

VIEW FROM THE HOUSE

The European Referendum Bill is now working its way through the legislative process. Its full title is 'A Bill to make provision for the holding of a referendum in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union.'

And following on from that simple title, the legislative process is also streamlined. So following the second reading, the House of Commons agreed a programme motion which schedules the Bill to be considered by a Committee of the whole House over two days, provisionally on 16 and 18 June 2015.

The debate on whether we should stay in or leave will begin with organisations and parties forming campaign groups. It is important that individuals, organisations and business in Walsall South express their views as I engage with the issue in parliament.

I was pleased to secure an Adjournment Debate on the topic of mental health and higher education institutions. These debates are an opportunity to put the case and for a minister to reply. Many students and higher education institutions are concerned that they are losing support services. During the debate I told the Minister that our students are saddled with an average debt of about £44,000 before they even start work. And it is interesting to note that Germany have abolished tuition fees – the last federal state did this in October last year.

There is some confusion, however, about the position of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) which enables students to access support. The Minister said it was out to consultation but a higher education institution I spoke to thought the matter had been decided. I hope to clarify this as it allows institutions such as the Royal Agricultural University to give support to students who would otherwise not get it. Two thirds of their students can qualify for DSA. We need qualified people with science degrees which will boost productivity.

More confusion over funding for schools in a state of disrepair. I was disappointed to hear that despite meeting with the Minister at the Department of Education and help from the Department for Education that Joseph Leckie Academy had to bid yet again for funds to rebuild classrooms. Worse still these were funds that were allocated before the 2010 election. The bid is for essential work so that a dilapidated building can be closed to build classrooms. I hope the Minister will listen and support us.

Valerie Vaz MP

Walsall South

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