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9 September 2020**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 9 September 2020

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 4 June).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Armed Forces Personnel

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support British armed forces personnel based in Scotland. [905549]

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support British armed forces personnel based in Scotland. [905561]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): British armed forces personnel in Scotland play a crucial role in defending the whole UK, and my Department meets regularly with the Ministry of Defence to help raise concerns that are specific to Scotland. I feel particularly indebted to the armed forces in Scotland, who keep us safe at home and abroad and who assisted with such dedication at the height of this covid pandemic.

Joy Morrissey: The SNP Government's decision to make Scotland the highest taxed part of the UK has threatened to put the many brave troops based there out of pocket through no fault of their own. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, because our armed forces serve the whole UK, it is only right that they are treated equally and fairly wherever they are based?

Mr Jack: I absolutely agree. Our armed forces perform a hugely important task in their service of the United Kingdom, and it is unacceptable that any member of them should be subject to discriminatory taxation. That is why the United Kingdom Government took the decision to make an annual payment to protect them from the Scottish Government's decision to make Scotland the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom.

Mark Jenkinson: British armed forces have contributed enormously to the national response to the covid-19 outbreak, supporting the distribution of personal protective equipment, assisting with testing facilities and transporting patients, for which Cumbria and my constituency of Workington are grateful. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the armed forces for all their work during the pandemic, and can he confirm that every part of our United Kingdom will continue to benefit from their hard work?

Mr Jack: Our armed forces have been instrumental in the Government's response to the pandemic, and I give my deep thanks to them for that work. In Scotland, that has included military planning personnel for the Scottish Government's emergency co-ordination centre, Puma helicopters deployed to Kinloss to support the NHS in medical transport and airlift critically ill patients from the Scottish highlands, and the operating of pop-up mobile testing sites across Scotland.

Strengthening the Union

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to strengthen the Union. [905550]

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to strengthen the Union. [905553]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): The Government and this Prime Minister are passionate about the Union, and the strength of the Union has never been more important or more evident. The UK has the economic strength to support jobs and businesses with generous financial packages, and it is the strength of the Union that will enable us to rebuild our economy and swiftly respond to any emerging threats to our prosperity.

Bob Blackman [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Figures released by the Scottish Government demonstrate that the cost to Scotland of leaving the United Kingdom and becoming independent would be £15.1 billion a year. We know that those figures must be true, because they were released by the SNP Government. Does he agree that, far from creating an economic case for leaving the United Kingdom, that demonstrates the strength of the Union and why Scotland is far better off being in the United Kingdom?

Mr Jack: Yes, absolutely. The Scottish Government's own figures show clearly how much Scotland benefits from being part of a strong United Kingdom, with the pooling and sharing of resources. Year after year, people in Scotland benefit from levels of public spending substantially above the United Kingdom's average, and that Union dividend is worth almost £2,000 per person to everyone in Scotland.

Alexander Stafford: Last month's figures from the Scottish Government confirmed that our Union is worth nearly £2,000 a year for every man, woman and child in Scotland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we not only benefit from being one Union and one happy family together, but that the economic benefits for Scotland from the Union are huge?

Mr Jack: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The benefits of the Union go way beyond public spending. The strength and size of the UK economy creates opportunities for Scottish businesses, and around 60% of Scotland's exports currently go to the rest of the UK. That is more than she trades with the rest of the world.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab) [V]: The Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Health and Social Care have confirmed that the Government will break the law by overriding the Northern Ireland protocol. That would mean reneging on the withdrawal agreement—an agreement that the Prime Minister himself

negotiated, brought to this House, voted for, ratified and campaigned on at the general election. This reckless move reignites the prospect of us crashing out of the European Union with no deal. The Prime Minister promised the British people an oven-ready deal. It now looks like an oven-ready no-deal. The Secretary of State himself has said previously that a no-deal outcome would “create damaging uncertainty” for the country and that he would never vote for anything that threatened or undermined the integrity of our United Kingdom. Does he think that reneging on an international treaty, breaking their promise on a deal and putting no-deal firmly back on the table strengthens or weakens the Union?

Mr Jack: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his partner on the birth of their baby daughter, Zola, which is why he is currently on paternity leave.

I hope that I face even questions such as that from the hon. Gentleman for some time to come, because he is honourable, which is a lot more than can be said for many in his party—the hard left of his party—who have sought to smear and undermine him in recent days. In answer to his question, we absolutely do want a deal. We are in serious negotiations again this week because we want to get a deal, and that is our intention, but the withdrawal agreement was written on the basis that subsequent agreements could be reached through the Joint Committee, and that Joint Committee process is ongoing and we are committed to it. None the less, in the event that it cannot deal with any adverse implications for the Good Friday agreement, it is important that we have a position that creates a safety net to uphold our commitments to the members of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: We do need to speed up.

Ian Murray: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for his kind words about Zola, and if his Government could legislate for a minimum of six hours’ sleep for new parents, I certainly would be the first person in the Aye Lobby to support them.

The Secretary of State’s Conservative colleague and prominent constitutional expert, Adam Tomkins MSP, his own—now resigned—most senior Government lawyer and many on his own Back Benches disagree with him. He must surely realise that the UK Government’s recklessness only benefits those who want to break up the UK and the consequences of breaking up the UK would be dire for all of our constituents. As has already been mentioned, the Scottish Government’s own figures last week showed that the UK dividend to Scotland is an extra £15 billion a year—the entire budget of the Scottish NHS. Does the Secretary of State agree with me that the focus of both the Scottish and UK Governments must be to protect public health, invest in our economy, and secure jobs and not to continue with this endless paralysing constitutional division?

Mr Jack: Well, Mr Speaker, as you have asked me to be brief, I shall answer that question with a firm yes.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP) [V]: I echo the congratulations to the shadow Secretary of State. However, I will not echo the congratulations to the Union. Today, the UK Government have published

their United Kingdom Internal Market Bill. I want to ask specifically about clause 46, which states that any UK Minister of the Crown may promote and directly provide economic development, effectively allowing the UK Government the powers to legislate in the following devolved areas: health; education; water; electricity; courts and pension facilities; housing; and the list goes on. Am I correct in my understanding that when the Government says that they are strengthening the Union, what they really mean is dismantling devolution?

Mr Jack: Absolutely not. We are strengthening devolution. We are bringing a power surge to Scotland—more than 100 new powers. We are not taking a single power away, and I invite the hon. Lady to name one that we are. I say that we are the party that backs devolution. The SNP is the party that wants to destroy devolution by leaving the United Kingdom.

Mhairi Black: Will the Secretary of State tell me, if he is not dismantling devolution, specifically where in the Bill does it say that the UK Government must acquire the consent of the devolved Administrations?

Mr Jack: The UK Government would like to get a legislative consent motion from the devolved Administrations, but we are quite clear that we need to bring forward this UK legislation to protect jobs, to protect producers, to protect manufacturers and to protect consumers. This is a piece of legislation that, through mutual recognition and non-discrimination, strengthens our United Kingdom economy. That is important to Scotland because over £50 billion of trade is done with the rest of the UK—more than Scotland does with the rest of the world.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Further talk of constitutional wrangling is deeply unhelpful at a time when we continue to fight the coronavirus pandemic in Scotland and across much of the world. Does the Secretary of State therefore agree that the SNP has got its priorities completely wrong by finding time to bring forward another referendum Bill as we have seen spikes in coronavirus in Scotland and across the UK?

Mr Jack: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment as leader of the Scottish Conservatives. I was sorry to lose him as a Minister, but I got to know him well, and I know very well that he will do an excellent job. He does make a very good point. It is important that we come together to fight this virus and not go back into division and constitutional wrangling. That just basically creates uncertainty and is bad for the Scottish economy and bad for Scottish jobs.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I just say ever so gently and candidly to the right hon. Gentleman that he is not presiding over the strengthening of the Union—he is presiding over its demise? Support for independence is now at an all-time high at 55%—but after today it is going to get a lot, lot worse for him. If there was ever any doubt that this Government were determined to override the authority of the Scottish Parliament, it is clause 46 of this disgraceful Bill today. Why does he not man up? Why does he not confess and be honest with the Scottish people and tell them that this is an unadulterated power grab?

Mr Jack: For the very simple reason that it is not—and still the SNP cannot tell us one power that is being grabbed, not one single power. It is quite the contrary—more powers are being delivered to the Scottish Parliament, strengthening devolution. SNP Members do not like that. They do not like the UKIM legislation because it strengthens the United Kingdom economy, and that does not fit into their plans either.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): In response to the fact that a majority of people in Scotland, in all recent polls, want Scotland to be independent, the Secretary of State's Government will today set out steps that betray the fact that they want to fatally undermine devolution, while declaring that they will break international law with malice aforethought. Does he believe that in being an accomplice to this, he will strengthen the Union?

Mr Jack: We have been very clear about our position. These are contingent powers that will be exercised only in cases where the Joint Committee cannot be formed or operate, or cannot come to a view at a particular time, to prevent—it is important to understand this—adverse implications for the Good Friday agreement. Our responsibility, first and foremost, is to the people of Northern Ireland. For the SNP, it is always, “Britain second, Brussels first.”

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Historically, the role of Secretary of State for Scotland has been to argue for more decisions to be made in Scotland. Does the current Secretary of State not feel ashamed and embarrassed to be the first incumbent of this office to actually argue for things to happen the other way around? Does he not realise that by so doing, he will make the argument for political independence for Scotland far better than those of us on the SNP Benches can?

Mr Jack: I utterly disagree with the hon. Gentleman. This legislation strengthens the United Kingdom. Scotland does 60% of her trade with the rest of the UK—over £50 billion. We want to protect that trade. We want to improve the Scottish economy. In no way is a single power being removed from the Scottish Government. It is quite the contrary: powers are being increased.

UK Internal Market

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) the Scottish Government on legislative proposals for a UK internal market. [905551]

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): What discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) the Scottish Government on legislative proposals for a UK internal market. [905557]

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the UK internal market White Paper. [905565]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): I have frequent discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of matters relating to the UK internal market. The UK internal market is vitally important for our

economy. As I have said a number of times over the past five minutes, sales produced in Scotland to the rest of the UK are £51.2 billion per year and over 60% of our exports.

Angela Crawley: By contrast to the Secretary of State's power surge, the European single market's principles, for example, are based on equality, co-operation and consent, with agreed standards for all member states. If he claims that the policy on the UK internal market is not a power grab, will he guarantee a mechanism for negotiation, agreement and consent between the four nations of the UK?

Mr Jack: The hon. Lady points towards frameworks, which is exactly what we are doing. For standards, frameworks will be by consent across the United Kingdom. There is the opportunity for parties to opt out. As a safety net for business, we are introducing mutual recognition, which underpins the European single market, and we are introducing non-discrimination.

Stewart Hosie: The gravity analysis published in the internal market Command Paper suggests that a border effected between Scotland and the rest of the UK would have an impact of about 1.1% of Scottish GDP. Brexit will have an impact seven times greater—a loss of GDP growth in Scotland of about 8%. When the Secretary of State has discussions with the Scottish Government, will he commit to bring forward another Command Paper insisting that Scotland remains part of the European Union single market?

Mr Jack: We are leaving the EU—I do not know if that point has been wasted on the hon. Gentleman. When we were on the Treasury Committee, we saw many projections about what would happen if the UK voted for Brexit, and all those projections had one thing in common: they were wrong. I do not recognise his figures. I believe that with good trade deals and this UK legislation, we will strengthen the Scottish economy.

Ruth Jones: Like many people in Newport West, I was astonished by the comments of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the Dispatch Box yesterday in relation to the Government's willingness to break international law. Legislation is important and so is the Government's ability to obey it, so will the Secretary of State commit to a UK-wide framework that protects workers' rights and environmental standards within the internal market, and will he pledge to stick to it?

Mr Jack: There are over 42 frameworks—I have not studied them all in detail, but I am sure that those subjects will be covered. When we have frameworks, it is by consensus. It is up to each member state of the United Kingdom—the four nations—to adhere to those. They do have an opt-out and, as I say, the UKIM legislation underpins that and protects producers, suppliers, manufacturers and consumers alike.

Covid-19: Support for Businesses

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on economic support available for Scottish businesses during the covid-19 outbreak. [905552]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): I have regular discussions with my Cabinet colleagues, including the Chancellor, on all aspects of the impact of coronavirus in Scotland. The unprecedented actions we have taken have supported over 930,000 jobs and more than 65,000 businesses in Scotland. Over £2.3 billion of support for business is being given through the Government-supported loan schemes.

Andrew Griffith: With its abundant renewable resources, Scotland has the opportunity to be a world leader in hydrogen technology, a \$2.5 trillion global market. Will the Minister inform the House what conversations are taking place between the Government and Scotland to ensure that we seize this opportunity together as a Union?

Iain Stewart: The Government are absolutely committed to the development of hydrogen as part of our decarbonisation strategy. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that in July, the Government launched the Hydrogen Advisory Council, where Government and UK industry will work together to identify and promote the supply of low-carbon hydrogen at scale across the energy system. Scottish companies are members of this council.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) and Mariam on the birth of their baby daughter, Zola. The House will be pleased to hear that she has very robust lungs and her father's cheeks—that is how it has been put to me. *[Interruption.]* These cheeks, Mr Speaker!

The Minister knows that businesses across Scotland are in desperate need of additional support specifically in relation to the furlough scheme. The UK Government have in place one of the shortest furlough schemes of any country in Europe. Will he please today, ahead of the Opposition day debate, announce that we will extend the furlough scheme for those businesses that need it most, and particularly in Scotland for the hospitality and accommodation sectors, because they need help from this Government?

Iain Stewart: I should also add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on the birth of his daughter. I am delighted to hear that her vocal contributions will be as strong as his.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) highlights the furlough scheme, which has been a very valuable tool in our economic response to coronavirus, but I point out to him that it is about giving the right support at the right time. The Chancellor is correct to move us towards supporting people returning to work through schemes such as the job retention scheme and many of the other packages that we are putting in place to support all sectors of the economy.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Many local newspapers in Scotland were pleased to get UK Government advertising business at the start of lockdown and agreed heavily discounted rates for it. Many of them were surprised then, after invoices had been issued, to get requests from the UK Government for further discounts. Is the Minister content that his Government should be treating Scotland's local newspapers in that way?

Iain Stewart: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. This is a unique partnership to support the newspaper industry. It was agreed by Newsworks on behalf of all publications and the terms of the agreement are commercially confidential. I can tell him that at least 60% of the funding is supporting smaller local titles. If he has any specific issues with titles in his constituency, I am more than happy to explore them with him and raise them with my colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Covid-19: UK-wide Response

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on co-ordinating a UK-wide response to the covid-19 outbreak. [905554]

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on co-ordinating a UK-wide response to the covid-19 outbreak. [905564]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): We can respond effectively to covid-19 only if we have a UK-wide approach. Pooling resources and using the strength of the UK economy enables the Government to support jobs and business and to provide the extra funding and other resources to the devolved Administrations to help them combat the virus.

Suzanne Webb: The UK Government have delivered an extra £12.7 billion to the devolved Administrations throughout this pandemic, including £6.5 billion for the Scottish Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that the enormous level of financial support that has already been provided showcases the strength and value of this great and united Union?

Iain Stewart: I very much agree with my hon. Friend; the strength of the UK economy and the Treasury's international standing means that we have been able to fund the covid-19 response across all parts of the UK. Given those facts, it is worth considering the point made last week by Alex Salmond's former adviser:

“Thirteen years in government and the SNP have yet to show their workings”

on how a separate Scotland would manage financially.

Martin Vickers: There is no doubt that some confusion is caused when the different Administrations come to different conclusions based on our advice about quarantine, numbers of people who can gather together and so on. The Minister has just spoken about a UK-wide approach. Would it not be better if some of these regulations were decisions for the UK Government?

Iain Stewart: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question. We have already had examples of collaboration during this period. For example, on 23 August, the chief medical officers for all parts of the UK issued a joint statement on the current evidence of the risks and benefits to health from schools and childcare settings reopening. UK and devolved Administration Ministers meet regularly to explore and discuss these issues. Although it is right that across the UK different authorities should be able to respond to specific circumstances, I hope that political considerations do not lead to this being difference just for the sake of it.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Will my hon. Friend expand on the success and the effectiveness of the Joint Biosecurity Centre in informing decision makers around the UK on our best way to combat coronavirus?

Iain Stewart: My hon. Friend highlights just another example of where working together strengthens our response. I am delighted that legislation has been passed enabling the Scottish Government and the UK Government to allow the JBC to provide services to Ministers and officials in both Administrations.

Covid-19: Care Homes

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): If he will hold discussions with the Scottish Government on reports that hospital patients who tested positive for covid-19 were subsequently discharged into care homes in Scotland.

[905555]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): The UK Government and the devolved Administrations regularly discuss all aspects of the coronavirus response. Public health and social care are devolved matters for the Scottish Government, but we do provide support to the devolved Administrations where necessary, including increasing testing capacity.

Mr Dhesi: My brother-in-law's father somehow contracted covid in a care home and, sadly, passed away. Like us, many families will have had to bear the tragedy of not being able to comfort their loved ones as they grieved their loss. Scotland has the highest care home death rate in the UK, and last month it was revealed that at least 37 hospital patients who had tested positive for coronavirus were discharged into care homes, which helped to turn them into breeding grounds for the virus, resulting in the loss of invaluable lives. So what discussions has the Minister had with Scottish Ministers about why that was allowed to happen?

Iain Stewart: First, may I extend my sympathy to the hon. Gentleman for his family's loss? There are so many examples where families are grieving because of the loss of loved ones. He raises a devolved matter, and I know that Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is looking at what caused this situation and that there will be an inquiry into it. This Government stand ready and we do help the Scottish Government in increasing testing capacity so that these instances are not repeated.

EU Exit: Scottish Economy

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to assess the effect on the Scottish economy in the event that the UK does not reach a deal with the EU by the end of the transition period.

[905556]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): We left the EU on 31 January, and negotiations for a future trade partnership are ongoing. Over time, the economic benefits of departing from EU law will clearly offset any short-run and often hypothetical problems, and those benefits will be felt both in Scotland and across the UK.

Bambos Charalambous: Yesterday's admission by the Northern Ireland Secretary that the Internal Market Bill would be breaking international law will make many countries question the trustworthiness of the UK's trade negotiations and the reliability of any deals. What impact does this Minister think that will have on the Scottish economy?

Iain Stewart: I simply point the hon. Gentleman to the development today that will help the UK join the trans-Pacific trade partnership, which will benefit companies in Scotland and across the whole UK.

Covid-19: Effect on Black Community in Scotland and England

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): If he will make a comparative assessment of the effect of covid-19 on the black community in Scotland and England.

[905558]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Duguid): It is clear that the black community has been disproportionately affected by covid-19, and action is under way to determine what is driving these disparities. We continue to work closely with the Scottish Government and the Department of Health and Social Care on a range of issues related to covid-19, and will continue to do so to address the impact on the black community across the whole of the UK.

Kim Johnson: Findings from three Edinburgh University surveys of Scottish ethnic minorities show that, from 2015 to 2019, between 18% and 20% of respondents said they experienced racial discrimination in using health services. Will the Minister's Department commit to investigating this further and to taking steps to eliminate all kinds of racial discrimination in health services?

David Duguid: I recognise that the hon. Lady is an ardent campaigner for equality in the black community. The UK Government are keenly aware of the continuing discrimination ethnic minorities face in the United Kingdom today and take seriously their obligation to secure equality for all. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities on 16 June.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

[905739] **Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 9 September.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Munira Wilson: If Ministers think it is acceptable for this Government to not obey the law, how on earth can the Prime Minister expect the public at home to do so?

The Prime Minister: We expect everybody in this country to obey the law.

[905740] **Sir Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that tomorrow the people of Gibraltar celebrate their national day. As I have the honour to be chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Gibraltar, will he join me in sending the people of Gibraltar our very best wishes for the day when they celebrate their democratic decision and continuing wish to remain British? Will he also pledge that Her Majesty's Government will continue to give them every support both in that matter and also in all the practical issues for which they may need our assistance going forward with the challenges which we jointly face as part of the British family?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the continual support he gives to the people of Gibraltar and to Gibraltar. I can assure him that the sovereignty of Gibraltar is inviolable, and I join him, as I hope all Members join him, in wishing the people of Gibraltar a very happy national day on Thursday.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Leader of the Opposition, with the first of six questions.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Yesterday, I spoke to a mum who lives in London. She has a four-year-old daughter, who had a very high temperature yesterday morning. She phoned 111, and was told to get a test. She tried to book, and was told the nearest was Romford. That was 9 o'clock in the morning. She explored that, but there were no tests there. She was then told Haywards Heath, halfway to Brighton—on exploration, no tests there. By lunch time, this mum was told the nearest place was Telford or Inverness. A slot became available in Lee Valley in the afternoon—one slot—but, unfortunately, that was being offered across the country, including to people in Manchester, and it was impossible to book. At 9 o'clock last night, she was told the nearest centre was Swansea. This is, frankly, ridiculous. Who does the Prime Minister think is responsible for this?

The Prime Minister: Clearly, I take responsibility, as I have done throughout, for the entire handling of the coronavirus crisis, but I would just say to those who attack NHS Test and Trace, and those who deprecate the efforts of the people who are doing their level best to keep us safe, that it is precisely because of the success of test and trace that capacity has gone up from 2,000 a month in March to 320,000 a day. We know, thanks to NHS Test and Trace, in granular detail, in a way that we did not earlier this year, about what is happening with this pandemic. We know the groups that are suffering, the extent of the infection rates, and we have been able, thanks to NHS Test and Trace, to do the local lockdowns that have been working. We also know that, alas, some people have not been following the guidance in the way that they should and, therefore, we are seeing a rise in infections, and that is why today we are taking decisive steps to intensify our social distancing measures—the rule of six that will be familiar to the country—in order that we can keep our economy going, that we can keep our schools open and keep this virus under control. I hope that he will support those measures and, indeed, support NHS Test and Trace.

Keir Starmer: I will hear the measures later on, but we will in principle support them, as I have supported all the measures the Prime Minister has introduced, as

he well knows. It is the right thing to do, and I have asked people to follow Government advice at every opportunity.

Nobody is attacking here. The Prime Minister needs to know how anxious hundreds of families are. In the past few weeks, they have been sent all over the country or told there are no tests. It cannot be brushed off. Earlier this year, the Health Secretary said:

“Anybody who needs a test can get a test, and it's the most important thing that you can do to stop the spread of this virus.”

This is a very serious issue, but the Government line on it seems to be changing all the time. Yesterday, the director of NHS Test and Trace said,

“Can I...offer my...apologies to anyone who cannot get a covid test...it's our laboratory processing”

that is the problem. This morning, the Health Secretary changed tack and appeared to blame the public. I note that he made a statement yesterday and faced questions but he did not say anything about the excuse that he puts forward this morning that emerged overnight. So who is right—the director of Test and Trace, who says it is a laboratory problem, or the Health Secretary, who says it is the public's fault?

The Prime Minister: I, of course, sympathise with all those who are facing difficulties getting a test as fast as they want, but demand is at an unprecedented high, particularly because of demand for asymptomatic patients, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman should know that this country has done more tests—17.6 million—than any other country in Europe. He likes international comparisons. That is thanks to the efforts of NHS Test and Trace, which is, in my view, doing an absolutely heroic job in spite of the difficulties that it faces. It has massively raised its output and it will be up to 500,000 tests a day by the end of October. This is an organisation that is working heroically to contain the spread of the disease, and it requires the public to trust the organisation and to participate. Yesterday, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that it was on the verge of collapse. I think that those were ill-chosen words. I think he now regrets those words. I think he should reflect and he should take them back.

Keir Starmer: Hundreds of families have been trying to get a test in the last week, and they cannot get one. I do acknowledge the number of tests overall, but this is basic stuff. People who have got covid symptoms are very anxious about themselves, their children, their families and what to do. It means they cannot go to work and they cannot send their children to school. It matters, and if they cannot get tests the Prime Minister needs to take responsibility and not just tell us about the future or something else, but address this problem.

I want to take it further, because it is not just that people are being told to go hundreds of miles. Somebody contacted me yesterday and said: “My wife has a temperature and they said we needed to isolate and get a test done. I have been trying to book a test”. This is yesterday, Prime Minister. They continued: “the site says, ‘No capacity’. Then I tried for a home test kit and they are telling me that there are no kits available at present.” That is the situation yesterday. Yesterday, there were no tests available in London and it was the same the day before. Prime Minister, what is happening?

The Prime Minister: I note that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not take back his criticism and his attack on NHS Test and Trace, and I regret that. I gave him the opportunity to withdraw his verdict that it was on the verge of collapse: it is not. It is doing a heroic job and testing hundreds of thousands of people. Yes, we will do more, and the world we want to move to as fast as possible is a world in which everybody can take enabling tests at the beginning of the day and antigen tests to identify whether or not we have the virus, like a pregnancy test, within 15 minutes or so, so that we know whether we are able to live our lives as normally as possible. That is the vision that the Health Secretary and others have been sketching out over the last few days and that is where we intend to get to.

In the meantime, NHS Test and Trace is doing a heroic job, and today I can tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that most people get an in-person test result within 24 hours, and the median journey is under 10 miles if someone has to take a journey to get one.

Keir Starmer: We all want test, trace and isolate to succeed, and I have offered my support before. The Prime Minister is ignoring the problem: if people are being told to go hundreds of miles, something is wrong. This has got a lot worse in the past week or two—all Members of the House know that, because they have all had constituents telling them that. The Prime Minister talks about capacity. The latest Government figures were updated last night. They show that, on average, 75,000 tests are not being used every day. If 75,000 tests are not being used, why yesterday were people being told to go hundreds of miles for a test? Why yesterday were people being told that there is no capacity?

The Prime Minister: The issue at the moment is that there has been a massive increase in the number of people who need or want tests, particularly people who do not have symptoms. We need—I hope the right hon. and learned Gentleman agrees—to prioritise people such as NHS front-line staff and our care workers who urgently need those tests. As we massively increase the number of tests, it is those groups who are getting priority.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is wrong in what he says about the failure of NHS Test and Trace, so let me tell him that of those contacts who supply details, 80% are reached, and 320,000 people have been persuaded to self-isolate and stop the spread of the disease. That is the British people ignoring the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attempt to undermine confidence in test and trace. They are ignoring his attempt to undermine confidence, and working together to get this disease defeated.

Keir Starmer: I am listening carefully to what the Prime Minister says, and what is undermining confidence is families being told to go hundreds of miles and they cannot get a test. That is undermining confidence. I just want this fixed. We do not need to have an argument. What is the problem? The Prime Minister should accept that there is a problem, tell us what the solution is, and we will all muck in, try to make it better, and tell our constituents.

I have been listening. Is the Prime Minister saying that too many people are coming forward for tests and that it is a capacity problem, or not? People are trying to

do the right thing. They want to go back to work. We want children back in schools. The Prime Minister is encouraging that—quite right too—and we understand and support that. The Government side of the bargain was to deliver an effective test, trace and isolate scheme, but two weeks into September there is a glaring hole. Will the Prime Minister tell the House when he first knew about this particular problem of people having to go hundreds of miles, or that tests were not going to be available? It is in the last week that this issue has arisen. When did he first know that that was a problem?

The Prime Minister: It is obviously a function of the growing demand and growing public confidence in NHS Test and Trace that we have to supply more and more tests, and that is what we have been doing. I do not know whether you have been listening, Mr Speaker, but I have been trying to give the House the figures. Thanks to the heroic efforts of NHS Test and Trace, we have gone up from 2,000 tests a day in March to 320,000 a day today. That is thanks to the efforts of thousands of people, who are listening keenly to the words of the right hon. and learned Gentleman for some support, encouragement or belief in what they are trying to do. Thanks to them, on average, people have to travel less than 10 miles, and thanks to them, 80% of the contacts that they or a coronavirus patient identify are reached and told to self-isolate. That is what we are trying to do. It is hard work. It is a big job, and they are doing a fantastic job. I think that what they would like to hear is some praise, encouragement and support from the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Keir Starmer: Why can we not just hear from the Prime Minister an honest answer? If he stood at the Dispatch Box and said, “I know something's gone wrong in the last couple of weeks. We have been getting hundreds of examples of people being sent all over the place or being told there is no test. I have looked into it. I have worked out what the problem is and here is my plan”, people might be reassured. But, as ever, he pretends the problem is not there. The infection rate is rising. This is the very point at which we need a functioning testing regime. Far from the “world-beating” system we were promised, the Government cannot even get the basics right. The Government are lurching from crisis to crisis. They still lack even basic incompetence—*[Interruption.]* They lack competence. *[Interruption.]* Yes, Prime Minister, they lack competence, and that is what is holding Britain back. My final question is this: when is the problem with test, trace and isolate going to be fixed?

The Prime Minister: I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman was on the money when he said that this Government lacked incompetence. I just say to him that we are working flat out to address all the issues confronting us today, including trying to get the infection rate down, and we are getting on with taking the tough decisions and making the tough calls that will take this country forward.

When it came to saying schools were safe, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was silent because he did not want to offend his union bosses. When left-wing anarchists tried to destroy the freedom of the press, he was silent because for some reason he did not want to offend crusty left-wing anarchists. When it comes, by

the way, to sticking up for our UK internal market and for delivering on the will of the British people—one of the most important issues facing us today—he is totally silent on the Bill that obsesses the rest of his Back Benchers. He is totally silent. A great ox once again has stood on his tongue. He has nothing at all to say about that subject today, because he does not want to offend the huge number of his Back Benchers who want to overturn the verdict of the people and take us back into the EU, which is of course what he wants to do himself.

This Government get on and take the tough decisions on behalf of the British people, delivering thousands of jobs through our kickstart scheme, record-breaking investment in affordable housing with a £12 billion programme, and getting on with all our work, working with the British people and working with the right hon. and learned Gentleman—if he would only do so—to get coronavirus defeated and to take our country forward. We make the tough calls; all he does is sit on the sidelines and carp.

[905744] **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): The work of the armed forces, especially 103 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in Northampton, in logistical support of the NHS, councils and volunteers during the lockdown was truly inspirational. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking them and recognising the importance to the town of the Clare Street barracks now and into the future?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. I indeed recognise the importance of the Clare Street barracks. Indeed, I salute the work of the entire armed services in what they have done across the whole of our United Kingdom to help us fight coronavirus.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Shortly, the Government will publish their internal market proposals. I have seen them. They are nothing short of an attack on Scotland's Parliament and an affront to the people of Scotland. As we have already heard, this legislation breaks international law, but it also breaks domestic law. The Prime Minister and his friends—a parcel o' rogues—are creating a rogue state where the rule of law does not apply. Why does the Prime Minister think that he and his friends are above the law?

The Prime Minister: On the contrary, the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill is about protecting jobs, protecting growth and ensuring the fluidity and safety of our UK internal market and prosperity throughout the United Kingdom. It should be welcomed, I believe, in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and throughout the whole country.

Ian Blackford: Of course, we saw the Prime Minister breaking the law last year with the Prorogation of Parliament. We have seen the behaviour of Dominic Cummings, and we know that the Government are prepared to break their international obligations. What the Prime Minister said is complete rubbish, and the Prime Minister knows it. His own White Paper was clear that state aid is going to be grabbed back from Scotland and handed to Westminster. If the Prime Minister will not listen to the Scottish Government, will he listen to the National Farmers Union Scotland president,

who warned that the proposals “limit” the devolved Administrations? The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee warned that they will “create new reservations in areas of devolved competence.”

The General Teaching Council for Scotland has warned that the proposals undermine devolved education functions. That, Mr Speaker, is the reality.

Scotland is speaking out, and I state that the Scottish Parliament will reject this attack on devolution, so the question is: will the Prime Minister break domestic law, disregard the settled will of the Scottish people, ignore the concerns of Scotland's communities and press ahead with this Bill? The time for Scotland's place as an independent, international, law-abiding nation is almost here. Our time has come.

The Prime Minister: The answer is that yes, indeed, we will press on with the Bill, because I believe that the right hon. Gentleman's attacks on it are totally illogical. It actually represents a substantial transfer of powers and of sovereignty to Scotland, to Wales, to Northern—it is a massive devolutionary act. What it also does is—I believe this is common ground across the Dispatch Box—[*Interruption.*] It also ensures the integrity of the UK internal market. He speaks of a transfer of powers to the UK Government. On the contrary, what he would do is transfer powers back to Brussels not just over competition and state aid but, of course, over fisheries too. That is the policy of the Scottish nationalist party, and it would be a disaster for our country. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the leader of the SNP would like to withdraw that last comment about being a liar. No hon. Member would do that. Please withdraw it.

Ian Blackford: Mr Speaker, it is on the face of the Bill that the Government of the UK are going to trample over devolution. That is not a lie.

Mr Speaker: Mr Blackford, you are a great Member of this House. You do the right things by this House, and I have accepted that you have withdrawn it.

[905745] **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con): Before being elected to represent Blyth Valley last year, I worked in mental health. Since October last year, there have been 120 suicides across the Northumbria police force area alone, and 24 deaths in Blyth. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will agree that one death is one death too many. Will he join me in supporting World Suicide Prevention Day tomorrow and in acknowledging the fantastic work by the mental health charity Mind, as well as by ENGAGE and Davy Orr at Unit Twenty in Blyth?

The Prime Minister: Every suicide is an absolute tragedy, and my hon. Friend is right to focus on that issue in the way that he does. I am proud that the Government are rolling out record investments in suicide prevention. I also pay tribute to the charitable sector—to Mind, ENGAGE and Davy Orr—for the fantastic work it does to make a difference at that crucial moment and to prevent suicide.

[905741] **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): They herd them on to trains, they shave their heads, they abort their babies. A genocide of the

Uyghur people by the Chinese Government is taking place before our eyes. It is easy to criticise the next world superpower, but harder to take action. What action will the Prime Minister take to stop the ethnic cleansing of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang? When will he lead the organisation of an international tribunal, because this time no country can say that it did not know?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is entirely right to draw attention to the plight of the Uyghurs, as both I and the Foreign Secretary have done. We raise these concerns directly with the Chinese authorities and will continue to do so in the G20, the UN and every other context.

[905747] **Elliot Colburn** (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): On Monday night, the BBC's "Panorama" revealed what parents in Carshalton and Wallington have been telling me for months: that Lib Dem-run Sutton Council is failing our most vulnerable children. Given the shocking scenes we saw, does the Prime Minister agree that the council should hang its head in shame, meet with the parents and sack its failing arm's length company, and that the Lib Dem councillors who presided over this failure should resign?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the council concerned has acknowledged the failures and the improvements that are needed. For our part, we are reviewing the oversight of special educational needs schools and will be commissioning a new round of inspections by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. I am happy to write to my hon. Friend further about that issue.

[905742] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Prime Minister is aware of the tragic case of Mercy Baguma, who three weeks ago was found dead in her Glasgow flat with her starving one-year-old son, Adriel, lying next to her. Thankfully, little Adriel has made a recovery, and he was running around my constituency office on Friday when his father Eric came to meet me. Adriel has been through more than any one-year-old should ever have to go through, and his future hangs in limbo while the Home Office prolongs his father's asylum application. Will the Prime Minister agree to organise a meeting between me and the Home Secretary to look at Eric's case and make sure that the family can go forward with certainty after such a difficult time?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I know that the whole House will join me in sending our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Mercy Baguma. We take very seriously the wellbeing of all who are in the asylum system, and I can assure him that the relevant Minister will take up that particular case with him.

[905748] **Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Prime Minister knows very well that I have an 11-year track record of opposing HS2, not least because of the environmental damage it is causing, and that I have expressed my support for peaceful environmental campaigns against this costly project. Regrettably, the actions of Extinction Rebellion, who have glued themselves to trains and now tried to interfere with the freedom of the press, have tarnished

the reputation of peaceful environmental protesters. Will my right hon. Friend tell me what options he is considering to ensure that rather than offering encouragement to law breakers, such unacceptable behaviour and attacks on our democratic freedoms can be prevented from happening again, and that the integrity of peaceful campaigners is not impugned?

The Prime Minister: I draw a sharp distinction and contrast between the civilised approach of my right hon. Friend to environmental protest and that taken by those who tried in vain to frustrate the freedom of the press. I must say that I was struck by the silence of the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) when he had an opportunity to condemn it. To answer my right hon. Friend's point directly, I do think it is important now, given the weight of the economic interests that were under threat and the threat to the freedom of the press, that we look at what we can do under public order and, indeed, under the law on nuisance. That is what we will do.

[905743] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): Yesterday, the Health Secretary said, and I quote:

"We have the largest testing system imaginable."—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 527.]

Yet in my constituency of Jarrow, which is one of the Government's areas of concern, people are struggling to get a covid test. This is not criticism or an attack on our NHS, but it is months since the Prime Minister promised us all a world-leading test, track and trace system, so I ask him: where is it?

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy with those who now want to get tests, and the demand is very acute, partly because so many people who do not have symptoms want a test. Our view is that the priority should be those who do have symptoms, and the groups that I mentioned earlier. We will do everything we can to address the issues in Jarrow and across the country. I remind the hon. Lady that NHS Test and Trace has so far conducted 17.6 million tests, which is more than any other European country, so she should take at least some pride in that.

[905749] **Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): While I am pleased that localised data has allowed local restrictions to be lifted in parts of my constituency—Mirfield, Kirkburton and Denby Dale—will the Prime Minister reassure the people of Dewsbury that if infection rates continue to reduce, Dewsbury will be lifted out of local restrictions sooner rather than later?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, and I thank the people of Dewsbury for their fortitude in doing what they have done and the local action that they are taking to defeat the virus. Of course, as soon as we see results in the case of a local lockdown, we do take that area out of lockdown. I have no doubt that the same will happen in Dewsbury and elsewhere.

[905746] **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): There have been reports in the last few days that the Chancellor may scrap the planned increase in the national living wage on the grounds that it may be considered unaffordable. Can the Prime Minister rule that out once and for all, recognise that working people

should not be made to pay for this crisis and confirm that the national living wage will rise as planned to £9.21 an hour in April?

The Prime Minister: It was this Government that introduced the living wage, and I am proud that we have so far delivered a record increase in the living wage and supported families throughout the crisis, not just with the living wage but with a huge £160 billion package of support. This is a Government who put their arms around the people of the country and help them through tough times.

[905750] **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): Burnley College was recently announced as the highest achieving college in the country, recognising its dedicated students, quality teaching staff and fantastic facilities, which include a centre for advanced engineering. As a result, the college has experienced strong year-on-year growth in admissions, but in order to ensure that our young people continue to have the skills they need for the future, it is vital that our further education colleges are invested in and keep up to date. That is why I have given my wholehearted support to Burnley College's latest expansion plans, which include greater teaching on drone technology, robotics and clean engines. Will the Prime Minister join me in giving Burnley College backing from the Government, and will he join me in visiting the college in the future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to champion Burnley College and the cutting edge education in the technologies of the future that this Government support. I welcome all the plans that Burnley College has for capital investment to develop its campus.

[905753] **Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Liverpool in 1869 was the first council to build council housing to replace overcrowded slums. Progress over the years has often been obstructed by this Tory Government, most recently with the refusal to extend our most successful landlord licensing scheme and the introduction of permitted development rights, which bypass local control and are likely to create the slums of the future. Will the Prime Minister give a straight answer and commit to withdrawing these plans and returning control to local communities to prevent a return to the 1860s?

The Prime Minister: This Government have already built far more council homes, as far as I can remember, than Labour did in 13 years when they were last in office, and we will go on. You have just heard, Mr Speaker, about the huge £12 billion investment in affordable homes that are making this week, and we will deliver beautiful new homes across the country, building on brownfield sites in a way that is affordable and helps young people on to the housing ladder in the way that they need, either through affordable rent or through part-buy, part-rent schemes, which are immensely attractive. That is the way forward for our country.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): King's Lynn will benefit from the Government's levelling up agenda with £25 million through the towns fund. Will my right hon. Friend encourage Ministers to look favourably at proposals for a school of nursing at the College of West Anglia, to help to kickstart local training and job opportunities for the people of west Norfolk?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is an excellent champion for his area, and if he can just contain his impatience a little bit, he may hear something to his advantage and to the advantage of his constituency from his right hon. Friend and mine, the Communities Secretary.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The £150 million spent on faulty masks, the £120 million spent on contracts awarded to a Tory council and the staggering £1 billion-worth of contracts awarded without proper due diligence—where has the money gone, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: All I can tell the hon. Lady is that there has been a massive investment in PPE throughout this pandemic, and billions of items have been supplied. If she has a particular anxiety about some particular contract, I am more than happy to address that if she will take the trouble to write to me.

[905752] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): From growing our food and producing renewable energy to managing our environment and setting higher welfare standards, British farmers lead the world in so many ways. On Back British Farming Day, will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the farmers in Havant and across the country for the contribution they make to our country, our national security and our prosperity?

The Prime Minister: As somebody who grew up on a farm many years ago, I am thrilled to support Back British Farming Day. It is thanks to them that we have fantastic food on our plates every day, and also that we have an amazing opportunity to increase our agricultural exports around the world. That is why I am so much looking forward to that period, which comes at the end of this year, when we will be able to take advantage of the freedoms that Brexit brings, and I hope very much that Opposition Members will join the whole House in pushing through the valuable United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, which will help to support UK farming across the whole country and build a stronger agricultural industry for our whole country.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Prime Minister may be aware that there are some Scottish nationalists who want Scotland to follow the example of Catalonia and have a wildcat independence referendum. I oppose that because it would be illegal. If the Prime Minister thinks it is acceptable for his Government to ignore international law, on what basis would he oppose it?

The Prime Minister: I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman. Let me just say this, because the Leader of the Opposition in my view neglected to raise this important subject. My job is to uphold the integrity of the UK, but also to protect the Northern Irish peace process and the Good Friday agreement. To do that, we need a legal safety net to protect our country against extreme or irrational interpretations of the protocol that could lead to a border down the Irish sea in a way that I believe, and I think Members around the House believe, would be prejudicial to the interests of the Good Friday agreement and prejudicial to the interests of peace in our country. That has to be our priority.

Points of Order

12.36 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Had the Secretary of State for Health given notice of the Government's intention to further restrict our liberty to meet with one another in his statement yesterday, at least some of us would have been able to question him about it. What remedy is there for those of us who enthusiastically support the Prime Minister, but nevertheless want to restrain the Government's ability to govern by order without debate?

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Member for giving me notice. I am very sympathetic to the main point he makes. I accept that decisions have been taken in a fast-moving situation, but timings for statements are known to Ministers. It is really not good enough for the Government to make decisions of this kind in a way that shows insufficient regard to the importance of major policy announcements being made first to this House and to Members of this House wherever possible. I have already sent a letter to the Secretary of State. I think the total disregard for this Chamber is not acceptable. I know that the Prime Minister is a Member of Parliament as well and that he will ensure that statements should be made here first, especially as this particular Secretary of State requests statements. To then ignore the major fact that he wanted to put to the country, and not put it before this House, is not acceptable and I hope he will apologise to Members.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Not only did we not get a convincing explanation yesterday from the Secretary of State on the ongoing testing fiasco, but in fact Mr Robert Peston of ITV wrote on Twitter, ahead of the Secretary of State's statement, that the Government were planning to shift the regulations down from 30 people to six. There was no reason why the Secretary of State could not have told the House yesterday that that was the Government's plan. Has the Secretary of State given you, Mr Speaker, notice that he is coming to the House to update MPs on that change in policy, or should we assume that Ministers do not know what they are doing from one day to the next?

Mr Speaker: What I would take on board is the fact that it was all over Twitter as this was going on. Obviously, somebody decided to tell the media rather than this House. What I would say is that I expect the Secretary of State to apologise to Members and make sure that this Chamber knows first. He was fully aware—fully aware—of what was going to be said later. Let me say that if this Minister wants to run this Chamber ragged, I can assure you now that I am sure an urgent question every day might just begin to run him ragged.

I am now going to suspend the House. In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

12.39 pm

Sitting suspended.

Virtual participation in proceedings concluded (Order, 4 June.)

BILL PRESENTED

UNITED KINGDOM INTERNAL MARKET BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Alok Sharma, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Michael Gove, Secretary George Eustice, Secretary Robert Jenrick, Secretary Brandon Lewis, Secretary Alister Jack, Secretary Simon Hart, Chloe Smith, Robin Walker and Paul Scully, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the internal market for goods and services in the United Kingdom (including provision about the recognition of professional and other qualifications); to make provision in connection with provisions of the Northern Ireland Protocol relating to trade and state aid; to authorise the provision of financial assistance by Ministers of the Crown in connection with economic development, infrastructure, culture, sport and educational or training activities and exchanges; to make regulation of the provision of distortive or harmful subsidies a reserved or excepted matter; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 177) with explanatory notes (Bill 177-EN).

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.43 pm

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation; to increase penalties for the contravention of such licences; and for connected purposes.

The private rented sector is an important part of our housing market. As we see large premises in town centres being vacated by businesses, there is a growing demand for them to be turned into housing. The introduction of high-quality residential units to town centres may be a great way to bring life back into town centres, but a worrying trend is developing in such units: they are subdivided into poor-quality houses of multiple occupancy, which are aimed at the very poorest and most vulnerable in society. The problem affects not only my constituency in Blyth Valley, but other towns up and down this wonderful country of ours.

Houses in multiple occupancy, or HMOs as they have become known, are a useful part of the housing sector, providing cheap accommodation for people whose housing options are limited. Although standards need to be met in large HMOs, these mainly relate to fire and building safety, as well as ensuring that facilities such as bathrooms are available. However, no consideration is given as part of the regime for the welfare of the residents or the impact that subdividing large properties into HMOs can have on the local community.

The standards set out a minimum accommodation size, but this makes appalling reading. Two adults are permitted to live in a space of just 10.22 square metres, which is nothing—the size of a reasonably-sized garden shed. According to the regulations, a child under 10 requires an additional 4.6 metres, or the size of a double bed—space not merely to sleep in, but to live, play, learn and eat in. Even more appalling is that, until the last Conservative Government introduced it in 2018, there was no minimum room size at all. The mental welfare of those forced to live in such conditions must be a concern for us all in 2020.

But however woeful the standards required for licensing HMOs across the country, in my home town of Blyth only one such premises is licensed as a house of multiple occupancy. Others are listed as hotels or marketed as Airbnbs or bed and breakfasts, creating a multitude of problems. When a property is not registered as a house in multiple occupancy, it falls through the gap, which means that local authorities such as the council and the police do not have the right of access and cannot implement boundaries, restrictions or measures to support the safeguarding of the clients living there.

The very nature of the accommodation provided by HMOs often means that those living in them have fallen on hard times or are suffering from mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, and, in a lot of cases, as reported to me by the police, domestic abuse. These are vulnerable people, whom we have a duty to safeguard. Allowing HMOs to exist by disguising them as hostels, hotels or bed and breakfasts not only denies tenants security of tenure, but means that the accommodation does not face the true scrutiny it should.

With no help or support, living in a community can be hard for people who are not well equipped to live on their own.

Many of these are young people. I worked for years in the NHS in a mental health capacity, and on a few really sad occasions I heard of clients forcibly being taken to cashpoints by drug dealers or loan sharks, where they were forced to empty their bank accounts of the benefits that had been paid in. This would leave the vulnerable client with no money left in their account to buy the basics to live for the next two weeks. Alone in a room with no support is no way for our vulnerable people to live in 2020.

You and I, Mr Speaker—and, I am sure, everybody in this House—are fortunate that we can take for granted being able to go to the fridge and have fresh milk, along with food to make a sandwich, clothing to put on our backs and a warm bed to sleep in. But when people are in a vulnerable position, it is hard when their finances are taken away from them. Just getting by, day to day, impacts on the trauma that some of these vulnerable people are already having to deal with.

It is vital that a stricter regime of checks and measures is imposed on landlords to ensure that safeguarding of clients is kept at the forefront. However, there are other issues that need to be addressed. For example, I find it concerning that, as things stand, the police are not consulted on planning applications for large HMOs. However, they are often called upon to deal with the issues that can arise from such dwellings. These houses cause concern in local communities that the inhabitants are likely to cause problems due to antisocial behaviour and other social problems. It is vital that the public living in and around the vicinity feel that they can live and integrate with the residents of houses in multiple occupancy safely and that community values are respected.

I would like to see, as a result of this legislation, greater powers to local authorities to deal with both the development and governance of houses in multiple occupancy. Requiring large HMOs to provide a nominated person to be responsible for the residents living there on a 24/7 basis would allow a point of contact for the authorities and the local community to highlight issues and, where possible, address them in a way that safeguards both the individuals and the local community.

I understand that not all HMOs exploit their tenants, and I also understand that there are other reasons why, for people wanting to live in small, cheap units close to facilities, they may be attractive. But I wish to ensure that they are not used as a method of housing vulnerable people in substandard accommodation with no regard for their mental or physical wellbeing or the needs of the local community. I want to ensure that someone being able to buy a house in a sub-prime area and divide it into multiple bedrooms, while showing absolutely no care for the individual or the local residents, becomes a thing of the past. I would like to see a balance given to the community, so that clients feel safe and part of that community, and the public living in and around the vicinities of houses of multiple occupancy feel that they can live and integrate with the clients, with respect and safeguarding for all.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Ian Levy, Duncan Baker, Paula Barker, Dehenna Davison, Katherine Fletcher, Peter Gibson, James Grundy, Paul Howell, Marco Longhi, Rob Roberts and Matt Vickers, present the Bill.

Ian Levy accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 5 February, and to be printed (Bill 178).

Opposition Day

[11TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Protection of Jobs and Businesses

12.52 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House calls for the Government to abandon its one-size-fits-all withdrawal of the Coronavirus Job Retention and Self-Employment Income Support Schemes, and instead offer targeted income support to businesses and self-employed people in those sectors of the economy that have been hardest hit by the virus and are most in need of continuing assistance, and in those areas of the country which have been placed under local restrictions due to rising rates of infection.

Our country is in the grip of a jobs crisis—a crisis that will intensify if the Conservative Government do not change course. Between April and June this year, the number of people in work fell by the largest amount in over a decade. By July, there were nearly three quarters of a million fewer employees on the payroll than there were just four months earlier. We know that these are extraordinary times. That is why Labour has acted as a constructive Opposition, working with the Government, businesses and trade unions to do all we can to save lives and livelihoods. But it is not enough for the Government now to say simply that this is an unprecedented crisis and that only so much can be done to mitigate the damage. In their amendment to this Opposition day motion, the Conservatives maintain that

“any deviation”—

I repeat, any—

“from this Government’s proposed plan will cause damage to the United Kingdom economy.”

Some humility, willingness to listen and flexibility is desperately required here.

Under this Government, the UK has suffered the highest number of excess deaths in Europe. It has experienced both the worst quarterly fall in GDP in Europe and the worst quarterly fall among all G7 nations. The evidence suggests that the number of job vacancies in the UK has fallen further than in any comparable economy and that it will take us many months to get back to pre-crisis levels.

Our people have suffered a double whammy: a health crisis coupled with a jobs crisis, both made worse, I regret to say, by the Government’s unwillingness to listen, learn and accept that they do not always know best. But there is still time to change course. Around 4 million people are still furloughed under the Government’s coronavirus job retention scheme. Another 2.7 million people have so far made claims under the self-employment income support scheme, the second and final phase of which has just opened. Many more people have not yet had any support from this Government at all and have fallen through the gaps between the various schemes.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Member is making a really powerful point. Does she agree that a huge injustice is being done to the self-employed, many of whom have gone for six months without any support whatsoever? These are our small business owners who take some of their salary and dividends for perfectly

[Caroline Lucas]

good reason. Does she agree that the Government should take their fingers out of their ears and start listening to the self-employed?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that intervention. I agree with her. We have repeatedly raised that issue with the Government. Repeatedly we have been told that the computer says no—that no response is possible. That does not appear to be the case given the evidence. There would be means to assess people's previous income. If there is a concern around fraud, ultimately additional deterrents can be added to the system to prevent any such fraud.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese (Slough) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Anneliese Dodds: I will give way, but I am aware that there are many, many speakers for this debate, so I wish not to do that too frequently.

Mr Dhese: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Given the importance of the aviation sector, which has been particularly hard hit, the likes of myself have been calling for an extension of the furlough scheme and a sector-specific deal. However, due to Government inaction and procrastination, thousands of individuals within my Slough constituency are now being made redundant, or are on the verge of being made redundant. Does she agree that it is now time for the Government to act before we lose those jobs for good?

Anneliese Dodds: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. The jobs crisis that we are talking about is particularly intense in many of those communities impacted by the withdrawal of support for industries critical for the future of our country. Of course, as he mentioned, we were promised a sector-specific deal for aviation. We have not received it. We have not had the Government sitting down with the sector to work through the different scenarios and how we can plan for the future in that case. And we are not seeing the targeted wage support in aviation or, indeed, in other industries critical for the economic future that we desperately need.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) rose—

Anneliese Dodds: I will take one final intervention, given that it is from the Government Benches, but then I will make some progress.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am grateful. On a sector-based approach, I think that, in an interview with *The Guardian*, the hon. Member said that such an approach would pose challenges. Has she yet published the solution to those challenges?

Anneliese Dodds: I fear that the hon. Member may have missed off the end of the sentence, which is that, while it poses challenges, ultimately that does not mean that those challenges should not be stepped up to—they should be faced up to by the Government. His Government have accepted the need for some targeted support for hospitality and retail with the grants. There is also the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. Yes, there will be boundary issues. We fully accept that, but, ultimately, to govern is

to lead. It is to take difficult decisions. The Government trumpet the fact that they worked with industry, with trade unions and with other stakeholders in creating the furlough scheme. They need to do that again to work through these challenges and to create the targeted system of support that is needed.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Member give way?

Anneliese Dodds: I will make some progress if the Member will permit me. He may find the answers to his questions—any further ones—in what I am going on to say.

In addition to those groups of people who I have just mentioned, we know that there are many others who are concerned about their futures working in parts of the UK that are still subject to local restrictions, or that may be subject to additional restrictions in the future. We also have huge numbers of people, as we have just been discussing, who work in sectors that are still not back to business as usual, despite their critical importance for our economic future—whether we are talking about highly skilled manufacturing or the creative industries—yet the Chancellor is ploughing ahead with this one-size-fits-all withdrawal of the income support schemes, pulling the rug from under thousands of businesses and millions of workers all at the same time, irrespective of their situation. He is doing so without any analysis, it appears, of the impact of this withdrawal on unemployment levels and the enormous long-term costs of so many people being driven out of work.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): One of the categories that comes under severe pressures, as the shadow Minister and others in this House will know, is local councils. Their staff have been furloughed and they are having to take them back but their budgets are squeezed. Does she support my plea that additional help must be given to those councils to protect and retain jobs, because people are operating as a skeleton staff for almost a standard level of service provision, and it is just not possible to deliver that?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising that point. The Government promised local authorities that they would meet their calls to back-fill not just the spending that they have incurred during this period but the income that was lost. What do we have instead? We have a resiling from that promise. That is problematic because of the huge impact it will have on employment in different areas—local authority employment can be a critical part of many economies—but it is also an enormous issue for the economic development in those areas, where ultimately the lack of local leadership will be a huge problem. The Government need to hold to their promise in that regard.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The shadow Chancellor says that she wants to extend the furlough scheme, but the key question is: how long for? The Chancellor said when he announced it that it would end in October. If it is October, the shadow Chancellor says it should be November; if it is November, then she says December. If she wants a sector-specific scheme, when does it end—at the end of the crisis, as some of her colleagues have said? Is that when the virus is eradicated? What is the solution?

Anneliese Dodds: With all due respect to the hon. Member, he may have missed what I said. We believe that the Government need to sit down and talk to exactly the stakeholders they trumpeted so much about working with when they created the furlough scheme, so that it can provide the system of support that is necessary to protect jobs and protect our economic capacity. As I have said time and again, we do not believe that a continuation of the furlough scheme precisely as it stands now is what is required. We need a targeted wage support scheme, which is exactly the approach being taken by huge numbers of other countries but which this Government are turning their face against.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Anneliese Dodds: I will make some progress because I am aware that so many Members want to speak on this critical subject.

For some businesses and staff well on their way back to normal, it is absolutely right and proper that wage support ends. As I said, we are not arguing for a continuation of the furlough scheme exactly as it stands across every sector of the economy, but for others, many of which are sectors crucial to our country's economic future, additional targeted support could be the difference between survival and going under.

The Chancellor says that he wants to pick winners, but the necessary public health measures that his Government have enacted have created losers. Across the economy as a whole, about one in 10 workers are still furloughed. For the transport sector, it is closer to one in five. For arts and entertainment, it is one in two. Yet he is stubbornly insisting on treating every part of the economy as if it is in exactly the same situation, and in doing so putting the recovery and millions of people's livelihoods at risk. A targeted extension of Government wage support to enable short-hours working does not mean extending support for everyone forever; it means targeting it at where it is needed most.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Anneliese Dodds: With respect, I will not give way as I have done so many times and I am aware of the time pressure with many Members wishing to participate in this debate.

We need support that is targeted to the sectors of our economy that have been hardest hit by the virus but are critical to our country's economic future; to areas of the country that are subject to local restrictions because of this Government's failure to get a proper grip on the health crisis; and to businesses that would be viable in ordinary times, employing people doing jobs they love, but just need a little more help to get through this crisis. These are people like those I spoke to over the summer in north Wales working in advanced manufacturing. They do not want a permanent handout from Government, just more support while the economy is still in dire straits to help them get back on their feet. Without that support now, jobs like theirs will take years to come back. Jobs in the supply chain linked to their plant will vanish too, and with them the economic prospects for their communities.

I called on the Chancellor to be more flexible when he gave his summer economic statement in this House two months ago. What do we get instead? A panicked

handout of £1,000 bonuses to any business, anywhere, that brought back a furloughed employee. That is too much public money to dole out to a business that was going to bring back workers anyway. The Chancellor allocated £9.4 billion for that bonus scheme. Let us just imagine how much more effectively that money could be spent if only he had thought flexibly about how to respond to the crisis. Let us imagine how many of those at-risk jobs could be saved. The economic reality simply does not support the approach the Chancellor is taking, and he should have the courage to recognise that and change course.

The Chancellor may not wish to take our word for it that a targeted, flexible form of wage support is the right way to go, but he could at least be persuaded by the examples of other countries, such as Germany and France, which have each extended their schemes to last for two years; the Netherlands, which has extended its scheme for a further nine months; or Australia and Ireland, both of which have committed to support furloughed workers until March next year. Of course, in our own United Kingdom the devolved Governments have called for targeted wage support to be continued, not snatched away at the same pace across all sectors of our economy.

If that is not good enough for the Chancellor, he could listen to trade unions or think-tanks—after all, he trumpeted working with trade unions to create the furlough scheme in the first place. He could listen to the TUC, which has proposed a job retention and upskilling scheme; the Institute for Public Policy Research, which has advocated a coronavirus work sharing scheme; or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which has suggested a covid-19 job support scheme.

If that is not compelling enough, perhaps the Chancellor could heed the voice of business. The British Chambers of Commerce has said that

“businesses across the UK are going to need further support to weather uncertainty over the coming months.”

Make UK has called for

“an extension of the Job Retention Scheme to those sectors which are not just our most important but who have been hit hardest.”

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Anneliese Dodds: If I may, I will finish this point and then take one more intervention; I do not want to frustrate all those colleagues who wish to speak in this debate. The Federation of Small Businesses has said that

“it is time for the Government to bring forward a rescue package for those who have been left out.”

The Institute of Directors has said that the Chancellor's bonus scheme would

“do little to prevent job losses”—

and that—

“some form of an extension to the furlough scheme should remain on the table.”

The CBI has been clear:

“It's too soon to pull business support away at the end of October.”

The Chancellor likes to think that he has the ear of business, but it is clear that he is just not listening when business tells him to change course.

Kevin Hollinrake: The shadow Chancellor makes some fair points, particularly about working constructively with government. On that basis, should she not constructively set out her solution to these problems, rather than simply saying that the Government should solve them? Obviously, she has ideas of how to solve them, so why does she not publish solutions?

Anneliese Dodds: I would love it, frankly, if the Chancellor and his team wished to open talks with the Opposition, with business, with trade unions, looking at the different options that I have just set out. I know the hon. Gentleman is one who does look at detail. I have just set out a variety of different models that have been set out by business, trade unions and think tanks. We want to work with government on this. If he is signalling that he wishes that discussion to happen, I hope that his Front-Bench colleagues will take that invitation up as well. It is not just he who wishes to have that discussion with his Front-Bench team. I note that a huge number of Conservative Members want to participate in this debate, and I am keen to hear their thoughts on it. Some of their colleagues have already pronounced on it. The right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) has said that there should be

“targeted extensions to the furlough scheme beyond October.”

The hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O’Brien) has said that he can see the case for it, too. How many more Conservative Members are worried, privately, about the impact on their constituents of this Chancellor pushing stubbornly ahead with his plan to take support away from everyone, all at once?

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I recall the Chancellor saying that he would do “whatever it takes”. The hospitality and tourism sector, which covers a quarter of the jobs in my constituency, is now entering its third winter in a row, as the sector puts it. Should not support be targeted at that sector, too?

Anneliese Dodds: My hon. Friend has been such a champion for those jobs in York and, indeed, for jobs throughout the country. I say to her exactly what businesses in tourism right across the UK have been saying to me when I have spoken to them: they do not want a handout; they just want a fair chance. If they end up having to close their businesses—if they end up having to lay off staff—it will take a very long time to build those businesses back up again. The Government should be listening to them.

Indeed, the Government should be listening, as I said, to the Government Members who are concerned about the withdrawal of the scheme. More than half a million at-risk jobs belong to people living in the constituencies of the Chancellor’s newest colleagues on the Government Benches—over 18,000 in Burton, more than 20,000 in Watford and in excess of 21,000 in Milton Keynes North—but so far, the Chancellor is not listening. Of course, he has not come to the Chamber today to hear what Members have to say about the very real fears of their constituents. We have not heard him speak in the House since the summer recess, despite the fact that our country is in the grip of a jobs crisis.

The Labour party, trade unions, think-tanks, business and even the Chancellor’s own Back Benchers can all see that what the Government are doing will make our

jobs crisis worse and lead to untold misery for millions of people, as well as reducing our economic capacity for the future. We are all sounding the alarm; the question is: what will it take for this Government to listen?

1.11 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add:

“welcomes the Government’s response to Covid-19 which has already protected the livelihoods of over 12 million people through the eight-month long Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme; acknowledges the support for hundreds of thousands of businesses up and down the country through unprecedented loan schemes, business grants and tax cuts; further welcomes the help to support, create, and protect jobs through measures such as the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, a temporary cut to VAT and stamp duty, increased incentives for apprenticeships, and the new Kickstart Scheme, as set out in the Government’s ‘Plan for Jobs’ policy paper published in July; and further acknowledges that any deviation from this Government’s proposed plan will cause damage to the United Kingdom economy.”

The House needs no reminding of the scale of the economic challenge facing our country. Recent GDP figures confirm that we have entered an acute recession on a speed and scale that we have never seen before. An economic crisis on this scale means that whatever the Government do, jobs will be lost, businesses will close and, as the Chancellor said last month, “hard times are here”. We should not underestimate the challenge ahead, but neither should we underestimate the Government’s resolve or that of the British people.

From the outset of this pandemic, the Government have acted decisively to protect people’s livelihoods, with one of the most generous and comprehensive packages of support anywhere in the world. We are doing everything we can to recover our economy, support businesses and give everyone the opportunity of good and secure work. Our economic response is moving through a careful, co-ordinated plan, in three phases: first, the immediate response, which started with the Budget in March; secondly, the specific plan for jobs announced in July, to protect, create and support jobs; and thirdly, rebuilding, on which we will say more in the autumn Budget and the comprehensive spending review. Let me take this opportunity to thank the many people—including Members from all parties—businesses and other organisations that have brought forward ideas and suggestions to help us to shape that plan.

Jim Shannon: I put on the record my thanks for all that the Government have done through the schemes that have helped many of my constituents. One thing needed to make this situation work is the co-operation and help of the banks. Will the Minister consider extending freezes on cards and loans for businesses, especially those in the retail and hospitality sectors? Discussions with the banks and credit card providers are critical to help companies to get over the line. We should extend that period to help them to recover.

Steve Barclay: As the hon. Gentleman will know, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury has regular discussions with the financial institutions; he will have heard the concerns set out by the hon. Gentleman and will be happy to take them forward in terms of how the banks respond. In some of the other measures the

Government have taken—for example, on mortgage holidays—we have seen a recognition of and response to the concerns we have heard about from our constituents.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Haribo in Pontefract has announced that it is consulting on over 200 redundancies and proposing to move some of its production back to Germany. This is devastating for the hard-working workforce. Will the Chief Secretary urge Haribo to work with the GMB trade union and Wakefield Council to look at alternative plans to prevent huge job losses in the middle of a recession, and will the Government stand ready to help them to do so? Does the Chief Secretary accept that manufacturing industry needs support if we are to prevent deeply damaging mass redundancies?

Steve Barclay: I absolutely share the concern set out by the right hon. Lady. From conversations that we have had in previous roles, I know how much she advocates for her constituency, and I support that business engaging with her, the council, trade unions and others. I will come on to a number of measures that the Government have taken, and some further measures that we will take, regarding our wider support package to the business community.

This should be set in the context of the three-phase approach. In the first phase of this crisis, the Government introduced measures to halt the spread of the disease. That included protecting our public services with more than £49 billion of funding for the NHS, schools, local authorities and other front-line services. The Chancellor said that he would do whatever is needed to support our NHS, and that is what he delivered. Our plan supported people, with the furlough scheme supporting nearly 10 million jobs—jobs that might otherwise have been lost.

The self-employed scheme provided 2.6 million people with £7.6 billion of support, and mortgage and credit payment holidays helped 1.9 million people to manage their finances—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to that earlier. For those who are out of work, we made welfare support more supportive and easier to access, and we introduced a hardship fund to help up to 3 million of the most vulnerable people. Of course our plan backed business, because we know that only by supporting businesses can we create sustainable jobs.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Steve Barclay: Sustainability is an issue dear to the priorities of the hon. Lady, so of course I will give way.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I pay credit to the Government because they have supported a number of different groups very well. There is, however, one group who they have not supported: the self-employed, who are falling between the gaps. He will have heard about the very real hardship that they are facing right now. They, and the Excluded UK all-party group, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), have been asking for a meeting with the Treasury team, but they have not heard back. Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to meet them and hear directly about the scale of the difficulties they are facing?

Steve Barclay: I am very familiar with this issue. We covered it in my appearance before the Treasury Committee some months ago, and the Chancellor has repeatedly

addressed it. As the hon. Lady will know, the shadow Chancellor referred to part of those concerns, and just yesterday there was discussion in the media about concerns regarding fraud in other Government schemes. Part of the challenge and the constraints on this issue is concern about the level of fraud. We have already set out the Government's position on the issue. I do not think there is further to add in that respect, because those concerns have been well articulated.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Steve Barclay: I will make some progress.

In addition to our support for businesses, we have provided nearly £40 billion of support through the tax system, with tax cuts, tax deferrals and the time to pay scheme. We have provided direct cash grants of £10,000 and £25,000 for small businesses and an extensive range of loan programmes, including dedicated investments for innovative tech firms through our Future Fund, and 100% Government guaranteed loans for the smallest businesses through the bounce back loan scheme. The shadow Chancellor said that she wanted the Government to listen, and bounce back loans are a good illustration of how the Government listened to concerns and changed the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme to include that additional measure. That scheme has benefited 1.1 million businesses. The House does not need to take just my word for it, because the chief economist at the CBI described the Chancellor as

“standing shoulder to shoulder with small businesses to help them through this crisis.”

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the CBIL scheme, but many medium-sized and larger businesses in my constituency have struggled to get the loans they require. Lloyds Banking Group in particular has been poor at making positive lending decisions. What are the right hon. Gentleman and his Government doing about that?

Steve Barclay: I can give a clear and direct answer to that because, together with UK Finance, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury has discussed bounce back loans, CBILS and larger business interruption loans. Those were targeted at up to £200 million for that mid-tier category of businesses, and I know from discussions with colleagues that a lot of regional businesses in that mid-tier category have been particularly impacted. The point is that this is about the package of Government schemes. Where there are individual constituency cases, we are, of course, always happy to look at them and UK Finance does a very good job in terms of its response.

I have set out the first phase. The second phase of the extraordinary support given relates to our plan for jobs. As part of protecting jobs, we have temporarily applied a reduced rate to VAT for tourism and hospitality, supporting over 150,000 businesses and protecting 2.4 million jobs. I do not know whether you, Mr Speaker, had an opportunity to benefit, but you will be familiar with the popular eat out to help out scheme, which has been a real success. The latest figures—only the one course, clearly, Mr Speaker—show that 100 million covers have been claimed, helping to support 130,000 businesses and protect almost 2 million jobs in a sector which, very seriously, has been particularly acutely hit by the covid pandemic.

[*Steve Barclay*]

Our plans also create new jobs, injecting new certainty and confidence in the housing market by increasing the stamp duty threshold to £500,000 for first-time buyers. That will drive growth and support across housebuilding and property sectors. It also builds on other schemes, such as creating green jobs through a £2 billion green homes grant, saving households hundreds of pounds a year on their energy bills, and through our £1 billion programme to make public buildings, including schools and hospitals, decarbonised. Together, they are all a part of the £640 billion capital investment in economic recovery, job creation and revitalising our national infrastructure over the next five years.

Kevin Hollinrake: Earlier, my right hon. Friend pointed to the success of bounce back loans. There is no doubt that they have been a huge success, but some businesses who have taken out those loans will hit trouble in terms of making repayments. Will he support a programme of best practice across the banking sector to ensure that those businesses have every chance of getting through this, perhaps with different payment plans?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend raises an important point. From other parliamentary campaigns he has been closely involved in, I know how much he values best practice in the financial services sector. As a former financial services Minister, I share that objective, which is why I am so grateful for the work he has been doing to ensure that best practice is followed to address the specific issue he brings before the House. Of course, the best thing to enable businesses to pay loans back is to get the economy as a whole motoring. That is why we are redoubling our efforts to get on with that now and why the Prime Minister announced that £5 billion of capital investment will be brought forward as part of giving a boost to businesses, so they can indeed meet the requirements of those loans as they arise.

Our plan supports jobs, creates jobs and protects jobs. That supporting of jobs is really the third component. It includes the announcement of the £2 billion kickstart scheme set out by the Chancellor, which will subsidise hundreds of thousands of high-quality jobs for unemployed young people, allowing young people to gain experience that will improve their chances of going on to find long-term and sustainable work. We are also investing a total of £1.6 billion in scaling up employment support schemes, training and apprenticeships to help those of our constituents who are looking for a job.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Chief Secretary will be aware that companies such as British Airways have used the furlough scheme to facilitate mass redundancy programmes for their staff. In fact, BA has also implemented the firing and rehiring of its remaining 30,000 staff, often on massively reduced wages. Does he think that that is fair?

Steve Barclay: That is exquisite timing, because I was just about to turn to the point that the hon. Gentleman raises about that use of furlough and the question that the shadow Chancellor raised about whether the scheme should be extended. I want to address head-on the concerns I have heard about that decision.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Steve Barclay: I was just going to answer the question, but I will give way.

Jamie Stone: The Chief Secretary is very gracious for giving way. This is possibly not the intervention he expects. When we get through all this, and when we have time and peace and quiet, may I urge him and the Chancellor to carry out some sort of audit of how the furlough scheme worked? There have been newspaper stories of inappropriate furloughing of employees, and for any Government of any colour, we need to get to the bottom of that when we have time to do so.

Steve Barclay: Having been Brexit Secretary over the previous year and Chief Secretary during this economic challenge, I can say that we will come through this, as the Chancellor has set out, and we will come to a time when we can look at the scheme in the way that the hon. Gentleman refers to.

The scheme has protected up to 10 million jobs. The shadow Chancellor raised the duration of the scheme, and I understand those concerns. It has been one of the most difficult decisions that the Government have taken, but it is the right one. I remind the House of the extent of the support that we have offered. First, the furlough is already over eight months. It is one of the most generous schemes in the world, and we have been contributing at a higher rate of people's wages than in Spain. We are supporting a wider range of businesses than in New Zealand, and our scheme will run for twice as long as in Denmark.

I remind the House that our support for furloughed employees does not end in October, as has been suggested in some interventions. In the Chancellor's summer statement, he announced the new job retention bonus, which will pay employers £1,000 for every employee still in post by the end of January. For an average employee, that is a subsidy worth 20% of their salary—nearly double the amount of subsidy that a cut in employer's national insurance would have provided, which I know some people were calling for prior to the Chancellor's announcement of the bonus. I further remind the House that most people on furlough are employed by very small businesses where £1,000 is a significant and welcome boost.

While we will continue to support furloughed employees through the job retention bonus, it is right that the main scheme comes to an end. We need to focus now on providing people with new opportunities, rather than offering false hope that they will always be able to return to the same job they had before. It is in no one's long-term interests for the scheme to continue, least of all those trapped in a job that only exists because of the furlough scheme.

To those calling for a new targeted or sector-based furlough, I simply pose three questions that I have still not heard answered satisfactorily today. First, which sectors would we not provide support for? Secondly, what would we do about the supply chains of those sectors on furlough, which can reach across the whole economy? Thirdly, most observers have accepted that the furlough cannot last forever, so how long would we extend it for? Without being able to answer those questions, any proposal for a sector-specific furlough cannot be seen as a serious one—

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab) *rose*—

Steve Barclay: But perhaps we have an answer to the three questions coming—I will happily take the intervention.

Matt Western: The Chief Secretary is being generous in giving way; I thank him for that. He will be disappointed to hear that I do not have the answer. However, I want to ask him a simple question. Germany has a much more advantageous scheme, which lasts until 2022. It has been described by industry bodies in the automotive sector and elsewhere as giving them a competitive advantage. Does he agree with that?

Steve Barclay: The German scheme sits within a very different landscape. It is not actually administered by the Government. It is a long-standing scheme; it has not been set up as a response to covid specifically. I just gave some illustrations of where the UK's furlough measures stand internationally. This needs to be seen as part of the wider package of support that the Government have set out. Again, the UK package as a whole stands comprehensively as one of the best international schemes on offer.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Steve Barclay: I will not, because I am conscious that a lot of Members want to speak in the debate.

It is important to note that providing such a comprehensive and decisive economic response has, in common with every advanced economy in the world, dramatically increased public borrowing and debt. In the short run, that has been the right strategy, so that we can protect jobs and incomes, support businesses and drive the recovery. Indeed, the OBR has said that if we had not provided the financial support, the situation would have been far worse. But over the medium term, it is clearly not sustainable to continue borrowing at these levels. Yes, clearly, interest rates right now are at historic lows, which means our cost of borrowing is cheap, but with the Government debt exceeding the size of the UK economy for the first time in more than 50 years, even small changes in interest rates would have a very big impact on our public finances.

Thankfully, we were in a strong fiscal position coming into this crisis, which allowed us to act quickly to support jobs and businesses, but having seen two supposedly once-in-a-generation economic events in just 10 years, we are reminded once again that we cannot know what is around the corner. We will need to return to a position of strong and sustainable public finances.

Let me make one further point this afternoon. While we have made great strides in tackling coronavirus, it may continue to be necessary to take targeted local action to keep the virus under control. We know the impact these local measures have on people and businesses. Since 1 September, we have been trialling support for individuals in Blackburn with Darwen, Pendle and Oldham. Eligible individuals who test positive with the virus will receive £130 for their 10-day period of self-isolation, with higher payments of up to £182 for members of the household or other contacts who need to self-isolate.

Today, I can announce further new measures to support businesses. The Government will provide direct cash grants to businesses that have been ordered to close.

Closed businesses with a rateable value of £51,000 or less will receive a cash grant of £1,000 for each three-week period they are closed. For closed businesses with a rateable value higher than £51,000, the grants will be £1,500. The grants will cover each additional three-week period, so if a small business is closed for six weeks, it will receive £2,000. This new support will give closed businesses a lifeline through the difficult but temporary experience of lockdown—an important next step in our economic plan to protect jobs and businesses against coronavirus. I am grateful for everything my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has done to develop this scheme, and he will bring forward further details shortly.

Let me close with one final observation. In the first phase of our economic response to coronavirus, we supported people, businesses and public services, with support totalling £190 billion. In the second phase, our plan for jobs is protecting, supporting and creating jobs, and as we enter the third phase our economic policy will be driven not just by responding to the immediate crisis, but by ensuring that we level up, spread opportunity, tackle climate change and make sure our response to the pandemic is not just about recovery but renewal. I commend the amendment to the House.

1.33 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): People across these islands are going through the most difficult of times. In the past six months, people have lost loved ones; they have not been able to have the human contact we all need; and they have struggled to keep themselves and their families going. Communities have pulled together admirably to help their neighbours, but businesses of all sizes have found it difficult, and an estimated 730,000 jobs have been lost so far. Ending the employment support schemes prematurely could cost 3 million jobs. The SNP fully supports the motion tabled by the Labour party today.

On 17 March, the Chancellor made a promise in this House. He said:

“I promised to do whatever it takes to support our economy through this crisis and that, if the situation changed, I would not hesitate to take further action.”—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2020; Vol. 673, c. 931.]

On these Benches, we welcomed the coronavirus job retention scheme and the self-employment support scheme. The economic powers to create such schemes rest in the hands of the UK Government. That has nothing to do with the strength of the Union: it is merely a reflection of where the economic powers lie.

The Scottish Government's programme for government shows that where we do have the powers, Scotland has an ambitious and comprehensive plan for sustainable economic recovery, and 71% of Scots now think that Holyrood should have the financial powers required to protect our economy.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned the SNP's programme for government. Does she agree with the SNP Scottish Government adviser who has said that the programme for government announced by Nicola Sturgeon lacks ambition for business and economic recovery in Scotland?

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Member ignores the fact that the SNP Government do not have the full range of powers that we need to protect our economy and which only independence can give us. He knows that is the case.

This is no ordinary economic downturn. The UK Government, on clear and urgent public health grounds, instructed and required many profitable, productive and sustainable firms to close. In sectors, such as hospitality, events, tourism, aviation, culture and the arts, these limitations will remain for the foreseeable future.

Jim Shannon: One thing we have not yet considered in this debate is the proposal for a four-day working week. Does the hon. Lady think a four-day working week could enable the economy to maintain its position and get beyond the dark spots of next January, February and March?

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Member makes a very good and well-considered point. There are lots of opportunities the Government have not considered for how we might spread around the limited and reducing number of jobs we have in order to keep people in employment.

The Federation of Small Businesses has noted that tourism and retail account for nearly half a million jobs in Scotland, many of them seasonal and rural, and many of them now facing the furlough scheme's winding down at the very time business is at its quietest. As we have seen from local lockdowns, such as those in Leicester, Aberdeen and Greater Manchester, there is an urgent need to put in place more flexible and enduring support—exactly the type of further action the Chancellor promised he would take. Aberdeen, for example, only managed to raise £232,000 via the “eat out to help out” scheme because of the local lockdown imposed on hospitality there. That compares with over £1 million each in Glasgow and Edinburgh. We need to look at whether the schemes in place are flexible enough when local lockdowns happen.

A further spike and further local restrictions seem inevitable, so ending support now is incredibly short-sighted. Until public health grounds for closure are removed, the SNP believes that the Government have a clear responsibility to assist and support wherever they can. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury mentioned some additional schemes at the tail end of his remarks, but I would ask him to think very carefully: could he live on the money he proposes for those asked to self-isolate? If he ran a business, could he survive and pay wages, pay for stock, the rent and all the bills on the grants he has announced? He probably could not, and many businesses cannot and will fold as a result without support.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury talked about phases of this crisis. The coronavirus is not done with us yet. Life is not going back to normal any time soon. The British Chambers of Commerce's quarterly recruitment outlook revealed that 29% of firms expect to axe jobs over the third quarter—a record high. At the same time, the number of new job opportunities is also depressed across almost all sectors, as is reflected in the various vacancies data. For example, the Office for National Statistics and Adzuna data show the number of online job vacancies for Scotland for the week to 21 August to be almost half the 2019 average—down 49 percentage points—and the Office for Budget Responsibility has

warned that UK unemployment could surpass the peaks of the 1980s after weaker than expected economic growth. The Chancellor and his Treasury team have a duty to prevent this kind of economic scarring. The devastation of the 1980s still haunts many communities, and I urge them not to gamble with the life chances of the people we are here to represent.

Jamie Stone: I give credit where it is due to the Government: the assistance afforded to the tourism industry has saved it in my constituency, which relies hugely on tourism. God forbid that the second spike gets worse than it is, but if it does and we have to close things down again, frankly that will ruin some of those businesses permanently. I make a plea to the Scottish Government and Her Majesty's Government in Westminster to work together as closely as possible. I hope that this eventuality does not happen, but if it does, we will all need to put our shoulder to the wheel.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Member is absolutely correct. A second spike does not seem to be on the Government's agenda, and it should be. The measures put in place were put in place at speed, at haste, and the Government should be learning from this and preparing for that second spike now. I would be incredibly grateful if at some point a Minister confirmed that they are doing that, because it is absolutely necessary. We cannot ignore the risk of a second spike, given how the figures have been creeping up in recent days.

The IPPR has said that ending the furlough scheme will lead to unemployment “not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s”, with the loss of 3 million jobs, 2 million of which would be viable in the longer term if it were continued. The furlough scheme should be continued for at least two years, or for as long as we need it—perhaps we will not need it for two years, which would be a good eventuality—as is being done in Germany and France. Independent Ireland is keeping its scheme going for a year. No employee or employer should be forced to decide between their health and their income.

The self-employment support scheme should also have been continued. In addition, a basic temporary income scheme should have been introduced to protect anyone falling through the gaps in support. There is still time for the Treasury to step in and make that commitment, because the lack of parity between those in the different schemes is completely unjustifiable. I remain deeply disappointed that the recommendations of the Treasury Committee to address the gaps in support have not been taken up by the Treasury. The ExcludedUK group, representing at the least 3 million people who have been denied any UK Government support—these include the newly self-employed, freelancers, limited company directors, those on short-term PAYE contracts and many others—is still being ignored by the Chancellor, despite having presented the Treasury with viable solutions.

The situation facing women requiring maternity leave has also been incredibly stressful and unfair, with many finding themselves ineligible and some who were forced to take maternity leave early now struggling to get the childcare they need to even attempt to go back to work. It is hugely disappointing to hear that the UK Government have rejected the very reasonable request by the 226,000 maternity petitioners to extend maternity leave for three months. I hope the Government will reconsider that. I

am led to wonder whether different decisions might be made if there were more women on the UK Government Benches.

When we see Jim Harra, head of HMRC, admit this week that £3.5 billion of furlough cash has been lost in fraudulent claims or error, it is even more galling to those who have no support whatsoever. There have also been errors in my constituency on HMRC's part. Its inflexibility and inability to deal with MP requests on this issue has also been hugely frustrating for those whose businesses are on the brink.

The take-up of the coronavirus job retention scheme has been significant, as has been said, with 9.6 million workers furloughed by 1.2 million employers since March. Those employers had made £34.7 billion of furlough claims by 9 August. The scheme will cost the UK Government an estimated £80 billion in total, but we should not forget that this cost is an investment in people and in public health. The cost of not acting would be far greater.

The figures published by the Treasury demonstrating the sectoral impact of the furlough scheme are interesting. They show only 2% of employees in public administration and defence and 7% of those in finance and insurance being placed on furlough, compared with 77% of those in accommodation and food services—some 1,693,600 employees—and 70% of those working in the arts, entertainment, recreation and other services, amounting to 474,300 employees across the UK. This of course reflects the different nature of the jobs in those sectors and whether it has been possible for people to work.

The sectors in which furlough take-up has been high are not suddenly going to be able to return to pre-covid business, and there is a real argument for sectoral extensions if the Government will not consider a wholesale extension. The ability of these businesses and organisations to generate income will continue to be hampered by the need to impose public health restrictions. For example, how would a national arts company or a full-scale production be able to get a theatre performance up and running? How would that theatre be able to turn a profit at 40% capacity? What about the restaurant next door, which theatre goers might usually have gone to for a pre-theatre meal, or the pub they might have gone to afterwards, where nobody will be allowed to stand at the bar and that will not have outdoor seating in the depths of a Scottish winter, or even a Scottish autumn?

How does the Chancellor expect such firms to bear the cost of staffing, rent and other outgoings when they will not see a corresponding increase in income? The short answer is that those costs cannot be borne. The CBI's head, Carolyn Fairbairn, has warned that

“it's too soon to pull business support away at the end of October”.

The Fraser of Allander Scottish business monitor for quarter 2 this year reported that 55% of businesses that have made use of the job retention scheme expect to decrease their staffing numbers when the scheme is phased out.

Gavin Newlands: My hon. Friend will have heard me raise with the Chief Secretary those companies that have abused the furlough by using it to pay for mass redundancies—British Airways is not alone; Centrica and others have followed suit. However, he failed to answer the question about the firing and rehiring of staff at massively reduced wages. Does she think that is fair?

Alison Thewliss: It absolutely is not fair. The scheme is being abused by businesses, and that should not be allowed to happen. I commend to the Government my hon. Friend's Bill on fire and rehire. If they wanted to do anything at all to help, they would take on the recommendations in his Bill, because they would make a huge difference to people. People should not be expected to do the same job on vastly reduced terms and conditions, under pain of losing their job altogether. It is exploitation pure and simple, and the Government should not accept it.

The Chief Secretary talked about new opportunities for those in industries that could not continue, but that fails to recognise the reality that there might not be enough jobs for those who are laid off to go into, and that what jobs there are might not be at the same wage level as the jobs they are in now. The cost will be met by the UK Government in one way or another—in employment benefits if not in extending furlough.

The end of furlough coincides with the end of the period for which people have been granted bill payment holidays. The Standard Life Foundation report, “Emerging from lockdown”, highlights that

“of the 3.7 million households across the UK granted a bill ‘payment holiday’, over 6 in 10 are already facing financial difficulties and will struggle to repay their debts when these arrangements end. For many, these payment holidays will cease on 31 October 2020—the same date the government's job retention schemes end, leaving many facing job losses and crippling financial strain.”

The effect could be devastating: people laid off because their employers cannot afford to keep them on, with debt mounting, and all this among people who are already finding life difficult. The drop in income if people move on to universal credit—if, indeed, they are eligible, which many people are not—will push many families over the brink. I fear that the UK Government are not looking at the bigger picture in the choices they are making.

The kickstart scheme is not available easily to small employers, which could have a disproportionate impact on the rural economy in places where there are not enough employers to club together to make up the minimum 30 employees. To return to a theme I have spoken about before, there is a risk of young workers being exploited and not being paid a living wage. Nobody in this House would want to live on the wages that young people are expected to work for in this country. I ask the Chief Secretary to reconsider and to pay a real living wage to the young people on the scheme. They deserve nothing less.

I also raise caution about relating the scheme to universal credit, because many people are not able to access universal credit, as I have said. If the scheme runs only through universal credit, many young people who might otherwise have benefited from the scheme, such as it is, will not be eligible.

Where the Scottish Government have the power, they have acted. The Scottish Government have spent £4 billion on covid, with over £2.3 billion for businesses. That is above the Barnett consequentials allocated to us. The Scottish Government published their response to the recommendations of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery on 5 August. They are acting to protect jobs by developing and delivering sector-led recovery plans, working with industry leadership groups, trade unions and others, starting with the construction sector, which

[Alison Thewliss]

is coming back from its furlough period. They are supporting jobs through the covid-19 transition training fund. Through the programme for government, they are supporting a national mission to create new jobs, good jobs and green jobs, which includes investing £60 million to support up to 20,000 young people into jobs. There is the £100-million green jobs fund, investment in decarbonisation and the Unlocking Ambition programme. They are also using the national performance framework to promote equality and to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

The Scottish Government have made an extra £330 million of funding available this financial year specifically to support Scotland's economic recovery. That includes £230 million of economic recovery stimulus to invest in capital projects and a £100 million package of funding focused on protecting jobs and supporting those who have been made redundant or whose jobs are at risk.

I would dearly love the Scottish Government to do more, given the scale of the crisis, but their hands are tied. The Fraser of Allander Institute is clear that

“the Scottish Government can borrow up to £450m per annum for capital investment (a cap of £3bn). On resource spending, they can borrow up to £600m per annum (a cap of £1.75bn), but only for ‘forecast error’ and ‘cash management’. They cannot borrow to fund discretionary resource spending.”

That is the crucial point. We urgently need more financial powers in Scotland. If the UK Government will not act on the things we have asked them to act on, they should not stand in Scotland's way when we have a desire to support our people and businesses. Powers must be devolved to let the Scottish Government get on with the job.

All of this stands in the context of the looming threat of a no-deal, chaotic and damaging Brexit, with the UK Government gleefully breaking international agreements they themselves signed up to and the outrageous proposals today in clause 46 of the Tories' United Kingdom Internal Market Bill. The UK Government's power grab over economic development and infrastructure plans cannot be allowed to stand. The Tories speak of a power surge, but the last time I checked, a power surge was a dangerous thing that usually lasts only a few seconds, but that results in serious damage to valuable appliances. For once, the Tories might be telling the truth when they say that that is what is coming to Scotland under their plans.

Westminster and the Tories cannot be trusted with our economy. What we see today is not “whatever it takes”. Winding up the furlough scheme and allowing so many people to fall through the support net will cause lasting harm to so many people with businesses and to the wider economy. We must have the full powers of a normal independent country to meet the needs of our economy and, most importantly, of the people of Scotland.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It will be obvious to anyone who has looked at today's call list that 90 Back Benchers are hoping to participate. I have to intimate that it is unlikely everybody will be called; indeed, it is impossible. I will leave it up to individual Members to do their own arithmetic, but I

am afraid that I will have to impose an immediate time limit on Back-Bench speeches of three minutes. I call Caroline Nokes.

1.50 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that might mean some of the niceties go out of the window.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary is absolutely right to have identified the great long list of support that has gone to business, and I thank him for doing so because I now do not have to. I welcome the presence on the Front Bench of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. I would like to pay particular tribute to him for the help he has given me with individual constituency cases, particularly, I note, with one small business and Lloyds Banking Group. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) has just left—in time for me to make that point.

I want to put on record some local perspective of where businesses in Romsey and Southampton North have had assistance: over 10,000 jobs protected by the furlough scheme; £9.5 million to self-employed people; more than £42 million of bounce back loans; and £17.5 million in business grants. Those are very significant figures. The borough council has worked hand in hand with the Government in reaching out to small businesses, making sure all those who are eligible applied and received assistance. Some 47,000 meals have been eaten via eat out to help out. Could my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary pass on to the Chancellor the particular thanks of the lady I met in the Cromwell Arms in Romsey who wanted to talk about the “lovely local lad” who is of course my right hon. Friend the Chancellor?

Turning to the issue of ongoing support for local businesses, I was pleased to hear this week from Simon Parkes of Elumin8, a Romsey-based business making advanced lighting systems for the automotive industry. He is looking to recruit between three and five new employees—young employees—as soon as possible, and is keen to make the kickstart scheme work not just for his business, but for the benefit of such unemployed young people. Both he and the local council are working with the local enterprise partnership to bring together the minimum number of 30 needed so that more local businesses will be able to benefit. It is great to see the determination to make schemes work and get young people into real jobs who will then enable his business, even in difficult economic times, to thrive and grow.

I commend the support that has gone to hospitality. We know it is a sector that employs many young people and, indeed, many women—an interest I have particularly. I pay tribute to the Four Horseshoes in Nursling, which is continuing the scheme on its own terms, and I know across the country many are doing the same. However, it would be remiss of me not to return to a sector that I have raised many times in this House and will continue to champion. The beauty industry employs over 370,000 people, over 90% of whom are women. They have stayed locked down longer than other industries, and in some parts of the country they remain locked down, so I welcome the grants that my right hon. Friend has mentioned.

The green homes scheme is a great scheme and one that can provide energy efficiency and jobs, but please can we make it as wide as possible, so that companies

such as Kelda Technology in my constituency, which makes showers, can also benefit from it, reducing energy costs through reducing water heating costs?

Finally, on those in the events industry, my right hon Friend the Chancellor is working really hard to rebalance the economy, but these are small businesses which, if allowed to thrive, will in turn be paying tax in years to come, enabling us to rebalance the economy.

1.53 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): My simple request of Ministers today is that they summon the confidence to target support where it is needed most. The Chief Secretary said today to the House that he would not do that because a number of questions need answering. I may be old-fashioned—I hope he listens, as he leaves the Chamber—but I am sure it is for Ministers to answer the questions, not to sit back and wait for others to do their homework for them. If the Chief Secretary is not willing to provide sector-specific support, perhaps he could set out at the Dispatch Box why he is not willing to do that, as opposed to posing questions to Members in this House and deflecting from the call to arms.

Supporting the industrial foundations needed for our recovery and our future growth is right not just in terms of industrial policy, but in terms of spending taxpayers' money.

The Government are understandably borrowing significant amounts of money, but they must spend every pound prudently. Wasting a few billion here and a few billion there is not acceptable when there are so many jobs and businesses on the line.

Ministers today might refer to HMRC reports that an estimated £3.5 billion has been fraudulently claimed from the furlough scheme, but that is the obvious pitfall of an open-to-all scheme. Bespoke packages of support to strategically important sectors would be negotiated directly with those businesses, with the due diligence and obligations that come with that. I hope that Ministers, too, will have the sophistication to differentiate support for the strategically important sectors—important for the foundations of our economy and our future growth—and the vast number of jobs in the broader economy that fish around them. If strategically important sectors cannot reopen or get back to work, the knock-on effect for bus drivers, security guards, coffee shops and the like, as well as the hospitality, creative and tourism sectors that rely on workers having money to spend, is clearly significant.

I have confidence that the Government are able to meet those challenges. In addition to sector-specific support, including for sectors that will take longer to reopen, that means two things. First, we need to ensure that we have an adequate test and trace system that gives employers, workers and unions the confidence to return to the workplace. It is not working; getting it right is crucial to retaining jobs in the economy. Secondly, we need the Chancellor to bring forward a fiscal investment in people, as well as a fiscal investment in infrastructure, with proper redundancy support services attached to skills and training opportunities in every part of the country.

British businesses are up for that challenge, from bringing forward R&D projects and decarbonising to pulling together in the national interest. This pandemic has shown the powerful partnership that can be formed

between Government, businesses, workers and unions during times of crisis. We should try to hold on to that collective endeavour as we seek to recover and build the British economy, but that requires Ministers to step up to that challenge, to answer the questions that are being posed of them, and to take the necessary action to protect jobs and businesses across the whole of the country.

1.56 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Across the House today, we have heard recognition of the extraordinary support that the Government have put in place for the economy and British businesses. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), I pay tribute to the Treasury team and the Parliamentary Private Secretaries who have been supporting us and many of our businesses with queries.

It has been mentioned that nationally, we are paying the wages of 9.6 million people. Of course, people find national statistics very difficult to relate to, so in Wimbledon, 12,100 people were furloughed, 4,200 people have benefited from the self-employed scheme, there has been £76.8 million of bounce back loans, which have helped over 2,000 businesses, and CBILS has helped 99 businesses. Inevitably, as the country returns to work and the post-economy starts to revive, we will see a very different mixture in the economy. Some industries and sectors will inevitably be impacted on in a way that we had not expected and there will be an adjustment. We would be wrong to try to pretend that that is not going to happen. Surely, therefore, a plan for jobs and a kickstart scheme is right, rather than a continuation of the furlough scheme, and the plan for jobs must look at protecting and creating jobs.

On the protection of jobs, I spoke about the arts sector in the pre-recess debate, and I hope that the announcement today from the Chief Secretary will extend to the arts sector. On the plan for jobs and where we are looking to create them, there must be a mixture of skills programmes to equip people coming into the workforce with skills for the future. The future is key, both in the Government's announcement, rightly, about the acceleration of capital investment and in the £600 billion that they are talking about in terms of future prosperity. Certainly, in terms of infrastructure investment, I urge Treasury Ministers to look at what is fibre investment and what is iron investment—we need more fibre and less iron.

Finally, as we look to the future, it must be right in the short term that we concentrate our efforts on the growth programme. That is entirely right in terms of infrastructure. However, if we look to the medium term, beyond the growth ideas coming from many parts of the House—I commend for some notable growth ideas the One Nation Conservatives caucus group paper, which, surprisingly, I edited and authored, along with many other colleagues—we must put our economy and finances on a sound basis. I urge the Treasury, as we look to the medium term, not to rule out any of the economic levers that we are looking at to support the economy now in order to restore sound finances in the future.

1.59 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): In my constituency of Birmingham, Ladywood up to 8,600 jobs are at risk if the Chancellor presses ahead

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

with the removal of the furlough scheme and the self-employed income support scheme in October and if he does not change course and adopt a targeted continuation of both schemes for particularly hard hit sectors. My constituency already had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country before the pandemic hit. My fear is that if many of the jobs of those currently on wage support schemes go, then my area and my city will take much longer to recover than other parts of the country.

I want to make the case for the arts and entertainment sector. I know that many are making cases for different sectors in this debate, but there are 60,000 jobs in the arts and entertainment sector in my region of the west midlands, and Birmingham is at the heart of many of those jobs. My constituency encompasses the whole of the city centre, which is home to many of the venues and therefore the jobs in the sector. It is therefore crucial to my area and the social, cultural and economic life of Birmingham.

The sector is struggling because it cannot get back up and running like other sectors can. The public health advice and the laws that are in place because of public health mean that its businesses cannot get back to normal. In those circumstances, it is unconscionable that economic support does not follow where the public health rules lead us.

Everything we heard from those on the Treasury Bench today about the challenges in continuing a sector-specific wage support scheme sounds very hollow to all those who are desperately trying to save their jobs. The Government have shown real creativity in coming up with economic policy to deal with the impact of the pandemic, and that should not stop now. They should overcome the hurdles that are in place to adopt a sector-specific approach, because every job in every sector that is saved today or in the next few months will decrease the scale of the bills we will all face when we ultimately have to pay off the costs of this pandemic. The cost of supporting jobs and sectors facing total collapse—those businesses are going to go to the wall—will be cheaper than the cost of inaction, which will be much more expensive in the long run. The Government's current approach, I am afraid to say, not only does not make economic sense, but fails the test of fairness, too.

In the short time left to me, I wish to make the case for Birmingham in particular, because we are due to host the Commonwealth games in 2022. If the heart of our arts and entertainment sector is ripped out from our city, we will not be able to see the full benefits of what the Commonwealth games could bring to the brilliant city of Birmingham. I urge the Treasury to take a region-specific approach and take into account factors such as international events, so that we can have the full benefits for all our constituents—benefits envisaged when we win such bids in the first place.

2.2 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I, for one, really think that the Government deserve enormous credit, not just for the sheer scale of the financial response to the pandemic, but for the speed with which key parts of the safety net were put in place really early on as the crisis unfolded. I say that first of all as a Welsh Member of Parliament who sat and listened to a near

constant stream of criticism from Welsh Labour Government Ministers about our actions here as a Government, and something similar could be said for the Scottish nationalist Government in Edinburgh. I am really proud that we were able to support so many families and businesses in every part of the United Kingdom. The question those politicians need to confront is how on earth those businesses and families could have been supported in a similar way without the strong intervention of the United Kingdom Treasury. That is an important point.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Crabb: I am not going to give way—forgive me. For me, the subject we are discussing today is about two things. One is how we support livelihoods. How do we support families and help keep them afloat during this crisis? There is a point I would like to make, which has not yet been made, about the strengthening of our social security system. Alongside the schemes to support businesses and jobs early on in the crisis, the Treasury took the very important decision to put extra money into universal credit as a temporary measure. If I may make one plea to those on the Treasury Bench this afternoon, it is that they need to decide very quickly that that increase should stay in place for next spring for those families, many of whom will still be adjusting to having lost their jobs and having perhaps moved from furlough to benefits, and many of them will find that a very hard landing indeed. Any prospect that we are going to remove that additional money next spring is for me unthinkable.

This debate is also about how we protect key strategic parts of our economy and our national life, and how we ensure that they come through this crisis without too much irreparable damage. I confess that I have some sympathy for some of the opinions that have been expressed on both sides of the House this afternoon. I have talked about extending furlough in a targeted way previously, but I absolutely do recognise from the conversations that I have had with trade bodies and with Ministers in recent days and weeks just how difficult it is to pin down and define a targeted extension of furlough. None the less, I plead with Ministers to keep an open mind when we talk about these sectors. I think about the enormous manufacturing operation of Airbus in north Wales and how strategically important it is for Wales and the United Kingdom. I also think about all those padlocked theatres a short walk from here in the west end and in every city centre up and down the country.

We want to protect key parts of our economy and our national life, and I really urge Ministers to keep an open mind about how we do that. They need to think flexibly and work collaboratively with unions and trade bodies on getting our economy through this crisis.

2.5 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): The UK is facing a jobs crisis unlike any experienced in living memory. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost. The UK is facing the worst recession of any advanced economy. Many people's hopes and aspirations for the future are now in question, but the worst is yet to come.

Last week, the Trades Union Congress warned of a possible tsunami of redundancies when the furlough scheme and other support measures are wound down. The Office for Budget Responsibility has similarly warned that, by 2021, unemployment could rise to 3.5 million—just over 10% of the UK total workforce. This jobs crisis has been keenly felt in almost every part of our economy from aerospace to retail to the creative industries. In the short time available to me, however, I want to focus on the devastation that UK manufacturing faces if the Government do not urgently change course and extend the furlough scheme.

I should first declare an interest. For four years, I proudly served as a regional secretary of Unite the Union, of which I continue to be a member. In that role, I was privileged to represent tens of thousands of people working in the manufacturing sector, including more than 20,000 workers in shipbuilding and aerospace. I know just how rare these well-paid, high-skilled jobs are in the modern economy and how much pride these workers have in their work. I also know how vital these jobs are to some of the most deprived and left-behind communities in our country—the very communities that this Government promised to level up.

In the third quarter of 2019, there were more than 345,000 manufacturing jobs in the north-west. Research commissioned by Make UK showed that output and other levels in the region reached -60% and -65% during the height of the pandemic. This economic disruption will far outlast the current set of lockdown measures within the sector, which is set to contract by 9.4% in 2020. Job losses in this sector do not just impact those who find themselves suddenly unemployed—perhaps for the first time in their lives—but have a disproportionate and devastating impact on local economies. For every job lost at a private aerospace company, four more are lost in the wider supply chain and countless others in local shops, restaurants and independent businesses.

In short, the Government's failure to extend the furlough scheme is nothing short of wanton economic vandalism. It risks not only devastating the manufacturing sector, but laying waste to some of the most marginalised and deprived communities in which manufacturing companies are based. With furlough schemes across Europe set to last until at least March 2021, it also risks seriously undermining the competitiveness of British manufacturing at a time when it could not be more vital to our long-term economic prosperity.

2.28 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I am pleased to speak in this debate and place on record my thanks to the Government for the incredible support that they have provided to my constituents in Darlington. The unprecedented challenges that my constituents face have been met with measures ensuring that they had the security of income for their families and that their businesses were able to survive. The coronavirus job retention scheme ensured that 12,300 of my constituents were supported. This represents almost a third of the entire workforce in Darlington. This scheme alone made funds of up to £184 million available to the furloughed employees of Darlington. The self-employed income scheme was accessed by 2,500 self-employed people, enabling them to access up to £2,500 per month. That support was worth more than £6 million per month.

Businesses across Darlington have benefited from a variety of business grants, business rates holidays and tax deferral schemes. Business rates relief in Darlington totalled over £12 million, and the Government have distributed 1,581 grants to small and medium-sized enterprises in Darlington with a value of almost £16 million. I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of my colleagues at Darlington Borough Council, who made sure that their distribution of the grants was one of the swiftest in the country. I also pay tribute to the work of Ben Houchen, the Tees Valley Mayor, for the local support that he has given to businesses in Darlington. The phenomenal eat out to help out scheme, enabling the hospitality sector to bounce back, was enjoyed by 62 establishments in Darlington, which have served more than 50,000 meals, and I want to pay tribute to the Tomahawk Steakhouse for its fantastic steaks. Darlington businesses have applied and been accepted for over £33 million-worth of bounce back loans.

Furlough, grants, tax extensions, bounce back loans and rates holidays—these measures have been truly extraordinary, but this emergency safety net needs to come to an end. It cannot be extended indefinitely. I know, and the hard-working people of Darlington know, that we need to get back to standing on our own two feet. We have protected the NHS, we have supported our employees and we have cradled our businesses, but we need to move forward, creating jobs and levelling up on investment in places such as Darlington to truly unlock the potential that I know the north-east has.

2.11 pm

Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): I am sure the whole House would like to join me in congratulating and sending best wishes to Jack Booth, a world war two veteran who celebrates his 100th birthday on Friday.

At the beginning of this week, parts of Blackburn were still under local lockdown. Swimming pools, gyms, bowling alleys and wedding venues were all closed. That changed yesterday, when they were allowed to reopen, but it means that further restrictions were placed on Blackburn for nearly eight weeks. The impact of the pandemic has taken its toll on local residents and businesses, and of course, the council, which is predicting a £19.5 million deficit, despite the Government saying that they would do “whatever it takes”. The Government are refusing to recognise that additional support is needed in areas with additional lockdowns. I am not sure whether they are incompetent or wilfully neglecting areas in local lockdown. They provide support to some areas, but it is very sparse across east Lancashire. It is also nonsense to say that specific sectors, some of which have only just opened and others that have opened in a limited capacity, do not require additional support.

The Chancellor's decision to withdraw wage support for jobs, particularly in Blackburn, is making matters worse. It is clear that the Government's one-size-fits-all approach does not work, and the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the British Chambers of Commerce have said as much. Instead, the Government should be giving support where it is needed most, not withdrawing it in one go. No one here is asking for a permanent handout, but cutting off support for every worker in the country from October—no matter whether they are back at work or not, or under local restrictions—is equivalent to pulling the plug at the worst possible time. We have just heard the Prime Minister say that his priority is to

[Kate Hollern]

protect jobs, but too many people have already been excluded from the support. If the Government are serious about protecting jobs, high streets, councils and services, they need a targeted approach to further support in areas such as Blackburn that are still suffering additional lockdowns.

2.14 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): Our Chancellor said he would do “whatever it takes” and the support that has been provided has been unprecedented. I have always said that there is no such thing as Government money, just taxpayers’ money, and we need sustainable public finances, but this programme was the right thing to do. In my constituency and up and down the country, high streets have struggled as more people shop online and visit out-of-town retail parks. The last thing they needed were the extra challenges posed by covid-19, having to close down and facing the prospect of making staff redundant. The small business grants, about £28 million in the first instance and then an additional £1.18 million in discretionary grants, have saved many businesses. The furlough scheme, used by 13,900 people in Bassetlaw, has no doubt saved many jobs too. We are talking about people who, through no fault of their own, suddenly found themselves unable to pay their household bills, mortgages and other living expenses. The scheme gave them the means to do that. Now we need to get people back to work.

The construction scheme has been able to start up again, get staff off furlough and back into work to build the homes we need. Many people have been able to move once more, aided by the Chancellor’s stamp duty measures. As a newly adopted Retfordian, I have seen at first hand the growing recovery in the town centre. We owe a debt of gratitude to businesses and local volunteers who have helped to create the conditions where people can again use our shops, hairdressers, pubs and restaurants safely. In Bassetlaw alone, the Eat Out to Help Out scheme has been used for up to 72,000 meals. In a post on my Facebook page, the owners of the Shireoaks Inn in Worksop said, “This scheme has given my pub a massive boost and has secured the jobs for all my staff for the foreseeable future”.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I know the hon. Gentleman is short of time, so I thank him for giving way. Does he not agree that we should use every tool available to beat this virus, including extending the furlough? Does he not think that we should take the advice of the Bank of England and treat the debt accrued as war debt?

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, which takes us back to the point about sustainable public finances. That is the key to all of this, and furlough should fit in with that as well. At some point, we actually must get back to work.

I was setting out why the support we provided was the right thing to do. We have also managed to support some tremendous community assets, such as the North Notts Community Arena, with things such as furloughing, bounce back loans and business rates relief—that was worth £11.9 million in Bassetlaw. Although the arena was unable to secure the discretionary grant from the council, it has been saved with funding from other

sources, such as the big lottery community fund. I wish to thank Severn Trent Water and Sport England for supporting this wonderful facility, and community champion and manager Nigel Turner for driving it forward.

In addition to the £9.3 million given out for those who are self-employed, we now have a great scheme, in kickstart, which will help to benefit youngsters in the area and in their quest to find work. Although we still face many challenges ahead, our plan for jobs provides the basis for a strong recovery and bright future.

2.17 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I wish to acknowledge the tremendous campaigning efforts by members of Unite the union, my own trade union as a Unite MP, who have come down today from the aerospace, aviation and manufacturing sectors, and a variety of others, to express their concerns for their own jobs when the furlough scheme comes to an end. Those are real concerns, and those people are demanding that the Government take action now to protect workers, businesses and the wider economy from the wider economic effects of covid.

In the short time I have, I wish to talk a little about the importance of sector-specific support. Some Members may know that I am on the Transport Committee. I wish to mention one sector in particular, the coach sector. I thank TM Travel, Northeast Coachways and the Honk for Hope campaign for furnishing me with information for this debate and for their efforts to safeguard the coach industry. I wish to highlight to Members early-day motion 851, which is on the Honk for Hope campaign to protect jobs and businesses. They are trying to safeguard the long-term future of coach travel, and I want the Government to take note of that.

The sector has been sadly neglected, and specific asks are being made of Ministers. The first is that they extend finance holidays—an issue raised by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—by 12 months to ensure that no coaches are repossessed during the winter period, so that businesses can bounce back if there is a recovery from covid in 2021. The second ask is to designate the coach sector as part of the leisure industry to enable access to support and grants that have been made available to other leisure businesses. The third ask is to introduce a freeze on lenders seeking to repossess family homes as a result of the collapse of a coach company. The fall in demand in this sector has resulted in 98% of coaches being parked up and left in their depots off the road. The level of loss is simply unsustainable for the sector, which employs over 40,000 people, unless the Government get out of neutral and into top gear—if you will excuse the pun—and provide some sector-specific support.

The end of the furlough scheme is clearly going to cause a wave of redundancies, but coach operators, in particular, may well have to close their doors for the final time. I urge Ministers on the Treasury Bench to please look at some sector-specific support for the coach sector.

2.20 pm

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): As the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West, employment has been high on the agenda for me from the outset. For decades, Wolverhampton has been

above the national average on unemployment. Economic opportunity for our great city was really championed when the Prime Minister said that he was going to level up the country, and areas like St Peter's, Graiseley and the rest of Wolverhampton were given hope. Then covid hit and the world as we knew it changed. In dark times, I was able to see a city come together in unity, regardless of party, beliefs or views, and do what was right for the city. Businesses were repurposed or adjusted to serve the community, from the amazing Jim Gough's of Tettenhall to Grill-It in Newbridge. Key workers went over and above in a time of crisis.

As lockdown was eased, I was able to get out and see these businesses face to face to see what they were doing. Simply put, it was hard for them. Footfall is down and the future of business looks more challenging than ever before. The market traders of Wolverhampton trade on with steely determination in a difficult climate. There are businesses such as EcoWulf in Chapel Ash, which was set up one year ago and had to deal with covid in its first year but trades on with a great product. Malik Butchers of Whitmore Reans has used this time to repurpose its business to provide some truly amazing halal street food.

Without a doubt, business in Wolverhampton will be concerned about paying the bills and keeping their employees in jobs, but what has made a difference in this unprecedented time is the support the Government have provided. From the job retention scheme to business grants, it has all made a huge difference to people. I have heard this from so many; it has been well received. It has been a lifeline that has saved many jobs and businesses throughout our great city. However, it does have to end.

It is never good to see someone lose a job or a business go under. This I know from experience having gone through it: the sadness you feel when you make people redundant; the numbness you feel when you tell your family you cannot put food on the table. Nobody wants this. But we have to look forward. We must make sure that we provide the best circumstances to safely get the economy moving forward and create sustainable public finances. We need to empower businesses to give them the opportunities to fulfil the visions that they have. We must move forward in supporting them as we are through the kickstart scheme and other great opportunities. We have to support businesses moving forward, but we cannot keep the furlough scheme going forever and a day.

2.23 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): We stand in this country at a crossroads in our economy, with profound implications for future generations. That is why I support, and my party supports, the Labour party in its call for an extension of the furlough scheme—but more, we would like it to cover all sectors, incentivise flexibility and be guaranteed until at least June 2021. This is a scheme that the Liberal Democrats called for and campaigned for, and, to give the Government credit, it has helped to stave off the worst economic impact of covid-19. Almost 10 million jobs were furloughed from March to June, and more than 6 million people still benefit.

The scheme has massive flaws, however. Primarily, it does not help everyone. It has excluded more than 3 million people, who have been left without any financial

support at all. Perhaps the biggest long-term flaw is that the current support scheme was intended as a bridge over the deepest chasm of this crisis, and so far it offers us no destination. If the Government have a strategy for the onward journey, this would be the time to tell us. Where will those nearly 7 million people be when the bridge comes to an end? At the moment, I fear that the answer is: high and dry.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I am particularly concerned about tourism in the lakes and dales. We had a very busy August, and that was welcome, but most businesses could not operate at anywhere near capacity and therefore they could not turn a profit after losing £1.6 billion in the first part of the year. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need a special package to support hospitality and tourism, especially through the winter months, before the new season kicks in next year?

Christine Jardine: I thank my hon. Friend for the excellent point he makes. I know the impact on Edinburgh West of the loss of the festivals, and tourism is one of the sectors that will struggle. My fear is that if the scheme is withdrawn, we will simply have spent billions to delay the pain for those sectors, with nothing to lessen it in the long term and nothing to prepare for worse to come. Aviation, hospitality, the arts and tourism are all struggling sectors. We need the scheme not only to continue, but to do more. We need it to invest not just in staving off the crisis, but in creating a new, stronger, greener economy. If the job retention scheme is to be truly successful, that is where the bridge must lead us.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government must take urgent action towards their target of net zero carbon, and that now is the time to invest in the transition away from carbon-emitting industries and create new green jobs?

Christine Jardine: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend, and I believe that this crisis may, ironically, afford us the opportunity to do so. That is why we cannot afford to cut off the job retention scheme in October. We need it to help us through that transition into the post-covid economy, whatever it looks like. None of us knows what that will be. None of us knows which sectors of the economy will survive or even thrive, and which will struggle or collapse.

That is the one point on which I take issue with the Labour motion. How do we know which sectors to target, and if we target, who do we leave out? Which industries do we allow to go to the wall? Which employees do we throw on the scrapheap? I come originally from Clydeside. I know—the memory of it is seared on my consciousness and runs through everything I do in politics—the damage that is done to lives when an industry dies and those who depended on it have nowhere to turn. We cannot allow that to happen to another generation.

If this virus has confronted us with the challenge of a lifetime or of a century, it also offers an opportunity, because we are now as close to having a blank sheet of paper as we are ever likely to be. Use the job retention scheme and the structure of support, and develop it further. Furlough people while we begin to transition and develop our future. Use the scheme as the basis of the Government's strategy, for which we are all waiting.

[Christine Jardine]

It has been calculated that keeping the scheme going until June of next year would cost £10 billion. Surely, that is a drop in the ocean compared with what will be lost if we do not. In that time, we can ensure that the industries and employers that can survive do so, and we can help the others to transition. Instead of mothballing companies, encourage them to work. Look at the flexible schemes in Germany, France and Austria, and at what they are doing to protect their economies. Let us use the time we have to upskill and retrain.

We need to innovate our way out of this, and we can. We need to create new industries and green jobs, investigate hydrogen power and encourage our aviation industry to be greener. We must make wellbeing the measure of our economy, and quality of life the measure of our success. The world and its economies are changing around us. The job retention scheme has given us time and we need to ensure that we use it properly. We must turn the birthplace of the industrial revolution into the home of a new green revolution.

2.29 pm

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): I want to start by paying tribute to the businesses up and down the country who have done so much to protect us at this time, businesses such as: Quotient Sciences in Rushcliffe, working day and night to develop coronavirus treatments; Ruddy Fine Gin in Ruddington, which converted its production line to make sanitiser and donated hundreds of bottles to vulnerable people; or Cheff—Clean Healthy Energising Fresh Food—in Lady Bay, which produces a range of fresh, healthy meals and has donated them to frontline NHS workers and the most vulnerable. I have always believed in supporting business, because business supports our communities. That is why I am so grateful to the Chancellor for the comprehensive response to the financial jeopardy many businesses found themselves in under lockdown.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): The furlough scheme is effectively credit to business. My grandparents used to call credit never, neverland. Does my hon. Friend agree that unlike the Opposition, who live in never, neverland and thrive on the delights of hindsight, this Government take their responsibilities seriously and want to support people back to work?

Ruth Edwards: The furlough scheme has done so much over the past few months for people in my constituency. In Rushcliffe, over 12,500 jobs have been protected by the coronavirus job retention scheme, over 3,000 self-employed people have been claiming support through the self-employed income support, and over £18 million in grants has been distributed to businesses in Rushcliffe. However, my hon. Friend is right that we must have sound public finances and that we cannot just carry on with support in this way forever.

Contrary to the claims of the parties on the Opposition Benches, support for business and jobs is not ending in October. It is changing. We must be honest with ourselves and the public about the future. Our economy is going to change. Coronavirus did not just press pause on businesses, but accelerated the big changes we will see in our economy and were always going to see in our economy in the medium term through the adoption of

new technologies such as AI, data analytics and robotics, the fusion of our digital and physical worlds, changing the world of work as we know it and changing the mix of skills in the economy.

Change is unsettling. It makes us anxious and fearful. However, it also provides huge opportunities and we must make sure that those opportunities are there for everyone. The measures the Government are now taking as part of their plans for jobs will help to make sure that that is the case: over £100 million to triple the scale of traineeships; £32 million to recruit careers advisers for 250,000 people; double the number of work coaches to help people find jobs where they may have been lost; triple the number of sector work-based placements; and investing in apprenticeship creation for people of all ages. That is what the Government are, and should be, focused on: training people for the new economy and the new opportunities it will bring.

2.32 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this timely debate, which is of critical importance to my constituents. Out of the four constituencies that represent South Lanarkshire in this House, my constituency has the highest number of people receiving support for their incomes during the pandemic. The most recent figures, from July, show that 15,800 constituents were placed on the furlough scheme, with 3,200 constituents on the self-employed income support scheme. To put that into context, the total number of people on those schemes is just shy of a quarter of the total electorate in my constituency.

There can be no doubt from those figures that the economic effects of covid-19 are going to be felt for some time to come. It is with that understanding that we now face an incredibly stark choice about what to do next. It is my fundamental view that the Chancellor is moving far too quickly to wind down those schemes. There are sectors of the economy that are clearly not yet ready to reopen or expect a longer time to recovery, because coronavirus mitigations will be with us for many months to come.

One example of an industry that faces a deeply uncertain future without furlough is the events industry, which employs many of my constituents and supports our thriving cultural scene. My constituent Anne Porter, who owns a small production company that has been running in Burnside since 1989, told me that she has relied on furlough to keep the company going. However, with many major live events cancelled or postponed until next year and the furlough scheme winding down, many businesses like Anne's are now facing closure across my constituency.

My constituents whose livelihoods rely on productions and events have told me that continuing support is essential for those sectors to recover. Many performers see the end of furlough as an enormous setback to what will often be the first tentative steps into their career. Ending furlough too early will lead many to conclude that the so-called "broad economic shoulders" of the UK are being put to work creating cliff edges, just at the moment when many people will be feeling economically vulnerable. For some it will be the first time in their lives that they have experienced this kind of insecurity. They have paid their taxes, followed the rules and done all the

right things, and the UK Government are now repaying them with worry and uncertainty as the scheme winds down and the threat of redundancy looms large.

In conclusion, I do not want to have to beg another Government to do the right thing and extend the furlough and self-employed income support schemes. I do not want to hear more stories from ExcludedUK of people who are falling through every gap in the support schemes and been left with nothing, not even the hope of one-off support that might help them get back on their feet. I want the Government to start listening and to keep this lifeline support going. If they will not do that, it is time that we have the choice to support people and businesses through the powers of an independent Scotland.

2.35 pm

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): The Treasury paid out nearly £14 million in business grants in my constituency, instant cash that was vital to keeping businesses going during a situation that none of us wanted or could have foreseen. I must also mention the fantastic eat out to help out scheme. It has been widely welcomed by my constituents. Pubs and restaurants from Great Barr to Greets Green and from Friar Park to Newton have taken advantage, serving up 91,000 discounted meals in total across the constituency. In August, I had the pleasure of visiting the Sportsman, the Yew Tree, the Island Inn and the Cricketers Arms, to name just a few, and of course, I took my team to the amazing Red Lion.

Everywhere I went, the Chancellor's support was hugely appreciated, and 13,400 jobs in West Bromwich East were supported by the furlough scheme. Over the summer recess, I visited Rimstock, Guest Truck and Van, and Sheldon Clayton Logistics—all brilliant businesses in West Bromwich East that benefited from the furlough scheme. It was a genuine lifeline for many businesses. However, a phasing-out of the furlough scheme is ultimately the right thing to do now. The scheme has rightly supported millions since it was introduced, but we cannot continue to run a labour market where people's jobs are completely dependent on the state making them viable. I have listened with great interest to the Opposition, and it is not clear which sector they want to support, how long for or at what cost. I fear that the shadow Chancellor did not know either.

The Opposition seem to have also neglected to mention that it is not just in this country that support measures are coming to an end this autumn. Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Canada, Denmark, Norway, New Zealand, Sweden and Switzerland have all announced that their equivalent wage support schemes will be phased out over the coming months. The Bank of England's chief economist hit the nail on the head when he said that extending the furlough scheme meant

“prolonging the inevitable in a way that probably doesn't help either the individual or the business.”

He is right.

We need to turn our attention to providing new opportunities for people. We must bring the public finances back under control. I am a big fan of the Chancellor's kickstart scheme, and we need to go further for young people. We are looking at an entire generation of young people who have had their early career stalled through no fault of their own. That is where the

Government need to step in, and it is also why I support the Prime Minister when he says that young people need to get back into the office because it is they who benefit from peer support, guidance, role models and progression.

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con): I wonder, having listed all the countries that my hon. Friend did just now, whether she would take issue with the Opposition's mention of France, which has a youth unemployment rate of nearly 19.5%. Should we therefore not really take any lessons from the French on how to run a successful jobs market?

Nicola Richards: I agree with my hon. Friend's assessment of the situation.

I have a constituent who runs a firm called Sandwell Pest Control Services which is already looking to take on a young person in an administrative role through the kickstart scheme. That is just one example of the urgency many businesses are feeling to get going again. Last December, the people of this country came out en masse to reject the Opposition's vision for the economy. The British people ultimately know that, as a hero of mine once said,

“eventually you run out of other people's money”.

In West Bromwich East we want sound public finances. The Government stood up for jobs and our economy when it was needed the most, and they will drive forward our recovery from here in a responsible way that brings the public finances under control through competent Conservative policies.

2.39 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in today's debate at such a crucial time for both the nation's public health and, of course, our economy. As so many Members have said since the pandemic began, the two are very much intertwined, such that our success in keeping the virus at bay will in large part determine whether our economy bounces back or remains on life support.

Covid-19 has put a powder keg under our economy and the global economy, and the recession we are now in was of course inevitable, but it must be said that the true depth of the jobs crisis that our country now finds itself in was not inevitable. The responsibility for putting that right falls squarely at the door of No. 10.

There are 4,700 jobs at risk in my Ogmore constituency, according to Office for National Statistics and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs figures. It is interesting hearing Government Members talk about that as if it does not matter and we will find new jobs. Constituencies such as mine have already had 30 years of deindustrialisation because of 18 years of attacks from a Conservative Government. My constituents cannot cope with any more deindustrialisation or job losses.

I welcome the Government's support at UK level, and I welcome the Welsh Labour Government's support for businesses across Wales—theirs is the most generous of any of the UK Administrations' packages for supporting business—but I echo the calls of my Front-Bench colleagues: the furlough scheme needs to be extended. The suggestion that all sectors will simply survive when something is cut in October is for the birds. That simply is not true.

[Chris Elmore]

In the aviation sector in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones)—I pay tribute to her for all the work she has done on supporting so many of the staff—workers face cuts. At the BA site alone, several hundred people face the possibility of job losses. The south Wales economy will take a £1.6 billion hit if BA continues to make cuts to sites across south Wales. The Government cannot just ignore that. It is simply not appropriate for a Government to stand by and do nothing in support of the aviation sector.

Patricia Gibson: What Opposition Members are asking for is an extension of temporary support. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that Government Members are characterising that as a request for permanent support? The premature withdrawal of this support means that tens of thousands of viable jobs will be lost for want of an additional temporary extension. To characterise us as asking for permanent support is shameful.

Rob Roberts: How long for?

Chris Elmore: I agree with the hon. Lady. It is rather concerning to hear the hon. Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts) shout, “How long for?” when he knows full well that the aviation industry in north Wales is the bedrock of what jobs there are in aviation. I am sure that his constituents will be interested to hear that he has very little interest in extending anything for the jobs in his constituency. I very much agree with the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson).

Surely, if the Government’s mantra of “Global Britain” is to continue, we need an aviation sector that can become a global economic hub once the global economy begins to recover. If there is little to no aviation sector left, and no highly skilled jobs, as the hon. Lady mentioned, what is it that we will become global Britain of? We will have no economic hubs in the aviation sector through which to support it.

I am conscious of the time. I have mentioned already that my constituents cannot cope with more deindustrialisation. It will be like deindustrialisation on steroids if there is not intervention from the UK Government and the furlough scheme is not extended. We need to protect the highly paid, highly skilled jobs that exist across the south Wales economy. For the Government to say that it is too complicated—“We can’t do this; we can’t do that”—just is not good enough. Constituents know it is not good enough, and they will repay that tenfold at the ballot box when it comes to future elections.

Let me raise one final point with the Minister. The Welsh Government have announced a lockdown in the Caerphilly county borough. Insurance companies and organisations that link to insurance say that it is not a recognised lockdown, so constituents cannot get support; they cannot make insurance claims. May I ask the Minister, on this technical point, to work with the Welsh Government to ensure that where lockdowns happen in any of the nations of the UK, the economic support is there from those sorts of insurance companies to ensure that people who have to self-isolate can do so?

2.44 pm

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): The Government’s vital support for businesses and jobs across the country throughout this crisis has been unprecedented. In my constituency, we have seen 11,800 jobs protected under the job retention scheme, £9.1 million of support for the self-employed, over £440 million of bounce back loans for small businesses, £89 million of business grants and 849,000 meals discounted—I am only responsible for a couple of them—thanks to the brilliant eat out to help out scheme.

Despite that much-needed support, central London is still struggling. Pre covid, over 600,000 commuters came into Westminster every day to work, with another 500,000 in the City of London. The local economy relies on those workers spending in small shops and independent cafés and restaurants, but they are not coming back in the same numbers. Central London is the economic powerhouse of UK plc, driving forward this Government’s levelling-up agenda, and it is usually the first out of the traps following a recession or downturn. Sadly, this time, it looks like we will be one of the last. That is why I have produced a plan, which the Government may wish to consider, that could help to protect jobs and businesses not only in my constituency but across the country.

The furlough scheme has secured hundreds of thousands of jobs in the west end. I appreciate the reasons why the Government are bringing the scheme to an end next month, which we must do to sustain our public services. As the MP for theatreland, I want to ensure that we protect theatres even more. I welcome the Government’s £1.5 billion cultural support package, but I hope that we can keep theatres open when they come back in the new year, and a bit more help for them would be welcome.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the arts and arts venues are important all over the country and that small venues such as the Queens Park Arts Centre in my constituency are also incredibly valuable and have benefited greatly from the Government’s scheme?

Nickie Aiken: My hon. Friend is right, and that is why I welcome this brilliant £1.5 billion package.

I welcomed the Chancellor’s announcements in March about a review of the business rates scheme, the £25,000 grant and the freezing of business rates, but I would welcome that freeze being extended for another 12 months. Another measure that the Government could introduce, which would bring in much-needed tax receipts, is an extension of the retail export scheme for EU visitors, allowing them to shop tax-free from 1 January. Such a tax reform could be worth up to £1.4 billion in additional annual sales. While 80% of tax-free shopping in the UK is done in my constituency, that would still have an impact on the UK as a whole.

Finally, adding two hours at the end of Sunday trading, extending it from 6 pm to 8 pm, would provide a major boost to the economy. While I appreciate that this is quite controversial for some of my colleagues, I would like to make it clear that I am only calling for this at the moment for international designated areas such as Knightsbridge and the west end. I am sure that there

would be a knock-on effect for bars and restaurants as people decide to travel to central London later and enjoy a meal and drinks once the shops close.

We must ensure that London is seen to be open to the world so that it can continue to compete with other global cities such as New York, Paris and Tokyo. I ask the Government to consider the measures that I have suggested, to protect both London's position as a global cultural hub and the UK's standing as a major business and visitor destination, safeguarding millions of jobs and livelihoods across the nation. I look forward to supporting the Government as they continue to support jobs and businesses as the situation develops.

2.48 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The aerospace industry employs well over 100,000 people in the UK, in mainly very well-paid and highly-skilled jobs. Aviation has been one of the hardest hit sectors and will be one of the last to recover, taking years to get back to where it was before the pandemic started. At Airbus in Broughton, we are experiencing the consequences of that downturn, with 500 Guidant agency workers losing their jobs, to be followed by nearly 1,500 direct employees under a voluntary redundancy scheme. I pay tribute to Daz Reynolds, the Unite convenor, who has done an incredible job in very difficult circumstances.

That is a massive hit on the local economy. If we add in the calculation that, for every job lost in a prime such as Airbus, four or five jobs will be lost in the supply chain, we see that the scale of the crisis we face is stark. The furlough scheme has helped lessen the impact for now, but we need the Government to step up to the plate and bring forward a package of measures that will help to secure the sector not just now or in the medium term, but for the long term as well.

The French, Germans and Americans have all recognised the need to implement support longer term, and a key measure should be implementing a shorter working week, where the extra time freed up would be used to upskill the workforce. Government financial support would not only secure employment, but it would also deliver value for money for the taxpayer, because people would continue to work, spend and pay taxes.

Support for airlines should be linked to a requirement for them to update their fleets and scrap older, less-environmentally friendly aircraft. More than 70 aircraft that currently fly out of the UK are more than 15 years old, and they should be replaced. Suppliers and SMEs need the Government to support an investment fund to help them to restructure and face up to new challenges, and we must support apprenticeships, which are vital for the future. As I have said, other countries have recognised the need for a sector-specific scheme, and if we do not, the danger is that future investment will go elsewhere. The Treasury does not like sector-specific schemes or to pick winners, but aerospace is already a winner. We are a world leader, and if we do not protect that, we will lose our position in the world, and we could lose the jobs that go with it.

2.51 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): In response to this crisis, the Government have introduced one of the most generous packages of measures in the world and

certainly the most generous in our nation's history. What marks it out as exemplary is that the Government's response in such difficult circumstances was an early recognition of the need to protect businesses and livelihoods in places such as North Cornwall.

As of early August, 13,000 of my constituents have been supported by the coronavirus job retention scheme, 5,800 local self-employed people have received more than £16 million of self-employment income support, 1,847 local businesses have received £54 million in bounce back loans, 1,327 local businesses, and 15 nurseries, will pay no business rates this year, and 4,626 local businesses have received grants of up to £25,000. That financial support has been invaluable for businesses and employees in my constituency, and we must now get back to supporting sustainable public finances. I believe that the decisions taken on planning legislation and licensing laws have also been crucial in helping to support businesses in North Cornwall. Those businesses were given the flexibility to open to their customers and adhere to social distancing regulations.

Let me stress how important it was to reopen the tourism industry for many people and businesses in North Cornwall. Reopening was a difficult decision, for obvious reasons, but because the Government took time to wait, businesses had time to prepare and make themselves covid-secure. As the virus receded, enough of them were able to open and help with tourism during the summer months. If it were not for the Treasury support put in place at the time, hundreds of businesses in my constituency could have folded.

Many of my constituents were understandably concerned about the prospect of hundreds of thousands of people coming to Cornwall during the summer and visiting during the pandemic, but most people have generally behaved respectfully. Thankfully, infection rates in Cornwall remain very low.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Scott Mann: I am not going to give way today; I am sorry.

It is heartening to see how many businesses have responded to this crisis. One brilliant example of that in North Cornwall came from lobster and crab fishermen. Suddenly, dozens of boats had Instagram and Facebook accounts and websites, and they advertised their catches locally and eventually around the country. That demonstrated Cornish ingenuity in a crisis.

Since I closed my constituency office during lockdown, as of mid-August we have opened nearly 7,000 cases. Those include supporting 309 local businesses that got in touch to inquire about support and 730 individuals who required guidance on specific covid-related issues. I am fortunate that I have now been the MP for five years. The fact that nearly a quarter of my entire caseload has come in the past six weeks demonstrates to me how badly this crisis has affected many of my constituents.

Lastly, I pay tribute to all the good people of North Cornwall and to my constituency staff who have helped during the crisis.

2.54 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): I have spoken passionately in this Chamber about the impact that the coronavirus pandemic is having on the livelihoods

[*Taiwo Owatemi*]

of my constituents. Ensuring that no one is left behind should be at the heart of the Government's response to this economic crisis. As the MP for Coventry North West, it is my job to come to this place and secure the very best deal for my constituents, my neighbours and my community.

It is my contention that we are unprepared for the impending disaster that awaits people on the furlough scheme across the country and in Coventry North West. The scheme is masking the true extent of the unemployment crisis to come. We do not yet know what the furlough scheme has protected us and our constituents from. The Government put in place a scheme to ensure that jobs were protected, in the hope that our constituents would also be protected. However, the indiscriminate and premature severing of the furlough support scheme will leave the businesses in my constituency bereft and possibly at risk of bankruptcy.

Let me lay bare some sobering facts and statistics. Since my last speech in this place, I have learned that in my constituency the number of claimants for unemployment benefits has risen to 4,780, some 3,500 people are seeking help from the self-employed income support scheme, 17,000 people are on furlough and 7,600 jobs are in the high-risk category for unemployment. We have seen job losses at large, small and medium-sized businesses in Coventry—from Rolls-Royce to Ikea and many family businesses. The figures will hit the roof if the furlough scheme is not extended and better planning not put in place.

Rob Butler: The hon. Lady is telling us how she would very much like the furlough scheme to be extended; would she, by contrast to those on the Labour Front Bench, like to tell us for how long she believes the scheme should be extended?

Taiwo Owatemi: The furlough scheme should be extended for as long as the country and my constituents need it to be extended.

Why are this Government so comfortable with putting businesses and my constituents' livelihoods at risk? With the threat of a second lockdown and the potential for other local lockdowns, surely it just is not worth the risk. Alternatively, rather than ending the furlough scheme completely, have the Government sought to reform it so that it continues to support jobs in the worst-hit sectors and targets aid to struggling industries—something Labour is fighting for in its five-point plan? We are also demanding that if and when people do return to work, they are in a safe environment and protected against the disease.

The Government would do well to heed our call to fight for jobs, bring back our businesses, leave no one behind, keep workers safe and drive job creation. There is no room for stubbornness in a crisis like this. The Chancellor needs to think creatively, be more flexible and target support to protect jobs in the hardest hit parts of the economy.

2.57 pm

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The decisions taken by the Government to protect jobs throughout the coronavirus emergency have been bold and decisive—and all within sound public finances. The support has been unprecedented; there are few schemes, even among the world's most-developed economies, that can compare with the support provided by the Government.

Businesses across Dewsbury, Mirfield, Kirkburton and Denby Dale have shown extraordinary resilience in the face of this pandemic by innovating and diversifying into other business sectors. For instance, in Dewsbury, the Rugby Clothing Company, which normally makes high-quality rugby kits, has had great success in manufacturing corporate face coverings and is supplying businesses far and wide. Looking ahead, we need to see more such innovative approaches to the difficulties businesses face. We need to explore ideas outside the economic textbooks. Eat out to help out was not a conventional policy response to the struggles of cafés and restaurants, but it has been an outstanding success up and down the country.

Rob Roberts: I completely echo my hon. Friend's sentiment about Eat Out to Help Out, which has provided over 30,000 meals in my Delyn constituency. I know that he has a background in furniture manufacturing, and I have some furniture manufacturers in my constituency. Does he have some ideas for things that could help the sector as it continues to recover?

Mark Eastwood: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. As it happens, I am coming on to my background in furniture. My background is in furniture manufacturing. Furniture and bedding have been at the forefront of Dewsbury's manufacturing resurgence, employing hundreds of people across the constituency. Around 60% of the UK population sleep on something made in Dewsbury. [*Laughter.*] Interesting fact.

The British Furniture Confederation is soon to launch its "Buy British" campaign, urging consumers to buy the best, buy British and save jobs. This is an excellent campaign, which places a focus on the value of British manufacturing and highlights the importance of retaining these high-quality jobs. Every £1 million spent by consumers buying British furniture could secure an additional 50 manufacturing jobs and many more in retail. I therefore urge manufacturers and retailers, not just in furniture but in all industries, to consider taking up this campaign to get the public into shops, buying British goods and supporting jobs.

Furthermore, with the announcement of major capital projects, the Government could look at widening the scope of public sector contracts to assist British businesses through this period, whether through the supply of furniture, the provision of services or even stationery. That would assist companies such as Shackletons in my constituency, which employs more than 80 people and supplies high-quality furniture to the struggling care home sector. Its products could easily be supplied to the NHS and other social care facilities if the Government were to consider relaxing procurement frameworks. In addition, we could reduce barriers to innovation and look at reducing burdens on employers to encourage job retention. I look forward to seeing bold ideas from the Government to boost businesses, encourage employment and incentivise innovation.

Finally, the message that I would like to put out to the people of this country, and in my constituency is: buy the best, buy British and save jobs.

3.2 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): These are deeply troubling times for the businesses and workers across the country who form the backbone of our economy and are looking to this Government to provide reassurances that they will continue to be supported, not cast aside as the recession worsens and we enter a potential second wave of the pandemic. The furlough scheme has been a welcome lifeline for many businesses. In my constituency of Ilford South, 17,500 people—a third of those in work—were furloughed at the peak of the crisis. The flipside is that a significant number could sadly be unemployed when the furlough scheme ends, with a cataclysmic knock-on impact in Ilford and across east London and Essex.

Indeed, the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that between 10% and 20% of those currently on furlough will end up unemployed when the scheme ends. In my constituency, that would mean more than 4,500 people being thrown on the dole. Recently, the Bank of England predicted that a further 1 million more people will be unemployed by Christmas, with potential headline unemployment rising to more than 2.5 million.

Tim Farron: The hon. Gentleman is making some extremely good points. His constituency, like mine, will have on average something like 4,500 workers and business people who have received no support whatsoever from the Government since March. The excluded groups include those who have been self-employed for a short period and many others, as we know. Does he agree that it is right for the Government to compensate those people, who are struggling to put food on their tables right now, having had nothing throughout this whole crisis?

Sam Tarry: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. Like him, I have had many constituents get in touch to raise exactly that point. Clearly the Government have been found wanting on that issue.

The Bank of England estimates that ending the furlough system before businesses have recovered from the first phase will lead to a total of 4.5 million unemployed. To put that into context, that is worse than the great depression of 1930s and will have a catastrophic effect on our nation's finances. With half a million of those job losses predicted in Conservative-held seats, I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will join me in urging the Government to extend the supportive measures that are already in place.

We have already seen that our economy was the worst hit of all the major economies in the OECD. With both the CBI and the TUC calling for the furlough scheme to be continued to avoid such mass unemployment, will the Minister and the Government now listen to the united voices of business and unions, bosses and workers and change course before it is too late? This is not an unrealistic expectation; it is a practical necessity. Other European nations have already committed to long-term furlough schemes, which will give their economies a much better chance of bouncing back from the negative spiral they are already in. For example, Germany and

France have both committed to supporting their workers up until 2022, so why cut our own jobs lifeline after just eight months?

This Government's rationale—we have heard it from some colleagues on the Conservative Benches today—is that the furlough scheme has cost too much. We have invested only—in my view—£35 billion, which is a fraction of the £500 billion that was used to bale out our banks during the global financial crisis. The social and economic costs in many now Conservative-held seats would be catastrophic and incalculable. History shows us that once good skilled jobs are lost, they do not return in this country.

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sam Tarry: I am sorry, but I will not on this occasion.

That is why we need an industrial strategy that protects jobs and enables businesses to recover while we restructure our economy to function in a way that benefits all of society and protects our environment. In that way, we can protect British jobs and give the people of this nation real hope for a better tomorrow, which is sadly lacking from this Conservative Government.

3.6 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May I begin my remarks by thanking the Labour party for bringing forward this motion for debate today? It has allowed Members from both sides of the House and across all parties to highlight the positive impact that has been felt by the massive measures that were introduced by the UK Government during this coronavirus pandemic and the positive impact that has been felt in constituencies the length and breadth of the country.

In Moray, 85,000 meals were served under the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme, 12,900 jobs were furloughed, 2,800 individuals were supported through the self-employed income support scheme, more than 1,000 bounce back loans totalling over £28.5 million were granted as well as 44 coronavirus business interruption loans. That has delivered more than £7 million in the Moray constituency alone. That is the support that we have seen from the UK Government, and I am extremely grateful for that.

Briefly, I want to echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), who is no longer in his place. I have raised the plight of the coach industry at Treasury questions. I know that this is a difficult issue and I know that Treasury Ministers have heard this case before, but Maynes of Buckie, who I have been doing a lot of work with, and groups across Scotland and the UK are looking for support for the coach industry and anything that can be done would be gratefully received.

I also want to highlight something that I have done in my first month as leader of the Scottish Conservatives. I made a pledge to produce a document for Scotland's economic recovery and jobs recovery, which is so important during this pandemic and as we recover from it. I was disappointed that none of the suggestions that we put forward in our policy document—both short-term and long-term measures—were picked up by the Scottish National party. Indeed, the Scottish Government's programme for government that was announced just a

[Douglas Ross]

few weeks ago did not mention small businesses once. They did not include an education Bill, which is vital as we take our country forward, but, they did, of course, find the time to put in another referendum Bill to separate Scotland from the rest of the UK. That shows the priorities of the SNP during this pandemic and its lack of ambition for Scotland after 13 years of power.

Alison Thewliss *indicated dissent.*

Douglas Ross: The hon. Lady can shake her head, but when I intervened on her to ask her whether she agreed with the Scottish Government's adviser to Nicola Sturgeon, she claimed it was because Scotland does not have enough powers at the moment. That adviser was specifically saying that the programme for government—the powers that Holyrood already has and that the SNP could use to rebuild Scotland's economy and to get us going again—lacked ideas to bolster economic growth. That was the criticism of an adviser to the Scottish Government of the lack of ambition and lack of determination from the SNP after 13 years in power in Scotland to deliver for areas the length and breadth of the country. We need to move away from the separation and the division of the past and look more at the opportunities for Scotland in future. That is what I intend to do in this place and as leader of the Scottish Conservatives. I hope that others do that, too.

3.9 pm

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Last Saturday, I joined the climate change demonstration outside the Senedd in Cardiff, and today I stood alongside trade union colleagues outside Parliament at the launch of the SOS for jobs campaign. These two actions are inextricably linked. In the 1980s, under a previous Tory Government, my constituency of Cynon Valley suffered terrible job losses. We do not want to see this repeated. It is estimated that at least 2.5 million people in the UK will be out of work by the end of 2020, unless Government action is taken to prevent this.

The job retention scheme has shown what an active Government can do in a crisis. We now need a strategy for job protection and upskilling, as proposed by the TUC. Our workers want to move forward and see the change that is needed. As one of my constituents said to me recently, "We want to be manufacturing, and if that means changing the way we work, learning new skills, we're ready for it. We want to be productive."

There is a golden opportunity here to repurpose industry to address climate change and to support our public services. There have been 100,000 redundancies in local government in the last 10 years. We need more social care and NHS workers. What are the Government doing to address this? We could create 1.24 million jobs in two years, given adequate investment to develop the green economy. At the heart of this are workers and their families, and as one of our local innovation workers said, "I've always been prepared to learn new skills. I come from a mining background, but there are no pits left. That's the past, but I now fear for the future." That is the human cost of not investing.

Westminster can seem remote to the people of Wales, and we need to be where the people are. At the same time as caring about individual constituents, we are

aware of the bigger picture. Wales's aerospace generates £1.47 billion of gross value added for the Welsh economy. The UK has the largest offshore wind power generation network in Europe, but we do not manufacture a single wind turbine here in the UK. What a disgrace! When will the Government finally agree to establish a national council for recovery, involving Government, industry and unions to work together to develop a green industrial strategy?

To quote a previous Tory Prime Minister, "You turn if you want to."

Well, U-turns are something this Government are very adept at, and we need a U-turn from them now: extend the furlough scheme, trial a four-day week, invest in green energy and in our public services, and work with others to prepare an economic plan for jobs that gives our workers, their children, their communities and this planet hope for the future.

3.12 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): A global leading response: just look beyond this country, and we see that this Government have delivered one of the most generous and comprehensive packages in the world, which is protecting jobs in Warrington South and around the UK with business grants, loans, rate relief, deferral of taxation, protecting people's livelihoods and supporting businesses directly.

On Saturday, when I walked down London Road in Stockton Heath, businesses—large and small—came out to talk to me and, overwhelmingly, their response was positive. "Thank you, Chancellor," is what they said. So how have the Government supported Warrington South? Let us start with Rishi's dishes: 103,000 meals eaten in Warrington South, supporting pubs, cafés and restaurants—and, yes, I did enjoy it. There has been the furlough scheme supporting 15,400 incomes and the self-employed scheme supporting 3,200 homes, as well as the £126 million issued in CBILS and bounce back loans to businesses based in Warrington South. Having visited Warrington jobcentre last week, I want to pay a particular tribute to the team there who have made huge efforts to get universal credit out to those who need it quickly.

This Government's support for business and employees is not ending, but it is important that we confront the realities of where we are today. We need to encourage employers to keep their employees on, so I fully support steps such as the job retention bonus scheme—a £1,000 bonus to every business for employees who were furloughed previously—and the kickstart scheme that kicks in to create job opportunities for young people. We need to get back to work and focus on providing new opportunities for people. Where jobs have gone, let us put all our efforts into helping those displaced get back into work. That is why I strongly support this Government's plan for jobs. To those who argue for a sector-specific approach, I have one question: how exactly does that work—how far down the supply chain do we go?

Fortunately, the UK came into this crisis in an incredibly strong position. Warrington's economy was one of the strongest in the north-west. Thanks to careful Conservative management of the economy over the last 10 years, we came into this crisis with public finances in a good position, which enables us to react strongly. But we should be

clear that it is not sustainable to borrow at current levels in the long term. It is only right that, over the medium term, we get back to strong public finances.

Patricia Gibson: Will the hon. Member give way?

Andy Carter: I will not, because I want to let other Members speak.

It is right that we get back to strong public finances and falling debt. It is not just the sensible thing to do economically; morally, it is the right thing to do.

3.15 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I want to join my colleagues on the Government Benches and, indeed, the Opposition Benches in congratulating the Government on their generous and nimble support for industry in this economic crisis. It has been an extremely difficult time, but it would have been far worse if the Government had not intervened in the way that they have. As the trend is to give figures for our constituencies, I will tell the House that South Cambridgeshire has had 13,600 jobs furloughed—saved—and nearly £90 million in grants and loans to businesses. We also beat Warrington South, with 122,000 meals eaten out and enjoyed by people, including myself. I know from the emails and the talks I have had with businesses and pubs in my constituency that, for many of them, this support made the difference between them failing and thriving. Many of them are now looking forward to the future—we are not out of it yet, but people are a lot more positive.

It is a feature of crises that it is far more difficult politically to get out of them than to get into them, whether the lockdown restrictions or the economic support package. The Labour party has called for continued subsidies, but it will not say when those would end. That means that it is calling for subsidies without end, which means borrowing without end. I do not believe in borrowing without end, because we have to pay off the debt at some point, whether it is us, our children or our grandchildren.

Miriam Cates: None of us wants to see mass unemployment at the end of furlough scheme, but given that none of us knows how long this crisis and the restrictions will last, is it not better to shift our support from helping those who may otherwise lose their jobs to creating new jobs, taking advantage of the opportunities in our economy right now?

Anthony Browne: I absolutely agree—my hon. Friend has taken the words right out of my mouth. I believe, and the Conservative party believes, in sustainable national finances. Do the Opposition parties believe in that? If they do, they have to explain how they want to get there.

Patricia Gibson: Will the hon. Member give way?

Anthony Browne: I will carry on.

We are at a time when we must look to the future, not try to preserve the past. The great Andrew Bailey, the new Governor of the Bank of England, said recently in an interview that the Chancellor is

“right to say we have to look forward now. I don’t think we should be locking the economy down in a state that it pre-existed in.”

The shape of the economy will change, as we have heard today. It will not be in the same shape in a few years as it is now. The companies and people working in the aviation sector face a very difficult time over the next few years. E-commerce, on the other hand, is thriving. We have seen airlines cutting jobs, but we have seen Amazon recruiting. Inner-city sandwich shops have been hit really hard and will be for some time as people carry on working from home. Supermarkets are thriving. Pret a Manger has cut 1,600 jobs, but Tesco has just announced that it is recruiting for 14,000 jobs.

The focus of Government should not be on “prolonging the inevitable”, as the chief economist of the Bank of England said. The focus of Government should be on helping with the transition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) said, by helping the people who are losing their jobs into the new jobs that are being created. We must ensure that short-term unemployment does not move into long-term unemployment and that when people come out of work, they have relevant skills, motivation and contacts in industry. As soon as people become long-term unemployed—after six months or one year—they lose motivation and contacts, and the likelihood that their unemployment will carry on for much longer increases. That is why the Government are right to focus on their plan for jobs, through measures such as the kick-start scheme, support for apprenticeships, increased training and advice from Jobcentre Plus. That is the right approach.

Finally, many Members have been praising the international comparisons. We heard earlier the list of countries that have already announced the ending of their furlough schemes. I like statistics, and I have been looking at the Eurostat website, which is very good but could be a bit more user-friendly. The UK’s employment figures from Q2 to Q1—the key employment figures—dropped by 0.7%. That is after a very long period, and every job lost is bad news. However, Germany’s employment figures in Q2 to Q1 this year dropped by 1.4%, twice as much as the UK. In Ireland, the employment rate dropped by 6.1%, nine times faster than in the UK. In France—there seems to be a liking for France on the Labour Benches—there was a 2.6% drop in employment from Q2 to Q1, four times the rate here. We do not have that much to learn from the French employment market, and I really do not think we should start doing so now.

Finally—[*Interruption*]

I want to say that Treasury Ministers have made the right decisions at the right time and I am confident they will in the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. There is no “finally”. “Finally” has to come before the end of three minutes—I am sorry.

3.20 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—I appreciate that intervention! I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on a very important subject.

We are living through unprecedented times with a massive health crisis. The economy will of course adapt and change, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) said, but the question is what steps

[Alison McGovern]

we ought to be taking to make sure that we protect people. Conservative Members have talked about sound finances and not extending debt too far, and the Thatcherite principles of the Conservative party. I have to tell them that they have not been paying attention, because the seats that the Conservative party won in December, particularly those in the north of England where I am from, were not promised a return to Thatcherite economics—they were promised redistribution. So I would say to the Conservatives: get with the programme.

Miriam Cates: The focus of the Government's response has been largely towards those in the lowest income brackets represented by many of us. In fact, the group of people who have most benefited from the Government's help are those in the lowest income decile. We have seen a huge redistribution of our country's resources during this crisis.

Alison McGovern: Well, the hon. Lady should listen up, because if she thinks redistribution is important, then she should be aware that in the new seats that the Conservatives won at the election in December, there are half a million jobs at risk. If the Conservatives think that they can turn away from this issue as those people end up on the scrapheap, then they are very much mistaken.

We have heard London Tory MPs saying, "London is the powerhouse of the country—make sure London is all right and everyone else will be okay." Again, I thought that the Conservative party was not about that any more; I thought that the Conservatives had mended their ways. Well, let us see: are they really going to vote to ignore those half a million jobs in the seats they won only in December? I would say to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire: beware headline statistics, because the employment rate, as he well knows, cannot describe the situation for places that went through wave after wave of deindustrialisation, and where the previous rounds of high levels of unemployment impact today on people's skill levels, income and ability to mobilise capital in those places.

My greatest fear right now is for young people, because the labour market has memories. When the labour market has a negative shock like this that impacts on people who are working today and experiencing it, they will feel that shock for the rest of their career. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, employees aged 25 and under are about two and half times as likely to work in a sector that is now shut down as other employees. Those young people will live with this shock for the rest of their career. I say to the Minister: those young people in our country today will never, ever forget what this Government did. The Federation of Small Businesses has said that kickstart is disappointing and we need much better for young people.

Finally, on rebalancing, what should that really look like? Where I am from in Merseyside, devolution has been worth it for us and it is going well. Merseyside's chief economist, Aileen Jones, has come up with a credible recovery plan that ought to be supported by the Government. Whether it is innovation or the new digital economy, we can do it. We just need the Tories to do what they said they would.

3.24 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is absolutely right that we should be protecting jobs and businesses, and that is exactly what the Chancellor has been doing repeatedly throughout this crisis. As Conservatives, we are the responsible party of government and the natural stewards of the economy, and we have always been the party that has made the right decisions through difficult times. It was the Chancellor who stepped up and provide a lifeline to so many—so many individuals, businesses, their employees and the most vulnerable in society.

Of course, ending furlough is not easy, but it cannot go on. While the Labour party, through this motion, postures and virtue signals, the people who elect us understand that these interventions cannot continue. They understand that the bills must be paid. They understand that our economy must be allowed to find its feet again and that life must return to normal.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that as the Chancellor approaches the autumn statement, he is looking toward a future of sound, sustainable finance?

Saqib Bhatti: I absolutely agree and I am proud of the Government for putting ideology aside, but there is a reason that we are the only party that the British public entrusted with our economy. Therein lies the difference, because while we talk about sustainable public finances, Labour would like to see the people of this country reliant on the state forever with no end date, trying to sneak in socialism through the back door. Meanwhile, this Government are trying to work really hard to protect, support and create new jobs. If the Labour party wants to support businesses and protect jobs, they should support this Government and this Chancellor. This is the Chancellor who introduced the job retention bonus scheme so employers could bring back people from furlough. He introduced the £2 billion kickstarter scheme to get young people into six months of paid employment, with £2,000 for employers for each new apprentice under 25 and £1,500 for those over 25. He doubled the number of work coaches and invested £150 million in the flexible support fund to remove barriers to work.

Our furlough scheme was unprecedented. It went further than any country in the world and it was the right thing to do.

Patricia Gibson: We have heard much today on the Opposition side of the House about how generous the Chancellor has been with his support, but does the hon. Member not understand that when tens of thousands of jobs are being lost—jobs that would otherwise be viable with a bit of additional support—all this generosity is cold comfort when someone loses their job and potentially their home?

Saqib Bhatti: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. If we look at the quantum of the package, it has helped to protect the economy at its most difficult time, and I will come on to that.

As a Conservative, I never thought that we would be in a position where we would pay up to 80% of anybody's salary—80%—yet the Chancellor stepped up and did

what needed to be done, not once but twice. Since then, 9.6 million people have been furloughed and £30.9 billion has been given to over 1.2 million businesses. It was rightly lauded as extraordinary, because extraordinary times need extraordinary measures.

But that was not the only measure. There was the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme, the bounce back loan scheme, the rates relief, the business grants, the self-employed income support scheme, the mortgage holidays, the protection from evictions, rental holidays, tax deferrals, VAT cuts for hospitality and larger grants for the hospitality sector. These are just the ones that I can get in in a few breaths, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Rob Roberts: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Saqib Bhatti: Absolutely.

Rob Roberts: I thought I would give him a moment to catch his breath after listing all the interventions that we have provided. Does he agree that the Opposition are a bit rich to lecture us on not providing enough support, given all the things that he has just listed?

Saqib Bhatti: I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. I remember that the hon. Member for Ogmire (Chris Elmore) said that we would hear about it at the ballot box, but we have heard the British public's verdict on the Labour party's economic policy. We heard it in 2010, 2015 and 2017, and we heard it decisively in 2019. I will never forget the feeling of disbelief and deep disappointment that I had when I first read the note that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) left in the Treasury when Labour were last in Government, saying that there was no more money left. Thank God we are a far cry away from the recklessness that we saw under the last Labour Government, and that is why I will be opposing the motion.

3.29 pm

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Saqib Bhatti).

Protecting jobs and businesses has been a priority of the Government throughout the crisis. Let us not forget that more has been done to support the economy than ever before in this country, in response to the immeasurable challenge presented by the pandemic. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's coronavirus job retention scheme has helped protect more than 15,000 jobs in Redcar and Cleveland alone, with a further 4,600 people eligible for the self-employed income support scheme. That is almost 20,000 jobs protected, to say nothing of the thousands of businesses saved from collapse and the many thousands of families able to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads.

The job retention scheme was extended until the end of October, with the introduction of some flexibility to get employees back to work, as this is the safest choice for the nation's health and our economy in the long term. Now, as we emerge from the pandemic, we must bring these schemes to an end, or risk delaying our economic recovery and causing even more damage to businesses and jobs. Through the furlough scheme, we have supported almost 10 million jobs, but we must accept the harsh reality that some of those jobs simply do not exist anymore. Indeed, even the Bank of England's chief economist described extending the furlough scheme as "prolonging the inevitable".

Covid has changed our world drastically. For many, our working style has changed, including for those of us in this House who now participate virtually and process through the Lobbies like one half of Noah's ark. We have to face up to the consequences of telling people to work from home. When Sadiq Khan refuses to encourage people back into this great city, it means that businesses close and jobs are lost. Hospitality is still struggling, with Pret and Costa cutting jobs, yet the Mayor of London and the Leader of the Opposition refuse to encourage people to get back to work.

I am proud that the Government stepped in when people needed them most. Now, they are leading the charge to safely get the country back on track—back to trading, back to creating jobs, back to work. Millions are at risk of becoming unemployed as a result of the potential economic standstill if we continue to suffocate our economy. Rather than squashing growth and keeping jobs in suspension, we are focused on encouraging consumers to create that economic activity, with the eat out to help out scheme, the green homes grant and the stamp duty cut. Our steps do not suspend jobs; they create jobs. There is so much more potential for job creation in emerging sectors such as decarbonisation. This is our chance to build on the environmental benefits of the lockdown and promote a green economy.

Nothing protects jobs and businesses more than a Government who are right behind them every step of the way, from weathering the pandemic to helping them create the opportunities of the future. Our Conservative Government—the people's Government—are doing just that.

3.32 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The reserves have run out, the fundraising has dried up, and vital support never arrived for our vital community and voluntary sector. It is estimated by Pro Bono Economics that 60,000 jobs will be lost from our charities. The organisations that stepped up in the crisis are now in crisis and need the Government to step up. Already, 6,500 jobs are registered as being lost. On top of that, many small organisations will be losing the ones and twos that never hit the headlines. However, the pain for those organisations is as great. We think about animal welfare charities having to pay vet bills and feed animals. We think about medical research charities that are seeing a 41% drop in funding. The result is that the cancer plan is delayed, treatments are delayed and vital treatments are not provided. That is our loved ones not being cared for. This is what charities do day in, day out.

The withdrawal of the furlough scheme will be devastating for this sector, which has depended on it so much. There is no money coming in. We need a solution.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rachael Maskell: I wish to continue.

When talking about large organisations, from the Southbank Centre to Oxfam and the National Trust, we must also remember the small organisations. It is estimated that 90% of black, Asian and minority community organisations will be gone by the end of the financial year. If we think of what has just happened

[*Rachael Maskell*]

across this country, it is clear that we need those organisations. The Government need to step up and ensure that they are there.

The sector is calling for an extension of the coronavirus job retention scheme with greater flexibility; a gift aid emergency relief package; the repurposing of the national fund, which is worth £500 million, to allow access to support charities and services; the effective and efficient distribution of the shared prosperity fund; and the creation of a community wealth fund using dormant assets. It is crucial that is brought forward now, before it is too late.

If I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to raise one issue concerning my constituency. We will be the second worst hit constituency in the country, and therefore we need some action now. While the Government have supported the BioYorkshire plan, which will create 4,000 jobs, they are tying that up in a devolution deal. I therefore urge the Government to bring that funding forward so that we can provide that safety net now to stop us moving into an unemployment crisis in York, which no one in this House wants to see. The Minister could solve that problem for us.

3.35 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The breadth and scale of the support package put in place by the Government is genuinely unprecedented, whether in times of war, disease or global recession. In Dudley South, nearly 12,000 of my constituents have been supported through the job retention scheme, and 2,500 more have been supported through the self-employment income support scheme. Without such measures, thousands more of my constituents and millions of workers around the country would have lost their jobs. Whereas the last Labour Government chose to bail out the bankers, this Government have decided that the real priority is to back working people around the country, and that is something of which I am extremely proud.

We now need people back at work and the economy growing so that those jobs can be genuinely protected and sustainable in the medium and long term. It is not just a matter of sandwich shops and coffee bars losing out when large numbers of workers are away from the office and the factory for so long. We live and work in an interconnected economy where all parts of it rely on other sectors. One of the main factors limiting order books for manufacturers and other businesses in my constituency is the fact that so much of the economy is performing below normal capacity, and that impacts on supply chains. The longer that many jobs are furloughed, the less likely those jobs are to be there and to be sustainable whenever the furlough scheme ends, and that is why it is not appropriate to have an indefinite extension of the scheme.

Jamie Stone: The hon. Member is very courteous to give way. I too pay tribute to the furlough scheme, which has been very helpful to businesses in my constituency. I am the chair of the Excluded UK all-party parliamentary group. Other Members have made this point already, but does he agree that the APPG would not have happened had it not been for support from the Government Benches? It would be helpful if we could have a meeting

with Ministers from the Treasury to discuss constructively how we might be able to help the people who have been missed out.

Mike Wood: I obviously will not answer on behalf of Ministers as to their availability for meetings, but for those who fell outside these extensive schemes, I think they more than anybody need the economy to be moving back towards a state approaching normality, because that is where their sustainable income comes from. The quicker we can do that, the better it is for them.

While it would not be appropriate to have an indefinite extension of the furlough scheme—I do not think furlough is even a medium-term solution—there are some parts of the economy where there are particular needs for support. The measures announced earlier this afternoon by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for businesses that are told to shut and for individuals who are made to self-isolate are extremely welcome. I do hope that Ministers will look at what measures other than furlough might be appropriate for those businesses when legislative requirements mean that they cannot operate or cannot operate economically—we have heard about theatres and live events—where ongoing regulations mean that demand has simply been taken away. For some parts of the tourism and travel sector, for example, quarantine measures mean that their customer base is not there at all. Businesses across the economy would not have survived the last six months without the innovative support that has been put in place by the Chancellor. I thoroughly welcome that, but now we need to build the economy for a sustainable future.

3.40 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I think most of us agree that we are facing a triple whammy at the moment, with a public health crisis in the guise of covid, an economic crisis in which Brexit has already cost our economy billions of pounds, and climate change, which will eventually cost us a lot and is currently costing lives as well as other things that the Treasury may not be making a record of. That is certainly an expensive project as well. We are in a recession. We know that GDP fell by 20.4% in the second quarter of 2020—that is 20.4%, not 2.4%—which is the largest confirmed fall of any economy in Europe and the G7, so we are facing really tough times.

I spent the summer visiting food banks—like many other Members, I am sure—and I would like to put on record my praise for the volunteers who run the Campsbourne Primary School food bank, which is providing desperately needed food for many families in Hornsey. I also want to mention another fantastic service, which is an innovation I hope others can look to. It is called Connected Communities, and it is local authority-based but works closely with the voluntary sector to pick up hard-to-reach groups of people who are not digitally aware.

Danny Kruger: I want to echo my support for those sorts of organisations and to follow on from what the hon. Member for York Central (*Rachael Maskell*) said about the charity sector. I sympathise very much with what both hon. Members are saying about support for these organisations. Does the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (*Catherine West*) acknowledge that

the Government made £750 million available for small grass-roots charities to help them to get through the covid crisis?

Catherine West: Indeed. No one on this side of the Chamber is saying that any of that money was not very much called for. There was a tiny bit of wastage, according to the Select Committee findings that I read yesterday, but I hope that, over time, the Treasury will get rid of the £3.5 billion wastage.

I have some asks for my constituency and I have my figures here. I am a London MP, and many Members who know London will be aware that Muswell Hill ward is not considered to be a low-income place. Unfortunately, however, it has seen an increase of 300% in jobseeker's allowance and universal credit claimants. The neighbouring Fortis Green ward, which is also considered quite an expensive and well-to-do part of my constituency, is facing a 234% increase in the number of people signing on. Alexandra ward is home to the famous and beautiful Alexandra Palace exhibition hall, the former home of the BBC, and it is a lovely part of my constituency. It has seen a 220% increase in the number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance and universal credit. The difference between this recession and the 2008 global financial crash is the impact that this one has had across the economy.

Lots of people are very well paid when they are in work, but because they are self-employed, they are suffering exponentially. What are my asks? First, I am asking for sector-specific schemes for workers, so that we can look at the self-employed and particularly those in the creative sector. Secondly, I am asking for specific help for people who, for example, have a small business and are helping several of their employees to manage but have not had anything back for themselves. In conclusion—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We must now go to the wind-ups.

3.44 pm

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The purpose of today, and the theme of so many of the contributions that we have heard, is the need—now so desperately urgent—for the Government to change course and move away from a one-size-fits-all approach. To secure a better future for working people and businesses across our country, we need a targeted extension of the furlough arrangements for the sectors that face the biggest challenges in the months ahead. So many Labour Members have raised their constituents' concerns. Although time constraints mean that it is not practical for me to name them all, the House will have heard their call, and Labour's call, for the Government to change course.

We have also heard from many Government Members. Some Conservative Members have been prepared to say on the airwaves that Ministers should think again, and we heard from the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) about that today. However, with so many jobs at risk and so many sectors in trouble, I find it extraordinary to witness such a level of complacency, from so many of the Conservative Members who are here today, about so many jobs in parts of our economy that face very difficult months ahead.

We have had a lot of statistics today, but we can have some more. In Burnley, there are 3,050 jobs in sectors hard hit by the pandemic, across aviation, manufacturing, restaurants and car manufacturing; in Bury North, there are 2,420 jobs in restaurants, pubs and clubs, hospitality and tourism; in Keighley, there are 3,700 in restaurants, pubs and clubs and childcare; and there are so many more. People in all those constituencies, and people in similar sectors in constituencies across our country, will wonder why the Government simply do not seem to want to listen.

Rob Butler: May I ask the hon. Lady for one more statistic? How many months or years does she feel the furlough scheme should be extended for?

Bridget Phillipson: It is always a delight to hear from Conservative Members who think that the Opposition should make those kinds of decisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), the shadow Chancellor, has set out very clearly that we will work with Government to design a scheme that can be targeted more at the sectors of our economy that are in trouble, but only Ministers have access to all the data that can best point us to how the scheme could properly work.

Internationally, we are an outlier in our response. We are far from through this crisis, and it would be a mistake to pull away support prematurely. Doing so will damage our economy in the long run and hit world-leading sectors of our economy. We should not make that mistake, and we urge Ministers to work with us and to think again.

It is not just the Labour party that is urging the Government to change course and provide for such a targeted extension; the TUC and the CBI take the same view, and we even hear from *The Daily Telegraph* that it is far too soon to be ending furlough. Indeed, with every passing day, it is becoming harder to find people—apart from Conservative Members—outside No. 11 Downing Street who believe that the Treasury has got this right.

Aside from the furlough extension, the Minister has again shirked the opportunity to address the gaps in the schemes. The shadow Chancellor has consistently pressed the Chancellor for support for those who, through no fault of their own, have fallen through the gaps of the schemes that were designed to provide employment support—the excluded. Perhaps they are employees who were changing jobs. Perhaps their business has a high street presence that does not qualify for rate relief. Perhaps they have only this year moved from employment to self-employment. Perhaps they are in one of those situations and their partner is in another.

We understand that these are difficult decisions to get right, but the Government have had six months. Today we heard yet again the same reply about what they mean to do for those people. They have done nothing, they are doing nothing and they propose to do precisely nothing. In the years ahead, Conservative Members may discover that many of their electors have longer memories than they would like.

None of these arguments is one to which the Opposition have come lately or had a belated conversion. Quite the contrary; inside and outside this House, we have spent months calling on the Government to fix the shortcomings in their schemes. The shadow Chancellor has been

[Bridget Phillipson]

absolutely clear that we are more than willing to work with the Government, with businesses and with trade unions to get this right.

I will not be able to quote every remark, because time is limited, but I will remind the House how often, and for how long, we have urged the Government to get a grip, change course and, above all, bring in a targeted extension of furlough. On 19 April, the shadow Chancellor said:

“Our main concern right now is that a number of those programmes are not fulfilling the promise that has been placed on them”

On 20 April, I said that the date set for the introduction of the scheme still set aside many workers. On 3 May, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the shadow Business Secretary, urged a second wave of support, including where necessary an extension of the furlough scheme. On 12 May, the shadow Chancellor warned again of our concerns, and again on 23 May. On 30 June, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), the shadow Transport Secretary, was already drawing attention to how often we have been making this point:

“Labour has consistently called for an extension to the furlough in the most impacted industries”.

On 15 July, the Leader of the Opposition made the same points to the Prime Minister, warning that

“the decision...not to provide sector-specific support to those most at risk could end up costing thousands of jobs.”—[*Official Report*, 15 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 1509.]

On 28 July, he added:

“We need a targeted extension of the furlough scheme for the hardest-hit sectors and proper support in place to help those who are unemployed back into work.”

It is not simply the Opposition who believe that a targeted scheme would be better value for money. The Government’s own civil servants required ministerial direction before pursuing the Chancellor’s poorly targeted job retention bonus. The Chancellor himself has accepted that there will be a deadweight cost that might stretch into the billions, yet the amendment in his name today suggests that any deviation from existing Government policy will cause damage to the UK economy. The self-confidence is breathtaking. Does the Chancellor really believe that his Government have got everything right? It is a pity that he has not graced us with his presence today to make that argument himself. The language of infallibility is not helpful to families who fear for their jobs. Persistence may be a virtue; obstinacy in the face of all evidence is not.

The frustration that people in this country feel at the Government’s refusal to listen, understand and engage is growing all the time. The Government amendment is clear that the man in Downing Street knows best. That is not the sense shared by many businesses and workers right across our country. People do not expect handouts, but they do expect fairness. They expect that in their hour of need the Government will not abandon them, their families or their businesses. The Chancellor has shown all summer that he is not prepared to engage with the concerns of businesses in sectors facing the toughest challenges now and in the months to come.

But what matters is not the Chancellor’s persistence in sticking to decisions made in March. What matters most is a secure future for Britain’s firms and Britain’s families. Today we have again seen the Chancellor’s stubbornness holding Britain back—holding back our people and holding back our economy. It is not too late. I urge Conservative Members, especially those who have only recently arrived in this place, to think of the conversations that they must have had, as I have, with local businesses worried about the months ahead and with families fearful for their jobs, and to back this motion.

3.52 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

It is a privilege to close this debate on behalf of Government. I thank hon. and right hon. Members across the House for their varied and considered contributions. The Government have worked closely with colleagues across the House to help to define the interventions that we have made. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken), for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for Moray (Douglas Ross) for making further constructive contributions today.

I think I can discern four themes on which to base my remarks. First, many colleagues have referenced the support from the schemes that the Government have introduced over recent months. The Government have acted decisively to protect people’s livelihoods and support businesses, with what has been one of the most generous and comprehensive responses in the world. The Government have supported people, businesses and our public services with over £190 billion. The OBR and the Bank of England agree that the actions that we have taken in the first phase of our response have helped to safeguard millions of jobs and that without them there would have been far worse outcomes. The OBR has said that the positive action that the Government have taken

“should...help to limit any long-term economic ‘scarring’, by keeping workers attached to firms and helping otherwise viable firms stay in business.”

At the heart of today’s debate is the fact we have supported more than 9.6 million furloughed workers and 2.6 million self-employed individuals through our schemes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) and others recognised. We have helped millions of the most vulnerable people in the country, with a more generous welfare system, a hardship fund and financial support through mortgage and credit payment holidays. We have intervened to reduce income losses faced by working households by up to two thirds, with the poorest working households protected the most—a point that was welcomed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). We have produced extensive support schemes, working with businesses, with tax cuts, tax deferrals, direct cash grants and an extensive programme of loan schemes. I will be happy to engage with the hon. Member for Ogmere (Chris Elmore) and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) on the specific concerns they raised about various schemes.

Of course, the direct cash grants to businesses that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has just announced will give businesses either £1,000 or £1,500, depending on rateable value, for each three-week period that they are closed. That will provide vital support to closed

businesses throughout the difficult but temporary experience of local lockdown—measures that have been urged by colleagues such as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Mark Logan) throughout these difficult weeks.

Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

John Glen: I am sorry; I will not be taking interventions, given the shortness of the time.

The second theme that I want to draw out is that, in response to the unfolding tragedy of people losing their jobs, the Government have announced a specific plan for jobs. We are one of the first countries in the world to do so. The plan for jobs protects, creates and supports jobs. We introduced the Eat Out to Help Out scheme—another scheme that Treasury officials had to issue a ministerial direction for—and temporarily reduced the rate of VAT on tourism and hospitality. Doing so supported millions of jobs in some of our most jobs-rich industries.

To create jobs, we are driving growth in the housing sector by increasing the stamp duty threshold temporarily to £500,000, creating green jobs with the green homes grant, and providing billions of pounds of capital investment. To support jobs, just last week we launched the kickstart scheme to subsidise the most vulnerable category of 16 to 24-year-olds. In addition, we have been providing employment support schemes, training and apprenticeships, and providing the extra support of job coaches in jobcentres.

The third theme I want to draw out from the contributions today is the furlough scheme. The furlough scheme will have run for eight months by the time it closes, and it has supported millions of people and their families. It is right to say that it is one of the most generous schemes in the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards) mentioned, ending the scheme is the right thing to do. On Monday, the chief economist of the Bank of England agreed, saying that to maintain it in its current form would not help either individuals or businesses.

Although I have heard the arguments at a high level for a targeted or sector-specific furlough scheme, I have heard no clear, satisfactory answer to the questions the Chief Secretary posed earlier about which sectors would not be provided with furlough, how we would treat and define supply chains, and when such a scheme would end. Of course, we are not ending our support for furloughed employees; the job retention bonus scheme provides an incentive for businesses that bring employees back from furlough to do meaningful work and ensures that they are supported as the economy gets going. As my right hon. Friend set out, the bonus represents a significant sum that will be vital particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up 95% of the employers that have claimed for furlough grants and 60% of furloughed workers.

The final thing that I want to emphasise is that our comprehensive and generous economic response has required us to significantly increase our levels of borrowing. In the short run, that has been absolutely the right strategy so that we can protect jobs and incomes, support businesses and drive the recovery, but over the medium term it is clearly not sustainable to continue borrowing at these levels. We will need to return to strong public finances where our debt is in a more sustainable position.

With Government debt now exceeding the size of the UK economy for the first time in more than 50 years, even small changes could be hugely damaging. Thankfully, we were in a strong fiscal position coming into this crisis, which allowed us to act quickly and decisively without hesitation to support jobs and businesses. The difficulties we now face remind us once again that sound public finances are not an optional extra; they are the foundation of a good economic policy.

The Government certainly are not saying “job done”. We know that there is more we need to do to protect jobs and businesses, and today’s debate has helped us to focus on some of the future ideas and solutions.

The economic challenges that we face are extraordinary and unique in our history, but the Government have been proceeding since March with a clear plan to address those challenges. We are providing one of the most comprehensive economic responses to the coronavirus of any country in the world, and we are determined to do everything we can, not just to get through and recover the economy, but to rebuild a better, fairer and prosperous economy, as we deliver on our governing mission to level up and unite the country. That is why we are supporting the Government amendment this afternoon.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Apologies to the 56 Members who did not get in on this debate today. We will now put the original question to the House.

Question put, (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 249, Noes 329.

The House divided: Ayes 249, Noes 329.

Division No. 89]

[4 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Cadbury, Ruth
Abrahams, Debbie	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Ali, Rushanara	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Ali, Tahir	Carden, Dan
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Amesbury, Mike	Chamberlain, Wendy
Anderson, Fleur	Champion, Sarah
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Chapman, Douglas
Ashworth, Jonathan	Charalambous, Bambos
Bardell, Hannah	Cherry, Joanna
Barker, Paula	Clark, Feryal
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cooper, Daisy
Begum, Apsana	Cooper, Rosie
Benn, rh Hilary	Cooper, rh Yvette
Betts, Mr Clive	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Black, Mhairi	Cowan, Ronnie
Blackford, rh Ian	Coyle, Neil
Blackman, Kirsty	Crawley, Angela
Blake, Olivia	Creasy, Stella
Blomfield, Paul	Cruddas, Jon
Bonnar, Steven	Cummins, Judith
Brabin, Tracy	Cunningham, Alex
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Daby, Janet
Brennan, Kevin	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Brock, Deidre	David, Wayne
Brown, Alan	Davies, Geraint
Brown, Ms Lyn	Davies-Jones, Alex
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Day, Martyn
Bryant, Chris	De Cordova, Marsha
Buck, Ms Karen	Debbonaire, Thangam
Burgon, Richard	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Byrne, Ian	
Byrne, rh Liam	

Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben

Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily

Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity

Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom

Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse

O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patil, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander

Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
James Morris and
Maggie Throup

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the proposed words be there added.

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 9.

Division No. 90]

[4.16 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward

Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve

Baron, Mr John	Eastwood, Mark	Jenrick, rh Robert	Philp, Chris
Baynes, Simon	Edwards, Ruth	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Pincher, rh Christopher
Bell, Aaron	Ellis, rh Michael	Johnston, David	Poulter, Dr Dan
Benton, Scott	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jones, Andrew	Pow, Rebecca
Beresford, Sir Paul	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Jones, rh Mr David	Prentis, Victoria
Berry, rh Jake	Eustice, rh George	Jones, Fay	Pursglove, Tom
Bhatti, Saqib	Evans, Dr Luke	Jones, Mr Marcus	Quince, Will
Blackman, Bob	Evennett, rh Sir David	Jupp, Simon	Raab, rh Dominic
Blunt, Crispin	Everitt, Ben	Kearns, Alicia	Randall, Tom
Bone, Mr Peter	Fabricant, Michael	Keegan, Gillian	Redwood, rh John
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Farris, Laura	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Bowie, Andrew	Fell, Simon	Knight, Julian	Richards, Nicola
Bradley, Ben	Fletcher, Katherine	Kruger, Danny	Richardson, Angela
Bradley, rh Karen	Fletcher, Mark	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Roberts, Rob
Brady, Sir Graham	Fletcher, Nick	Lamont, John	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Brereton, Jack	Ford, Vicky	Largan, Robert	Robinson, Mary
Bridgen, Andrew	Foster, Kevin	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Rosindell, Andrew
Brine, Steve	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Ross, Douglas
Bristow, Paul	Frazer, Lucy	Levy, Ian	Rowley, Lee
Britcliffe, Sara	Freer, Mike	Lewer, Andrew	Russell, Dean
Brokenshire, rh James	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Rutley, David
Browne, Anthony	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Sambrook, Gary
Bruce, Fiona	Garnier, Mark	Loder, Chris	Saxby, Selaine
Buchan, Felicity	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Logan, Mark	Scully, Paul
Buckland, rh Robert	Gibb, rh Nick	Longhi, Marco	Seely, Bob
Burghart, Alex	Gibson, Peter	Lopresti, Jack	Selous, Andrew
Burns, rh Conor	Gideon, Jo	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Shapps, rh Grant
Butler, Rob	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Loughton, Tim	Sharma, rh Alok
Cairns, rh Alun	Glen, John	Mackinlay, Craig	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Carter, Andy	Gove, rh Michael	Macleane, Rachel	Simmonds, David
Cartlidge, James	Graham, Richard	Mak, Alan	Skidmore, rh Chris
Cash, Sir William	Grant, Mrs Helen	Malthouse, Kit	Smith, Chloe
Cates, Miriam	Grayling, rh Chris	Mangnall, Anthony	Smith, Greg
Caulfield, Maria	Green, Chris	Mann, Scott	Smith, Henry
Chishti, Rehman	Green, rh Damian	Marson, Julie	Smith, rh Julian
Chope, Sir Christopher	Griffith, Andrew	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Smith, Royston
Churchill, Jo	Griffiths, Kate	Mayhew, Jerome	Solloway, Amanda
Clark, rh Greg	Grundy, James	Maynard, Paul	Spencer, Dr Ben
Clarke, Mr Simon	Gullis, Jonathan	McCartney, Jason	Spencer, rh Mark
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Halfon, rh Robert	McCartney, Karl	Stafford, Alexander
Clarkson, Chris	Hall, Luke	McPartland, Stephen	Stephenson, Andrew
Cleverly, rh James	Hammond, Stephen	McVey, rh Esther	Stevenson, Jane
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Hancock, rh Matt	Menzies, Mark	Stevenson, John
Colburn, Elliot	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Bob
Collins, Damian	Harris, Rebecca	Merriman, Huw	Stewart, Iain
Costa, Alberto	Harrison, Trudy	Metcalfe, Stephen	Streeter, Sir Gary
Courts, Robert	Hart, Sally-Ann	Millar, Robin	Stride, rh Mel
Coutinho, Claire	Hart, rh Simon	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stuart, Graham
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hayes, rh Sir John	Milling, rh Amanda	Sturdy, Julian
Crabb, rh Stephen	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Sunak, rh Rishi
Crosbie, Virginia	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Sunderland, James
Crouch, Tracey	Henderson, Gordon	Moore, Robbie	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Daly, James	Henry, Darren	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Syms, Sir Robert
Davies, David T. C.	Higginbotham, Antony	Morris, Anne Marie	Thomas, Derek
Davies, Gareth	Hinds, rh Damian	Morris, David	Timpson, Edward
Davies, Mims	Hoare, Simon	Morrissey, Joy	Tolhurst, Kelly
Davies, Philip	Holden, Mr Richard	Morton, Wendy	Tomlinson, Justin
Davis, rh Mr David	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mullan, Dr Kieran	Tomlinson, Michael
Davison, Dehenna	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mumby-Croft, Holly	Tracey, Craig
Dinenage, Caroline	Holloway, Adam	Mundell, rh David	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Holmes, Paul	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Trott, Laura
Docherty, Leo	Howell, Paul	Neill, Sir Robert	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Donelan, Michelle	Huddleston, Nigel	Nici, Lia	Tugendhat, Tom
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hudson, Dr Neil	Nokes, rh Caroline	Vickers, Martin
Double, Steve	Hunt, Jane	Norman, rh Jesse	Vickers, Matt
Dowden, rh Oliver	Hunt, rh Jeremy	O'Brien, Neil	Villiers, rh Theresa
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hunt, Tom	Offord, Dr Matthew	Wakeford, Christian
Drax, Richard	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Opperman, Guy	Walker, Sir Charles
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Javid, rh Sajid	Parish, Neil	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Duddridge, James	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Patel, rh Priti	Warburton, David
Duguid, David	Jenkinson, Mark	Pawsey, Mark	Warman, Matt
Dunne, rh Philip	Jenkyns, Andrea	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Watling, Giles

Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
Maggie Throup and
James Morris

NOES

Chamberlain, Wendy
 Cooper, Daisy
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Lucas, Caroline

Olney, Sarah
 Stone, Jamie
 Wilson, Munira

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs Heather Wheeler and
Mr Robert Goodwill

Question accordingly agreed to.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's response to Covid-19 which has already protected the livelihoods of over 12 million people through the eight-month long Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme; acknowledges the support for hundreds of thousands of businesses up and down the country through unprecedented loan schemes, business grants and tax cuts; further welcomes the help to support, create, and protect jobs through measures such as the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, a temporary cut to VAT and stamp duty, increased incentives for apprenticeships, and the new Kickstart Scheme, as set out in the Government's 'Plan for Jobs' policy paper published in July; and further acknowledges that any deviation from this Government's proposed plan will cause damage to the United Kingdom economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am going to suspend the House for three minutes, so that we can sanitise both Dispatch Boxes. Please do not move around during this period.

4.30 pm

Sitting suspended.

Awarding of Qualifications: Role of Ministers

Mr Deputy Speaker: There has been a lot of interest in this debate, and a limit of three minutes will be put on Back-Bench speeches during it.

4.33 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I beg to move,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give a direction to Her Ministers to provide all correspondence, including meeting notes, minutes, submissions and electronic communications, involving Ministers and Special Advisers pertaining to the process of awarding qualifications in GCSE, A-Level and NVQs in 2020 and 2021 by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education to the Education Select Committee.

Today's debate follows a chaotic summer of distress and dismay for young people, their families and their teachers. The system for awarding examination grades that the Secretary of State for Education put in place left thousands of young people devastated. When they received their results, they felt that they had been robbed of the opportunities they deserved by a flawed algorithm that the Secretary of State had pushed for. As events unfolded, the scale of the Government's incompetence became obvious. Less than two days before the A-level results, new grounds for appeal were announced, ones that Ofqual has since said were never going to be workable. On results day itself, the Prime Minister and Secretary of State insisted the system was robust, even as it was unravelling around them. Two days after, the Secretary of State said there would be "no U-turn, no change", but days later a U-turn was made. After days of campaigning by students, their families and the Labour party, the Government accepted that students should be awarded their centre-assessed grades. That was the right decision, but this shambles is no way to run a country.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Given that the Welsh Labour Government took identical steps in Wales, does the hon. Lady share the same opinion about their Administration?

Kate Green: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman asked that question, because initially the Welsh Labour Government intended to rely on the AS-levels, which, of course, they could do because, unlike in England, AS-levels had continued in Wales. However, we have a national, UK-wide university system, so I very much welcomed the consistency of decision across Wales, England and Scotland to ensure that students from Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales could all access universities throughout the UK.

Today's debate is not simply about the Government's policy and their inability to govern competently; it is also about integrity and process. It is about what the Prime Minister knew, what the Secretary of State knew and when they knew it. It is about why, when faced with concerns about their chosen system, they did not do anything to address them. Our motion is not about scoring party political points; most of all it is about transparent government and learning from the mistakes that were made this year so that they are not made again in future. That is why I hope all Members from all parties will support the motion. As constituency MPs,

[Kate Green]

we all know that what has happened since August has shattered confidence in this Government among young people, their families and educational professionals.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): In the spirit of co-operation across the Chamber, I am sure that we all want to do the right thing for the class of 2021, so does Labour want the exams to be later next year to give more time for tuition?

Kate Green: Yes indeed we do, but the Government need to start to plan that now so that markers can be recruited, schools can schedule their learning and teaching and UCAS and universities can plan their admissions process. We still do not have a clear decision from the Government.

The collapse in confidence must be addressed, because only if confidence is in place will we make a success of the reopening of our education settings and the exams to come in the academic year that is just starting, as the right hon. Gentleman mentions. The mistakes that were made this summer must be understood and learned from, and they must not be repeated.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): As a dad of two kids, one of whom went through GCSEs and one of whom went through A-levels this year, I understand massively the disruption that was caused to families and especially to the young people looking to their futures. Does the hon. Lady agree that, looking to the future, the Secretary of State should show humility, listen to the teaching profession and learn, and he should understand that all-or-nothing exams next spring are a huge risk to our young people, particularly given the crisis we might be in then? Is it not better to assess along the way, as many teachers are telling us would be far wiser?

Kate Green: Over the past few weeks, we have seen the danger—indeed, the folly—of having put all the eggs into one single, end-of-year final-examination basket. That innovation was, of course, introduced under the current Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

We can learn from the mistakes of the summer only if the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister come clean, and today I offer them the chance to do so. Last week, Ofqual gave evidence to the Education Committee about how the decision to cancel exams and award grades by algorithm was taken. I am concerned that there is some inconsistency between Ofqual's version of events and statements that the Secretary of State made to this House, so will he put the facts on the record today? I am sure he will seize the opportunity to do so.

First, will the Secretary of State explain to the House how the decision to cancel exams and use calculated grades was taken? Roger Taylor, chair of Ofqual, told the Select Committee that Ofqual first advised Ministers back in March that its preference was to hold socially distanced exams; failing that to delay exams; or, if necessary, to award a teacher certificate, rather than using a system of calculating grades. Roger Taylor also said:

“It was the Secretary of State who then subsequently took the decision and announced, without further consultation with Ofqual, that exams were to be cancelled and a system of calculated grades was to be implemented.”

Will the Secretary of State now make clear to the House when he took the decision to cancel exams in 2020? What other options were presented to him? Why did he reject them? Is Roger Taylor right to say that the Secretary of State made that decision unilaterally, without further consultation with Ofqual? In his statement to the House last week, the Secretary of State said:

“Ofqual had put in place a system for arriving at grades that was believed to be fair and robust.”—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 42.]

Of course, it turned out to be anything but, but is it really right to say that Ofqual put the system in place, or was it done because of the Secretary of State's decision? If so, he needs to take responsibility for the consequences, which he had been warned about. Ofqual said that as early as 16 March, it warned the Department for Education that, to quote its evidence to the Select Committee

“it would be challenging, if not impossible, to attempt to moderate estimates in a way that's fair for all this year's students. Everyone, throughout the process, was aware of the risks.”

A former senior official in the Department for Education, Sir Jon Coles, also met the Secretary of State weeks before results day to raise concerns about the approach adopted. Will the Secretary of State tell the House when that meeting took place, what concerns were raised and what action he took as a result of it? The Minister for School Standards told the House on Monday that the problem was simply passed over to Ofqual to deal with, but does the Secretary of State accept that, ultimately, he is responsible for the chaos that followed?

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): The hon. Lady is clearly a fan of reviewing the events of the past few weeks with the benefit of hindsight. In that spirit, would she also like to review her own party's equivocation about getting students back into the classroom?

Kate Green: I have always been clear, and the leader of the Labour party has always been clear, that students must return to class this September, and we are very pleased that the vast majority of schools have returned and children have returned to the classroom. The important task for the Secretary of State now is to keep them there. We must all be concerned, I believe, about the very swift picture we are seeing of children being sent home because of outbreaks. In the absence of a reliable and rapid testing and tracing system, schools are placed in an impossible position.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: No, I will carry on if the hon. Member will forgive me, because others will want to speak.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kate Green: I will take an intervention from my hon. Friend and then from the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), because, as he knows, I respect all colleagues from all parts of the House. If he will forgive me, I will take an intervention from my hon. Friend first and then of course I will take one from him. Then, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think you would like me to progress a little.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I have this afternoon received an email from a senior leader in my constituency who faces having a member of staff, who has been instructed to self-isolate, waiting, worried and unable to get a test until next Thursday. Is there not a danger that schools will be forced to close not necessarily because of an outbreak, but because of the failure of the testing system?

Kate Green: Yes. This is the test that the Government have to pass; otherwise we will see thousands of children up and down the country unable to stay in class as the Secretary of State wants them to—I know he does—as I want them to, and as teachers and parents want them to.

Alec Shelbrooke: The hon. Lady is most generous and has always been so. She made a comment earlier about perhaps sitting exams this summer. She has just taken an intervention on and commented on the fact that it is difficult having children back in school. This is a very different scenario to where we were in March, so there is a certain amount of hindsight. Does she accept that at the moment those decisions were being taken, we were facing a very different picture—one that seems to be proven by the fact that people are worried about children going back to school at this stage, let alone in March?

Kate Green: I accept how difficult it was to predict the way in which the pandemic would open out in March and to decide on a course of action, and it is important that we understand how those decisions were taken, but what is not acceptable—

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: No, I will not—I am going to make some progress.

What is not acceptable is that we ended up in a system of utter chaos when results were declared: chaos that was deeply demoralising—indeed, devastating—for many young people.

Ofqual told the Secretary of State that No. 10 was briefed before A-level results day—told about the risks to outlier students and to schools that were improving, and about the benefits to small cohorts such as independent school students. So is it true that No. 10 was aware of these concerns well in advance of results being published, and if so, why did the Prime Minister fail to do anything about them? Time and again, it seems, both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister were warned about injustices that the system would throw up but failed to address the problems. That is not to say that Ofqual was perfect, although the Secretary of State forced it into an impossible position. Ofqual must know that there are lessons to be learned and commit to learning them. That is why it is reassuring to see it commit to releasing all the data used in the qualifications process this year to independent researchers. Will the Secretary of State today give a similar commitment?

Tom Hunt: Did the hon. Lady not express her own concerns back in July about predicted grades, and was she not an advocate for standardisation?

Kate Green: Nobody has said that centre-assessed grades are perfect. On the day that the Leader of the Opposition called for them, he acknowledged that problem,

but we were in such an extreme situation at that point, where it was vital to put the best interests of young people first. It took days and days of agony and anguish for those young people and their families before the Secretary of State made the right decision.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech concentrating on A-level results, but weeks after the A-level issue was resolved, I still had BTEC students who had not received their grades. We talk about lessons to be learned in 2021, but what about the BTEC students who deserve some justice now?

Kate Green: My hon. Friend speaks for the constituents of hon. Members all around the House. Indeed, I expect that we may hear some examples of that in the course of the debate. Those students had a particularly difficult experience waiting for further re-marking of their awards, and I think it was only last week that the Secretary of State said that they would all be expected finally to receive their results.

We also need to be clear today about the decision-making process that led to the announcement a few days after A-level results day to award students their centre-assessed grades. In his evidence to the Select Committee, Roger Taylor said that that decision was taken by Ofqual. Can the Secretary of State confirm who made the decision to award the CAGs? Did he do it or was it Ofqual? Is it right that Ofqual did not agree with the Secretary of State's policy to allow appeals based on mock results, believing that that would not be credible?

While responsibility for decision making appears to have been complex and confused, there is no confusion when it comes to who carried the can for the failure. In the aftermath of this fiasco, the chief regulator of Ofqual and the permanent secretary at the Department for Education were forced to resign—but in our democracy it is Ministers, not officials, who are accountable.

Alun Cairns: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Green: No, I will not. *[Interruption.]* I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

It was repeated incompetence right at the heart of this Government that led to this year's exams scandal. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns) were a member in my class, I would send him to see the head now. A Prime Minister and a Secretary of State who refused for months to listen to concerns pushed ahead with a system that unravelled in a matter of hours. While the eventual U-turn to accept CAGs was welcome, and indeed necessary, it cannot undo the devastating impact on young people on results day. Those who feared losing their university place completely, or who now have to wait a year to take up the opportunities that they deserve, have to live with the serial incompetence of the Government.

Today the Secretary of State can begin to make amends and restore the confidence of young people, their families and teachers, as can all Members of this House, including those on the Government Benches. All they have to do is vote for a motion to provide the public with the transparency they have a right to expect and to ensure that there is no repetition of the mistakes in future.

4.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

The House is aware that, earlier this year, the Government took the difficult decision to close schools and colleges and cancel the summer exams because of the covid-19 outbreak. It was not a decision that was taken lightly. It was taken only after serious discussions with a number of parties, including, in particular, the exam regulator, Ofqual. This virus has propelled not just this country but the rest of the world into uncharted territory. We have had to respond, often at great speed, to find the best way forward, given what we knew about the virus at the time. Although the procedure that we put in place to award exam results was changed, I am pleased that students have now received, for GCSEs, AS-levels and A-levels as well as for vocational and technical qualifications, the results that they deserve and that they are in a position to be able to progress to the next stage of their lives. Let me turn to the motion tabled by the Opposition.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I say to the Secretary of State that now is the time to look to the future to ensure that adequate places are available on all those courses that were oversubscribed this year. I am speaking on behalf of all the students of Northern Ireland who come to universities here on the mainland. Perhaps now is the time to look at that matter.

Gavin Williamson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. More than a third of students from Northern Ireland come to study in Great Britain, and it is important to ensure that students from all parts of the United Kingdom have those opportunities. It is something that I shall come on to later in the debate. I wish to put on record my thanks to Peter Weir, the Education Minister, who has done so much and worked so closely with us as we tackled some of these issues, including making sure that places were available for youngsters so that they had the maximum amount of opportunity when they came to make their decisions about universities.

I want to turn to the motion tabled by the Opposition. As Members of this House will know, policy can be made only through open discussion between Ministers, their advisers and departmental officials. This motion fundamentally undermines that. Officials must be able to give advice to Ministers in confidence. I am appearing in front of the Education Committee in person next Wednesday, and I will commit now to working with its members to provide the information that they request wherever it is possible.

Today, I will set out the process that was followed once the exams were cancelled back in March. In the absence of exams, we needed to come up with a robust and fair system that accurately reflected the work and abilities of each individual student. In a written statement on 23 March, I explained that the process would be based on teacher judgments, as teachers know their students best, but that other relevant data such as prior attainment would also be taken into account.

On 31 March, I directed the regulator to work with the exam boards to develop a process for providing calculated grades for 2020 and to hold an exam series as soon as reasonably possible after schools and colleges fully opened again—that is the autumn exam series that we have put in place. My letter stated that the grades

submitted by centres should be standardised and that the national grade distribution should follow a similar pattern to previous years as far as possible. I also requested that students should have a right of appeal where there are errors in the process. I issued a second direction letter to Ofqual on 9 April regarding vocational and technical qualifications. From that point on, Ofqual began to develop a process for arriving at calculated grades.

At the beginning of April, Ofqual published a policy document on awarding grades for GCSEs and A and AS-levels, which was followed by a two-week public consultation, to which more than 12,700 responses were received.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Just to track back a tiny bit, was the Secretary of State's system what Ofqual suggested to him as the best system?

Gavin Williamson: Ofqual, quite understandably, suggested that exams were the best system of assessment. I think that everyone on the Government Benches would agree that exams are the best form of assessment, but we have to remember the situation in March. We were in the grip of a global pandemic and had to shut down every school in the country. If the hon. Lady takes a look at the advice Ofqual gave, she will see that it clearly recognised that if schools were to close and there was no normal-running schooling system, it would not be feasible to run an exam system. Given that, we had to come up with an alternative, and that is what we asked Ofqual to do—to come up with a series of alternatives that we could proceed with.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend feel that it was helpful, at the point when everybody agreed we should seek to run the independently moderated exams that grades depended upon, that the National Education Union advised its members not to participate in online teaching, making it absolutely certain that the vast majority of children would not get a fair crack of the whip?

Gavin Williamson: There was a challenge there. As my hon. Friend points out, the National Education Union advised its members not to participate in remote teaching, which was a shame, but I am pleased to report that hundreds of thousands of teachers ignored the advice and made sure it happened and that children could benefit from it.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I think the Secretary of State has just contradicted himself. He said that exams were the best form of assessment and then said that in a disrupted education system exams clearly cannot deliver. Why, then, will he not consider a broader based assessment that draws on the talents of all children and tests their skills in many different ways, as educational experts recommend?

Gavin Williamson: We have always believed that exams are the best form of assessment, but it was not possible to run exams in May or June, so we had to come up with alternatives.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Following on from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), if that is the case, the crucial issue—and

I speak as a year 11 parent—is the planning for next year. Parents' deep concern is that the lessons from the mistakes made have not been learned and that we are walking into a crisis next June. Will he please take that into account and provide the necessary support?

Gavin Williamson: It is recognised on both sides of the House, I think, that children in years 11 and 13 are among those who have suffered the most severe disruption. I speak as a year 11 parent myself. We are very conscious of that—Annabel reminds me of it regularly.

Lilian Greenwood *rose*—

Gavin Williamson: If the hon. Lady will allow me to make some progress, I am sure I will make time for her to share her views and opinions.

On 22 May, Ofqual published its decisions. The key principle of using a statistical standardisation approach was supported by 89% of those who responded to Ofqual's consultation. It is important to remember that similar approaches to awarding qualifications following the cancellation of exams were put in place in Scotland, which, as we are all aware, has an SNP Administration, in Wales, which, as we are all aware, has a Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration, and in Northern Ireland, which, as we are all aware, has a DUP-Sinn Féin Administration. All four nations reached the same policy conclusion about the best and fairest approach for awarding qualifications.

Between April and August, the detail of Ofqual's model for awarding grades without examinations was developed by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation and by other assessment experts in conjunction with it. It was vital that the model was seen to be fair, and we were reassured by Ofqual that it was. We explored issues, including whether disadvantaged students and other groups such as black, Asian and minority ethnic students would be treated fairly by the model. Information on this was shared at the public symposium held by Ofqual on 21 July, which made it clear that the standardisation process was not biased.

After the publication of the Scottish results on 4 August, we again sought reassurance from Ofqual about the fairness of the model. The Department also rapidly considered a number of options to reduce the risk of a similar loss of public confidence happening in England.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way on that very point. How does he reconcile the two statements he has just made? On the one hand, he talked about reconciling the model, looking at its potential implications and considering that it was fair, and on the other hand, earlier in his remarks or certainly earlier in the debate, we heard that the small groups of students who tend to be in independent schools were likely to benefit from this approach. How does he reconcile those two points?

Gavin Williamson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. He references back to my correspondence and direction of 31 March. One of the key elements of that letter was making sure that Ofqual looked at that issue to make sure that that balance was achieved, and that if there was any unfairness within the system, every action that could be taken was taken to eliminate such unfairness.

Lilian Greenwood: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Gavin Williamson: I had expected the hon. Lady to intervene just a moment ago, and the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) sneaked into her slot, so I will make some progress. I can see that she is bubbling away with interventions, possibly even provided by the Whips Office, ready to go. [*Interruption.*] No, that does her a disservice. As a former Chief Whip, I was obviously giving far too much credit to the Labour Whips Office for being so organised.

Following discussions, I announced the triple lock system on 12 August. This policy clearly showed my determination that we build in fairness by giving students a safety net, including being able to appeal on the basis of a valid mock result or sitting an exam in the autumn. As happens every year, we did not have sight of the full details of A-level results at individual or school and college level ahead of their release on 13 August. Over the following days, it became clear that there were far too many inconsistent and unfair outcomes for students, and that it was not reasonable to expect these to be dealt with through an appeal system.

Lilian Greenwood *rose*—

Gavin Williamson: I feel I have to give way to the hon. Lady, and I will do so now.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way, and of course I wished to make an intervention because of what he had said, but the question I want to ask is: even if he did not see those results and understand that they were having a disproportionate impact specifically on students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, why was he not able to provide assurance about what a valid mock was, and why did the appeals process, when it was published, have to be withdrawn just a few hours later, adding further confusion to an already difficult situation?

Gavin Williamson: All Members will remember—I think the hon. Member and I joined the House in the same year—the legislation that was taken through for the establishment of Ofqual to create an independent regulator. I would defer to my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards, who has been in the Department for a few years longer than I have, but I believe it has always been standard practice that we do not have sight of those qualifications at those levels, and that has been the case every single year.

When it comes to the extra measures that we put in place to ensure the maximum amount of fairness and flexibility for students and so that they were able to appeal if they felt that there was an injustice, frankly if there is anything that I can do, as Education Secretary, to enhance that fairness and to make sure they get the results they truly deserve, I will do it. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) shouts from a sedentary position about charging. We made it clear that there would be no charge for those centres. She may misremember, but we always made it clear that the exam series for the autumn would be available free to students who wished to retake.

John Redwood: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that up until the point when the policy clearly had to change, he was always assured by Ofqual that the very sensible aims and instructions he had given it on a fair system of moderated results were going to work?

Gavin Williamson: That is correct. Understandably, we always sought assurances on this, because all of us in this House strive at every moment to ensure that there is fairness for every one of our constituents. We want to ensure that all those young people who have studied so much in the run-up to their GCSEs, BTECs, A-levels or AS-levels get the grades they deserve.

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentioned the triple lock. Wales had a similar system to the triple lock, but instead of mock exams, AS exams were used to fall back on. Unfortunately, that led to many of the highest achievers, who would have gone on to medical or veterinary qualifications, not being able to get the highest levels because the A* grade does not exist in the AS facility. Is it not right that people who were appealing in Wales would have had a guaranteed downgrade because of the Welsh Labour system?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There would have been weakness and challenges whichever system we adopted. All four nations of the United Kingdom did everything they could do to ensure that there was the maximum amount of fairness for those students who were not in a position to take their exams as the result of a global pandemic.

On 16 August, Ofqual's chair and the chief regulator advised me that the Ofqual board was minded to make a formal decision to revert to centre assessment grades for all students, or the calculated grade where that was higher. I accepted their view and the decision was announced on Monday 17 August by Ofqual and myself. Subsequently, the Department worked closely with Ofqual and the exam boards to ensure that GCSE results were revised and issued on the original results day of 20 August, and A and AS-level results were reissued on the same timescale.

The majority of awarding organisations that deliver vocational and technical qualifications did not use similar processes as those for GCSEs and A-levels, and those results were issued as planned. However, there were delays to some results where a similar standardisation process had been used, to allow them to be reviewed and reissued.

We took a range of actions to ensure that no young person would be held back from going on to higher education as a result of the grading changes. On 17 August, we announced the removal of temporary student number controls, which had been introduced for the coming academic year. We have also lifted the caps on domestic medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and teaching courses. We have provided additional teaching grant and funding for universities to support that.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Throughout the summer, headteachers in Croydon were getting in touch with me with increasing alarm and concern about what they felt would be really bad outcomes for their children. What does the Secretary of State wish he had done better?

Gavin Williamson: We have to recognise that we were dealing with a truly unprecedented situation. I think it is recognised on both sides of the House that we had to make swift decisions in truly unprecedented times.

Let me turn to what some Opposition Members have said. The deputy leader of the Labour party, the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), opposed teachers handing out unaltered grades. When Ofqual announced how grades would be handed out, she—then the shadow Education Secretary—said:

“We have always said predicted grades are not always accurate, and can disproportionately affect the children who need the most support, and we pushed ministers to ensure students can sit an exam later if they wish.”

There has constantly been a whole set of decisions that have had to be made. That has been done at speed, while we are dealing with a novel virus that we have learned a lot about over the past few months. One thing that was clear in March was that we were not in a position to proceed with exams, and of course, Ofqual and many others would have wished to do that.

Kate Green: I understand the difficulties that the Government faced in an unprecedented and utterly unpredictable situation, and I understand that the Secretary of State did not see the individual schools' and individual students' A-level results, but he did know the overall picture some days in advance of results day, and he would have known that 40% of awards were being downgraded. Did that not ring alarm bells? Why did it take so many more days before he acted, during which he insisted that there would be no U-turn?

Gavin Williamson: That is exactly the reason why we brought in an enhanced appeals system, to ensure that if there were outliers or concerns, those could be dealt with.

Alun Cairns: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and to Education Ministers around the UK, who have faced extremely difficult decisions throughout a very difficult and genuinely unprecedented time. Does the fact that all the Ministers came to the same conclusions at roughly the same time and changed policy at the same time give confidence that the best outcome with the information available has been arrived at in every nation across the UK?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I remind the Secretary of State that Back Benchers are being put on a three-minute limit. We want to get as many in as we can. He has been incredibly generous with interventions.

Gavin Williamson: I will cease to be generous and kind, Mr Deputy Speaker. My right hon. Friend makes an important point. At every stage, everyone looked at how we could do what is right and best for those young people who had not been in a position to take exams, in a truly extraordinary situation across all four nations of our great United Kingdom.

We set up the higher education taskforce to tackle some of the issues that we recognised would come about as a result of a higher level of grading due to centre assessment grades being awarded. Through the taskforce, the university sector has agreed to honour all offers to students who meet the conditions of their offer where possible. In the event that a course is full, universities will give students a choice of a suitable alternative

course or a deferred place if they would rather wait a year. For those who are not happy with their grade or who did not receive one, we are running an additional series of exams later in the autumn. We have launched an exam support service for schools and colleges, to help them secure venues and invigilators and meet any additional costs arising from the autumn exam series.

Looking to 2021, my Department is working closely with Ofqual, the exam boards and groups representing teachers, schools and colleges to consider the best approach for exams and other assessments for next year. I expect next year's exams to go ahead. Our aim when providing qualifications this year was ensuring that all our students received just recognition for their efforts, enabling them to progress to the next stage of their lives in the knowledge that their qualifications had the same value as in previous years. When it became clear that there was a risk that for some that would not be the case, I believe that the actions we took offered the fairest solution in these most unprecedented of times.

5.15 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Let me be clear from the outset that I want to approach today's debate with humility above anything else. Put simply, the grading of this year's pupil qualifications is a plague on all our houses, and I wanted to put that on record in the opening seconds of my speech. I will try to be constructive in my analysis today.

In approaching this debate, it is important to acknowledge that 2020 is not the academic year that any of us could have envisaged. From the talk of possible disruption in February, we quickly moved to a position where schools and universities had to be closed before the full lockdown a few days later. After the initial shock, staff and students swiftly developed different ways of working facilitated by Zoom, Teams and Glow, and that has not been easy. It has brought into sharp focus the issue of digital exclusion, which has been highlighted to me by Derek Smeall, the principal of Glasgow Kelvin College in Easterhouse in my constituency.

Some young people were able to continue their studies, albeit on a different platform, whereas others found themselves cut off from their support systems just at the point when that support was most needed as they prepared for state exams. The decision to cancel the exams was therefore unquestionably the right thing to do, and I think we all agree on that. It was the right thing to do not just because of the health risks to students in physically participating, but because of the massive inequality that would have been built into any exam results as a consequence of the difficulty in accessing the usual teacher support. Unfortunately, actions meant to tackle inequality ended up embedding it, and that has to be acknowledged and apologised for, and that is exactly what has happened in Scotland.

Above all else, tribute should be paid to the young people campaigning for Governments across these islands to see the error of their ways and to U-turn. In Scotland, that campaign was fronted by my Shettleston constituent Erin Bleakley, who goes to St Andrew's Secondary. She eloquently articulated the anger and dismay of young people with her placard, "Judge my work, not my postcode".

There is no getting away from it: this has been a summer of confusion and distress for young people across the UK, who found themselves at the mercy of algorithms. However, it is not the use of the algorithm that is ultimately the problem; it is the litany of errors, ignored warnings, failures to act and missed opportunities for the Secretary of State to be proactive.

In April, experts from the Royal Statistical Society offered to help with the modelling. Their offer was refused. At the start of July, the former director general of the Department for Education, Sir Jon Coles, wrote to the Secretary of State, warning that Ofqual's grading system would lead to unfairness in the system. His concerns were ignored. On 10 July, the Education Committee warned about the algorithm, saying that it risked inaccuracy and bias against young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Still the irresponsibility continued. That is why we find ourselves debating Labour's motion on the Order Paper today, which is very specific in its proposed wording.

When Scotland's young people received their results on 4 August, it quickly became clear that something had gone wrong. Our Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills sat down and listened to the young people affected, yet the Scottish Tories were jumping up and down, calling for his resignation. I remember listening on the radio to the Scottish Conservative education spokesperson demanding that resignation. I look across the Chamber this afternoon, and I see no Scottish Conservatives here. That is why I deliberately started by saying that a bit of humility in this might not have gone amiss.

What happened in Scotland should have been a red flag moment for the Conservatives, and it should have been a warning to the Secretary of State to act, but what happened next left many young people in England in turmoil. As Scotland took decisive action, awarding young people their predicted grades, and crucially announcing new funding for universities to ensure that any young people with the entry grades would secure their place, the Tories remained in denial that there might be a problem with A-level results. When these shockingly inaccurate results were published, the Secretary of State dug himself into a hole by denouncing the actions of the Scottish Government, pontificating about the "unfairness" of taking teachers' predictions seriously as the basis for results and declaring that there would be no "U-turn, no change". Meanwhile, the Prime Minister was insisting that

"The exam results...are robust, they're good, they're dependable," before going on to talk about "mutant algorithms". To make matters worse, the Secretary of State fuffed about with the appeals process, leading to Ofqual revoking the process that it had published only a few hours earlier, leaving school leaders and exam boards utterly bewildered.

Despite what the Secretary of State said in his statement to the House last week, his actions were not immediate. He had both foresight and time on his side and squandered both. At the time of his U-turn on results, university places had been lost. The Schools Minister has maintained that he did not see the algorithm until results day, suggesting that something went wrong with its implementation. What questions were Ministers asking prior to the publication of results? Did anyone ask for a trial run of the algorithm? This is a pattern that keeps repeating itself with this irresponsible Tory Government:

[David Linden]

first, pretend the problem does not exist, then brush away the scrutiny, then make the wrong decision and then blame somebody else.

Can the Secretary of State tell the House how many young people who missed their first choice of university because of the now discredited approach to awarding grades have now been given places? Now more than ever, what has happened calls into question why young people should be paying £9,000 in tuition fees and saddling themselves with an average debt of £50,000. They are due some breaks, and if the Government were serious about their futures, the Secretary of State would be looking at that.

But of course, universities are dealing with much more than just this carry-on. A combination of the covid restrictions and the ongoing hostile immigration environment means that universities are preparing for an unprecedented drop in international students of up to 70%, which will punch a massive hole in the finances of our institutions. Indeed, Universities UK estimates that the shortfall could be close to £7 billion. At a time when universities are facing the loss of Horizon Europe collaborations and funding, the Secretary of State should be acting to protect the very institutions that will help to kickstart the economy. It would therefore be helpful to know what assessment he has made of the impact on universities and what discussions he has had with the Treasury about providing those institutions with additional financial support.

Universities are ready to support these young people, but as well as increased financial support, they need a fresh look at immigration. In Scotland, we have been clear about the need to extend the post-study work visa. It is incredible that, at a time when we most need talented graduates to be economically active, we have not brought post-study visas forward for our 2020 graduates. What is needed now is clear action to ensure that, whether or not we have another year of covid disruption, young people are not the victims.

As well as the steps highlighted earlier, the Scottish Government have gone further. In order to learn lessons and plan for next year, the Cabinet Secretary for Education in Scotland has asked Professor Mark Priestley of Stirling University to carry out an independent review of the events following the cancellation of the examination diet and to make representations for the coming year.

John Redwood: Can the hon. Gentleman give the House an update on the summer term in Scotland? How many pupils had the benefit of a full timetable of teaching digitally?

David Linden: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention. What happened in Scotland is perfectly on the record, but we have been back since the middle of August. Children are back in schools, learning. I have been in those schools and seen that for myself, and it seems to be going relatively well, although no doubt there have been hiccups. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, with humility, this is a process that we are all feeling our way through. If that humility was reflected by the right hon. Gentleman and the Government, that might be helpful.

The OECD's ongoing independent review of the curriculum for excellence will be asked to include recommendations on how to transform Scotland's approach to assessment and qualifications, based on global best practice.

In conclusion, young people have been extremely poorly served over the summer. We know that the Secretary of State hates to follow Scotland's example on anything, but he must now ensure that his actions are not ostrich-like, and instead be proactive to ensure that young people have the best possible experience over the next few years, because—to finish with an education metaphor—those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now come to the Back-Bench element of the debate, in which there will be a three-minute limit.

5.24 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): As a child, I hated examinations—I was on the Pro Plus, up all night—so I would have been over the moon at the idea of exams being cancelled. However, knowing that even if I worked hard my future would be decided by a mutant algorithm would have filled me with dread.

The Education Committee is going into what happened in a lot of detail. I thank the Secretary of State for saying that he would send all relevant documents to the Committee, and I am sure that will be confirmed by the Minister for School Standards when he sums up the debate. In the short time available, I want to make three points—and I will focus on Ofqual, as we have the Secretary of State appearing before us next Wednesday.

Having listened to Ofqual and read its statement, I feel that it had Charge of the Light Brigade mentality with its algorithm. It refused to publish the standardisation model in advance, despite the recommendation of our Select Committee. There should have been much more external scrutiny. As was just said, Ofqual should have taken proper advice from the Royal Statistical Society and people such as Sir Jon Coles. Yes, many consultations were done, but in my view those should have been specifically on the algorithm.

The second point that I would like to raise is whether Ofqual is fit for purpose and genuinely an independent body. Clearly, what happened on the weekend of 15 and 16 August, on which the Select Committee will go into more detail next week, suggests significant blurred lines of accountability and questions about how independent the organisation is. Given the opposition even to partial reopening of schools and the lack of learning of millions of students, I understand why the Secretary of State said that the formal exams were not a viable option at the time, but we need to understand better what ingredients the Department for Education demanded in terms of the burnt algorithm pie.

Thirdly, given the clear need for lines of accountability and the blame game that has gone on, I found Ofqual's refusal to communicate during the Select Committee session incredible; everything was referred back to the DFE. That was unacceptable to parents and teachers. I think the BTEC was mishandled.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): Was my right hon. Friend struck, as I was, in that Education Committee hearing that Ofqual could see coming many of the problems that came about? It knew that high-achieving children at low-performing schools would be disadvantaged, and it knew that schools with small classes would be advantaged, but its attitude was very much “We’ll just sort it out at appeals” rather than to worry about the distress it would cause on results day.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is a hard-working member of our Select Committee. I just think Ofqual had this Charge of the Light Brigade mentality that it knew best and no one could challenge its algorithm.

I mentioned the BTEC, where 450,000 students were affected. The way that all came out is very depressing. As a country, we should value vocational qualifications as much as we do academic qualifications, and I just think that summed up everything that is wrong with our country in the way we look at these results. We need to learn the lessons from that.

Let me say in the time that I have remaining that we clearly need to make a decision on exams next year—that is very important—but before that is done there should be nationwide assessments of all the pupils in the relevant years in particular, so that we can find out how much loss of learning there has been and how much catch-up is needed. The Government will then be able to say, working with the regulators, whether the syllabus needs to be pared down and how much of a delay is needed. I very much hope that exams will take place. That is the best solution, but if they do not and there is a plan B and we go to teacher-assessed grades, I hope very much that there will be an independent assessor—a human independent assessor—acting as a check and balance.

I hope that this saga and the things that went wrong give us a chance to reboot education. I hope that we can have a long-term national education plan that looks at addressing social injustice in education, levelling up, meeting our skills needs, helping children with special educational needs and much more besides.

5.29 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Having listened to the exchanges and read some of the documents before the debate, I am satisfied that the Secretary of State asked Ofqual to deliver the right answers. It is disappointing that its algorithm did not work and it was right that it had to be changed. Once the decision had been taken to close schools and not to proceed with exams, I think the best answer probably was to look to the teachers to evaluate the pupils and put them in the right rank order, but for there to be some moderating influence so that, overall, we got a fair spread of results. However, it appears that the algorithm did not do that and produced all sorts of individual injustices. It may have produced what Ofqual thought was the right answer school by school, but it did not produce the right answer pupil by pupil. That was a great pity and it was clear from what the Secretary of State has been saying that that was not shared with him, which is why we are debating this today. We should now move on. As many have said on both sides of the House, we need to learn lessons and make sure that the class of 2021 is better served and does not have the same difficult foray into getting their results as the class of 2020 did.

I am very pleased that a decision has been made that exams will be reinstated. I note that we have had one Ofqual consultation already, with some conclusions, and a further consultation is under way. We have a series of new injustices that have to be dealt with, and they need to be dealt with quite soon, at this early stage. Some pupils were taught a full timetable of lessons remotely by their schools. Others had very little teaching during the summer period. Some schools were better equipped to press on with the full rigours of the GCSE and A-level courses and others were not. We need to ask ourselves what will happen in those situations, where some have been prepping for the full exam and others are now saying that perhaps they cannot in time prep for the full exam. Can we create some more time to make sure that all can be brought up to a satisfactory situation?

I see that it has been decided already that there will not be field work for geography and geology, which is quite a big loss, that there will not be formal oral examinations for languages, including English language, and that there will be less of a syllabus for those who are doing history and geography, in terms of choice of questions. These quite big decisions have already been made. I hope that there will be no need for any further decisions that could in any way undermine the reputation or the quality of the exam that will be set, and many will pass, for the class of 2021.

Rob Roberts: Does my right hon. Friend agree that getting the students who are due to sit their exams next year, in all the subjects that he mentions, back into the classroom again is vital to their continued academic success? Will he also join me in welcoming Labour’s refreshing new position of wanting to see all children go back, having dragged its heels on this issue over the summer?

John Redwood: I am delighted that the Opposition rightly wish to see children properly educated. I have never doubted that they wanted to see children properly educated—that must be a shared view that we all hold—but it would certainly be good if the Opposition carried on in the spirit of co-operation and responded to some of the consultations, for example, because very important decisions will now be taken over when the exams will take place, what the content of exams will be and how they will be marked and assessed. We need to have two things first and foremost in our minds: of course, we need to be fair to the pupils and to take into account that their education has been interrupted in recent months, but we also need to make sure that the system itself guarantees quality, so that they get a qualification that means something and is widely respected both at home and abroad. I hope that the Secretary of State will soon be able to bring forward positive proposals so that the class of 2021 can be properly looked after.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I understand that it is important to have free-flowing debate, but I point out that we have a lot of people who are probably not going to get in on the debate, and interventions do prevent others from speaking. That is just a gentle reminder.

5.34 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It seems that I am in good company here today as the parent of a year 11 child.

[*Jess Phillips*]

I want to speak up for them and year 13 children today in my remarks. When the lockdown was lifted, and not a moment before, I went to see some friends in the countryside—not near Barnard Castle. This was after the regulation was lifted. My friend's child goes to a private school. I sat alongside this young girl, the same age as my son, who goes to a state comprehensive school. I listened to the level of education that she had been having and compared it with the level of education my son had been having, and knowing that she will be entered into the exact same exam that my son will be entered into filled me with fear, and that was before the exam fiasco.

I ask the Secretary of State today to give me confidence as a parent that I will not be faced in August next year with having to lobby for a change to be made because another unfair system has been imposed on children who cannot afford to pay for their education and who cannot afford to have computers in their homes. I had to go around my constituency, giving out sim cards so that people could access their kids' schools on their phones, because they did not even have access to the internet. That was how their children were intending to access education.

The reason I want full disclosure of all the documents is that I do not want this mistake to be made again. I get it, we all like a bit of party political banter, but what I have seen over the summer and today is that Ministers seem more obsessed with things that people from the Labour party might have said, as if they are not the Government. If I had one wish, it would be that my children's lives were not particularly in their hands, but here I am as a rule taker, not a rule maker in this situation.

I wish that the Secretary of State would show more humility. I am the representative for Birmingham, Yardley and I have a very eminent predecessor, Baroness Morris of Yardley. When she felt that she had not done her very best when she was in the position the Secretary of State is in today, she said that the children, schools and teachers mattered more than her job. That is the kind of humility that I would expect from a Government, and it is not something that I have seen. All I can say is that he had better pray that he does not find himself in the same situation in August next year.

5.37 pm

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): This is the first time I have made a speech in this Chamber since leaving the Government and I want to speak today to put on record my confidence in my former ministerial colleagues, with whom I had the pleasure of working closely. I know that my hon. Friends would have sought to ensure that, in this year that no one could have predicted, the replacement assessments were as rigorous, and held to the same standards, as previous exams.

If we are to have confidence in our exam system, its credibility needs to be maintained not just in a single year, but across decades. The UK's A-level qualification system is internationally renowned for precisely that reason—it has been maintained as a gold standard, providing confidence to pupils, teachers and society alike. It simply is too easy to judge in hindsight what course should have been taken. Hindsight can be a

friend to us all, but in reality we must caution that, in the height of uncertainty in the global pandemic, any alternative could equally have come unstuck.

What we need now is recognition of the fact that we need solutions to issues that have resulted from the grading that has now been adopted. Some of these issues are good problems to have. We now have record numbers of young people progressing to higher education. We have record numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds entering university. Now these students have been enrolled in these institutions, I believe that we have a duty to ensure that their welfare is protected. Travelling to perhaps an unknown city or leaving home for the first time during the pandemic, many students will be anxious and nervous about their future. I know that universities have made extensive plans in advance of students returning to campus, but amid the scientific focus on preventing outbreaks of the virus, we must never forget that students can be vulnerable young adults whose pastoral care is paramount.

That duty, however, should not be limited to as long as the pandemic lasts. Many students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will struggle to adapt to their new environment and new forms of learning, having missed valuable time at school. Allowances must be made to ensure that students do not fall through the net and drop out.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's priority has been children's education? That is demonstrated by the delivery of the £1 billion covid catch-up plan to make up for lost teaching time as well as by the £650 million for children who have fallen behind.

Chris Skidmore: My hon. Friend is correct to highlight what is being done now. I raised this during questions to the Department for Education earlier in the week with regards to South Gloucestershire Council's recovery curriculum. We must also maintain a focus on future intakes. Next year's intake needs reassurance that they will not be penalised by any restriction in place due to deferrals that are being made this year.

Some issues have taught us valuable lessons that need to be heeded. One, I believe, is that our entire admissions system to university should now be reformed. Both main parties have already spoken of a desire to investigate what a post-qualification admissions system might look like. The Office for Students and Universities UK are doing important ongoing work, which was commissioned when I was Universities Minister, into what future measures could be considered. We know, however, that neither predicted grades nor A-level grades can solely be an accurate measure of future success at university.

Too many students, including those with health or mental health conditions, students facing the stress of a care or caregiver background, and those from homes that can never provide the learning environment needed for effective study or revision, will never achieve their actual ability while at school. They should not be written off simply because they have not achieved the grades, which after all measure performance at school, and not future potential. Of course universities are select institutions, but selection should be far more finely tuned to merit than simple grade boundaries. An admission system

that uses post-qualification offers would help empower students to choose courses in the full knowledge of their results, whether based on qualifications or university assessment. That would end the process of clearing, which no matter how smooth it has become, has always struck me as no way to decide the future of—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has reached the end of his time. He also took an intervention, so he has already had extra time and taken time away from others who may want to speak later.

5.41 pm

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): The publication of A-level results confirmed that nearly 40% of A-level grades in England were downgraded on the basis of an algorithm that was based on the prior performance of the pupils' school and their prior attainment. That created mass inequality and did not account for individuals' ability. The number of pupils achieving grade C or above was downgraded from teacher estimations by just over 10% for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, compared with just over 8% for their most affluent peers. Yet again, working-class young people are being failed by this Government.

The Government imposed a deeply unfair system on young people, and were forced into a U-turn by the determined campaigning of the young people whose hopes, dreams, and aspirations had been shattered, supported by their families, the National Education Union, and the Labour party. Although the U-turn was welcome, it created other problems that the Government have been slow to address, if they have addressed them at all.

Some young people had still not received BTEC results by the end of last week, and some students in my constituency have had no choice but to defer their place at university entirely, due to the Government's incompetent handling of results. To add insult to injury, we have now learnt that, in the days and weeks following the exam fiasco, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister were warned repeatedly about the risks of their chosen approach but did not act to prevent that.

Ofqual's chair said that the Secretary of State took the decision to cancel exams and move to a system of awarding grades, and that his decision was taken without further consultation with the regulator. It is abundantly clear that the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister are directly responsible for the exams fiasco. They imposed the discredited system for awarding grades and, despite being repeatedly warned of the problems, they did nothing.

Our young people deserve better. Austerity policies over the past 10 years have already ensured that this generation will be worse off than generations before them, with insecure housing, low-paid work and zero-hours contracts an impending reality for so many. The serial incompetence of the Government's approach is no way to run a country. It is time for them to be fully transparent about the process and provide all documents related to the exam fiasco to the Education Committee. Ensure absolute transparency and ensure this situation is never repeated.

5.44 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): As my time is short, I will start by saying that I fundamentally disagree with pretty much every word that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Paula Barker) just said.

In reality, Ofqual did not want to get rid of exams. It said to the Secretary of State, "We would rather do exams", but that option was not on the table. We saw the unions kicking back when we wanted to get children back in primary school in June. The idea that we would easily have been able to hold exam season at that time of the year is simply for the birds. That was not going to happen. Putting that aside—that is the history and that is where we are—what was the best step forward?

It is no surprise to learn that many of the public would prefer to have expert outsiders and independent people running things, rather than politicians. That is not exactly a shocking revelation to anyone here. When the Secretary of State said that we could not hold the exams—he did so for reasons that we could explore further but, in hindsight, he still made the right decision at the time, given the circumstances that we faced—he instructed Ofqual, by directive, to put forward a system, and people had a right to expect that the independent experts would come up with the right answers. When the Secretary of State challenged Ofqual about the problems that he perceived and that had been presented to him, he had the right to expect that he would be given the correct answers. By the way, the head of Ofqual earns far more than the Prime Minister, because apparently we have to pay such salaries to get the best people in the job. That is not a criticism, but it is what is always said. When the Secretary of State asks specific questions and is given specific answers, he therefore has every right to expect that the system is robust.

There are lessons to learn, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear at the Dispatch Box today that when he goes before the Education Committee next week, he will work with my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). However, we must be careful not to say, "Nobody wanted to do this in the first place; they wanted to do exams," because that option was not on the table. We still face a pandemic crisis to this day. At 4 pm this afternoon, the Prime Minister gave a broadcast to the nation about the tightening of restrictions, so we are not out of the woods yet. Everyone in this Chamber has concerns about the welfare of children and their education, and we need to learn the lessons, but we must recognise that it was not an option to say, "We should sit exams." I therefore urge my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow and his Committee to take a strong, hard look at Ofqual and make sure that the Secretary of State can rely on its advice, so that these mistakes are not repeated.

5.47 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's speech. Apart from the litany of excuses that he offered to explain how the exams fiasco came to unfold—none of it his own fault, of course—he did not offer a compelling reason why the document that the Opposition motion calls for should not be released to the Education Committee.

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

I appreciate that he intends to give evidence—I hope it will be fulsome—to the Select Committee when he appears before it next week, but our motion asks for a higher degree of disclosure than is the normal practice when Secretaries of State attend Select Committee hearings. He offered nothing substantive about why that should not happen as our humble address suggests.

For all the young people who have been on the receiving end of this Government's incompetence, the inescapable conclusion that they will draw from all that they have heard from Government Members today is that, rather than being the result of a "mutant algorithm", the blame for this fiasco lies squarely at the Secretary of State's door. When he was warned about the problem with the exam system, why did he not address the issues that were raised? We had no answer on that point today. Why were the Government so willing to preside over a situation in which the top grades at private schools were increased far beyond those of their state school at counterparts? We had no answer on that point today either.

I want to address the situation in relation to BTECs, and I welcome what the Chair of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), had to say about that. The situation has been very much mishandled, and that is depressing to see. BTECs do a great job of contributing towards social mobility, which has been, frankly, limited over the past decade. The Secretary of State will know that almost half of students whose parents are in routine or manual jobs study BTECs or a mixture of BTECs and A-levels, compared with just over 22% of those whose mums and dads work in higher managerial administration roles. Half of white working-class and black British students in England get into university with qualifications that include BTECs. Those students should not have been left languishing at the back of the queue, waiting longer than anybody else for their results to be confirmed. They have been treated with a particular degree of disrespect, and it would have been good to hear the Secretary of State give an apology at the Dispatch Box today to BTEC students and a confirmation that they will not be forced into the same position next year.

What we have seen unfold over the summer is not simply a story of Government incompetence; it is the inescapable end point of the political approach that has been adopted by this Government, one that has degraded teacher assessments and coursework. They must change course before next summer.

5.50 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I, too, thank all the school leaders in my constituency, who have worked so hard to ensure not only that the pupils receive the exam grades they deserve, but that the schools have reopened. I pay great tribute to their leadership. I also wish to thank the ministerial team, who have always afforded me a great deal of time in dealing with the questions and concerns I have raised. They have always been very open, on a cross-party basis; a month ago, I joined a call that all colleagues were encouraged to attend, and at that point we did not see the issues that were forthcoming—we can all be experts in hindsight.

I also wish to put on record the fact that I do not believe that the Department's time and Ministers' time is best spent at the photocopier delivering documents about the past; it is best spent fixing matters for the future—for the next cohort who are about to take their exams. With that in mind, I call for three points to be considered by the ministerial team. I am keen that we be unequivocal that the exams will be held at their scheduled time at the beginning of summer and will not be pushed back, as the teachers I speak to do not believe that that will work for them, or for pupils or universities. I know, as this was almost to my cost, that exam grades, rather than teacher assessments, can sometimes give people the opportunity in life, because they can turn out better than the assessment that teachers have made. That is particularly the case for pupils from schools that are perhaps not as highly performing; my own example sees me here as a result of exams, rather than teacher-predicted grades.

Secondly, we have to make sure we get the content right for this year's exam takers. I still believe that we have not reduced the content commensurately to the amount of time that can be fitted in. The exam boards need to work closely to guide teachers as to what content will be needed in order for those exams to be focused, and they need to work with universities to ensure that where degree courses rely on A-levels to get the young pupils through, the focus is on the right amount of A-level content to ensure that pupils get the right start in that course at university. This requires the schools to work with the exam boards, and the boards to work with the universities to ensure that the content is correct and is proportionate in respect of the amount of time young people have missed, so that they are not penalised.

We need to send out a message to all parents that schools are safe. As the Secretary of State knows, we have various views on face masks, but the most important point is that schools are open, they are safe and they are places where young people can learn and thrive. They should all be there, and parents need to heed that message too. I echo the point that has been made about testing. People are having to travel far too far to get testing, and that will hold schools back. Those are the points I wish to make.

5.53 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): When the sheer scale of this exam fiasco started to unfold, I had students and parents contact me, their hearts broken and their dreams in utter tatters. This total shambles has occurred on the watch of a Secretary of State who a few weeks before the fiasco dared utter the words

"I will stand for the forgotten 50%."

He has been responsible for overseeing 40% of students, primarily from disadvantaged backgrounds, having had their results downgraded. This failure to live up to his promise will not be forgotten, and certainly not as quickly as he forgot his promise to the students who needed the Government to support them the most. To explain the absolute ludicrousness of the algorithm used, let me give the example of one pupil from Luton who was born and raised in Spain, with Spanish being his native tongue. He was predicted to get an A* in Spanish by the teachers who knew him, yet he was downgraded to a B by an algorithm that knew nothing about him. This was replicated thousands of times across constituencies in the country.

This is not about blame. This is about accountability—something that this Government have been running away from rapidly for the last six months. We have heard heavily caveated yet empty apologies, excuses and delays from Government Ministers, so I think we should now hear some sensible words from students in Luton North. One said:

“We are capable of so many great things, and it is not at all fair that so many doors are being shut for us based on an algorithm or due to the Government.”

Another said:

“Unfortunately, due to the Government’s mess, I was rejected on Thursday by LSE. I was heartbroken, yet after the U-turn on my results I still want to go to the university of my choice.”

Some of those who are contacting me were hoping to get on to medical courses—something we are crying out for during this pandemic. I really welcome the fact that the Secretary of State mentioned the lifting of the cap on medical places, and I ask him to extend that to the next year, because we are going to see students who have had to defer this year clashing with next year’s intake.

While looking to the future, if we are ever in a situation like this again, instead of the exam results chaos that we saw in Luton and across the country, I implore the Government to believe the teachers and to believe that the students can live up to the grades that were predicted for them and that they are worthy of futures brighter than those who have gone before them.

5.56 pm

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): I refer hon. Members to my entries in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests as well as a declared interest in having a son who was another one of the many pupils that made up the 5.2 million GCSE exam entries this summer. He is happy with his results, and as both a parent and a former Children’s Minister, I believe the decision that was made to revert to centre-assessed grades was the right one. Once covid-19 hit and the repercussions became ever starker, ultimately leading to school and college closures, the class of 2020 was always going to need to be treated as an exceptional year. When it became apparent that the process put in place by Ofqual had any evidence or suggestion of unfairness, that was a necessary step to take. It is one that was also taken, as we have heard, in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For what it is worth, the feedback from my local heads in Eddisbury at the Winsford Academy, Bishop Heber High School and Tarporley High was that the centre-assessed grades, while in need of moderation, were almost moderated out of the final calculated grades altogether—leading, they believe, to some of the anomalies that we saw played out. For A-level students in particular, this caused real and well-founded worry about potentially lost university places and, in some cases, the actual loss or deferred acceptance of their chosen course. So it is important that we look to understand what needs to be done to future-proof the integrity, reliability and fairness of the awarding of exam results for 2021 students and beyond. I have every faith that, in that endeavour, with the assistance of the Chair of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) forensically following all legitimate lines of inquiry, the Government will work hard to meet that particular test, although this might also be an opportune moment to

review the performance of all awarding bodies, both academic and vocational, to establish whether they are, individually or collectively, what is required to meet the expectations that lie ahead.

The House also needs to consider constructively how best to equip our head teachers, teachers, school support staff, parents and children for the academic year ahead. Take physical education. Whether in relation to behaviour management, academic attainment, mental health, obesity, social skills, self-confidence or, sometimes, reacting positively to failure, physical education can ensure a better core for a better life. That is why, with the support of the Association for Physical Education, I am chairing a taskforce that brings together a range of experts, practitioners, frontline staff and others to look under the bonnet of the PE taught in our schools, with an ambition to demonstrate how to put high-quality PE at the very heart of our recovery and beyond—and boy, it has never been more needed. To that end, it would be helpful if the Minister could reiterate that PE is going to carry on as normal, not least because of the huge benefits that it brings.

Let us make sure that the unique circumstances and challenges of this summer lead to a heightened ability to respond to all conceivable exam-related issues effectively and with fairness, but let us not forget that there are many other aspects of school life to help to shape children’s futures.

5.59 pm

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The head of Ofqual made it clear that the grades fiasco was not entirely the fault of an algorithm; it was a conscious decision taken by the Secretary of State for Education. It is extraordinary that the Secretary of State is still ducking responsibility for this latest of shambles, which caused so many young people throughout the country serious distress last month.

The head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission said that Ofqual must consider the equality impacts of the results. Ofqual did produce a paper on the subject in April this year, but that was well before the Secretary of State decided to use the algorithm to calculate grades. Will the Secretary of State publish the equality impact assessment of the algorithm? I did ask that question last week, but did not get a straight answer, so I respectfully ask again. Will the Secretary of State also commit to publish an equality impact assessment for whatever arrangements are put in place for next year?

We know that after their exams were cancelled, home-schooled and independent learners were left without any grades at all, as a result of their having no teacher to give a centre-assessed grade to fall back on. Home-schooled and independent learners account for tens of thousands of pupils UK-wide, so what assessment has the Secretary of State conducted of the impact on those young people, and will he publish it? What about those young people who are now going into work full time while also preparing to sit their autumn exams? There is no level playing field for them.

Naturally, there are conversations about the possibilities of pushing back the dates of exams next year to give students some time to catch up; will the Secretary of State give us assurances about how those decisions will be reached and who he will consult on any such changes before they are finalised?

Rob Roberts: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Daisy Cooper: I probably should not, as you have given me a strong steer, Madam Deputy Speaker—my apologies.

As we all look ahead to the next year, I draw Members' attention to the gov.uk guidance on the four tiers of local-level restrictions on education that could be used. It is clear that remote education could be used in three of the Government's four scenarios. Working parents will look at the guidance and wonder what guarantees the Government will provide that their children will continue to receive a good education over the next year if, in three of those four scenarios, parents are going to be responsible for home schooling. Will the Secretary of State listen to parents' groups such as September for Schools and reconsider the Liberal Democrat amendment to the emergency covid legislation, which called for a guarantee that families could expect a minimum standard of education and that the Government would give schools the necessary resources to deliver it?

Ultimately, we need the full disclosure of the documents that the motion calls for, and we must have an investigation into the decisions and evidence that led to this debacle. We must learn from this episode and ensure that it is never, ever repeated, especially if we get to a position in which exams could be cancelled because of further lockdowns. It is time that the Secretary of State commissioned an independent investigation into the handling of GCSE, A-level and BTEC results.

6.3 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I approach this debate as not only a Member of this House but a teacher who taught students who were directly affected by this year's exams issues. Covid-19 has presented us with an exceptional set of circumstances and meant that tough decisions have needed to be made. In the end, Ofqual's decision to use centre-assessed grades was the correct one and the Government were right to back it.

As a teacher, you go out to bat for your kids. If a teacher is 50:50 on a grade to award, they are naturally going to want their student to do well, but that is matched with professionalism and fairness. Teachers' professional judgment is exceptional, but we still need things such as moderation, and there will always be some schools that award grades differently from others. That is why the original system was a well-intentioned one that tried to correct things in the fairest possible manner.

With hindsight, we can now say that the appeals process would not have been able to handle the excessive numbers of results that would have needed to be reassessed because of the algorithm, and that that simply would not have been possible in the time available. When it became clear that it could not be done, we made the right decision by our students.

I welcome the early decision that was made on the awarding of GCSE results and on ensuring that BTEC students were not forgotten in all this. Have we seen grade inflation? Yes, but that is a small price to pay compared with the disruption and unfairness that would have been the alternative.

So where do we go next? My biggest concern is making sure that we support those who are in year 10 and year 12 and halfway through their courses, so taking their exams in 2021. I am delighted that through

the covid catch-up plan we must now focus on getting them the outcomes that they deserve. Getting students back into school this September is a crucial part of that. I thank our heads, teachers, governors and support staff for making this possible. Now we need to make sure that we can keep the schools open.

Grade inflation now could affect students next year, so we need to make sure that this is dealt with. Many have suggested that students could defer university places, but the reality is that most want to go to their chosen universities and want to do it now. In my constituency, we will have a new £3.5 million university campus in Worksop to train healthcare professionals, thanks to a partnership with the health trust, the University of Derby and my old university, Nottingham Trent. I hope that those people will then choose to stay in Bassetlaw to work in their chosen careers.

This should not be about playing politics with our children's education. In Scotland, education is controlled by the SNP, in Northern Ireland controlled by the Executive, and in Wales controlled by Labour and led by a Liberal Democrat.

Suzanne Webb: There has been a lot of strong and emotive language used in this Chamber. My hon. Friend is absolutely correct that swift action was taken by this Government to deal with this perceived crisis: this "chaotic, terminal shambles". Does he agree that education is so important that it should not be politicised?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Lady has had two interventions and she is not even down to speak, so that means that somebody who is down to speak will now not be able to speak. That is the reality.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention.

Getting back on track is the No. 1 thing, but, as I said, education is controlled by different parties across the UK. The main point, though, is that this has been an incredibly difficult process for everybody and that we must make the right decision by the students, as I think that everybody in this House would want to do. So today let us concentrate on that and on the next step, not on political point-scoring.

6.6 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): The pandemic has raised a huge number of challenging and unprecedented problems that the Government have had to grapple with. They have had to create countless schemes and programmes to support us and to keep us safe, and are now having to find ways to unravel it all while the playing field continually changes around them. These have been necessary responses to questions that the pandemic has asked of them, and they have had to do it in record time.

With schools, there is no easy answer. Nothing will ever be able to cover, even in the short term, for the amazing job that teachers across Mansfield and Worksop do, week in, week out. With schools being closed, we knew that children's learning would suffer. We knew that ever-tightening restrictions were going to make it impossible to hold exams. We can look back now and say that maybe it could have been different, but at the time the widely accepted truth was that we must close the schools and plan for an alternative system of assessment.

The Ofqual formula was an imperfect solution to an impossible problem. In hindsight, it was not right that those from lower-income areas had their grades disproportionately affected. It was not right, clearly, for a child to get a U for an exam they were never allowed to sit. That was hugely problematic. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Perhaps it could have been done differently. But the Government employ experts in the form of Ofqual to manage these processes, and at the time those at Ofqual were offering reassurances to Ministers that it would be okay. They have since apologised for getting it wrong. They too are only human, and every other nation of our United Kingdom had come to the same conclusion.

What this says to me on a broader level is to do with the problematic nature of these structures of government run by a kind of quangocracy that we have had for many decades now, which blurs the lines of accountability and decision making. I hope that the Government will address that over the course of this Parliament.

I was glad that Ofqual agreed for teacher-assessed grades to be awarded to pupils who were unable to sit exams. That was the correct way to proceed given where we have ended up. It is still not perfect—it throws up questions about grade inflation and impacts on universities in future years—but we have eventually got to the right place.

I know at first hand from my own experience how long and hard Ministers and officials in the DFE have worked to try to rectify the problems. I know how many phone calls my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, for example, has made to universities to try to get them to go back and make more offers to students and to support them. I know how much time Ministers have offered me to raise concerns, ideas and issues, and I am very grateful to them for that. Nothing is perfect in a pandemic, and I know that what has gone on has been incredibly frustrating, but I have seen how committed the Department has been to trying to make it work. We should all be grateful for that. The key thing now is that lessons must be learned from these challenges. Let us look at the relationship between FE and HE, at the admissions process and at the Government's decision-making structures and ensure that we do these things better in future. We also need to draw a line and move forward, in the best interests of our children and young people, which I know the Secretary of State is committed to doing.

6.9 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): The Sunday following A-level results day, students in my constituency should have been celebrating their achievements with their families after years of hard work. Instead, they were in Coventry city centre protesting the unjust algorithm that levelled them down, in some cases, by three to four grades, denying them their place at university.

I stood with them that Sunday, not just as their MP but as a former student at a school deemed failing by Ofsted. I suspect that if I had been a student this year, my postcode would not have passed the Government's algorithm test, and my grades would have been downgraded significantly. I would have lost out on my place to study pharmacy, and the NHS would have had one less pharmacist to treat cancer patients in their time of

need. I cannot help but fear that this Government's failure to handle A-level, BTEC and GCSE results has cost the NHS and other sectors future key workers at a time when the country has remembered their necessity.

I also regret the disregard of teachers—a workforce of key workers who are too often forgotten about during the pandemic. This Government chose to implement an algorithm that devalued not only students but the professional expertise of teachers. At the height of the pandemic, teachers worked relentlessly to provide the requested evidence for predicted grades, while simultaneously providing increased pastoral support for their students. The Government should have listened to these key workers and valued their skills, rather than an algorithm steeped in bias. We must do everything we can to ensure that these key workers are never undervalued again. Our future generation depends on them.

For students in Coventry, the academic year ended in uncertainty because of the coronavirus, but it is because of this Government that their next academic year has needlessly begun with uncertainty too. Colleges and universities, which are already under the pressure of adapting to blended learning and ensuring a safe working and learning environment, have also been forced to pick up the pieces from the Government's chaotic handling of results day. Even now, there are students still uncertain whether they are starting university in just a matter of weeks, still unsure about accommodation and still in the dark about their immediate future.

I wholeheartedly welcome the Government's U-turn, which saw the abandonment of their algorithm that graded by background and not by aptitude. However, I do not welcome the lost futures, mental anguish and disruption incurred by waiting for its arrival. As an NHS worker, I knew that young people's mental health was already in crisis. This summer's exam results will have undoubtedly exacerbated that crisis, already strained by lockdown and restricted access to mental health crisis care. A survey by YoungMinds found that 80% of respondents agreed that the coronavirus pandemic has made their mental health worse, with 31% saying that they were no longer able to access support but still needed it. I am also deeply concerned about the further impact that this mishandling of young people's future has had on their mental health—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I call Sara Britcliffe.

6.12 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): First, I would like to thank all the teachers and members of staff in our local schools, colleges and sixth forms across Hyndburn and Haslingden who have worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic. The class of 2020—and, in fact, all students—have been some of the most affected by this pandemic, with exams cancelled and schools closed. Those moving from primary to high school or high school to college have missed out on all the events that take place during that time—proms, leavers assemblies and those final days with close friends.

I spent most of my week on the phone to pupils and parents, trying to assist those who had potentially lost their place at university and feeding into the Department the effect of this algorithm on the hard-working pupils

[Sara Britcliffe]

in Hyndburn and Haslingden. One parent I spoke to in my constituency, Paul Fury, told me about his wonderful and talented son, Joe, who was predicted top grades throughout but received lower, threatening his future and risking his position on his degree apprenticeship. Joe contacted me this week to let me know that he received final confirmation last Thursday for his degree apprenticeship, and I know that this young man has a brilliant future ahead of him. That would not have happened if the Government had not changed their decision.

I recognised that something had gone wrong when I first spoke to Joe's father and heard the heartbreak in his voice. I also spoke to local headteachers at Haslingden High School and at my former school, St Christopher's. My former headteacher, Mr Jones, said: "I know that you share my passion for the liberating force of a good education. For the young people of Hyndburn and other parts of east Lancashire, St Christopher's Sixth Form has sought to act as a beacon—a place where the levelling-up agenda can be seen in practice—and yet for this year's students we risk snuffing out the beacon for good."

As someone who knows the immense weight that exam results carry and who only took her final exam at university last year, I feel a deep sense of empathy for students across my constituency, and I wrote to the Secretary of State. The announcement was welcome. The Opposition constantly uses the phrase "U-turn", but I personally think that, in the exceptional circumstances in which we find ourselves today, the fact that our Government are willing to listen and to change their approach when they recognise that something is not working is the right thing to do, even knowing that the Opposition will then chant in their numbers about a U-turn again.

It is vital that the Government take every step possible to ensure that students sitting exams next year will not be at any disadvantage in the future through the lack of teaching. I know that Ofqual is continuing to work with the Department. I truly believe that the Conservative party is a party of opportunity and that we cannot let this awful pandemic ruin the chances of this country's future.

6.15 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I think the right place to start is to recognise the impact that covid has had on young people in my Warrington South constituency, by which I mean the disruption to their learning, the impact on their social development and, in particular, the challenge presented to students due to take their GCSEs, A-levels and BTECs who just could not take their exams this year. When it comes to impacting a child's life chances there is no replacement for learning in the classroom. I want to acknowledge the work that schools in Warrington South have done to introduce online learning. I also know that schools received laptops and routers to allocate to those children who did not have access to IT kits.

Looking at Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, I think that we can all accept that, whatever method Ofqual chose to award grades, there was always going

to be some problems when exams were not actually taken. There was also the issue of trying to ensure that grade inflation does not leave students disadvantaged against previous or future cohorts and that there is no disadvantage with regard to future university places. We should not forget that the majority of students who received their initial A-level grades saw no change when the system was amended, but I am afraid that too many did. I spoke personally to a number of young people who had been deeply affected by it. None the less, I am pleased that the Government responded and at speed when colleagues raised these issues and we were able to make the necessary changes to avoid lengthy appeals and, of course, to reflect the changes for GCSE students.

So much of the discussion in the Chamber today is about what happened in August and about placing blame. What is critical is how we ensure that students taking exams in 2021 and 2022 have the opportunity to reach their potential and that our children are back in school, engaging fully and benefiting from a full and rounded education. Yes, we must learn lessons, and I welcome the steps that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is taking to address the Select Committee next week.

I came to this House with a belief that we must ensure that every child has the best potential start to their life with a great education, so I welcome the increase in school funding that this Government are putting forward. Some £14 billion is to be invested over the next three years to ensure that every child gets a good education. As a member of the levelling-up taskforce, I can say that increasing per pupil funding for secondary schools to more than £5,000 and for primary schools to £4,000 under the national funding formula is great progress.

I saw for myself on Friday the work that is already going on so that young children can catch up. I went to meet Mrs Briggs, the brilliant headteacher at Great Sankey Primary School, and I saw the work that the staff team had done, which was an incredible experience, but best of all was seeing children back in their classroom.

6.19 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): We know what has been going on this afternoon. We are trying to ask for transparency from the Secretary of State, but I will use my limited time to talk about those young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods who are suffering the injustice of having their vital GCSE and A-level grades marked down because of the school that they went to and their postcode. I will, if I may, illustrate my comments with the experience of a couple of my constituents. One young man, Hamzah, who was hoping to go to Leeds University, was on course to achieve the grades. He was originally marked down by the algorithm. By the time he managed to get his appeal the course was full, so he is now waiting another 12 months.

Haaris is another young man with a bright future. He was informed by his college that it would be unable to award him centre-assessed grades. On the same day, Ofqual announced that external candidates could transfer their exam entries to a new centre, one that could assess them and award them grades, so he transferred to a new AQA exam centre, Cambridge Street School in my constituency, and called AQA to ask if that would be okay.

The following sequence is just a Kafka-esque nightmare of flip-flopping that has really impacted on Haaris's mental health. He was told on that day, 15 May, that that was the deadline for submissions, a deadline that he and his school were unaware of. The next working day they submitted a late entry, accepted as long as basic information was supplied. There was then a long period of silence, with calls and emails unanswered. AQA has said that around the entry deadline in May it experienced an extremely high volume of inquiries from exam centres, parents and students. It is clear that the exam board was not properly prepared or resourced. Had it been able to reply, AQA could have told Haaris earlier that he would not be considered because Joint Council for Qualifications regulations would not allow CAGs to be awarded where a prior relationship did not exist between a student and a centre.

What happened was that after a period of assessment and mocks, Haaris got A*s and As, and it looked like he would be going to a university of his choice in London. However, when AQA was contactable it said that Haaris's entry would not be processed and that he would not get grades. Then it changed its mind and said that it would process the application if the unique candidate identifier was available. Within hours, that was snatched away again when AQA said it could not process his application.

The back and forth impacted severely on Haaris's mental health and sense of self-worth. Four years of dedication and hard work in extreme extenuating circumstances have all been for nothing. Students like Haaris and others really do deserve transparency from this Government. We need full disclosure. I support the motion 100%.

6.22 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): As this is the first time I have spoken in a debate on education since the lockdown has been lifted, I would first like to pay tribute to all the teachers and school staff in the Meon Valley. The measures and work they put in place during lockdown were crucial to the education of many children, and parents are very grateful.

Last week, I visited Cowplain School and heard how 99% of year 7 are attending school and that 97% of all pupils have returned. I am meeting Horndean Technology College next week and I know it will be the same story. Our headteachers have worked incredibly hard in difficult circumstances and I pay tribute to every single one of them.

I do not have a sixth-form college in my constituency and have just three secondary schools, but of course many constituents have just done their A-levels and I know how hard they have worked over many years. Several contacted me after the first set of results were announced. I am therefore extremely grateful that Ofqual and the Government took the right decision over A-levels and GCSEs. Inconsistencies and unfair grading were obvious very quickly, so the swift action taken by both Ofqual and the Secretary of State was very welcome. The fact that two teachers have considered the judgment of centrally assessed grades, which have been signed off by the headteacher or principal, means that students must be confident that their grades are the right ones. This year has been a difficult year for everyone, but I hope that every young person is now confident about what they will be doing next.

Looking to next year, young people definitely need to do exams and there is no reason why village halls or other buildings cannot be turned into exam centres if we have to still socially distance. There is also talk about delaying exams. I do not see that that is necessary if the exams start after summer half-term, but exam boards should be looking to reduce the content while making sure that the mastery of a subject can be demonstrated by students. There is the issue of local lockdowns and some schools and classes closing for a period of time. It is a confusing situation for everyone and difficult decisions will have to be made, but to avoid confusion, we need to have very clear decisions ahead of time and clarity of guidance for those administering the exam process.

I personally think that covid has given us the opportunity to look at restructuring our exam system and that we need to look at whether we still need exams at 16, as we expect people to stay on in educational training until they are 18. I know that that is a subject for another debate, but do we really need GCSEs anymore?

Lastly, I praise all our young children for the fortitude they have shown during the past few months and wish all school leavers best wishes for the future. Very shortly, they will find that exam results at 16 and 18 are not as important as character and resilience. They have all shown that over the covid-19 crisis and it will put them in good stead for their future careers.

6.24 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This summer, pupils have been tested in more ways than any exam could manage. First, classes and exams were cancelled. That was followed by a rollercoaster of emotions as the Government took a chaotic path with their education, failing teachers and young people. As the Secretary of State spun himself into a series of U-turns, rather than him taking responsibility, we saw the heads roll of leaders across the education sector. Our education system, which once was the best, crashed. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister joked that this was some kind of mutant algorithm—no laughing matter, when the mutant system has been carefully designed to manipulate grades to uphold entrenched inequalities.

Faced with such evidence, one would expect contrition, learning and urgent action. That is why the motion is so important. We have to look to the past to make sure we get it right for the future. It will therefore be important to work with educational experts, academics, teachers and trade unions to build from this point.

There are four things I want to raise. First, we need proper recovery proposals to be brought forward. Secondly, ignoring the calls for a recovery curriculum will not put children in the best place for their future. Thirdly, the obsession with exams does not accommodate the realities of life and does not test young people in the best ways. Fourthly, we need to look at young people's wellbeing and the impact that this situation is having on them.

We must move from the chaos before us into a recovery programme. Obviously we welcome more money being put into the system for catch-up, but the fact that it will not be delivered until later in the autumn term is already adding to the chaos. Local experts in York, which is well known for its educational prowess and success, tell me that they could deliver a programme

[Rachael Maskell]

much quicker because they have the relationships on the ground, they know the needs of the local schools and children, and they have the people in place to deliver it.

The urgent request from my local authority and local leaders is, instead of running a national programme, to make it local. That kind of U-turn would be most welcome, because we would be able to build an education system run by local experts, delivering local results. That is what we want to see in the recovery curriculum; not children working on Saturdays and after school, as the Secretary of State is suggesting, which our local leader of education said would just stress out traumatised brains.

6.26 pm

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con): Coronavirus has impacted nearly every aspect of society; sadly, schools are no exception. Despite the difficulties and extra stress that covid has caused, I commend the hard work of all the teachers and teaching staff across Delyn who have adapted their lessons to be accessible online and supported students throughout. I also praise Delyn's students, and those throughout the United Kingdom, who have had to cope with unprecedented pressures and uncertainties over the past few months regarding their results and futures.

Before we can start to move forward and ensure that the same errors are not made again, we need to understand the distress and worry that has been caused to students, families and schools. The algorithm was wrong. It did not lead to the fairest outcomes for all students. It is right that we stop to evaluate the methods used to calculate grades and how that process was handled.

As was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), while some Opposition Members triumphantly trumpet another Government U-turn, I urge them to consider what it actually shows: a Government willing to listen and to be flexible and adaptable. Indeed, a recent YouGov tracker of the public response to Government U-turns found that 49% of respondents think that a U-turn is a good sign, as it shows that Ministers are willing to listen and change, compared with only 23% who think that U-turns are a bad thing. The *Financial Times* has stated that a Government U-turn can be

“a sign of a healthy and functional democracy”.

If we want to encourage healthy and honest debate, we should define these U-turns in a positive light, as they demonstrate that the Government can be held to account and will react accordingly and do the right thing. I therefore support the Government's decision to base GCSE, AS and A-level results on teacher estimates, when the algorithm that was widely accepted as the best system failed to deliver.

I cannot help but comment on the slight hypocrisy of Opposition Members, who have been very vocal in their criticism of this Government's handling of the grading process, despite the Labour-led Government in Wales, with a Lib Dem Education Minister, using a similar algorithm and undertaking a U-turn to base results on teacher-predicted grades. Claims were made by the Welsh Labour Government that the system in Wales was, in

fact, more robust and more credible, with the First Minister even defending the original system, but that actually led to a higher number being downgraded than was the case in England. They either carried out their own analysis and reached the same conclusions as the UK Government, in which case they should feel the same criticism from their colleagues, or they did no analysis and just followed blindly the UK Government's position, and they have no legitimacy to govern at all. I suggest that Opposition Members evaluate the same mistakes and decisions made by their own party in government before criticising this one.

I hope, ultimately, that the regulatory bodies and relevant groups across all the devolved nations take the time to learn the lessons needed, even in these challenging circumstances.

6.30 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): The Government's exam process has been nothing short of shambolic, with their disastrous predictive algorithm resulting in students being significantly downgraded and ultimately missing out on their first choice schools, colleges and universities. In many cases, this even included their insurance option. While the subsequent Government U-turn was welcome, sadly it took four days to arrive and was too late for thousands of students, with educational institutions already having filled their places during that period.

The question remains as to why the Government were so slow to act, given that, in its evidence last week to the Education Committee, Ofqual stated that both the Education Secretary and No. 10 were briefed about the issues in the system. Why, therefore, did they fail to address these concerns, which has resulted in such distressing scenes for families across the country and is having a detrimental impact on the future of so many children? Instead of apologising and acting swiftly, this Government allowed the situation to spiral out of control, and instead of soul searching, they threw civil servant after civil servant under the bus in an attempt to deflect from their own failings, including the sacking and scapegoating of Ofqual's chief regulator and the Department for Education's permanent secretary. Only one person should have carried the can for this fiasco, and that is the Education Secretary.

This episode is the latest fiasco for the Government to preside over and shows once again that they are not fit to govern, but this episode is far from concluded. As late as last week, many of my constituents in Stockport contacted me to say their child had still not received their BTEC results, some two weeks later than the official results date. Furthermore, students at Aquinas College and Stockport College in my constituency had to endure the worry and uncertainty of this year's ill-conceived algorithm. Those restarting their interrupted courses, having missed months of face-to-face teaching, have no idea what format the 2021 exams will take or when they will sit them. This is the latest insult to schools across the country, which have been rocked by the covid-19 pandemic and have very understandably looked to this Government to provide support. But the reality is that the Government have been found wanting. There appears to be no credible plan to ensure the stability of the sector at a time when the schools are stretched to breaking point.

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): Will the hon. Member give way?

Navendu Mishra: I am afraid that Madam Deputy Speaker has said she is discouraging interventions, so I will pass on that—forgive me.

I will just finish on the point that it is an incredibly worrying time for students, their families and teachers, and it is only right that they are given the assurances they deserve by ensuring schools have sufficient funds to remain open and avoid a repeat of this situation next summer.

6.33 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): It is a bit concerning for someone coming in at this part of the debate that they will end up repeating what everyone has said before them, but I will give it a go and try not to be repetitious. I want to start by paying tribute to my schools and my students in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton, many of whom were impacted by this and by the postcode lottery we have seen.

I do just want to make one point because Opposition Members have made quite a big thing about the postcode lottery, disadvantaged students and how we need to close that gap, yet when we had a debate on this, not one of them was here. I am sorry, but this is absolutely just not on. We were here—I was in that debate and talked about this—and we talked about how we were going to close that gap, and bar the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who had to be here, not one hon. Member from the Opposition was here. I am sorry, but that is unacceptable. I come from a community that has been hit by that postcode lottery. Many of my students were impacted by that, and I share their anger. It is absolutely unacceptable for the Opposition to talk about that when Labour Members cannot turn up when it matters.

I do not want to repeat the points that many of my hon. Friends have made, but yes, the centre-assessed system did not work, and no, it is not perfect. Indeed, many of us lobbied our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education on this point. People can call it a U-turn or whatever; I call it pragmatic government, because that is what it comes down to at the end of the day. But it always seems to be the same old story, because the Labour Administration in Wales are doing exactly the same thing, yet what we did is classed as a U-turn. It seems to be one rule for them and another for everyone else, and if they come to Sandwell, they will see what 50 years of Labour running the place looks like.

We need to ensure that this does not happen again. That is absolutely right, and I agree with all hon. Members who have made that point today. I am heartened by the work that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done to, for example, lift the cap on medical places, ensure that kids in vocational education are not impacted, and lift the temporary students numbers limit for universities, but we need to go further. I would implore him please not to forget technical education. Students in my communities are absolutely reliant on that. They want T-levels to work, and I know he is committed to this, but I implore him to ensure that they do.

To round up, in the 40 seconds I have left, we now need to look to the future. It is as simple as that. We need to ensure that, for example, communities such as mine, which lag below the GCSE A* to C grade average by 14% and where the A-level attainment rate at AAB is only 5%, are levelled up. We need to sort that out. I trust my right hon. Friend to get that right, so let us move on from this and look at how we level up. Let us take the opportunities that this presents and really examine it, through the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and the Education Committee. Together, let us make sure that students, particularly in communities such as mine, can thrive and succeed.

6.36 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): In my time in this place, I have repeatedly highlighted the attainment gap for young people in Bristol South. The covid crisis makes it much worse, which is why it is urgent that the Secretary of State makes a decision about exams and what will happen next year to allow planning to close that gap. I congratulate all schools, leaders and City of Bristol college in Bristol South for their heroic efforts over the summer to get our kids back to school fully and make things as covid-safe as possible. I have been very impressed with the work they have done, and also with the collaborative way in which Bristol City Council has worked with them.

However, everyone is completely and utterly dismayed at the Government's late and unhelpful guidance during this crisis. As one of the chairs in Bristol South said to me, "The DFE guidance still comes in fits and starts, often lacking in clarity and sometimes seeming to ignore the practical issue real schools face in interpreting and implementing the guidance." In the spirit of being helpful, I am keen to help my own children and the children of Bristol South and, indeed, the country. Education is about outcomes and preparing for life. No set of school leavers needs that more than these young people, so let us help. Let us think big. Let us get ambitious for these young people.

First, let us start co-ordinating the guidance. Do not send it every day or every week, but make clear what has changed since last time. Put it through a computer with track changes on. That will make a massive difference for school leaders. Secondly, can we have some clarity on how we use Ofsted in the next year or so? What will be the nature of its visits to schools? Can the approach now be reviewed to look at the balance between support and challenge? We need to get Ofsted helpfully assisting with school improvement and safeguarding, rather than doing last-minute, high-stakes accountability inspections, which are unnecessarily adding to school leaders' workloads.

The third area is FE transition apprenticeships, which are the key to young people's opportunities in Bristol South. I am a strong supporter and a chair of the all-party parliamentary group on apprenticeships, but the pandemic has wreaked havoc on the ability of employers to support apprenticeships. As was discussed in the Education Committee yesterday, what is needed for FE is a national plan for colleges and sixth forms. There can be no one-size-fits-all approach. We need an end to these piecemeal, headline-grabbing policy announcements.

[Karin Smyth]

Those are my suggestions for the Government. They need to take note of what we have learnt this year to help with next year and going forward, and they will have a lot of co-operation from many Members in this House in doing so.

6.39 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Clearly, this was a very concerning time for many of my constituents, and I have seen many cases of young people in my constituency having been negatively impacted by this algorithm, so it could have been handled better, perhaps. It could have been handled better in Wales, perhaps; it could have been handled better in Scotland, perhaps. However, this is an unprecedented time. It is not like we can go to the shelf and ask, “How do you reopen schools in the middle of a global pandemic?” or “How do you award exam results when you have no exams?” This is completely unprecedented, and it is right that we take that on board.

It is interesting that when it came to reopening schools and getting kids back to school, or awarding exam results when we had no exams, it is not like the Labour party said, “Right, this is our plan: you should do this. Here’s a really detailed plan that you should follow.” The Labour party has never done that. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, we actually had the shadow Education Secretary in July criticising predicted grades and saying that standardisation was a way forward.

I say this passionately, as someone who became a Member of Parliament because I care about children with special educational needs and as somebody who had special educational needs myself. I think the Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition should take some responsibility for the fact that we were not able to get more kids back to school before the summer holidays. I think he should accept that responsibility. Looking forward—[*Interruption.*] He made no effort. The Labour party has great influence in the National Education Union. It used none of that influence, and it continues to use none of that influence. Vulnerable children have paid the price of its leader’s inaction. [*Interruption.*] Okay—let’s all calm down.

Looking forward, it is absolutely critical that we provide schools and schoolteachers with certainty as quickly as possible, and that must mean exams next year. Exams are not perfect, but they have a place and they should continue to have a place. I say that as someone who was dyspraxic and an unconventional learner and pulled rabbits out of the hat at exams. Sometimes kids with SEND actually do better in exams than they do if there are no exams.

We should also look at what happened in Germany, which is probably the main example of a country that carried out socially distanced exams. With the benefit of hindsight, of course, we made the right decision at the time, but we should learn from Germany and next year give certainty to all our schools that exams will go ahead. There will be no plan B; there must be exams. I disagree with much of what Ofqual has said over the last few months, but on that I am in agreement with it. I look forward to seeing the Secretary of State next week.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Apsana Begum, who has two minutes.

6.42 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this important debate.

I want to begin by paying tribute to all the young people whose courageous and passionate protests secured major and justified U-turns from the Government. Much has already been said about the impact of the fiasco, so in my short contribution I shall focus instead on the issues that are still outstanding as a result of the decisions and U-turns—because the issue is not over or resolved. Indeed, I and countless colleagues continue to be contacted by students who have had no choice but to defer their place at university entirely because of the handling of the results.

First, some BTEC students have still not had their grades. Can the Secretary of State provide clarity and an assurance about when all BTEC students will have their results? Given the way that BTEC students are often stigmatised and treated as a class of their own in the education system, they truly deserve an apology.

Secondly, days before the fiasco unfolded, the Minister with responsibility for exams reassured MPs in a meeting that there was no evidence to suggest that the attainment gap had widened in any way during the pandemic. I remain very concerned that those from disadvantaged groups—primarily those of black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds—have been disproportionately affected as a result of the previous performance of their institutions impacting their grades. What assurances can the Secretary of State provide that every single student and institution has had the support and information to appeal and will be supported through that process?

Thirdly, the significant financial challenges across the entire education sector have been exacerbated by both coronavirus and the Government’s handling of the exams fiasco. What plans are there to ensure the stability of the sector?

The answers to those questions are crucial to ensuring transparency, and they are the key to ensuring that there are no repeats of this mishandling in any future processes. It is increasingly clear that we need a long-term review of the assessment methods used to award qualifications, including the possibility of more coursework, and systematic—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I thank the hon. Lady, but I have to bring in the Front Benchers now.

6.44 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): This has been a really important debate and at its heart is the question of public confidence in the Government’s handling of GCSEs, A-levels and NVQs this year. Clearly, feelings are running high on this issue, and I pay tribute to the students, their families and the teachers who faced months of uncertainty after the Secretary of State announced back in March that the exam regulator, Ofqual, and the exam boards would work with teachers to provide grades to students whose exams would not take place in the summer.

I regret that I will not be able to mention every single person who has spoken in today’s debate, but there have been some important contributions from all parts of the House. I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the

Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), the shadow Secretary of State for Education, for opening the debate. The right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) spoke about just how badly BTEC results were handled and made the important point that we should value vocational qualifications as much as academic ones. I was concerned to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) say that she has constituents contacting her now to say that those results still have not been given to some of her constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) made an emotional plea that this fiasco never be repeated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Paula Barker) spoke of how students in her constituency have had no choice but to defer going to university because of the Government's failure. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) spoke about the devastating impact that the fiasco has had on her constituents and spoke of hearts broken and dreams in tatters. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) told of how young people's mental health will have been impacted by this debacle. Indeed, that was illustrated by the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), who described one such case as a Kafkaesque nightmare.

The hon. Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond) asked the interesting question of whether we need GCSEs anymore. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said that she had expected to see contrition, learning and urgent action, and she spoke of the importance of a recovery curriculum. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) spoke of constituents missing out on their chosen universities and colleges because of the Government's failures, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) spoke of just how difficult it was with Government guidance coming out in fits and starts. She also called for clarity on how we use Ofsted.

This Government have presided over a summer of chaos, incompetence and confusion. Even the Secretary of State acknowledged on 1 September that the situation with exams had caused students

“a great deal of stress and uncertainty”.—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 42.]

It is the failure of this Government to effectively manage the exams process this summer that has caused enormous anxiety to young people, as well as to their families and their teachers. At last week's meeting of the Education Select Committee, Julie Swan, executive director of general qualifications at Ofqual, said that the regulator provided advice to Ministers on 16 March that it would be

“challenging, if not impossible, to attempt to moderate estimates in a way that is fair for all this year's students. Everyone, throughout the process, was aware of the risks. A paper to the general public sector ministerial implementation group on 1 May, highlighted the risk of widespread dissatisfaction with grades awarded, from individual students, schools and colleges, and the risk to public confidence.”

She said that Ofqual had briefed No. 10 on 7 August and held regular meetings on the matter with the Schools Minister throughout the period.

The warnings were there, so why did the Government not heed them? Was it simply that they chose not to and hoped that everything would turn out all right in the end? It is time now for full transparency from the

Government, and that is why we have tabled this motion today. Young people and their families deserve to know how they came to be let down so badly.

On 17 August, the shadow Secretary of State called for the Government to use centre-assessed grades for GCSEs and A-levels to put an end to the exams fiasco. Later that day, the Government did that. It is not just in the delivery of A-level, AS-levels and GCSEs that the Government failed. As the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow, pointed out, BTECs were treated almost as an afterthought, and that comment has been made by many contributors today. Even as late as 2 September, the Government's Minister in the Lords admitted that some BTEC students were still awaiting their results being communicated. Why are they in that situation? Will the Minister apologise to them?

Four education unions—the National Association of Head Teachers, the National Education Union, the Association of School and College Leaders and the NASUWT—have called on the Secretary of State to commit to an urgent independent inquiry into what happened this year in order to understand what went wrong and to learn the lessons for the future. Will he act on their call?

The chair of Ofqual told the Select Committee last Wednesday that Ofqual would be happy to publish all the communications and minutes it has had with the Department of Education, provided the Government are in agreement with it doing so. What discussions has the Minister had with Ofqual about materials being made public?

The Government need to set out for schools and students how they plan to deliver an assessment process in 2021 that is rigorous, fairly managed and able to deliver in the event of further disruption in the coming year. Labour has called for exams to be put back to June to allow students and teachers to make up vital lost time and to address the potential for further disruption. The NEU is calling on the Government to reduce the content in GCSE and A-level exams, and to work with teachers and school leaders to develop a national system of moderated centre assessment grades in case there is further disruption. I ask the Minister: what consideration have the Government given to those suggestions? It is vital that the Government set out as a matter of urgency how they will ensure that grades are awarded fairly next year so that teachers can teach accordingly.

So far, we have seen no coherent plan from Government. If they wish to rebuild confidence in the public in the awarding of grades, it is essential that they are open and transparent about their failings regarding the awarding of grades this year. The House needs to know what the Secretary of State knew and what the Prime Minister knew, when they knew it, and what they did about it when they were warned of the difficulties. Full disclosure is vital so that students, their families and teachers can see what went wrong. I appeal to Members on the Conservative Benches to think of those young people in their constituencies who have been left upset, angry and disadvantaged by the Government's incompetence, and I call on all Members to support the motion today.

6.51 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): The debate has been largely constructive. As we have said consistently, the Government never wanted to cancel

[Nick Gibb]

exams. They are obviously the best and fairest form of assessment. But we had to take the difficult decision to close schools and colleges and cancel summer exams because of the covid-19 pandemic. As the Secretary of State said in his opening speech, the virus has propelled not just this country but the rest of the world into uncharted territory, and we have had to respond, often at great speed, to find the best way forward given what we knew at the time.

Once the decision to cancel exams and instead to issue calculated grades to students was made, the Government followed the necessary steps. Our overriding aim was to ensure that all students received just recognition for their efforts and were able to progress to the next stage of their lives in the knowledge that their qualifications had the same value as previous years.

We provided clear direction to Ofqual in the form of two direction letters, the first for general qualifications and the second for vocational and technical qualifications. We worked closely with Ofqual as it developed the process for arriving at calculated grades. As an independent body, the decisions throughout this process were rightly for Ofqual to take, but as the Secretary of State has already made clear, the Department was consulted throughout. I met weekly with senior colleagues at Ofqual during the model development period, and whenever I was made aware of possible challenges with the model, I raised them with Ofqual, seeking the necessary reassurances and urging Ofqual to consider appropriate changes to the arrangements—for example, an enhanced appeals process to help address our concerns about able candidates in schools with a track record of lower standards.

As other issues were raised, we were reassured that, overall, the model was fair. The work to award qualifications based on calculated grades was a mammoth task that had never been carried out or even expected before this year. It is important to remember that similar approaches to awarding qualifications following the cancellation of exams were put in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the key principle of using a statistical standardised model was supported by 89% of those responding to Ofqual's consultation.

As is normal every year to reflect its status as an independent regulator, Ofqual shared some headline data in the days immediately before the release of results, but I and the rest of the Department did not see the detail of how individual students or schools and colleges would be affected until A-level results day. Over the following days, it became clear to me and to the Secretary of State that there were far too many inconsistent and unfair outcomes for students that did not reflect their hard work or ability. It was not reasonable to expect all of those to be dealt with through an appeals system, and they severely undermined public confidence in the system. Therefore, Ofqual and the Government took immediate action, announcing on Monday 17 August the decision to revert to centre assessment grades for all students, or the calculated grade where this was higher.

The Department worked exceptionally closely with Ofqual and the exam boards in the following week, and I chaired daily taskforces on the matter, pressing hard to ensure that the results were issued as soon as possible. Despite the extremely challenging circumstances, GCSE results were revised, and they were issued on the original

results day of 20 August. A-level and AS-level results were reissued to schools and colleges at the same time as well. I continue to hold this taskforce, which is attended by Ofqual, the awarding organisations, key school and college leader stakeholder organisations and unions, and I will ensure that it meets whenever appropriate to discuss operational concerns.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who has responsibility for apprenticeships and skills, also held daily meetings during this time to monitor progress with the issuing of vocational and technical qualifications and to ensure that the results were issued as soon as possible, so no one awaiting a place in further or higher education, or on an apprenticeship, would lose out.

In opening the debate, the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), said that lessons must be learned from what happened this summer, and of course that is right. We are working closely with Ofqual to make sure that we learn the lessons from 2020.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) said that we should all approach the debate with due humility, and I share that wish. He asked about Sir Jon Coles and his concerns about the model. We did raise Jon Coles' concerns with Ofqual and were given assurances.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), the Chair of the Education Committee, made the important point about the degree to which—*[Interruption.]* Ah, he has moved. He spoke about the degree to which pupils need to catch up on lost education. I can assure him that we will be conducting the research that he is suggesting, in particular, to monitor progress that pupils make.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) and for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond) were right to focus on 2021 and on ensuring that we release as much time as we can for extra teaching, and that those exams go ahead as planned.

The former Universities Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), made compelling points about the admissions system, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb), in a powerful intervention, reminded the House about the Government's commitment to help students to catch up, with a £1 billion catch-up premium.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) was correct to say that—*[Interruption.]* I wish my right hon. Friends would stay in the same seats. He was correct to say that while exams are of course the best and fairest way to award qualifications, in the middle of this pandemic, exams were no longer an option.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) raised the issue of BTECs. I can confirm, from the four awarding organisations that I have been working with, that there are now no results outstanding. The delay was to ensure that candidates taking BTECs were not put at a disadvantage, given the changes to the grading of GCSEs and A-levels.

I share the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) for PE. That is not something I would have said as a child, but he is right

that exercise is vital for mental as well as physical health. The hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) spoke of a minimum standard of education in three of the four tiers in the contained guidance. We have published very clear expectations for schools on the quality of remote education.

Every child and young person in this country has experienced unprecedented disruption to their education as a result of covid-19, with those from the most vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds being among the hardest hit. Education recovery lies at the heart of our national mission as we recover from the disruption caused by covid-19 and ensure that we provide schools with the necessary guidance, support and funding that they need, with high attendance at schools—.

Robert Halfon: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Nick Gibb: If my right hon. Friend will forgive me, I am just coming to an end. I was delighted to hear of the very high attendance in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley.

I and the Secretary of State know that the situation has caused stress and uncertainty for many, and clearly this was never the intention. I can assure them that we are working with Ofqual to ensure that what happened this summer does not happen again. There are lessons to learn, and we want to be transparent. The Secretary of State—

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put.

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 327.

Division No. 91]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Brown, Ms Lyn
Abrahams, Debbie	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Ali, Rushanara	Bryant, Chris
Ali, Tahir	Buck, Ms Karen
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Burgon, Richard
Amesbury, Mike	Byrne, Ian
Anderson, Fleur	Byrne, rh Liam
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cadbury, Ruth
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Bardell, Hannah	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Barker, Paula	Carden, Dan
Beckett, rh Margaret	Chamberlain, Wendy
Begum, Apsana	Champion, Sarah
Benn, rh Hilary	Chapman, Douglas
Betts, Mr Clive	Charalambous, Bambos
Black, Mhairi	Cherry, Joanna
Blackman, Kirsty	Clark, Feryal
Blake, Olivia	Cooper, Daisy
Blomfield, Paul	Cooper, Rosie
Bonnar, Steven	Cooper, rh Yvette
Brabin, Tracy	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cowan, Ronnie
Brennan, Kevin	Coyle, Neil
Brock, Deidre	Creasy, Stella
Brown, Alan	Cruddas, Jon

Cummins, Judith	Keeley, Barbara
Cunningham, Alex	Kendall, Liz
Daby, Janet	Khan, Afzal
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Kinnock, Stephen
David, Wayne	Kyle, Peter
Davies, Geraint	Lake, Ben
Davies-Jones, Alex	Lavery, Ian
Day, Martyn	Law, Chris
De Cordova, Marsha	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Debbonaire, Thangam	Lewis, Clive
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Linden, David
Dodds, Anneliese	Lloyd, Tony
Doogan, Dave	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Dorans, Allan	Lynch, Holly
Doughty, Stephen	MacAskill, Kenny
Dowd, Peter	Madders, Justin
Duffield, Rosie	Mahmood, Shabana
Eagle, Ms Angela	Malhotra, Seema
Eagle, Maria	Maskell, Rachael
Edwards, Jonathan	Matheson, Christian
Efford, Clive	Mc Nally, John
Elliott, Julie	McCabe, Steve
Elmore, Chris	McCarthy, Kerry
Eshalomi, Florence	McDonald, Andy
Esterson, Bill	McDonald, Stuart C.
Evans, Chris	McDonnell, rh John
Farry, Stephen	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Fellows, Marion	McGinn, Conor
Flynn, Stephen	McGovern, Alison
Fovargue, Yvonne	McLaughlin, Anne
Foxcroft, Vicky	McMahon, Jim
Foy, Mary Kelly	McMorrin, Anna
Furniss, Gill	Mearns, Ian
Gardiner, Barry	Miliband, rh Edward
Gibson, Patricia	Mishra, Navendu
Gill, Preet Kaur	Monaghan, Carol
Glendon, Mary	Moran, Layla
Grady, Patrick	Morden, Jessica
Grant, Peter	Morgan, Stephen
Gray, Neil	Morris, Grahame
Green, Kate	Murray, Ian
Greenwood, Lilian	Murray, James
Greenwood, Margaret	Newlands, Gavin
Griffith, Nia	Nichols, Charlotte
Gwynne, Andrew	Nicolson, John
Haigh, Louise	Norris, Alex
Hamilton, Fabian	Olney, Sarah
Hanvey, Neale	Onwurah, Chi
Hardy, Emma	Oppong-Asare, Abena
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Osamor, Kate
Harris, Carolyn	Osborne, Kate
Hayes, Helen	Oswald, Kirsten
Healey, rh John	Owatemi, Taiwo
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Owen, Sarah
Hendry, Drew	Peacock, Stephanie
Hill, Mike	Pennycook, Matthew
Hobhouse, Wera	Perkins, Mr Toby
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Phillips, Jess
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Phillipson, Bridget
Hollern, Kate	Pollard, Luke
Hopkins, Rachel	Powell, Lucy
Howarth, rh Sir George	Qureshi, Yasmin
Huq, Dr Rupa	Rayner, Angela
Jarvis, Dan	Rees, Christina
Johnson, Dame Diana	Reeves, Ellie
Johnson, Kim	Reeves, Rachel
Jones, Darren	Reynolds, Jonathan
Jones, Gerald	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Jones, Ruth	Rodda, Matt
Jones, Sarah	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Kane, Mike	Saville Roberts, rh Liz

Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Siddiq, Tulip
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard

Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony

Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James

Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Javid, rh Sajid

Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy	Stephenson, Andrew
Parish, Neil	Stevenson, Jane
Patel, rh Priti	Stevenson, John
Pawsey, Mark	Stewart, Bob
Penning, rh Sir Mike	Stewart, Iain
Penrose, John	Streeter, Sir Gary
Percy, Andrew	Stride, rh Mel
Philp, Chris	Stuart, Graham
Pincher, rh Christopher	Sturdy, Julian
Poulter, Dr Dan	Sunderland, James
Pow, Rebecca	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Prentis, Victoria	Syms, Sir Robert
Pursglove, Tom	Thomas, Derek
Quince, Will	Timpson, Edward
Raab, rh Dominic	Tolhurst, Kelly
Randall, Tom	Tomlinson, Justin
Redwood, rh John	Tomlinson, Michael
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob	Tracey, Craig
Richards, Nicola	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Richardson, Angela	Trott, Laura
Roberts, Rob	Tugendhat, Tom
Robertson, Mr Laurence	Vickers, Martin
Robinson, Mary	Vickers, Matt
Rosindell, Andrew	Villiers, rh Theresa
Ross, Douglas	Wakeford, Christian
Rowley, Lee	Walker, Sir Charles
Russell, Dean	Wallis, Dr Jamie
Rutley, David	Warburton, David
Sambrook, Gary	Warman, Matt
Saxby, Selaine	Watling, Giles
Scully, Paul	Webb, Suzanne
Seely, Bob	Whately, Helen
Selous, Andrew	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Shapps, rh Grant	Whittaker, Craig
Sharma, rh Alok	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Shelbrooke, rh Alec	Wiggin, Bill
Simmonds, David	Wild, James
Skidmore, rh Chris	Williams, Craig
Smith, Chloe	Williamson, rh Gavin
Smith, Greg	Wood, Mike
Smith, Henry	Wragg, Mr William
Smith, rh Julian	Young, Jacob
Smith, Royston	Zahawi, Nadhim
Solloway, Amanda	
Spencer, Dr Ben	Tellers for the Noes:
Spencer, rh Mark	James Morris and
Stafford, Alexander	Maggie Throup

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CLIMATE CHANGE

That the draft Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 13 July, be approved.—(*Michael Tomlinson.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Industry Training Board) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.—(*Michael Tomlinson.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, in respect of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—(*Michael Tomlinson.*)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): The motion just passed allows amendments to the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill to be tabled with immediate effect. Although the motion refers to amendments being handed to the Clerk at the Table, Members should table amendments not in the Chamber but by email to the Public Bill Office at PBOHoC@parliament.uk.

PETITIONS

NHS Parking Charges

7.15 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Coventry South regarding hospital parking charges, alongside an online petition on the same topic, which has been signed by 2,219 people.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Coventry South,

Declares that NHS staff deserve thanks and recognition for their extraordinary service through the Coronavirus pandemic; notes that parking charges have recently been re-imposed at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire; and further notes that NHS staff have faced a decade of falling pay and that, despite this, a pay rise has still been refused to nurses, porters, cleaners and many other staff.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to scrap hospital parking charges for staff, patients, and visitors, and to ensure that there is a pay settlement for NHS staff that gives them the recognition they deserve.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002594]

Premier League Transparency

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I rise to present a petition calling for Premier League transparency and accountability on behalf of my constituents. Online, this petition received over 21,000 signatures, 2,000 of them from Newcastle upon Tyne Central. An earlier change.org petition calling for an independent investigation into the Premier League takeover process attracted over 110,000 signatures, demonstrating the determination and passion of football fans.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Newcastle upon Tyne Central,

Declares that football is an important part of a city's cultural identity and economy; further declares that football fans have little say in their club owners; notes that football ownership is determined by the Premier League's Owners & Directors Tests; further notes that the Premier League do not provide updates to supporters about the progress of takeover bids; further declares that Premier League due process is opaque; further declares that the Premier League are not accountable to football supporters;

[Chi Onwurah]

further declares that the Premier League have failed to engage with fans; and further notes concerns that Premier League inactivity led to the collapse of the recent Newcastle United takeover.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take action to review the way in which the Premier League assessed the recent Newcastle United takeover bid, to provide accountability to fans and local communities of clubs subject to takeover bids, with particular reference to Newcastle United, and to commit to a timescale for a fan-led review of football, as promised in the Government's manifesto.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002596]

Hunterston B Nuclear Power Station

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I rise to present a petition to the House of Commons on Hunterston B nuclear power station.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the North Ayrshire & Arran constituency,

Declares that there is an urgent need to support inward investment in North Ayrshire; notes the announcement of the complete cessation of energy production at Hunterston B Nuclear Power Station in January 2022; further notes the £54 million annual contribution the station makes to the North Ayrshire economy; and further declares that, while there is no immediate threat to the jobs of approximately 520 staff and 250 contractors working on the site, action needs to be taken now to ensure the sustainability of the local economy once the defueling of Hunterston B has concluded.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the UK Government to work in partnership with the Scottish Government and North Ayrshire Council to deliver investment in green, clean energy production in North Ayrshire as a matter of urgency.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002597]

Detention of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Michael Tomlinson.)

7.19 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I am grateful to have secured this Adjournment debate so that I can take this opportunity to press the Government, in the strongest possible terms, to take much stronger action against the Chinese Government and their campaign of genocide against the Uyghur people of Xinjiang. This crime can longer go unpunished, and someone has to say, "enough is enough".

While we were away from this place for the summer recess, I wrote an article entitled, "Genocide does not rise for recess". Over the past few weeks, that has proven to be the case. Even amid growing international fury in many quarters, the Chinese Government continue unhindered with a campaign of what can only accurately be described as genocide, but where we should expect leadership and action, there is only a yawning void.

We learned this week of one of the most striking examples of choosing to look away from what is happening to an entire people at the hands of the Chinese Government. The Disney Corporation, that self-styled beacon of wholesome positivity, chose to film its latest blockbuster movie, "Mulan", in the very province where the Uyghur people are being interned, tortured and forcibly sterilised. Disney even thanked the state authorities in China for their co-operation. There is a particularly savage irony in a story of family, friendship and emancipation being filmed against a real-life background of forced sterilisation, families torn asunder and cold-blooded torture—in short, against a backdrop of genocide.

The repression of Uyghur Muslims by the Chinese Government has a depressingly long history, but in the last few years the state has become bolder and more belligerent in the scale of atrocity that it is willing to commit—its bullishness is matched only by its brazenness. It is estimated that more than 1 million people are being held at internment camps in Xinjiang, and the Chinese Government are showing no signs of pausing their orchestrated campaign.

We have all seen the horrific drone footage showing men being rounded up, and we have all heard the stories of forced labour camps. The testimony of witnesses is becoming ever more disturbing. Earlier this month, a Uyghur doctor spoke to ITV:

"She speaks of participating in at least 500 to 600 operations on Uighur women including forced contraception, forced abortion, forced sterilisation and forced removal of wombs. She told me that on at least one occasion a baby was still moving when it was discarded into the rubbish."

In the same programme, a Uyghur man spoke of his experience of being tortured in an internment camp:

"The torture was relentless. They beat me with the twisted wire and pipe nonstop. There was no place left without bruising. They tortured me for three hours, I couldn't cope any longer so I begged them to take me down from hanging...After screaming and begging for so long I passed out."

Those are two short examples of the atrocities being committed. I could go on, for the charge sheet is long and horrific.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Over the summer, a coalition of human rights organisations reported that many of the world's biggest fashion brands are complicit in human rights violations perpetrated against the Uyghur people in Xinjiang, including the use of forced labour. Does my hon. Friend agree that multinational corporations have an urgent responsibility to ensure that their supply chains are free from such gross abuses of human rights?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I will come on to talk about forced labour, the supply chain and actions that we might take against the Chinese Government and companies.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will not give way just yet; I will see how we get on. I know that there is a lot of intense interest in this debate, and I have had representations from many Members. That makes the case for not only how seriously Members from across the House take this matter, but how much people want to debate it and get a response from the Government. I think we should aim for more debates on the Floor of the House with more time, rather than end-of-day Adjournment debates like this one.

The genocide convention, to which China is a signatory, defines genocide as specific acts against members of a group with the intent to destroy that group in whole or in part. These acts include killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life to bring about the group's physical destruction, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. Any one of these categories constitutes genocide. The overwhelming evidence of the Chinese Government's deliberate and systematic campaign to destroy the Uyghur people clearly meets each of these categories.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on holding this very important debate. She has very clearly laid out the tenet of what is required in international law to say that genocide is taking place in Xinjiang. Unfortunately, though, China's power within the UN means that the UN is a busted flush, so it is up to our Government—our Foreign Office—to say that enough is enough and we will hold our own tribunal to work out what the evidence suggests, which will no doubt be that genocide is indeed taking place.

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the hon. Lady and agree with everything she said. Her remarks are testament to how much cross-party agreement there now is about what is happening to the Uyghur people at the hands of the Chinese Government. I would certainly welcome an opportunity to work closely with her and other Conservative Members so that we can lobby their Government to take the action that we would all, I am sure, like to see.

We should all be alarmed and appalled by what we are seeing, but we should all also resolve to forge a path forward for Uyghur freedom. I do believe that, as the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) said, our Government can play a key role in averting disaster. The time has certainly come for Magnitsky-style sanctions on individuals, whether state or non-state actors, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the person

is involved in serious human rights violations in Xinjiang. There is no good reason to explain why these have not already been activated. I believe that the Government's current position is that the evidence is not there yet—a position that I have to say I find incredible. If the evidence we already have is not strong enough, then could the Minister tell us what more is required? What line has to be crossed before we say that sanctions are now appropriate?

Sanctions alone will not, of course, be enough. We should go further in using and enforcing domestic avenues of accountability—in particular, corporate accountability relating to supply chains, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) remarked. We cannot allow the fruits of forced labour to end up on our shores and in our homes. I know that British people everywhere would be appalled to think, for example, that the personal protective equipment that we have all come to rely on could have been produced by the abused and subjugated people of Xinjiang. If our words on eradicating modern slavery are to mean anything, then surely the commercial goods that the Uyghurs and others in Xinjiang are forced to make should be squarely in our sights.

Both these options relate to following and then attacking the money. As distasteful as it may seem, money does matter a very great deal. The Chinese Communist party has busily been buying up influence and the silence of other countries. A challenge based on restricting the flow of money for key regime individuals, and also for companies, both Chinese and others, that are benefiting from these crimes would hit where it hurts and send a clear message too.

There are legal options as well. I know that the situation is complicated—China is of course a permanent member of the UN Security Council—but we should not let that stand in our way, as the hon. Member for Wealden made clear. I know that the Government are proud to have co-ordinated a joint UN statement, and I am sure that the Minister will remark on that. I do not wish to sound uncharitable as to the actions that the Government have been trying to co-ordinate. I know that even getting to that point, faced with a concerted counter-effort by the Chinese Government, is significant, but I also know we can do better. As the Bar Human Rights Committee has said, we should lead efforts to establish an impartial and independent UN mechanism such as a special rapporteur, or maybe an expert panel, to closely monitor the situation in Xinjiang.

We should investigate the viability of more innovative legal approaches that could be taken, as we have seen in respect of the Rohingya. The International Criminal Court has intervened to probe the violence against Myanmar's Rohingya community because part of the crime—deportation—has taken part in Bangladesh, which falls within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court even though Myanmar itself does not. Similarly, we know that deportations are taking place from Xinjiang to Tajikistan and Cambodia, and people are then repatriated to China and later murdered, tortured or sterilised.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this very important debate. Does she agree that if the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and genocide are not prosecuted—as in the case of the Burmese military, despite the now overwhelming evidence—it is likely that genocide will become a policy

[*Rushanara Ali*]

tool for China and many other countries and leaders around the world? It is on our country and our Government to show leadership here.

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We can be in no doubt as to the ambitions that the Chinese Government have: President Xi Jinping made clear in his 2050 vision statement the sort of dominance that his country wishes to achieve. If the current actions of the Chinese Government are allowed to go unchecked for any longer, we are heading for a very dark century indeed, which is why we must all take action and press the Minister today.

Mr Dhesi: I thank my hon. Friend for securing this very important debate. What is happening with the Uyghur people is absolutely diabolical. As she rightly pointed out, the alarming reports coming out of China indicate genocide, ethnic cleansing on an industrial scale, and the destruction of a people and their language, religion and culture. That is why, rather than mere platitudes, our Government should be spearheading an international movement to shine a light on the situation and force the Chinese Government to mend their ways.

Shabana Mahmood: The points that my hon. Friend highlights go to the fact that many of us now think that the tests for what constitutes genocide are being met by the Chinese Government. It is truly depressing that because of the growing dominance of the Chinese Government and the way in which the United Nations institutions work, so much of the international community is just completely unable to effectively stand up and say, “This is not going to happen.” Too often the world just says, “Never again.” We were supposed to have “Never again” on genocides decades ago, yet they have continued to take place and one is taking place even now. What will it take for the world to act? That is why I want to push the Minister very strongly on that point.

The Government can do more to consider more innovative legal approaches. I will refrain from making comments on the rule of law, which everybody has been discussing in the past 24 hours with regard to our treaty obligations, but the Minister will know, because he has to have the conversations with his Chinese counterparts and others, that Britain must be believed to be a country that stands by its international obligations and the rule of law. That is one of the great gifts that we have and it is one of our key strengths as a country when we play our role on the international stage. The Government should right what they have done wrong in the past 24 hours so that we can make representations with the full force of moral and legal authority that we have enjoyed for a long time.

One thing is indisputable: nothing will change unless co-ordinated, robust political force and pressure is applied while commercial, financial and legal routes to take action against the Chinese Government are navigated and explored. The UK now has a choice as to whether to lead the charge or turn our backs and allow these atrocities to continue once the outrage has inevitably subsided.

I support the actions that the Government have taken and intend to take in relation to Hong Kong citizens and I have supported the Government’s decision in

relation to Huawei. In fact, I think it is high time that we as a country take a more realistic and clear-eyed approach towards our relationship with China. As the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), has said, we have frequently rolled out a red carpet for the Chinese Government but got nothing in return. Surely, the perpetration of a genocide necessitates a full review and reset of our relationship.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, and I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this matter forward. China stands condemned in the world courts for its persecution of the Uyghur Muslims, and also for murders, killings, injuries and human rights abuses. Does she therefore agree with me and many others in this House that the genocide against the Uyghurs is one of the worst crimes of the 21st century?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. The scale of what is happening in China defies belief. The videos that we have now seen and that are being pursued by commercial television news channels such as ITV lay out starkly the reality of what is happening, and we cannot turn away. As he says, one of the great crimes of the 21st century is being committed before our very eyes. Whatever happens next, we will not be able to say that we did not know. We did, we do, and we must act, because it is not too late for us to avert the worst of this developing atrocity. History will judge us for the unforgivable lack of action thus far, but it will also judge us for the choices we make in the coming days and weeks.

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this important matter before the House. As we all here agree, UK values are built upon our shared belief in, and celebration of, liberty, freedom and pluralism. We therefore understand that people are not truly characterised by their race or religion, and that they are characterised by their innate human value. Sadly, their intrinsic value is not recognised by the People’s Republic of China for millions of people, whether Falun Gong, Muslims or Christians. If we cannot get change by talk alone, does she agree that we need to move into sanctions and other measures to get the Communist party of China to move?

Shabana Mahmood: That is exactly why I have laid out—with some clarity, I hope—the case today for Magnitsky-style sanctions, for action against companies that are benefiting from the forced labour in the camps and for approaches that can be pursued in the arena of international law—difficult though that is, given the position we are in with the United Nations and China’s status as a permanent member of the Security Council. It is in our gift to stand up to the Chinese Government. It is in our gift to give voice to those Chinese citizens who are, as I speak, being shaved, sterilised, dehumanised and brutalised. It is, in short, in our gift to do so much more to halt this genocide. Enough is enough. Britain must lead the way.

7.37 pm

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): May I start by saying how incredibly grateful I am to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) for

securing this debate and for her powerful speech? I very much acknowledge the strength of feeling around the Chamber on this important issue. That has been characterised by the number of people who have intervened on her speech. I will try my best to respond to all the points that she has raised.

Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang are continuing to experience significant restrictions to their freedom of religion or belief, their freedom of speech and their freedom of association. The Chinese authorities have banned everyday expressions of religious observation, to which every person should be entitled. We are also aware of credible reports that mosques and other religious sites have been closed to worshippers or, even worse, demolished.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): There are reports that Disney has filmed its new film, “Mulan”, in Xinjiang, the area that is the subject of this debate where people are being forcibly held against their will. There are very concerning reports of further things. What assessment has the Minister made of Disney filming “Mulan” in Xinjiang?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend raises something that has been in the news over the last few days, and I know that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood mentioned it in her comments. I very much note the concerns about the filming of “Mulan” in Xinjiang, and the comments made by the actresses. This has also been brought up by other Members of this House, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), who has mentioned the crediting of the state authorities in the film’s titles. As everyone should know, this Government have said that UK businesses—bearing in mind that Disney is not a British business—operating in the region should be conducting due diligence to ensure that their activities do not support, or risk being seen to support, any human rights violations.

We have seen evidence that Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities are being used as a source of forced labour across China, following release from the internment camps. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood referred to this. If individuals refuse to participate, they and their families are threatened with extrajudicial detention.

Jim Shannon: We have great concerns about forced organ donation, which is carried out on a commercial scale in China against Uyghur Muslims, Christians and Falun Gong. It is time that China caught themselves on. The world has a role to play as well, which is not to send people over for those transplants.

Nigel Adams: It is a great pleasure and a great surprise to be responding to an intervention from the hon. Gentleman. We take those allegations absolutely seriously. We have consulted the World Health Organisation and our international partners. The evidence provides disturbing details about the mistreatment of Falun Gong practitioners, for example, and raises worrying questions about China’s transplant system. We are keeping the matter under review, and welcome any and all new evidence on the issue.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): We have been talking about these issues for so long, yet there does not seem to be international action to deal with them. In Xinjiang

province, people are living in fear, with 1 million people incarcerated and threats of sterilisation, yet we are not taking any action. Does the Minister agree that, as well as taking the action that we can take, we should get the international community behind us so that we can take concerted action to deal with this?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. In recent months, we have seen deeply troubling allegations of forced birth control measures and sterilisation against Uyghur women in Xinjiang. We have also seen reliable reports that Uyghur children are being forcibly separated from their parents and taken to state-run orphanages, where lessons are taught in Mandarin and where political education, for want of a better phrase, is a key part of the curriculum.

Over 1 million Uyghurs, which is more than 10% of the Uyghur population, have been detained in internment camps without trial. Recent reporting, based on analysis of satellite images, suggests that the Chinese authorities continue to construct new internment camps.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving way and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) on securing this debate. The situation in Xinjiang is serious and Members from all parts of the House are talking about it. What is happening in Xinjiang is deeply disturbing, but it replicates what has happened in Tibet over the past few decades. We know the kind of oppression that Buddhist people have faced in Tibet. Does the Minister agree that it would be a welcome first step if the Government added the people from the Chinese Government who are responsible for these crimes to the list for Magnitsky sanctions?

Nigel Adams: I will come on to our approach. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise that point, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood also raised the idea of sanctions. I will address it later in my remarks.

I am slightly concerned about how much time there is left. How long do I have? [*Interruption.*] Until 7.49 pm—jolly good. I had better crack on. I do apologise.

The construction of new internment camps runs counter to the statement of the Chairman of Xinjiang in December that all detainees had, in his words, graduated from the camps. It is not known for how long each individual is detained, what chance they have of release or whether they can appeal their detention. What is clear is that these detentions have split families, left children effectively orphaned and created a culture of fear. Our diplomats visited Xinjiang in November 2019, and their observations supported much of the recent open-source reporting on the region and reports by non-governmental organisations.

China’s initial response to allegations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang was to deny the existence of the camps. After a significant amount of evidence was reported and international attention increased, that position became untenable. It now describes the camps as education and training facilities. China claims that they are part of a legitimate and necessary policy to prevent extremism, and it has repeatedly dismissed international concerns, claiming that the UK and others are politicising matters and interfering in China’s internal affairs.

[Nigel Adams]

We believe that, based on all the available evidence, China's actions in Xinjiang constitute an egregious abuse of human rights and, as a strategy to prevent extremism, are grossly disproportionate and deeply flawed. Untold numbers of innocent citizens have suffered under these policies and will continue to do so unless China implements UN recommendations to close the camps. It must also allow UN observers unfettered access to the region. China is contravening its obligations under the 1948 universal declaration of human rights and its own constitutional provisions on freedom of religion.

The human rights situation in Xinjiang remains a priority concern for me, the Foreign Secretary and the Government as a whole, and as the Foreign Secretary told the House on 20 July, the UK wants a positive relationship with China. He said:

“There is enormous scope for...constructive engagement. There are wide-ranging opportunities, from increasing trade to co-operation in tackling climate change...but as we strive for that positive relationship, we are also clear-sighted about the challenges that lie ahead.”—[*Official Report*, 20 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 1831.]

The Foreign Secretary has underlined our grave concerns regarding the gross and egregious human rights abuses being perpetrated against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, which is why we have repeatedly taken a leading international role in holding China to account for its gross human rights violations in Xinjiang.

Let me come to some of the points that the hon. Lady raised in the time that I have left. She raised the issue of sanctions. We are carefully considering further designations under the global human rights regime, which we introduced in July, and we will keep all evidence and potential listings under close review. I know that this is something that other hon. Members have raised. It is important, though, that sanctions are developed responsibly and on the basis of evidence. It is definitely not appropriate to speculate on who may be designated in the future as to do so may reduce its impact.

Shabana Mahmood: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Adams: I can do, although I may not be able to get round to answering all the questions.

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the Minister for giving way. I just want to say that there is intense interest across the House on the issue of Magnitsky-style sanctions

. Can he perhaps give us an indication of timings of when we might expect the Government to develop their position on sanctions, so that at least we will know when we may get further detail from the Government on this point?

Nigel Adams: What I can tell the hon. Lady—she is very wise to push me on this—is that those sanctions are under constant review and it would be unwise to speculate on this. I am sure that she will understand why at this time.

The hon. Lady mentioned the definition of genocide. She will know that it is our long-standing policy that the determination of genocide should be made only by a competent court rather than by Governments or non-judicial bodies. However, we are closely monitoring those developments. She also mentioned what we have done in terms of holding China to account. As I have said, we have raised this issue now twice in a joint statement at the UN. I do feel that this is a subject that needs to be raised in the House in a longer forum than a half-hour Adjournment debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To conclude, the UK Government strongly condemn the actions of the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang. China is pursuing policies that deny the Uyghur people their right to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of speech and freedom of association. One million Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities have been extrajudicially detained. We have repeatedly urged China to end these disproportionate and damaging policies, and I repeat that call from the Dispatch Box today. It is in the interests of China's international reputation and the long-term stability of Xinjiang that China honours its commitments to its own constitutional provisions on freedom of religion or belief and to the universal declaration of human rights. It is precisely because we respect China as a leading member of the international community that we expect it to live it up to its own international obligations. Its human rights obligations are no exception to that, so we urge the Chinese Government, without further delay, to change course and meet their commitments for every single one of their citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

7.49 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy: w

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green)	Chris Elmore
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting)	Chris Elmore
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston)	Patrick Grady
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South)	Clive Efford
Scott Benton (Blackpool South)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North)	Patrick Grady
Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham)	Chris Elmore
Richard Burgon (Leeds East)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth)	Chris Elmore
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton)	Chris Elmore
Sir William Cash (Stone)	Leo Docherty
Sarah Champion (Rotherham)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife)	Patrick Grady
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North)	Chris Elmore
Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)	Chris Elmore
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde)	Patrick Grady
Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torrif and West Devon)	Alex Burghart
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark)	Chris Elmore
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)	Chris Elmore
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford)	Caroline Nokes
Janet Daby (Lewisham East)	Chris Elmore
Geraint Davies (Swansea West)	Chris Evans
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West)	Chris Elmore
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)	Patrick Grady
Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire)	Stuart Andrew
Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock)	Gagan Mohindra
Philip Dunne (Ludlow)	Jeremy Hunt
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover)	Maria Caulfield

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Farry (North Down)	Wendy Chamberlain
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)	Patrick Grady
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South)	Patrick Grady
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford)	Chris Elmore
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk)	Theo Clarke
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green)	Stuart Andrew
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet)	Caroline Nokes
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)	Chris Elmore
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes)	Patrick Grady
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts)	Patrick Grady
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North)	Mark Fletcher
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish)	Chris Elmore
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham)	Chris Elmore
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston)	Chris Elmore
Mike Hill (Hartlepool)	Chris Elmore
Simon Hoare (North Dorset)	Fay Jones
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West)	Chris Elmore
Adam Holloway (Gravesham)	Maria Caulfield
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley)	Chris Elmore
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Hussain (Bradford East)	Judith Cummins
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central)	Chris Elmore
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North)	Chris Elmore
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck)	Kate Osborne
Chris Law (Dundee West)	Patrick Grady
Clive Lewis (Norwich South)	Rosie Duffield
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale)	Chris Elmore
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking)	Stuart Andrew
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian)	Patrick Grady
Rachael Maskell (York Central)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Karl McCartney (Lincoln)	Stuart Andrew	Lucy Powell (Manchester Central)	Chris Elmore
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East)	Patrick Grady	Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East)	Chris Elmore
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)	Cat Smith	Christina Rees (Neath)	Chris Elmore
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East)	Patrick Grady	Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset)	Stuart Andrew
John Mc Nally (Falkirk)	Patrick Grady	Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge)	Chris Elmore
Ian Mearns (Gateshead)	Chris Elmore	Naz Shah (Bradford West)	Chris Elmore
Mark Menzies (Fylde)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield)	Chris Elmore
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North)	Chris Elmore	Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn)	Chris Elmore
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady	Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale)	Stuart Andrew	Jo Stevens (Cardiff Glasgow Central)	Chris Elmore
James Murray (Ealing North)	Chris Elmore	Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South)	Chris Elmore	Mel Stride (Central Devon)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire)	Patrick Grady	Julian Sturdy (York Outer)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon)	Rebecca Harris	Gareth Thomas (Harrow West)	Chris Elmore
Guy Opperman (Hexham)	Stuart Andrew	Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury)	Charlotte Nichols
Kate Osamor (Edmonton)	Nadia Whittome	Jon Trickett (Hemsworth)	Olivia Blake
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)	Peter Aldous	Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East)	Chris Elmore
		Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire)	Patrick Grady

Written Statements

Wednesday 9 September 2020

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

UK Commonwealth Chair-In-Office Report 2018-2020

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): My hon. Friend the Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, has made the following written statement:

In April 2018, the UK hosted the 25th Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM). The summit was the largest of its kind in our history. Forty-six Heads of Government and 49 Foreign Ministers met and agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth which is fairer, more sustainable, more prosperous, and more secure.

Since then, the UK, as chair-in-office, has continued to work with the three pillars of the Commonwealth—its member states, its Secretariat, and its organisations and networks—to deliver commitments made at CHOGM. This work has been supported by over £500 million of UK-funded projects and programmes under the four themes of the summit.

A detailed report, entitled “Commonwealth Chair-in-Office 2018-20”, will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. This succeeds the interim report which the then Foreign Secretary provided to the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Commons on 15 May 2019. It gives a comprehensive overview of outcomes and achievements against CHOGM 2018 commitments. This statement highlights some of those.

To build a fairer Commonwealth, the UK has worked with member states to support the delivery of 12 years of quality education for all by 2030. The Girl’s Education Challenge, for which the UK announced £212 million funding at CHOGM 2018, is now active in 11 Commonwealth countries, working to ensure marginalised girls have access to quality education. On inclusive and accountable democracy and promotion of human rights, the UK has supported Commonwealth secretariat election observation missions to eight Commonwealth countries, a number of which have since undertaken electoral reform. In Geneva, UK-funded human rights and trade advisers have supported Commonwealth small states to engage more effectively with international human rights and trade mechanisms. The UK-funded Equality and Justice Alliance has provided support to six Commonwealth countries to repeal or reform outdated legislation which discriminates against, or fails to protect, women, girls and LGBT communities.

To build a more sustainable Commonwealth, the UK has continued to champion the Commonwealth Blue Charter launched at CHOGM18. The “Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance”, co-led by the UK and Vanuatu, now has 34 members, which have committed to tackle marine plastic pollution. The UK-funded extension of the Commonwealth Marine Economies programme has supported 17 small island developing states to further develop sustainable and diverse marine economies. On climate change, the UK has co-funded a centre of excellence on nationally determined contributions based in Fiji, which is now working with 10 Commonwealth Pacific countries on their plans to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

To build a more prosperous Commonwealth, the UK has continued to be an advocate for intra-Commonwealth trade and has facilitated the delivery of the Commonwealth connectivity agenda. The UK has co-led with South Africa work on digital connectivity, and supported Barbados as the lead on regularly connectivity. The UK-funded trade facilitation programme has

been working with 18 priority countries to adopt more efficient customs procedures. The UK-funded Commonwealth standards network now comprises the national standards bodies of 50 Commonwealth countries, supporting the effective implementation of international standards which increase opportunities for trade. Gender equality has also been at the forefront of our Commonwealth prosperity work: over 3,000 women-owned businesses have so far been supported to enhance their ability to trade; an extension of this programme was announced by the International Development Secretary in January.

To build a more secure Commonwealth, we have prioritised implementation of the Commonwealth cyber declaration, helping member states to enhance their cyber-security capacity. Thirty-eight out of 54 countries have now completed national cyber-security capacity reviews—a cornerstone commitment of the declaration’s implementation plan. Thirteen of these reviews have been completed since CHOGM 2018, of which seven were funded by the UK. We have worked with Commonwealth partners to apply and strengthen legislation on modern slavery and human trafficking. In July 2019, with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UK funding, Malawi launched four landmark regulations on human trafficking and labour protection.

Following the postponement of CHOGM 2020, we look forward to the gathering of the Commonwealth family in Kigali next year. In the meantime, the UK will continue to serve the Commonwealth family as chair-in-office. In that role, we were pleased to facilitate agreement of a comprehensive statement issued by Commonwealth leaders on 16 July 2020, setting out their commitment to work collectively with international partners on the full range of responses required to mitigate the many adverse impacts of COVID-19, and to ensure that no one will be left behind.

[HCWS441]

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Subsidy Control Regime

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Alok Sharma): I am today updating Parliament on Government plans for a subsidy control regime to replace the EU state aid rules at the end of the transition period on 31 December this year.

From 1 January, the Government will follow the World Trade Organisation rules for subsidy control. These are the internationally recognised common standard for subsidies. The rules apply to goods, not services. They ban subsidies that are dependent on either how much a company exports to other countries or the use of domestic goods over imports. For all other subsidies, they provide a mechanism to resolve disputes between countries. These rules are designed to facilitate an effective international trading system and are followed by the vast majority of countries.

Before the end of this year, the Government will publish guidance for UK public authorities to explain these rules and any related commitments the Government have agreed in free trade agreements.

The Government will also publish a consultation in the coming months on whether we should go further than those existing commitments, including whether legislation is necessary. As our approach will affect businesses and all public authorities that grant subsidies with taxpayers’ money, including the devolved Administrations, we will take the necessary time to listen closely to all those voices and to create a system that promotes a competitive and dynamic economy throughout the UK.

We will shortly lay secondary legislation to remove redundant EU state aid rules from the domestic statute book at the end of the transition period. This will provide the necessary legal certainty for businesses.

The UK Internal Market Bill, which I am introducing into Parliament today, will set out that the UK Parliament alone should legislate for the regulation of subsidies, and will ensure that there is no confusion or ambiguity in UK law about the interpretation of the state aid elements in the Northern Ireland protocol.

As regards this Government substantive approach, one of the benefits of having left the EU is that we have the opportunity to design our own subsidy control regime, in a way that works for the UK economy. The EU's state aid system is designed for the particular circumstances of the EU, in which it is the responsibility of the Commission, as an independent authority, to police against subsidies distorting competition between EU member states within the single market. This approach is not suitable for the UK in the future and indeed their particular approach has not been followed in other advanced economies.

We are very clear nevertheless that we do not intend to return to the 1970s approach of Government trying to run the economy or bailing out unsustainable companies. We do not believe that the Government of a modern, competitive market economy should stand in the way or prevent adjustment to underlying market conditions. That is and will remain our guiding philosophy.

Equally, just as other countries do, the UK will need a modern system for supporting businesses to grow and thrive in a way that suits our interests and is consistent with a dynamic and competitive economy. As we rebuild and recover from covid, and given the broader uncertainty in the economic environment as a result, we must also maintain flexibility to support and bolster the UK's strategic interests, and to be able to intervene faster and more easily when it is necessary to do so.

Subsidy control is an important issue in the negotiations on our future relationship with the EU. The Government have always been clear about its position: we are seeking a precedent trade deal, similar to those the EU has previously agreed with countries like Canada. Such free trade agreements do not prescribe the specifics of either party's subsidy control arrangements, but instead provide for transparency in subsidies granted and for appropriate means of settling disputes between them. We have proposed such arrangements to the EU and we believe this is the right way forward. We will not give away our ability to determine our laws and funding arrangements in this area in an international treaty: the UK's subsidy arrangements are a matter for people across the UK and Parliament, now and in the future.

[HCWS443]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Data Strategy

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): I am pleased to inform the House that the Government are today publishing the

UK "National Data Strategy". This framework document sets out the Government's ambitions and global-facing vision for maximising the benefits of the effective and trusted use of data. This publication brings together the UK's ambitions for data within a single, coherent narrative. It also launches a 12-week consultation period.

The "National Data Strategy" aims to place the UK at the heart of the data revolution. It will harness the power of digital technology to drive our recovery from coronavirus—to boost growth and productivity, create new businesses and jobs, improve public services and position the UK at the forefront of the next wave of innovation.

The Government announced they would develop a national data strategy in 2018, as part of their unashamedly pro-tech, pro-innovation approach. The coronavirus pandemic has made that commitment more urgent than ever.

Data has been one of our most important tools in the battle against covid-19. The ability to share information quickly, efficiently and ethically has saved lives, while enabling us to keep the economy going and stay connected with loved ones throughout the pandemic. The strategy aims to build on that high watermark, and free up businesses and other organisations to keep using data to innovate, experiment and fuel a new era of growth.

The strategy proposes five priority missions, where we think we can take action now to have the biggest impact, and captures a further suite of proposed actions that will support delivery. The missions are:

- Unlocking the value of data across the economy.
- Securing a pro-growth and trusted data regime.
- Transforming Government's use of data to drive efficiency and improve public services.
- Ensuring the security and resilience of our data infrastructure.
- Championing the international flow of data.

In order to drive successful implementation, we will develop a monitoring and evaluation process for the strategy. We will provide further details of this monitoring and evaluation process in a future publication. The Government's response to this consultation will be published following the closure of the consultation period.

A copy of this report will be placed in the Library of the House today.

Attachments can also be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-09-09/HCWS442>.

[HCWS442]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Safety: Northpoint Building

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): I am today informing the House of a contingent liability for the Northpoint building for £200,000 to enable them to sign a basic

asset protection agreement (the agreement) with Network Rail and progress remediation. Northpoint is a private residential building in Bromley which, over three years after Grenfell, has unsafe aluminium composite material (ACM) which remains un-remediated. It is our expectation for high-rise buildings with dangerous ACM to start remediation work on site by the end of the year.

The Northpoint building is adjacent to a railway line managed by Network Rail. For remediation construction works to advance, an agreement needs to be signed between Network Rail and the Northpoint Management Company. Northpoint leaseholders are paying significant sums in “Waking Watch” costs for each month the building is not remediated, while the building poses a safety risk. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is funding the remediation of (ACM) cladding at the building through the private sector cladding ACM remediation fund. However, the risks associated with the agreement cannot be covered by the fund. This building is in a unique position, as it

is an unsafe ACM building, over 18 metres, which is adjacent to a railway and managed by a resident management company who require surety for a capped amount of liability. MHCLG will, therefore, underwrite Northpoint Management Company for £200,000 of risk.

MHCLG has undertaken a contingent liability during parliamentary recess. HM Treasury approved this liability before it was activated. The contingent liability was urgent, because it was needed to ensure the remediation of an unsafe building could take place as quickly as possible. This is in line with my Department’s aim to ensure that residents of high-rise residential buildings are safe and feel safe from the risk of fire. The liability is capped at £200,000.

If a Member has any further enquiries by giving notice of a parliamentary question or by otherwise raising the matter in parliament, the Department will be happy to provide a response.

[HCWS444]

Petition

Wednesday 9 September 2020

OBSERVATIONS

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Merger of Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Petition of the residents of the constituency of Glasgow East,

Declares that the proposed merger of the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is a retrograde step that will diminish the UK's respect as a global leader on international development; further declares that the merger is the first clear step in a change of policy, which will inevitably see UK aid explicitly linked to trade rather than being based on need.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to immediately abandon proposals to merge the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Linden, *Official Report*, 8 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 1086.]

[P002587]

Petitions in the same terms were presented by the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson).

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Duddridge):

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office was launched on 2 September 2020 following the Prime Minister's 16 June announcement that the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO) would merge.

The FCDO pursues our national interests and projects the UK as a force for good in the world. We promote the interests of British citizens, safeguard the UK's security, defend our values, reduce poverty and tackle global challenges with our international partners. This is the mission the Foreign Secretary has set out, which will remain central to the new department.

As we have seen with the covid-19 pandemic, the world will become even more complex and competitive, with growing, interconnected challenges and opportunities for the UK. That is why the Prime Minister decided that now is the right time to reform how the Government operates internationally. We need a new all-of-Government approach if we are to secure our values and interests, reduce poverty, confront global challenges and be a stronger force for good in a changing world.

As the PM has said, the new FCDO will put our world-class development programmes at the heart of our foreign policy in a world-leading department. The commitment to spending 0.7 % of our national income on aid is a manifesto commitment and is enshrined in law. This is about maximising the impact of our aid budget to help the world's poorest, while making sure we get the best value for UK taxpayer's money.

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PETITION

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	<i>Col. No.</i>
FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	15P
Merger of Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office	15P

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**not later than
Wednesday 16 September 2020**

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