

## View from the House

Back after the August recess and I am sitting on the Higher Education and Research Bill in committee for a line by line scrutiny of the Bill.

The legislation to reform higher education is the first for over a decade. This is an opportunity to tackle retroactive changes to student loans terms, a fundamental flaw in the student loan system that undermines the position of graduates whilst jeopardising the trust that young people have in the system to treat them fairly. Bills of £45,000 have been landing on graduates' doormats despite promises from Ministers that there would be no retrospective increase in interest on the loans.

At the evidence session I asked the Minister if this was a good time to pause the Bill given the Brexit vote and that higher education teaching and research are split over 2 new ministries. And now the latest Government policy on grammar schools affects the work of the Office of Fair Access which is set to be abolished in the Bill.

The Bill creates a new regulator for the sector: the Office for Students (OfS) and grants considerable powers to OfS from managing new institutions entering the sector, ensuring quality, providing teaching funding, and giving the power to award degrees. My amendment called for a change of name to Office of Higher Education given that there were no students on the Board of the OfS. Also it didn't address the issue of postgraduates, capping tuition fees, returners or lifelong learning.

Sadly, Wally Burley a doughty supporter of Animal Welfare has passed away. He was a former Labour Party official but will be most remembered for his commitment to the welfare of animals and lobbied hard for the Hunting Act. Condolences to Cllr Rose Burley, their daughter Maria and her family.

I was delighted to accept the invitation from Gary Fulford at WHG to open Cardan Pointe on the Waterfront. It is a delightful well-being scheme for those aged over 55 providing them with self-contained flats with a high level of specialist service and community participation. The residents I met are extremely happy to be living there.

Residents are at the heart of a new community and have access to the amazing New Art Gallery collection on a flourishing Waterfront. I was pleased the new head of the Arts Council, Nicholas Serota, mentioned Walsall when announcing his new appointment. We must continue to promote and protect our town's Gallery and cultural icon.

Valerie Vaz

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