of Sight, Out of Mind” Understanding Transport and Mobility Issues for People with Hidden Disabilities](#), Summary of Proceedings, 23rd January 2017

SN Maclean, [Dementia: an investigation into whether the current process of identifying reasonable adjustment to buildings by access audit is consistent for all disabilities](#), University of Salford, 2016

Civil Aviation Authority, [CAA guidance for airports on providing assistance to people with hidden disabilities](#), CAP 1411, 2016

National Union of Journalists, [Hidden disabilities: preliminary report](#), by Stephen Brookes, Rachel Broady and Lena Calvert, 2008

[Visibility93 website](#)

[Invisible Disability Project website](#)

[Disabled Access Day website](#)

### About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email [hcinfo@parliament.uk](mailto:hcinfo@parliament.uk).

### Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).