

**Wednesday
6 January 2021**

**Volume 686
No. 156**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 6 January 2021

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Orders, 4 June and 30 December 2020).

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

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the first item of business, could I thank all the staff of the House Service and the joint departments for their ongoing commitment and hard work to ensure that the House can conduct its business? Due to the current severe public health situation, every effort has been made to enable today's proceedings to take place with the bare minimum level of travel to and attendance at Westminster. I should inform hon. Members that when a speaking limit is in effect for Back Benchers, a countdown clock will be visible on the screens of hon. Members participating virtually and on the screens in the Chamber. Before I call the Prime Minister, I would like to point out that the British Sign Language interpretation of the statement is available to watch on parliamentlive.tv.

Covid-19

11.34 am

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Mr Speaker, I share your gratitude to the House of Commons staff for all their efforts and hard work to allow us to meet today in the way that we are. Before I begin my statement, I would like to say that I know the thoughts of the whole House will be with the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), who is currently in hospital with covid, and we wish her a full and speedy recovery.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about the measures we are taking to defeat this new variant of covid-19, protecting our NHS while it carries out the vaccinations that will finally free us from this wretched virus. There is a fundamental difference between the regulations before the House today and the position we have faced at any previous stage, because we now have the vaccines that are our means of escape, and we will use every available second of the lockdown to place this invisible shield around the elderly and the vulnerable.

Already, with Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca combined, we have immunised over 1.1 million people in England and over 1.3 million in the UK. Our NHS is following the plan drawn up by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which is aimed at saving the most lives in the fastest possible time. Given that the average age of covid fatalities is over 80, it is significant that we have already vaccinated more than 650,000 people in that age group, meaning that within two to three weeks almost one in four of the most vulnerable groups will have a significant degree of immunity. By 15 February,

the NHS is committed to offering a vaccination to everyone in the top four priority groups, including older care home residents and staff, everyone over 70, all frontline NHS and care staff and all those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

In working towards that target, there are already almost 1,000 vaccination centres across the country, including 595 GP-led sites, with a further 180 opening later this week, and 107 hospital sites, with another 100 later this week. Next week we will also have seven vaccination centres opening in places such as sports stadiums and exhibition centres. Pharmacies are already working with GPs to deliver the vaccine in many areas of the country, and I am grateful to Brigadier Prosser, who is leading the efforts of our armed forces in supporting this vaccine roll-out. We have already vaccinated more people in this country than the rest of Europe combined, and we will give the House the maximum possible transparency about our acceleration of this effort, publishing daily updates online from Monday, so that jab by jab hon. Members can scrutinise the progress being made every single day.

Yet as we take this giant leap towards finally overcoming the virus and reclaiming our lives, we have to contend with the new variant, which is between 50% and 70% more contagious. With the old variant, the tiers agreed by the House last month were working. But, alas, this mutation, spreading with frightening ease and speed in spite of the sterling work of the British public, has led to more cases than we have ever seen before—numbers that, alas, cannot be explained away by the meteoric rise in testing. When the Office for National Statistics reports that more than 2% of the population is now infected, and when the number of patients in hospitals in England is now 40% higher than during the first peak in April, it is inescapable that the facts are changing and we must change our response. And so we have no choice but to return to a national lockdown in England, with similar measures being adopted by the devolved Administrations, so that we can control this new variant until we can take the most likely victims out of its path with vaccines.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will open the debate on the full regulations shortly, but the key point, I am afraid, is that once again we are instructing everyone to stay at home, leaving only for limited reasons permitted by law, such as to shop for essentials, to work if people absolutely cannot work from home, to exercise, to seek medical assistance such as getting a covid test or to escape injury or harm, including domestic abuse. We are advising the clinically extremely vulnerable to begin shielding again, and, because we must do everything possible to stop the spread of the disease, we have asked schools and colleges to close their doors to all except vulnerable children and those of critical workers.

I do not think the House will be in any doubt about our determination—my determination—to keep schools open, especially primary schools, for as long as possible, because all the evidence shows that school is the best place for our children. Indeed, all the evidence shows that schools are safe and that the risk posed to children by coronavirus is vanishingly small. For most children, the most dangerous part of going to school, even in the midst of a global pandemic, remains, I am afraid, crossing the road in order to get there. But the data showed, and our scientific advisers agreed, that our

[*The Prime Minister*]

efforts to contain the spread of this new variant would not be sufficient if schools continued to act as a vector, or potential vector, for spreading the virus between households.

I know the whole House will join me in paying tribute to all the teachers, pupils and parents who are now making the rapid move to remote learning. We will do everything possible to support that process, building on the 560,000 laptops and tablets provided last year, with over 50,000 delivered to schools on Monday and more than 100,000 being delivered in total during the first week of term. We have partnered with some of the UK's leading mobile operators to provide free mobile data to disadvantaged families to support access to education resources, and I am very grateful to EE, Three, Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin Mobile and Vodafone for supporting this offer.

Oak National Academy will continue to provide video lessons, and it is very good news that the BBC is launching the biggest education programme in its history, with both primary and secondary school programmes across its platforms. We recognise it will not be possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal, and the Education Secretary will make a statement shortly.

I know many people will ask whether the decision on schools could have been reached sooner, and the answer is that we have been doing everything in our power to keep them open, because children's education is too vital and their futures too precious to be disrupted until every other avenue, every other option, has been closed off and every other course of action has been taken. That is why schools were the very last thing to close, as I have long promised they would be. When we begin to move out of lockdown, I promise that they will be the very first things to reopen. That moment may come after the February half-term, although we should remain extremely cautious about the timetable ahead.

As was the case last spring, our emergence from the lockdown cocoon will be not a big bang but a gradual unwrapping. That is why the legislation this House will vote on later today runs until 31 March, not because we expect the full national lockdown to continue until then, but to allow a steady, controlled and evidence-led move down through the tiers on a regional basis, carefully and brick by brick, as it were, breaking free of our confinement, but without risking the hard-won gains that our protections have given us.

These restrictions will be kept under continuous review, with a statutory requirement to review them every two weeks and a legal obligation to remove them if they are no longer deemed necessary to limit the transmission of the virus. For as long as restrictions are in place we will continue to support everyone affected by them, from the continued provision of free school meals to the £4.6 billion of additional assistance for our retail, hospitality and leisure sectors announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor yesterday.

We are in a tough final stretch, made only tougher by the new variant, but this country will come together. The miracle of scientific endeavour, much of it right here in the UK, has given us not only sight of the finish line but a clear route to get there. After the marathon of last year, we are indeed now in a sprint—a race to

vaccinate the vulnerable faster than the virus can reach them, and every needle in every arm makes a difference. As I say, we are already vaccinating faster than every comparable country, and that rate I hope will only increase, but if we are going to win this race for our population, we have to give our army of vaccinators the biggest head start we possibly can and that is why, to do that, we must once again stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. I commend this statement to the House.

11.45 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement and for his telephone call on Monday to update me. Can I also thank him for his kind words about my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens)? She is still in hospital, but I am happy to say that she is now improving. I also want to thank everybody in our NHS and on the frontline for all the work they are doing at the moment in the most stressful of circumstances.

The situation we face is clearly very serious, perhaps the darkest moment of the pandemic. The virus is out of control, over 1 million people in England now have covid, the number of hospital admissions is rising and, tragically, so are the numbers of people dying. It is only the early days of January, and the NHS is under huge strain. In those circumstances, tougher restrictions are necessary. We will support them, we will vote for them and we urge everybody to comply with the new rules: stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.

But this is not just bad luck and it is not inevitable; it follows a pattern. In the first wave of the pandemic, the Government were repeatedly too slow to act, and we ended 2020 with one of the highest death tolls in Europe and the worst hit economy of the major economies. In the early summer, a Government report called "Preparing for a challenging winter" warned of the risk of a second wave, of the virus mutating and of the NHS being overwhelmed. It set out the preparations the Government needed to take, and I put that report to the Prime Minister at PMQs in July. Throughout the autumn, track and trace did not work. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies advised a circuit break in September, but the Prime Minister delayed for weeks before acting. We had a tiered system that did not work, and then we had the debacle of the delayed decision to change the rules on mixing at Christmas. The most recent advice about the situation we are now in was given on 22 December, but no action was taken for two weeks until Monday of this week.

These are the decisions that have led us to the position we are now in. The vaccine is now the only way out, and we must all support the national effort to get it rolled out as quickly as possible. We will do whatever we can to support the Government on this. We were the first country to get the vaccine. Let us be the first country to roll out that vaccine programme. But we need a plan to work to. The Prime Minister has given some indication in the last few days, but can he tell the House exactly what the plan is? Can the NHS deliver 2 million vaccines a week? I think it can and I hope it can, but does it have the resources and support to do so? We will support that, of course. Will there be sufficient doses available week on week to get us to the 14 million doses by mid-February? What can we do to help? It is vital that

that happens. I am glad to hear that high street pharmacies will be helping. Can we use volunteers in support of this national effort?

Let me turn to financial support. Yesterday's announcement will help, but the British Chambers of Commerce and others have already warned that it is not enough. There are big gaps and big questions. First, why is there still nothing to help the 3 million self-employed who have been excluded from the very start? That was unfair in March of last year and it was even more unfair in the autumn. It is totally unforgivable now. It may well be a whole year that that group will have gone without any meaningful support. That gap needs to be plugged.

Secondly, will the Prime Minister drop his plan to cut universal credit by £20 a week? That needs to be done now, and we will support it. Will he immediately extend the eviction ban? That is due to run out in five days' time now, just as we are going into this new phase. Thirdly, will he address the obvious issues with financial support for those required to isolate, including statutory sick pay and support for local councils? Will the Prime Minister finally recognise that now is the worst possible time to freeze pay for our key workers?

We all recognise the huge damage that closing schools will cause for many children and families, but the Prime Minister knew that closures might be necessary, so there should have been a contingency plan. Up to 1.8 million children do not have access to a home computer and 900,000 children live in households that rely on mobile internet connections. Can the Prime Minister tell us when the Government are going to get the laptops to those who need them? He has spoken about the 50,000 delivered and the 100,000 more, but 1.8 million children do not have access to a home computer, so real urgency is needed as we go into the coming weeks. I welcome what the Prime Minister said about telecoms companies cutting the cost of online learning. It is vital that they do so. I am assuming that will happen straightaway, because we cannot delay.

Will the Prime Minister be straight about what will happen with exams this year? We cannot leave this until months down the line. That is a pressing question, in particular for those who are due to take BTEC exams in the next few days. Surely they must just be cancelled. Some leadership on this is desperately needed.

Next is our borders. The Prime Minister knows there is real concern about the rapid transmission of this disease. New strains are being detected in South Africa, Denmark and elsewhere. The quarantine system is not working. The Prime Minister said yesterday that we will be bringing in extra measures at the border. I have to ask why those measures have not already been introduced. They have been briefed to the media for days, but nothing has happened.

This is the third time the country has been asked to close its doors; we need to make sure it is the last. We will support the Prime Minister and the Government in these measures. We will carry the message and do whatever is asked of us, but we will demand that the Prime Minister keeps his side of the bargain and uses this latest lockdown to support families, protect businesses and get the vaccine rolled out as quickly and safely as possible.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who made some sensible points, in addition to some slightly party political ones. On the political points,

it is worth remembering that the waves of coronavirus we have seen across western Europe in the last few weeks we are also seeing here, with the additional pressure of the new variant of the virus. Most people understand that.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about support for the self-employed. We have already given, I think, £13.7 billion to help the self-employed in particular, as part of a massive package of support for jobs and livelihoods across the whole of the UK totalling £260 billion. We will continue to support families through universal credit; as he knows, there has been an uplift of £1,000 at least until April. The eviction ban is under review. There has been an above-inflation pay increase for public sector workers; in particular, nurses have had a 12.8% increase over the last few years.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about laptops and devices, and quoted a figure of 50,000. In fact, 560,000 have gone to schools. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will make a statement later about what we will do to support teachers and pupils. I repeat my immense thanks to them and to families who are now working so hard in unexpected circumstances to teach kids at home. I also thank the mobile companies and the BBC for what they are doing to assist. The House will hear more later about the BTEC exams. Obviously, we must be fair to those who are taking BTECs, and we appreciate the hard work they have done.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked a good question about borders. It is vital that we protect our borders and protect this country from the readmission of the virus from overseas. That is why we took tough action in respect of South Africa when the new variant became apparent there and we will continue to take whatever action is necessary to protect this country from the readmission of the virus.

I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for supporting the vaccination programme. I must say that I do remember the derision with which he attacked the vaccine taskforce and the lengths it went to to secure huge supplies.

Keir Starmer *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: I remember it well: it was at Prime Minister's questions, Mr Speaker. It would be a good thing if the right hon. and learned Gentleman could continue to keep up that spirit. Let me point out that not only did this country devise the first effective treatment of covid, secure the first stage 3 approval of a vaccine, and become the first to produce a vaccine that could be used at fridge temperature to great value to humanity across the world, but, Mr Speaker, as I stand before you today, it has vaccinated more people than the rest of Europe combined. It would be good to hear that from the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con) [V]: The Prime Minister is absolutely right to be taking the steps needed to protect the NHS at this very difficult time and I am very grateful for the work being done by my local Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHSTrust team. The Prime Minister is also only too well aware that thousands of businesses, many of which fall outside the scope of Government support, face

[Chris Grayling]

desperate times. Many of them support the Prime Minister in what he is doing but are very concerned that this House will not have an opportunity to take a further view on these regulations until the end of March. Will he give the House today an undertaking that he will personally lead a debate before the February half-term on progress towards reducing restrictions and that he will not wait until the end of March if it is possible to do so without overwhelming the NHS?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that this House should, and, I think, will inevitably, be given an opportunity to debate and discuss these issues at a national level before the end of March, and I hope substantially before the end of March. What we are trying to do, as he knows, is to vaccinate the first four cohorts in the JCVI list by the middle of February. If we can do that, if there is no new mutation in the virus, and if the vaccine programme proceeds as planned, then there will be substantial opportunities for relaxing the restrictions. Schools will be our priority, as I have said, and I have no doubt that the House will be consulted, as you would expect, Mr Speaker.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) [V]: Mr Speaker, may I take the opportunity to wish you, your colleagues and members of staff a good new year? I also send my best wishes for a speedy recovery to the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens).

People across these islands have entered into this new year feeling a mix of hope and fear: hope that the vaccine will finally end this terrible pandemic, but real fear, too, about the increased cases, the hospital admissions and, sadly, the lives lost. As our First Minister explained on Monday, this phase of the pandemic is now a race: a race to suppress the virus and a race to vaccinate our most vulnerable. If we are asking people for one last effort, if we are asking them to endure weeks of lockdown, then they need more clarity, they need protection and they need financial support. Most importantly, the UK Government have to act in a timely manner. It was said of the French designer, Pierre Cardin, that he was one step ahead of tomorrow. Nobody would say that this Prime Minister is one step ahead of tomorrow, or acts and shows leadership in dealing with this health pandemic. He was slow to act in the spring of 2020, slow in the autumn, and here again reacts after the events to the threats that we all face.

I want to ask the Prime Minister four specific questions on vaccines, on travel and on financial support, and I would appreciate it if he answered each of them not just for us, but for all the public who want answers. First, on the vaccine, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said last month that the only thing that will solve the issue of vaccine availability are the “fill and finish” supplies, such as specialised vials. Can the Prime Minister tell us exactly what actions are being taken to ramp up these supplies?

On travel, is the Prime Minister prepared to learn from his Government’s past mistakes? Will he consider closing the UK border to all but essential travel to prevent new strains of the virus from spreading?

On support for the self-employed, why did the Chancellor again decide yesterday to exclude the 3 million freelancers and self-employed who have not received a penny of

financial support since the start of this crisis? They are desperate and they need help, and they expect the Prime Minister to respond today.

Finally, on financial support for Scottish businesses, yesterday morning the Scottish Conservatives were busy making memes about an extra £375 million of Treasury support that they said was on its way to Scotland. Can the Prime Minister explain to Scottish businesses why, by the end of the day, it turned out there was no new money at all? Can the Prime Minister now give a personal commitment that the Scottish Government will get this money—this new money—for businesses in Scotland?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. On his questions about the self-employed, we have supplied, as I said to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), £13.7 billion already. We will continue to support people in any way that we can with a multitude of grants and loans already totalling, I think, about £260 billion, as I have said. The Barnett consequential for Scotland from the new money will of course be passed on. As I said just now, we will make sure that we protect our borders from the readmission of the virus. He has seen what we did already in the case of the South African strain, and we will bring forward further measures to stop the readmission of the virus.

But I have to say that the general tenor of the right hon. Gentleman’s questions seemed to ignore the fact that, I am delighted to say, the whole of the UK has benefited massively from the natural strength of the UK economy and the ability of the UK Treasury to make these commitments, and the mere fact that Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and every part of the United Kingdom has received the vaccine is entirely thanks to our national NHS.

Keir Starmer *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: I make common ground with the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras: it is thanks to our United Kingdom NHS, and thanks to the strength of UK companies, that we are able to distribute a life-saving vaccine across the whole of our country. I think that is a point that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) might bear in mind.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con) [V]: Most of us do appreciate the difficulty of the judgments my right hon. Friend is having to make, so I thank him, in particular, for the access he has given Members of this House to the Government’s medical and scientific advisers so that we can understand them better. Does he agree that while it is important that everyone understands the reasons why we have gone into a national lockdown, it is just as important that everyone understands the circumstances that will allow us to leave it? Can I therefore ask him—although I appreciate that he cannot yet give a date—to be more definitive that when a specific point has been reached in the vaccination of priority groups, with the consequent reduction in the risks of hospitalisations and deaths, then the balance of risk between health, on the one hand, and livelihoods and learning, on the other, will be significantly different, and restrictions can be lifted?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend makes a very important point that I know will be on the minds of everybody in the House, and everybody watching this can understand now the kernel of the debate. I understand why he wants a more detailed timeline; I know that colleagues across the House would love to have a more detailed timeline. Let me try to repeat what I can most sensibly say today. If our understanding of the virus does not change dramatically again as it has, and if the vaccines take effect in the way that we think that they will and the roll-out continues to be successful, and above all, obviously, if everybody continues to play their part in following this lockdown and following the guidance to stay home, protect the NHS and save lives, then, clearly, around about the middle of February, 15 February, when we have taken those four cohorts and immunised them, or shortly thereafter, there will be substantial opportunities to relax the restrictions that we currently face—if all those conditions are satisfied. Schools will clearly be the priority, and the whole matter will quite properly be debated by this House of Commons.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) [V]: People are afraid and anxious. This lockdown should have come sooner, but we must all support it now and do all we can to vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible. But we also need more action to save people's jobs, their businesses and their livelihoods. Small businesses have shown incredible resilience, but now they worry whether they can survive another lockdown. Three million people—most of them self-employed—have been excluded from Government support since the start, and the Prime Minister's answers today have not addressed that. We must leave no one behind as we tackle this terrible virus. Employers and workers need support and certainty, and they need it now, so will the Prime Minister instruct the Chancellor to publish an emergency Budget and to include a business rates holiday next year, an extension to furlough until at least the summer and support for every self-employed person in the UK, including those he has so far so unfairly excluded?

The Prime Minister: There will be a Budget in the course of the next few weeks and months, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is aware. He is also aware that the Government have made substantial cuts to business rates and to VAT and have produced a package of £260 billion of support for businesses, jobs and livelihoods across the UK, and I repeat the points that I have made about the self-employed. I have massive sympathy with everybody who is facing a tough time at the moment. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman very much in what he said about the resilience of our businesses—I think they are showing fantastic resilience under a huge amount of pressure—but the best way to help them now is for us to follow this latest lockdown, get that vaccine rolled out and get our economy moving again in the way that we all want to. The faster we can get through this period, the bigger the bounce back will be, and I am confident that it will be a very substantial bounce back indeed.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con) [V]: Stoke-on-Trent is keen to play our part in the national vaccination programme. Our mass vaccination centre is ready and able to serve the residents of Stoke-on-Trent and north

Staffordshire. However, it has not been scheduled to go live before the end of January. Will the Prime Minister ask the Health Secretary whether that can be expedited if the supply of vaccines is available earlier?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I will ask the Minister to write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC) [V]: I would also like to send best wishes to the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) and sincere thanks to everybody working on the frontline of the NHS.

A Conservative party newsletter recently told party members to say

“the first thing that comes into your head”

even if it is “nonsense”. It appears that the Chancellor took on board that advice yesterday when he unwrapped £227 million of already announced funding as new for Wales. This is, and I choose my words with extreme restraint, wilful misrepresentation, which deliberately misinforms desperate businesses in Wales. Will the Prime Minister apologise on behalf of his Chancellor and recognise that if Welsh covid measures are to be effective, there is an urgent need to lift the financial borrowing constraints imposed on Wales by Westminster?

The Prime Minister: I am sure the right hon. Lady, for whom I have a keen regard, would not wish to accuse the Chancellor of wilful misrepresentation, Mr Speaker. All the cash that we have announced, obviously, is passported on; the important thing is that the Labour Government in Wales spend it sensibly. The UK Government are here to support businesses, jobs and livelihoods across the whole of the UK.

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just say, while the right hon. Lady is on the line, that I am not over-happy with “wilful”? I think we have to think about the language we use within the Chamber. These times are unprecedented, but I really do think Members ought to be careful with the language they use.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con) [V]: I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. I know he has had to take difficult decisions, and I understand why he has had to and I fully support him. I am deeply concerned, however, about the impact of covid-19 and lockdown on our children and on our future generations, especially those children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Does my right hon. Friend share those concerns and will he work with schools, especially the ones in my constituency, to make sure that they get the IT support and laptops that they need, so that we leave no child behind?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that question and that is why we are putting so much cash—£300 million—in to help schools and young people continue with their education online. We have discussed already the role of the BBC, mobile phone companies and internet providers in helping as well, and the 560,000 devices that we have already delivered as part of a programme of a million for the children that need them most—laptops, computers and other devices.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) [V]: It is extraordinary that, yet again, the Prime Minister did not say a word about the Government's test, trace, isolate and support system. Vaccination and lockdown are essential tools but they do not replace the need to trace infections and isolate cases to help break the chain of transmission. It is an enduring scandal that we still do not have an effective contact tracing system, despite a whopping £22 billion being thrown at private companies and consultants, so will the Prime Minister fix it, including by ensuring that people can afford to self-isolate if they have to? Will he increase statutory sick pay and widen the eligibility criteria so that the nearly 2 million people locked out of it can finally benefit? Will he increase the value of support payments and offer hotel accommodation if people need it?

The Prime Minister: We have increased the support for those who are self-isolating and, obviously, have increased the penalties for those who fail to do so when they are asked to by Test and Trace. It is an absolutely vital part of our fight against the disease. What it has done, which I think people do not appreciate, is allow this country to have an incredibly detailed understanding of where the disease is and what kind of disease we are fighting. The UK is actually conducting 47% of all the genomic tests in the world to establish what is going on with the coronavirus and all its mutations, so NHS Test and Trace is a remarkable advance. Is it perfect? Of course it is not, but it is also indispensable to our fight against the disease, as is, of course, people's self-isolation when they are contacted—you must self-isolate.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I pay tribute to everybody at Stepping Hill Hospital and GPs across Stockport for their superb efforts in rolling out the vaccine: all care home residents and those over the age of 80 will have received at least their first jab by 15 January. Will the Prime Minister ensure that he blasts away any bureaucratic barriers that are getting in the way and ensure that vital vials and other such equipment are in abundant supply, because, frankly, there will be no excuses for any hindrance to this supreme national effort?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks entirely for me in what he says about the need to blast away bureaucratic obstructions. I am proud to say, at the moment, that we have vaccinated more than any other country in Europe and, indeed, more than every country in Europe put together, but that pace must not only be kept up; it must now, as the whole House can see—because everybody can do the maths—be accelerated, and we will be saying more about how we propose to do that.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Prime Minister, for the third time in nine months, the Government have introduced a damaging lockdown policy, which we know will cause thousands of businesses to go bankrupt, cost hundreds of thousands of jobs, damage children's education, lead the national debt to soar and remove basic liberties from people that we expect in a free democracy, all because the Government say, and their justification is, that we need to suppress the virus, protect the national health service and protect the vulnerable. Since those objectives were not achieved by the first two lockdowns, why does the Prime Minister believe that they will be

achieved this time? Is there some firm evidence for it or are the Government just hoping that it will be third time lucky?

The Prime Minister: I do not think anybody in this House takes any pleasure or satisfaction whatever in what we are being forced to do, but the right hon. Gentleman should know that lockdowns like this are being conducted and have been conducted across much of western Europe, basically because we all face the same phenomenon and because we have to protect our NHS and stop it being overwhelmed. That is what the previous lockdowns did: they stopped the NHS being overtopped by the waves of the pandemic. Had that happened, the death toll would have been unconscionable. That is why, when the right hon. Gentleman looks at what his constituents and the public think, he will see that they know overwhelmingly that we are right to protect them, protect the NHS and save lives.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I asked the people of Ipswich to come up with ideas for this question and what I decided to go for was the importance of grassroots sports clubs in Ipswich, particularly boxing clubs. In the summer, I visited Patrick's Boxing Club, which got help in the first lockdown but at the moment is struggling. It has still got fixed costs—rent, utility bills—that add to the burden. There is also Unity FC and Ipswich Kick Boxing Academy, which has a fantastic "Jab Not Stab" scheme to help combat crime and antisocial behaviour. Will the Prime Minister promise me that, when he considers any further support for these crucial clubs, which are based in the most deprived parts of the town that I have the honour of representing, he takes into account not just the benefits for physical and mental health, but the key role they play in keeping kids on the straight and narrow, out of harm and out of trouble, and in making a fantastic contribution to our wonderful town?

The Prime Minister: Ipswich will benefit from not just kickboxing jabs, but vaccination jabs. That will enable us to get through this crisis all the faster. I am delighted by what my hon. Friend says, but we are supporting clubs such as the one he so eloquently describes by an extra £210 million to help wonderful community sports institutions such as Ipswich Kick Boxing Academy throughout the pandemic.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) [V]: Does the Prime Minister appreciate that the campaign against covid does not fall equally on everyone in our society? For many, this third lockdown is one of devastating fear: of mental ill health, isolation, job loss, poverty, loss of their place of residence, and stress about the future. Will he at the very least ensure that statutory sick pay is increased to £320 a week, that universal credit is not cut, and that the protection of private tenants continues after the end of the lockdown? Above all else, will he ensure that every child in every school and every student has the chance to learn online by provision of a computer and, yes, free universal broadband?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who seems to recapitulate what the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras has already asked me, as though he were still doing his old job. I do

not want to repeat all the points that I made. Obviously, we are investing heavily to support jobs and livelihoods throughout the country. On mental health, the right hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the risk of increased suffering caused by the privations of lockdown. That is why we are investing hugely in mental health provision—another £13 billion, plus £18 million in support for our wonderful mental health charities across the country.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Pubs cannot compete with supermarkets for off-sales. Even within a household, people cannot play tennis or golf. Notwithstanding the assault on liberty and livelihoods, why are the regulations pervaded by a pettifogging malice?

The Prime Minister: Pettifogging, yes; malicious, no. I am going to have to take the hit here. The intention is to stop the virus, protect the NHS and save lives. To do that, we have to engage in restricting transmission between human beings. I know that my right hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Members will find all sorts of reasons to oppose all sorts of restrictions, but in the end, we have to look at the overall budget of risk caused by transmission between members of the human race, and that is what we are trying to restrict.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I have just come from a call with the big business organisations. I know that the Prime Minister is meeting them later, so let me give him the heads-up. Businesses are on their knees. It has been a year of lost trade and mounting debt. Cash grants are welcome, but they are not enough, and most businesses will not get them anyway. What they desperately want is not more sticking plasters but a proper long-term plan to help them survive to the spring and then thrive beyond it. It cannot wait until the Budget, because many will be bust by then, so will the Prime Minister urgently tell his Chancellor to come to the House with a proper plan for jobs and businesses? I say to him, please do not insult us by re-rehearsing what he has already done, because honestly, it is just not enough.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady asks for a timetable, as indeed have many colleagues on both sides of the House. Business rightly wants as much certainty as possible. What we have now, for the first time since this pandemic began, is clear sight of the end and the way to the end. We have set a deadline, as she knows, of the middle of February—15 February—to vaccinate the first four cohorts. I am sure she will appreciate that those groups comprise the overwhelming majority of those who have already, alas, died from covid. She will readily appreciate the implications of that for our ability to reopen our economy, and she will also understand, I hope, the implications that that could have, if all the conditions that I have already described are satisfied, for businesses across the country. I do believe that there are real grounds now for them to be very hopeful and very confident about the months ahead.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): We have all seen the data, and people—normal people—do understand the need for this lockdown, but like so many Members on both sides of the House, I worry about our

economy, jobs, businesses, mental health and children's educational attainment. Perhaps the Prime Minister could tell us how normal people—people in Milton Keynes and beyond—will know that things are getting better.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend; he is absolutely right about people's feelings across the whole country. They want a sense of when things are going to get better, and I have tried to give that today. I really think that with the pace of the vaccine roll-out, if it can accelerate in the way that I think everybody would want, we will reach an important moment on 15 February. As I have said many times in this House, I do believe things will be much better by the spring.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab) [V]: Special schools were not mentioned in the Prime Minister's statement, but they will remain open over the course of lockdown. Will he please advise the House what advice and support they have received to stay open safely for the often vulnerable young people who need them, and whether special educational needs school staff, students and their parents will be given priority access to the vaccine to keep them safe?

The Prime Minister: I thank SEN schools, their staff, parents and pupils for everything that they are doing—and all the work that is being done, by the way, by teachers across the country to continue to look after the children of key workers and vulnerable kids. The point that the hon. Lady makes about vaccination is one that many colleagues across the House have made, bringing forward the case for this or that group. It is vital that we as politicians leave that to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which is driven by a desire to stamp out the disease as fast as possible and to reduce mortality.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con) [V]: I fully support these measures and recognise how difficult the decisions are. Before Christmas, we were told that testing was happening at the Public Health England facility at Porton Down that would tell us within a couple of weeks whether the vaccines worked against the new strain. Would the Prime Minister update us on the latest on that, and if there is a glitch with the vaccine programme, are we implementing a plan B involving, for example, mass testing of high-transmission areas, deprived communities and so on so that we can properly isolate as quickly as possible anyone who could transmit the virus?

The Prime Minister: There is no reason to think that any new strain of the virus is vaccine resistant. On my right hon. Friend's point about testing, I can say that mass lateral flow testing in communities across the country will continue to be rolled out, because we still believe in its usefulness.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab) [V]: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, whether it is on exams, financial support or the measures on test and trace, the Government seem to sit and wait for the situation to reach boiling point before they act. However, throughout the pandemic, most other Governments have acted early and have clearly communicated contingency plans. Will the Prime

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

Minister acknowledge that the problem is his wait-and-see leadership strategy, which he needs urgently to revise so that the Government can get a grip?

The Prime Minister: I thought I understood the hon. Lady to be attacking the Government's wait-and-see position on the vaccines, but I really do not think that anyone in their right mind could accuse us of moving too slowly in that respect. Indeed, she might add to her script that this country has vaccinated more than all the countries in Europe put together.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's assurance that the House will be consulted on the lifting of restrictions, should that be possible, before the end of March. Many of us are concerned about being asked to approve a lockdown that could continue until 31 March. Can I ask him to reconsider and offer the House a vote at the end of January and at the end of February as well, not on whether to lift restrictions but on whether to continue them or not?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, and repeat what I have said several times. I cannot believe that it will be until the end of March that the House has to wait before having a new vote and a new discussion on the measures that we have to take.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: We have had Christmas on, Christmas off; schools in, schools out; eat out to help out; and stay at home. It is simply impossible to decipher the Prime Minister's covid strategy. Given that the efficacy of the vaccines against emerging strains is not yet known, can he assure us that his strategy is not based on vaccines alone? To get our schools back, can he assure us that teachers will be a priority for vaccines, and can he detail his long-term covid exit strategy?

The Prime Minister: Possibly the best thing I can say in answer to that question is to repeat—and it is very, very important to repeat this—that we have no evidence that any strain of the virus is vaccine resistant. It is very important that the hon. Lady should express full confidence in the vaccine programme, which will be indispensable to our way out of this crisis.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): Educating our children and giving them the best possible start in life is one of society's most important jobs, and I know that the Prime Minister has not taken the decision to close our schools lightly. Yesterday, I spoke to the director of children's services at Durham County Council about ensuring that Bishop Auckland's pupils can still access learning. On that, can the Prime Minister confirm that the Government will do everything in their power to ensure that every child across the country has access to high-quality remote education during the closures?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her campaigning for education in Bishop Auckland, and I repeat what I have already said today about everything that we are doing to roll out support to help remote learning of all kinds. It is a tough time for children,

teachers and parents, but a huge amount is being done to supply remote devices and encourage remote learning of all kinds.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Given the examples of elections being held in other countries, including the elections held overnight in Georgia, can the Prime Minister confirm that it is his intention that the local elections in 2021 will go ahead as scheduled on 6 May, and will not be delayed any further?

The Prime Minister: Of course; that is what the law provides for, although we will obviously have to keep it under review.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on getting a world-leading vaccine strategy going? Clearly, its success will depend on the availability of both the vaccine and the number of staff who can administer it. As a qualified but non-practising doctor, I have volunteered to help with the scheme, and urge others to do the same. But can I ask the Prime Minister why, in order to give a simple covid jab, I have been required to complete courses on conflict resolution; equality, diversity and human rights; moving and handling loads; and preventing radicalisation? I urge him to get the NHS and the Department of Health to drop the bureaucracy, drop the political correctness, and do all they can actually to get the vaccine programme moving.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend. I can tell him that I was fit to be tied when I read several days ago an account of what he has described. I am assured by my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary that all such obstacles and all such pointless pettifoggery have been removed. There should be absolutely nothing to stop my right hon. Friend volunteering to be a vaccinator.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab) [V]: The decision to close schools this week was inevitable, but it will have a detrimental effect on many children, especially the most disadvantaged. School staff across Blaydon, such as those at Crookhill Primary School in my constituency, are responding brilliantly to the challenge, but it is just not the same for children as being in school. Will the Prime Minister commit now to working with teachers, trade unions and others to plan how we can level up the educational and life chances of our disadvantaged pupils post covid?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed; I will. We must tackle the impact of differential learning that the last 12 months have had. We will be looking in particular at the advantages of one-to-one tuition, which could be transformational—not just for kids who are falling behind, but for all kids.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con) [V]: Without question, one of the most important things that this Government did during the first lockdown was to strengthen universal credit. That has been a lifeline, not just for people who have lost their jobs, but for people who have kept going out to work during this pandemic—people on low wages, including in retail delivery jobs and cleaning jobs. Our plan is still to cut

that support by £20 per week in less than three months' time. I know that the Prime Minister understands this issue, but does he agree that now is really not the moment to weaken our welfare safety net, and that the right thing to do is to give families on low incomes greater security for the year ahead by extending support, rather than cutting it?

The Prime Minister: I fully understand the point that my right hon. Friend makes. All I will say is that we will of course keep this under review.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister will have heard the concern across the House for the 3 million British taxpayers who have been excluded from support since March last year. They have had a terrible Christmas and new year, and are looking at another three months with no support at all. It is no surprise that the Chancellor's 92nd financial statement on Twitter felt like a kick in the teeth to those people with nothing. Does the Prime Minister believe that the excluded are important enough to get their own statement? If so, when will the Chancellor be coming to this House to deliver it, so that those taxpayers do not feel that they are completely abandoned by this Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: With great respect, I do not think that the hon. Lady can accuse my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of not keeping the House informed. I am sure that he will be using the earliest opportunity to update her and the rest of the House on the massive package of economic support that we are offering both to the self-employed and to others across the country.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that these new regulations will be reviewed every two weeks, but can he reassure me that come mid-February, there will be a presumption, rather than a prospect, of an easing of restrictions? I understand that there cannot be a cast-iron guarantee as we are in a moving situation, but my constituents would like there to be a presumption, especially when it comes to schools.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think I share my hon. Friend's constituents' instincts. Perhaps a cautious presumption is what I would advise them to make.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab) [V]: Ofcom estimates that 1.8 million children in our country are digitally excluded, with a lack of access to equipment or broadband. I would place a bet with the Prime Minister that that does not include a single pupil from his former school, Eton. Digital poverty is a class issue. The Labour policy of universal free broadband that he derided in 2019 is now desperately needed. Will the Prime Minister outline how he will solve the issue of digital poverty, which is widening the already vast educational inequalities in this country, so that not one child is left behind during this lockdown?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will of course know what the Government are doing to roll out gigabit broadband across the whole country to give every part of the country access to superfast broadband. In terms of the needs of people who do not have access

to broadband yet, he will have heard what we have said about the mobile phone and internet providers coming together today to provide cut-price access for those who need it across the country. I think that is the right thing to do.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Once we have vaccinated the high-risk groups, so that the vast majority of people who are at risk of death from covid are protected, what will be the metrics in decisions made on moving areas down the tiers and reopening schools?

The Prime Minister: The metrics will be exactly the same as they were under the previous tiering system. We look at the rate of reproduction of the disease, pressure on the NHS and the other factors that my hon. Friend would expect.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: The weather is even worse now than it was last March. Will there be a repeat of the "Everyone In" initiative for rough sleepers, with the Prime Minister guaranteeing a repeat of the emergency funding at least at the same level committed last March?

The Prime Minister: One of the consolations of the previous lockdown was that we did succeed in helping so many people off the streets—I think it was about 29,000—and we will continue to do everything in our power. The hon. Gentleman raises a very important issue. We will do everything in our power to prevent people from finding themselves sleeping rough or homeless during this winter, and that remains the policy of the Government.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): The vaccine is a massive achievement of which we are right to be proud, and the Prime Minister should be congratulated on all his efforts in that achievement. We must cut away all barriers to speeding up the roll-out: bin bureaucracy, incentivise 24/7 working by PHE, pay bonuses, use drive-throughs and pharmacies, and mobilise troops and volunteers. Will my right hon. Friend make this roll-out a dynamic, can-do, logistical British miracle, saving lives and livelihoods and not wasting a single day in taking us out of this lockdown hell?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend perfectly captures the mood of the country about the vaccine roll-out. That is what we all want to see. We want to see a great national effort now, and she is right to call attention not just to the role of the NHS, GP clinics, GP services and hospitals, but to the vital role that can be played by pharmacies and the armed services. We want to bring them all together to roll out this vaccine as fast as possible. The picture she paints is entirely correct.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: Surely those who cannot work because of Government restrictions should be compensated and supported. Given that the Chancellor has said that coronavirus restrictions could continue for months to come, will the Prime Minister commit to continuing furlough for as long as is needed and extending sector-specific furlough payments

[*Martyn Day*]

to the hardest-hit sectors? Will he ever do anything for the 3 million who have been completely excluded from any support?

The Prime Minister: They have not been excluded, and we continue to support people across the country. Furlough will indeed be continued further, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He should just bear in mind what I said to his colleague the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford): it is thanks to the might of the UK Treasury and the fundamental strength of the UK economy that we are able to make this support available across the whole of the UK.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and commend him for his actions. Obviously, our clearest way out of these restrictions is to deploy the vaccine at speed and scale to protect those most at risk of serious illness. Will he therefore lay out plans not only on the first four groups in the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation list, but on how we intend to get the vaccine to other key groups, such as teachers, police officers and home carers, to keep our country running day to day?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will have studied the JCVI's list of priority groups, and my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will be setting out a programme for rolling those vaccines out beyond the first four that I have already described.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) [V]: My constituent Ross has had no work since the first lockdown and is one of the people who have fallen through the gaps in the self-employed support scheme. His only income now is £598 per month universal credit. His rent, council tax and bills are £590 a month, so he is living on £8 a month. Could the Prime Minister live on £8 a month? If not, will he ask the Chancellor to look again at how he can help the people excluded by the self-employed support scheme?

The Prime Minister: I know that this has been raised many times already today by Members from across the House, but I must repeat what I have said: £13.7 billion has gone to support the self-employed already. I have no doubt that further measures will be forthcoming, but the overall package of support is £260 billion across the whole of the country.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con) [V]: The Prime Minister will know that Blue Collar Conservatism was instrumental in persuading the supermarkets to return the business rate relief that they did not need. We asked them to do that on the basis that there are many who have gone without support during this pandemic, and it was on that basis that they returned that money. So will he ensure that that £2 billion returned by the supermarkets will go to those who have not had any of the support so far and been excluded, because they cannot go another three months without any income?

The Prime Minister: Absolutely, and I thank my right hon. Friend and her fellow Blue Collar Conservatives for that initiative. It was entirely right, and those corporations—those supermarkets—were entirely right

to return that cash. I can tell her that overall when we look at the Government's support packages, we see that they go overwhelmingly towards the poorest and neediest in society; they are fundamentally a very, very progressive package of measures.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab) [V]: Cancer treatment has again been delayed; even though four-week delays are associated with increased mortality, many cases were delayed for longer than four weeks in the first lockdown. Today, the *Health Service Journal* reports that the NHS is having difficulty in agreeing payments with private providers for surgery and treatment. Will the Prime Minister take action to stop any profiteering and ensure that private providers use their capacity for NHS patients requiring urgent surgery? Will he also urgently bring a detailed plan to this House on how the Government intend to ensure that cancer patients get the treatment they need in good time?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I certainly can. One of the reasons for wanting to keep covid under control in the way that we hope to do with this lockdown is, of course, to allow the NHS to continue with cancer treatment and other vital services. The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about the need for all provision now to be dedicated to fighting covid or providing essential services for the British public, and he can expect to hear more about the way in which we intend to co-operate with private providers.

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con) [V]: So far, the Welsh Government have had £5.3 billion in additional funding for covid, but they are still sitting on more than £1 billion in unallocated money while my businesses in Delyn are in serious danger. Can my right hon. Friend apply any pressure on the Welsh Government to provide more assistance to Delyn businesses, or could those funds be reclaimed by the UK Government so that we can step in to help businesses where Welsh Labour is letting them down?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a good and important point. He is right to take that up with Welsh Labour, to hold it to account and to insist that the Welsh Government spend that money where it needs to be spent.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) [V]: Can the Prime Minister tell the House when every child in my Leeds constituency and across the country will have access to a laptop, when every parent who needs help will be able to afford the necessary broadband or phone charges so that their children can connect up to their lessons, teachers and classmates, and who they should contact if they cannot?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman raises the very important needs of his constituents in respect of broadband connectivity and laptops, and I totally understand their concerns. Obviously, we are massively expanding those things and rolling them out, but for the detailed answer that he needs about each of his constituents and those in need, I will have to write to him, if I may, setting out exactly when they can expect the help that he talks about.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for listening to our representations on keeping places of worship open. Does this not show how, if we work together with a pragmatic approach, we can reopen the economy sensibly? Many of us who will vote for the Government tonight out of loyalty, or because we want to preserve the Government's authority, are worried that every successive lockdown is less and less effective. That is because while every death is tragic, young people will have noticed reports that out of a population of tens of millions, only 400 healthy people between 16 and 60 have actually died.

Will the Prime Minister tell people like me in the priority groups that there has to be an element of self-reliance, self-isolation and looking after our own health, and that we cannot just rely on successive lockdowns? On carers, in particular, I noticed that the Gainsborough testing centre was turning away people who were not showing symptoms, but surely we want to encourage all carers of all elderly people to be tested. Let us get rid of all these bureaucratic hurdles and get more reliance on self-reliance.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to encourage people to go ahead and be tested, and I think he should encourage all the people of Gainsborough to do that when they have symptoms. As he will know, there are initiatives available for community testing with lateral flow testing that I think should be encouraged by colleagues across the House, as I know that they are. I totally support that. I also think that the British public and this House overwhelmingly support measures to protect the NHS and save lives. He makes a valid point about the way that coronavirus impacts on the population. It does fall disproportionately on the elderly and the vulnerable, but those lives must be saved where we possibly can, and I think that is what people of all generations in this country want to do.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister and the Government for all the help that they have given over the last nine to 10 months. However, may I highlight the aviation and aerospace sectors, which have almost entirely shut down since the beginning of the pandemic? As of 4 January, UK flight volumes were 73% below pre-crisis levels. There are now legal restrictions on travel and some countries have banned arrivals from the UK. This is having a catastrophic impact on aviation and aerospace and the millions of jobs that rely on them, but, unlike other industries such as hospitality, these industries have received no sector-specific support. In the light of the unique impacts being felt by these sectors, can I ask the Prime Minister to provide sector-specific support to aviation and aerospace to see them through this very deep crisis?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has raised this with me before, and he is an ardent campaigner for aerospace. He is quite right: it is a vital industry for our country. As he knows, we have time to pay and other packages of support, but we will be ensuring that we do everything we can to get the aerospace industry in the UK back on its feet as fast as possible.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Every vaccination jab in the arm should be viewed as a pupil who can return to the classroom. It is vital that we view it through that equation.

I say to the Prime Minister that I have not always followed him through the Division Lobbies on the restrictions, but I will do so today because it is clear to me that the vaccination changes the game and rids us of this pandemic. I ask him to ensure that the vaccination is available to rural areas, such as rural Rother which I represent, where we do not have a GP network or a hub in place as yet.

The Prime Minister: I am really grateful to my hon. Friend for his support and for what he has just said. We want to roll out the vaccine across the whole country as fast as possible. It is, I hope, common ground in the House today that we are right as a country to first put jabs into the arms of those who are most at risk of mortality. That is the way to reduce the death toll and, indeed, to get our country back on its feet as fast as possible.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]: We are in a race against time to save lives, save jobs and restore our freedoms. That is why we need a 24/7 vaccination programme that brings vaccination to every high street in the country. I therefore welcome the Prime Minister's comments about the role of community pharmacy. Will he confirm that it is not just a few big chains that will be involved, but the thousands of independent community pharmacies, such as Goode's chemist in Twickenham, which stand ready, waiting and able to vaccinate but have been knocked back. They would provide vital capacity and are able to reach people that mass vaccination hubs cannot.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to draw attention to the potentially vital role of community pharmacies, of which there are about 12,000 in this country, as I am sure she knows. In my experience, they are great places: they are hygienic and the staff are knowledgeable and professional. I think we have already signed up hundreds to the campaign, and I assure her that there will be many more to follow.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is exceptionally welcome that the UK has consistently tested more people than any other country in the world. This House owes a debt of gratitude to Kate Bingham and her team for procuring the vaccine in such large amounts and such diversified quantities—something the EU vaccination scheme never managed to achieve. Will the Prime Minister reassure me and other south-west Members that we will see the vaccine rolled out and that the lockdown will not be extended any longer than is necessary?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I thank my hon. Friend for his words about the vaccine taskforce. It was, as I say, satirised by the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), which I think was a mistake. We will do everything we can to roll out the vaccine to my hon. Friend's constituency and all constituencies across the country.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): On Sunday, the Prime Minister came on national television and, looking into the eyes of the British people, told worried parents that it was perfectly safe to send their dearly loved children to school. The following day, after being buffeted around by scientists, the Leader of the Opposition and the devolved Governments, he announced that it was not safe for children to go to school and promptly

[*Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi*]

closed them all down. Does the Prime Minister agree that the constant last-minute U-turns and this erratic approach to policy making are not conducive to assuaging the anxieties of people who are desperately seeking stability, certainty and assured leadership?

The Prime Minister: I really must ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw what he has just said. I did not at any stage say that schools were not safe—that is absolutely not what I said. In all fairness, he should correct that. I give him the opportunity to do so if he chooses.

Mr Dhesi: The Prime Minister closed down schools. Therefore, they are not safe for people to return to.

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the Prime Minister has put what he did say on the record. Let us move on.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con) [V]: I have been contacted by several dentists and dental assistants who have been told locally that they do not qualify as health workers for early priority under the vaccination roll-out. I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), a dentist himself, has campaigned tirelessly for dental teams to be in category 2 with other healthcare workers. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister advise, for clarity, whether dental teams are in fact in priority 2 with other healthcare workers for the vaccination roll-out?

The Prime Minister: Like my hon. Friend, I am a big fan of our colleague, our hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), the great dentist. I can tell him that all dentists in patient-facing roles, and members of their dental teams who may have social contact with patients, are eligible to be offered the covid vaccine. We encourage them all to take it if they are offered it.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab) [V]: My local hospital, Queen's, is one of many that are facing critical pressure on the supply of oxygen to patients. Demand for oxygen is running at 100% or more of the supply available. Will the Prime Minister assure me and my constituents that action is being taken to ensure a safe and secure supply of oxygen? Will he tell me what contingency plans he has in place to ensure that hospitals are not overwhelmed and closed, critically ill patients are not moved, and every patient receives the right amount of oxygen when needed?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to the right hon. Lady. I will immediately look into the matter that she raises about oxygen at Queen's Hospital. It had not been drawn to my attention before, but we will make sure that we get back to her as soon as we can.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con) [V]: Of course, the invisible shield goes first around the most vulnerable, and the JCVI determines that sequence. Once the highest-risk groups have been vaccinated, however, I encourage my right hon. Friend, with the JCVI, to look again at prioritising key workers, including teachers, because of the special role that teachers play in our society and because we prioritise education.

The Prime Minister: I fully understand the point that my right hon. Friend makes. I am sure that it will be borne in mind by the JCVI as it continues to make its judgments.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab) [V]: The Chancellor announced the financial support package via a 90-second video on Twitter yesterday. With him not coming before the House, it is difficult for us to ask questions, so perhaps the Prime Minister will help. Yesterday's announcement about grants did not say how long this new one-off grant support is intended to last. Will the Prime Minister tell us what will happen with business support should the current lockdown have to be extended or the vaccine roll-out delayed?

The Prime Minister: I think that the Chancellor was very clear about the £4.6 billion, with its Barnett consequential, which he announced to the House. I must say, I do not think that anyone could fault the Chancellor for his willingness to come to the House and to explain what we are going to do.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) [V]: Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking the armed forces for their extraordinary efforts to beat this virus, especially those in Rutland and Melton? At this time of national crisis, however, some of our enemies are seeking to exploit opportunities to undermine us, so will the Prime Minister reassure me that our vaccination programme will extend to those in our armed forces and reserves most at risk from catching covid in the course of their duties, especially those deployed abroad on mission-critical operations, so that their safety and ours is protected?

The Prime Minister: I thank our armed forces from the bottom of my heart. I very much share in what my hon. Friend has just said. They have played an outstanding role throughout this pandemic—where necessary, moving patients to hospital from remote places, conducting testing, and now having a big role with the vaccines as well. I am sure, like every other part of the public sector, they will be considered by the JCVI as it comes to make its decisions about the allocation of the vaccine.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) [V]: The Prime Minister will be aware that, as school lessons move online, the cost of pay-as-you-go broadband is completely prohibitive for poor families in areas such as Hackney. He is talking about coming to cut-price arrangements, but what so many families need is access to free broadband—an excellent policy, which was in Labour's 2019 manifesto. No child should be deprived of an education because their parents cannot afford the broadband cost, so will he look again at providing free broadband when it comes to accessing online education?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed, but I think the arrangements that are being put in place by the mobile phone companies and others will cover the vast bulk of the cost, at the very least. I am happy to come back to the right hon. Lady about exactly what is being offered.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: We in the Bridgwater and West Somerset constituency accept that the lockdown was vital and we

appreciate the extra help for businesses, but will my right hon. Friend consider urgently the way in which Government help for local authorities is being paid? Somerset County Council has been given huge grants but has then diverted much of the money to balance its books, which is not what it was for. These cowboys want to become a new unitary authority. It is a con trick to use that cash, which was meant to fight covid. The Prime Minister is Somerset born and bred. I urge him to put a stop to this, so that the money goes to the people who need it most—the people of Somerset.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight what is going on in Somerset. The county obviously has a duty to use covid grants for that purpose and not for any other. I thank him for drawing attention to what is going on.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) [V]: Happy new year, Mr Speaker. To govern is to choose. A lot of tough decisions have been made by the UK Government and we have supported a number of the business support mechanisms that have been announced. However, according to the House of Commons Library this afternoon, the UK Government have chosen to spend £3.3 billion of borrowed money on the stamp duty freeze, which is a vast subsidy to the middle classes who are buying and selling domestic property, who do not need subsidy. Does the Prime Minister regret prioritising that and excluding so many people, small companies and freelancers in the productive economy who really do need support?

The Prime Minister: That is entirely upside down and misrepresents what the package of support has done. The £260 million is overwhelmingly progressive and goes disproportionately to support the poorest and neediest in society, which is what I think this House and this country would expect.

Mr Speaker: Let us head to the Deepings, with Sir John Hayes and his wife.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con) [V]: Millions of Britons live in remote rural places, including here in Lincolnshire. The Prime Minister will know that isolation fuels fear, which exacerbates disadvantage, and that only vaccination will bring the safety that assuages those fears. Will he reassure my constituents that local doctors' surgeries will be equipped and supplied so that they are able to vaccinate the vulnerable not later, but sooner?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is our intention that doctors' surgeries, which clearly play a crucial part in the vaccination programme, will be equipped as fast as possible with supplies of the vaccine—as plentiful, I hope, as the copies of “Wisden” that adorn my right hon. Friend's shelf. That is what we intend to do. And may I say how delightful it was to see his wife Susan briefly in the background?

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab) [V]: When the Chancellor announced his support schemes for businesses and workers last year, I warned him repeatedly that the coverage did not go far enough and that many people in Bradford would be unfairly excluded, putting jobs, businesses and the livelihoods of the self-employed at risk. Will the Prime Minister therefore listen to my calls and those of campaign groups such as ExcludedUK to

ensure that the same mistakes are not made, and guarantee that everybody in Bradford who needs financial support during these difficult times will get it?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course we will listen to the calls of ExcludedUK as we listen to all such calls. I repeat the message that I have been giving today: the support packages are there to help businesses and protect jobs and livelihoods across the country, but they benefit disproportionately the poorest and the neediest.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend what the public health justification is for criminalising gatherings held exclusively between those who have already been vaccinated for more than three weeks, where there is no risk of infection or transmission? Will he use his libertarian instincts and immediately introduce an exemption for such gatherings, so that the many people in my constituency in the octogenarian group will be able to celebrate Brexit sooner rather than later?

The Prime Minister: I do not think any power on Earth is going to prevent my hon. Friend from celebrating Brexit, but his iron logic is applied to the restrictions that we have been forced to bring in. All I can say is that, as I think most Members across the House understand, the whys and wherefores of each restriction are not necessarily susceptible to iron logic, but cumulatively, they are there to protect the public, and I believe the public understand that.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab) [V]: The Prime Minister will be aware that the Welsh Labour Government have committed to providing the most generous financial package available to businesses across the UK. Sadly, in Pontypridd, even the very best support available has not been able to prevent mass redundancies and business closures. My constituents could have been helped if this Tory Government had stepped up to the plate sooner and committed to the Union when Wales went into an earlier lockdown. Can he explain why Wales continues to be an afterthought and what steps he will take to prevent people in Pontypridd from being excluded from any future support?

The Prime Minister: Wales is actually at the forefront of our thoughts and continues to be. We are anxious to continue to support the people of Wales in any way that we can. The salient point that I take from today is that there is £1 billion that the Welsh Labour Government have failed to spend in the way that they could, and I urge them to get on and do that, but the UK Government will continue to support Wales, as we support the people of the whole United Kingdom.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con) [V]: In Norfolk, those most at risk from covid have already received 27,000 vaccination first injections since 9 December, which are now available in our hospitals and 11 primary care networks, including the excellent Fakenham Medical Practice in my constituency. From Monday, those sites will be joined by many others. We are ready to do whatever it takes to keep up with vaccine supply, so what are the chances of securing more than 2 million doses of vaccine per week?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for what he is doing to campaign for vaccines in Broadland and to scale up at speed across the country. I have said the pace of roll-out that I want to see. That is already, as I think the Health Secretary would confirm, extremely challenging for our GPs and our hospitals. It is a big, big target—it is a big, big ask of the country. As my hon. Friend will know, because he will have heard me say this several times already today, this Government have been going faster than any other country in Europe, and we intend to remain out in front.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con) [V]: In March last year, the Government and the devolved Administrations laudably adopted a united response to the pandemic, with a clear, jointly agreed message that was easy to communicate. But since then, they have pursued different approaches with different terminology and different messaging, which can and, I believe, does lead to confusion. Could my right hon. Friend work with the leaders of the devolved Administrations by following the example of the four chief medical officers, who have worked closely together, and returning to the consistency and clarity of messaging that prevailed last March?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point about the occasional dissonances between the UK Government and some of the devolved authorities, although actually, if we look beneath the political surface and some of the argy-bargy that goes on, the fundamental message is the same. It was very telling that the three devolved Administrations and the UK Government came together to enact fundamentally the same package of measures at the same time yesterday and today.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab) [V]: I have listened closely to the Prime Minister, but at no point have I heard him apologise to education leaders, teachers, students and parents for the chaos earlier this week. He rightly asks the public to change our behaviours, which is in all our interests, but there is a reciprocal obligation on him, too. What has he learned from all this, and what will he do differently in future?

The Prime Minister: I certainly wish to pay tribute to everybody involved in the education sector: teachers, parents, pupils, and everybody who has made a heroic effort to cope with this pandemic. I think the hon. Gentleman and I would agree that it was important to do everything we could as a country and a Government to keep kids in schools if we possibly could; indeed, I believe that was the policy of the Labour Opposition, at least on Monday morning. I understand why the Opposition wanted to keep schools open. We all wanted to keep schools open, but alas, the pandemic has not made that possible, and we have got to take the steps that we have taken. I hope that he will also support them.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [V]: PHE data shows that younger adults with learning disabilities and autism are up to six times more likely to die of covid. Please can they be added to the priority vaccination list immediately? Also, during previous lockdowns, vital exemptions included autistic people being able to exercise more frequently, which was incredibly important in helping them cope and continue to have that much-needed routine in their lives. Will the Prime

Minister confirm that these exemptions will apply for the new lockdown, so that autistic people are not left stranded, and will he commit to the publication of accessible information about this as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I will commit to better and fuller information if that is necessary, although of course as my right hon. Friend knows, it is a general principle of these restrictions that people have more freedoms when they need to exercise for health needs.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab) [V]: If, as reports suggest, the Government intend requiring people arriving in the UK to have a negative PCR test within 72 hours of their arrival, how will British people currently abroad in areas where it is difficult to get quick turnaround PCR tests get home? I should declare an interest.

The Prime Minister: I think that the people of this country would want to see—as I do, and as I believe Members on the Benches opposite do—proper protection against the readmission of the virus. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman understands that, too.

Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con) [V]: I recently had the chance to volunteer at our local vaccination centre, hosted by Burton Albion Community Trust, and I am grateful for the work of Dr David Atherton, chair of our local primary care network, and all his colleagues involved in the roll-out of the vaccine to residents across Burton and Uttoxeter. Will the Prime Minister consider the consent process when looking at ways of speeding up roll-out? At the moment, I am advised that individual consent by a healthcare clinician takes 10 to 15 minutes. This means that it will take 41,000 hours to consent and vaccinate the priority groups in east Staffordshire alone. Will he consider a national consent model to help speed up this process?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very interesting suggestion. I should stress that we have no plans to make vaccines compulsory in this country; however, we want to make it as smooth and as easy as possible, which I think is her objective, and I think she would join me in encouraging everybody who is offered a vaccine to take it up as soon as possible.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: I wonder whether the Prime Minister has had a cursory glance at Scotland and seen the massive approval ratings for our First Minister and her handling of the covid crisis. Has he observed the clear leadership she has offered our nation? Does he ever think about comparing his poor performance with hers and wish that he could offer the same type of leadership to the UK?

The Prime Minister: I must confess I have not given that particular matter any thought, because I have been occupied entirely with protecting the NHS, fighting coronavirus and saving lives. I respectfully say that that should be the hon. Gentleman's priority as well, if I may say so, rather than these slightly abstract political considerations.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con) [V]: Throughout this pandemic the UK Government have provided the Scottish Government with billions of pounds of additional support,

but we know hundreds of millions remain unspent. These are vital funds that could help to protect jobs and support businesses. Is there anything further that could be done to encourage the Scottish Government to get these moneys out to Scottish businesses as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister: The best thing I can do is encourage my hon. Friend in the excellent work he is doing in holding the Scottish nationalist Government to account, and encourage them to get on and use the funds that the UK Government are giving to the people of Scotland to support jobs in Scotland.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I am sure the Prime Minister will agree that councils have borne the brunt of covid, particularly during lockdown, and have given all our communities maximum support. Leeds has incurred £40 million of additional costs, as the council is not covered by the grants the Government have given, and will now face further lockdown costs, with an overall £100 million budget shortfall, in the main caused by years of central Government underfunding. Will the Prime Minister ask his good friend, the Chancellor, to grant local councils a one-off payment to offset the additional costs incurred due to covid-19 and ensure the financial stability of councils this year and next?

The Prime Minister: Of course, I know that many councils find themselves under great pressure, although some have handled their budgets better than others. We have given £4.6 billion, I believe, to support local councils, and we will continue to support them. I thank the staff and workforce of councils for the huge and vital role they all help to play in fighting this disease.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con) [V]: I received a worrying call this morning from the chair of Barnet Council's health overview and scrutiny committee indicating that it may be that only 13 care homes in the borough have received vaccinations. Will the Prime Minister intervene to make sure the frail elderly and their carers in Barnet get the vaccinations they need as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I will. I have said that I want to have maximum transparency, and I want to see an accelerated roll-out of vaccination in care homes. So far, I believe that 10% of care home residents and 14% of care home staff have received the vaccine, but that clearly needs to be stepped up.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) [V]: It has been great to see vaccination already starting in the Rhondda, but obviously we can only give the vaccine when it arrives. The Prime Minister quite rightly said earlier that we should be prioritising the vaccine for those who are at risk of mortality. Rhondda Cynon Taf, unfortunately, has the highest rate of death per 100,000 of any local authority in the country. We have a very large percentage of people who are extremely vulnerable, and we have a higher than average percentage of people who are working in the NHS, so can I urge the Prime Minister, as a matter of urgency, to prioritise communities like the Rhondda and make sure that Rhondda's surgeries are getting not just 70 or 80 but hundreds of doses of vaccine a week so that we can vaccinate everybody who is at risk?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes an eloquent point about the way in which many people in the Rhondda will naturally fall into the high qualifying groups that have already been identified by the JCVI.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con) [V]: I welcome the Chancellor's £4.6 billion in new lockdown grants, but can the Prime Minister please look again at more support for hospitality, pubs, breweries, the entertainment industry, tourism and weddings, as well as the self-employed and those excluded so far? Specifically, will he look at delaying the tax return deadline to help freelancers and the self-employed, and also look at extending the business rates holiday and the VAT reduction? Finally, will he look at setting up a hospitality and tourism recovery fund?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, and I know that our right hon. Friend the Chancellor is going to consider all measures necessary to allow the hospitality sector to bounce back just as fast as we can get it out of the restrictions that businesses currently face and get them bouncing back. That will depend, as the House has heard extensively today, on our ability to roll out this vaccine, but above all it depends on our ability to follow the rules, restrictions and guidance in these measures, and I hope very much that hon. Members will support them this afternoon.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

1.20 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19: Educational Settings

1.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement regarding schools in national lockdown.

The last thing any Education Secretary wants to do is announce that schools will close¹, and this is not a decision that the Government ever wanted to take. I would like to reassure everyone that our schools have not suddenly become unsafe, but limiting the number of people who attend them is essential when the covid rates are climbing as they are now. We must curb the escalating cases of covid throughout the country and prevent the national health service from being overwhelmed. That is why, today, I am setting out the contingency plans I had prepared but had hoped I would never have to implement. I would like to thank all of our teachers, our education staff and our social workers for all that they have been doing to keep children and young people safe and learning.

During the lockdown, early years settings remain open nationally to all, providing vital early education and childcare. Schools will be open too for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. Those at university will predominantly study online, although there are a small number of exceptions, including those studying medicine, healthcare and education.

Unwelcome though this latest lockdown is—and I am very conscious of the real challenges that parents are facing with their children at home—we are far better placed to cope with it than we were last March. We are now better prepared to deliver online learning. This is an important step forward in supporting children to make the progress with their education that they so desperately need. We will also do what we can to help their parents, and I thank all those parents and carers who are having to step up once more to take on the challenge of home learning.

We have set out clear, legally binding requirements for schools to provide high-quality remote education. This is mandatory for all state-funded schools and will be enforced by Ofsted. We expect schools to provide between three and five hours of teaching a day, depending on the child's age. If parents feel their child's school is not providing suitable remote education, they should first raise their concerns with the teacher or headteacher, and, failing that, report the matter to Ofsted. Ofsted will inspect schools of any grade where it has serious concerns about the quality of remote education being provided.

We have significantly stepped up the digital support we are providing to schools and parents. The fantastic Oak National Academy continues to provide video lessons for all ages across all subjects, and yesterday the BBC announced it will be delivering the biggest push on education in its history, bringing 14 weeks of educational programmes and lessons to every household in the country.

Our delivery of laptops and tablets continues apace: we have purchased more than 1 million laptops and tablets and have already delivered more than 560,000 of them to schools and local authorities. With an extra 100,000 being distributed this week alone, by the end of next week, we will have delivered three quarters of a

million devices. We are also working with all the UK's leading mobile network operators to provide free data for key educational sites. We are grateful to EE, 3, Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin Mobile, O2 and Vodafone for supporting this offer. We have also been delivering 4G routers to families who need to access the internet.

Another area where we have learnt lessons is exams. Last year, all four nations of the United Kingdom found that their arrangements for awarding grades did not deliver what they needed, with the painful impact felt by students and their parents. Although exams are the fairest way we have of assessing what a student knows, the impact of the pandemic means that it is not possible to have these exams this year. I can confirm that GCSE, A-level and AS-level exams will not go ahead this summer.

This year, we will put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms. My Department and Ofqual had already worked up a range of contingency options. While the details will need to be fine-tuned in consultation with Ofqual, the exam boards and teaching representative organisations, I can confirm now that I wish to use a form of teacher-assessed grades, with training and support provided to ensure that these are awarded fairly and consistently across the country.

I know that students and staff have worked hard to prepare for the January exams and assessments of vocational and technical qualifications, and we want to allow schools and colleges to continue these assessments where they judge it is right to do so. No college should feel pressured to offer these, and we will ensure that all students are able to progress fairly, just as we will with VTQs in the summer.

I know that, understandably, there is concern about free school meals. We will provide extra funding to support schools to provide food parcels or meals to eligible children. Where schools cannot offer food parcels or use local solutions, we will ensure that a national voucher scheme is in place, so that every eligible child can access free school meals while their school remains closed.

Finally, I would like to turn to our programme of testing for the virus. There has been a brilliant, concerted effort in secondary schools and colleges to deliver testing for the start of this term, and none of the work done to roll that out is going to be wasted. Regular testing will take place of staff and students in school and in due course help us to reopen schools as soon as possible. Testing is going to be the centre of our plans to send children back to school, back to the classroom and back to college as soon as possible.

I never wanted to be in a position where we had to close schools again.¹ Schools should always have their gates open, welcoming children and being at the heart of their community. The moment that the virus permits, all our children will be back in school with their teachers and friends. But until then we have put in place the measures we need to make sure that they continue to progress. For that reason, I commend this statement to the House.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): A happy new year, Mr Speaker. May I begin by paying tribute to the deputy general secretary of the NASUWT, Gareth Young, who tragically died shortly before Christmas?

1. [Official Report, 20 January 2021, Vol. 687, c. 3MC.]

1. [Official Report, 20 January 2021, Vol. 687, c. 3MC.]

I am sure the House will join me in sending condolences to his loved ones and to his friends and colleagues in the union.

I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, but it is disappointing that he did not make a new year's resolution to avoid U-turns or chronic incompetence. Once again, where the Secretary of State goes, chaos and confusion follow, and it is children, families, and education staff across the country who pay the price for his incompetence. I can suggest a new year's resolution for the Secretary of State: that he at least start answering my questions.

Every pupil who is not in school must be able to access education. We must do everything we can to safeguard learning throughout this lockdown. I pay tribute to everyone who has made it possible to keep pupils learning online—the incredible leaders, teachers and support staff in schools and colleges, and those such as Oak and the BBC who are doing a huge amount to make learning accessible.

I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment on digital devices, and I am glad he has listened to Labour and to the charities across the country that called for zero rating of educational sites, but Ofqual estimates that up to 1.78 million children do not have access to a device. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that, under his plans, every child who needs a device will have one as soon as possible and that every one of those children will be able to learn remotely? May I also repeat the question the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister earlier: will the welcome data deal done with mobile providers take effect immediately?

I welcome the Secretary of State's comments on free school meals, and I hope he can guarantee that every child eligible for this support is already receiving it. If not, can he assure me that they will do so within days?

Months ago, the Education Secretary gave a cast-iron commitment that exams would go ahead. At that moment, we should have known they were doomed to be cancelled. I wanted exams to go ahead fairly, but I was always clear that there must be a plan B if that was not possible. For months, there was no sign of any such plan, although the risk that exams could not happen has always been entirely predictable. The Secretary of State says he will be providing support to teachers to award grades. Can he tell me when they will receive that support and what form it will take, and can he confirm that it will be available in all schools? Can he tell me exactly what will be done to ensure that all grades are fair and consistent and support pupils to move on in their education or employment?

I heard what the Secretary of State said about technical and vocational exams, but frankly he is failing to show leadership on the exams taking place in January, and he is simply leaving it to schools and colleges to decide what they should do in these difficult circumstances. Will he now do the right thing and cancel this week's BTEC exams, as parents, colleges and the Association of Colleges are calling for?

Staff in every part of our education system have faced a hugely challenging job and done extraordinary things to keep children safe and educated throughout the pandemic. Too often, though, the Secretary of State has refused to listen to their concerns or engage meaningfully with the expertise of professionals on the frontline. He can start to make it up to them today. Is

the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation working on a strategy to vaccinate all education staff to keep them safe and get children back in the classroom? Does he believe that they should be prioritised for vaccination to keep them safe and to allow schools and colleges to reopen?

Early years settings remain open to all children, but the Secretary of State has failed to explain how this will be safe for staff and families, so can he tell us what scientific advice he has received that made him think that they will be safe, and can he honestly say that he is following the science? Whether providers are open or closed, will he finally reconsider the unjustifiable decision to move early years funding in line with current occupancy, which will push tens of thousands of providers to the brink of collapse?

Finally, I turn to the return of schools in the months ahead. The decision to close them is not one taken easily or lightly, and although it is the right thing to do to control the virus and save lives, it has huge consequences for children's learning and development. That is why Labour has always said that schools should be the last thing to close and the first to reopen. Yesterday, the Prime Minister could not guarantee that children would be back in school before the summer. Can the Secretary of State tell us when he expects children to be safely back in the classroom?

At every stage of the pandemic, young people have been an afterthought for the Government, and now we are back where we were nine months ago, with schools closed and exams cancelled. There is time to act, but the Secretary of State must act now to ensure that all pupils can learn remotely, that families are supported and that the most vulnerable are safeguarded.

Gavin Williamson: I would very much like to join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to Gareth. I had the great privilege of working with Gareth during his time as deputy general secretary of the NASUWT, as well as with his colleagues there. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with his family and with his friends and colleagues.

The hon. Lady raises a number of very important points, including the roll-out of digital devices and our commitment to deliver 1 million digital devices across the country. We will be getting three quarters of a million of those devices out by the end of next week, supporting schools in delivering the full allocation of devices that they need and looking at how we can go further. It has been a great privilege to work with those brilliant teachers, those inspiring leaders, and to help fund and support them in setting up the Oak National Academy—a brilliant online school that is being viewed not just right across this country, but right across the world, for its quality of teaching. We want to see that used more and more as a vital teaching resource.

The hon. Lady is right to raise concerns about free school meals and how important this is for every one of our constituents. That is why we are putting the funding and support in place. There are many parts of the country where it will be best for schools to deliver those free school meals themselves, and they want to do that, but that will not be the case in other parts of the country where schools will want to do it as part of the national voucher scheme. That is why we will be standing up that scheme over the next few days and making sure

[Gavin Williamson]

that schools are not out of pocket and, most importantly of all, that children and families are supported at this incredibly difficult time.

The hon. Lady asks whether there will be training and guidance for teachers across the country as we move to teacher-assessed grades, and I can absolutely confirm that that will be the case. We have always been aware that there could be a situation where we would not be in a position to be able to proceed with examinations. We have always had a clear view that the best way of assessing children is through examination, so I will not apologise for being enthusiastic to ensure that we have been able to be in a position to roll out exams, but we do recognise that due to where we are as a result of this pandemic, we have to take a different course, and that is why we are taking the route that we are.

The hon. Lady mentioned technical and vocational qualifications. As she will know, it is very important that we give colleges, schools and all providers, including independent training providers, the necessary flexibility, because a lot of young people will need to complete some of their professional competency qualifications in order to take up work and job opportunities, such as those on electricians' or gas courses where they have to do a practical assessment in order to be able to get the qualifications to take the work, the jobs and the opportunities. We want to ensure that the door is kept open for them. That is why we have taken the decision to give providers the discretion, because they will be the ones who best and most accurately understand the needs of their students and those who possibly need these qualifications to be able to progress into a job that they would not be able to do if they did not have that option.

On vaccination, the Government have already set out the important need to vaccinate those who are most likely to be hospitalised if they catch this disease, and not just hospitalised but most at risk of death. Like the hon. Lady, and like everyone in the education community, I very much want to see the vaccination of all those who are tirelessly, every single day through the week and every week, keeping schools open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, when schools are fully reopened again, but coupled with this is a really important step forward, the mass testing programme that we have already started rolling out in schools. The mass testing programme in schools will be one of the largest testing programmes that this country has ever seen. It is ready to go—ready to be implemented—and it will be an important plank in ensuring that we can get schools opened at the earliest possible opportunity.

It will not surprise the hon. Lady that we listen to the best scientific and public health advice in making the decision to keep early years open. We all have a clear understanding of how important early years education is for every child. As I have always said, I will do everything I can to keep every educational establishment open if that is possible and if it is the right thing to do. When we were given the health advice that we could be in a position to keep early years open, which is so important not just for those children themselves but for families, I felt that that was the right decision to take.

I do not want to see any school closed for a moment longer than it has to be. That is why, in June, we all worked so hard and fought so hard to ensure that schools opened right across the country for primary

years. That is why, during June, we did so much to ensure that years 10 and 12 were able to return to school at the earliest possible opportunity. That is why, in September, we saw the opening of schools right across the country and all children being able to return to school.

I can absolutely assure the hon. Lady that I will not let schools be closed for a moment longer than they need to be. I will do everything I can to ensure that every school is open, so that children are able to benefit from the brilliant teaching that goes on in so many of our primary schools, secondary schools and colleges, because I know that is the best place for children. That is what I want for my children, I know that is what Members want for their children, but most importantly, that is what we want for our nation's children. That is why I will give everything in order to ensure that schools are the first things to be opened in every instance, because that is what is best for every one of our children.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We now go to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Robert Halfon.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: I strongly welcome the Government's laptop scheme, but we know that there will still be possibly hundreds of thousands of people on the wrong side of the digital divide. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those students who just do not have an internet connection or computers at home will be able to go to school alongside children of critical workers? Will he also confirm that any centre-assessed grade system will not only maintain standards but provide a level playing field for disadvantaged children and have a fair appeals process? Will he ensure that there are independent assessors—perhaps retired teachers or Ofsted inspectors—to provide a check and balance for each assessed grade awarded?

Finally, I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said about wanting to open schools again, and I know that he believes that strongly. Will he do everything possible to ensure that teachers and support staff are given priority for vaccination alongside NHS workers, so that we can get our schools open again sooner rather than later?

Gavin Williamson: The reason we are rolling out and expanding our devices package is that we realise how important it is for all children, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. In the previous situation where schools had to be closed, during the months of March, April and May, children who did not have access to digital devices were able to access education in school, and I can confirm that we are issuing the same standard and the same guidance today.¹

On disadvantaged children and the centre-assessed grades and teacher assessment, we will do everything we can to ensure that children are not left behind due to either their background or the community in which they have grown up and are learning. I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend and his Committee and taking their advice on any additional actions that we need to undertake to ensure fairness. I will certainly take on board his ideas and thinking about bringing in volunteers and people who want to support education, and about ensuring that teacher assessment is fair and

1. [Official Report, 20 January 2021, Vol. 687, c. 3MC.]

robust and that it maintains standards and, most importantly, fairness for the children who are taking those qualifications.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: We should not, of course, be surprised at this latest U-turn on schools. Any student teacher knows that planning is a key skill, but it is one that the Secretary of State has yet to master. His decisions have been made in a reactionary and last-minute manner. Schools in England have predictably gone from being open, with threats of legal action if they are closed, to being snapped shut in an instant, giving parents no time to put in place arrangements.

Let me say to all Members that we need to be careful about this narrative that children are falling behind. They are falling behind only on an external scale that we have defined for them. We cannot use the same metrics this year as we have before. Much as we all want schools to be open, young people are learning other skills too. That said, it is good to hear that the BBC is producing educational resources. Can the Secretary of State confirm whether there will be resources available for the Scottish curriculum at national 5, higher and advanced higher level?

Teachers are fed up with politicians paying tribute to them one minute and sending them into unsafe environments the next. The risk posed to children in school is small—we have evidence for that—but as the Prime Minister said earlier, pupils can act as vectors, and let us be clear that if a member of staff in a school catches covid, there is increased strain on the remaining staff, so it should not be only high-risk staff who are vaccinated. Before we talk about opening schools, we need a clear position on vaccinations for teachers and school staff. The First Minister has committed to look at that. The Secretary of State has said that he will do everything he can to ensure that schools open, so will he ensure that teachers are a priority for vaccination so that schools can open with confidence?

Finally, there are many students who are now learning at home completely and are not going to return to university after Christmas. They still have to pay for university accommodation. What support will the Secretary of State look at giving to those young people who have to pay out in that manner?

Gavin Williamson: It was interesting to listen to the hon. Lady's comments about students, which are probably indicative of some of the challenges in the Scottish education system, given that it has fallen down the rankings of the programme for international student assessment. It is really important that we support children so that they can learn. It is really important that we do everything we can to ensure that children are in a position to learn about maths, English, the sciences and the arts. It seems indicative in what she was saying that the Scottish National party is not very interested in making sure that children benefit from a knowledge-rich curriculum.

I would be happy to contact the director-general of the British Broadcasting Corporation on the matters that the hon. Lady raised, and I will write to her with details on that. It is always a privilege to work with colleagues across all nations of the United Kingdom, and it is really important that we share what works well and what works best. I would always be happy to work

with her. We have funded extensively the Oak National Academy, which has an incredibly rich curriculum resource, and I notice from the latest figures that it is used by a lot of students in Scotland as well as in England. I would be very happy to share some of the work that we are doing to help to support students in Scotland as well as students in England.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con) [V]: I welcome the statement by the Secretary of State. The economic recovery will be skills based, and the Government have rightly placed much emphasis on the importance of BTECs. However, there is worry, confusion and uncertainty in colleges and schools. Many have cancelled this month's exams, but others have not. They should not have been placed in a position of having to make their own choice as to whether to go ahead with exams. The Government should have shown clear leadership so that all students across the country were in the same situation. Will the Secretary of State work with Ofqual, the exam boards and the Association of Colleges to put in place as quickly as possible new arrangements that will provide students and teachers with certainty, clarity and confidence?

Gavin Williamson: As my hon. Friend will have heard in my statement, that is exactly what I have said we would do. For clarity, there are many colleges that know for their students' future prospects they need to complete assessments this month if those students are to be able access work and employment opportunities. So no, I am not going to go down the route that my hon. Friend suggested of taking that opportunity potentially to access work and other opportunities away from them, because I do not believe that that would be right for those children.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) [V]: Teachers and school staff have put themselves at enormous risk during the pandemic to keep schools open. Now that the Prime Minister has accepted that schools are the epicentre of high community covid transmission, it is essential that the Government give teachers and school staff the priority access to covid vaccination that they deserve. Will the Secretary of State look at adding them to category 7, as that would make teachers and school staff a top priority for vaccinations after those who are 65 and over, all those who are clinically vulnerable, and our NHS and social care staff?

Gavin Williamson: At every stage, we have put the safety of students, pupils, teachers and the whole workforce—and including the whole community—at the heart of everything we have done. All the evidence shows that the work, the precautions and the measures that have been put in place mean that schools have been able to operate safely and well. We will constantly work with the whole sector to ensure that every measure is undertaken so that that continues. That is why we are ready to roll out a mass testing programme, delivering millions of tests right across the board. That will happen in schools as they welcome the children of critical workers as well as vulnerable children into them. When schools fully return and can welcome all children back, the testing regime will be at the centre of that return.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con) [V]: I understand why GCSEs and A-levels have been cancelled and I am pleased to hear my right hon. Friend say that the

[Dr Luke Evans]

substitute system will be robust and fair. What can he do to confirm for the young people of Hinckley and Bosworth that students will be rewarded for how they perform, that they are not disadvantaged by the school they go to and that the teachers who conduct the assessments have buy-in and ownership of what they are doing in the current situation?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our great advantage is that we have the opportunity and the time to roll out extensive training, guidance and support for those teachers making that assessment, to ensure that it is accurate and fair and reflects children's abilities. We will undertake that with schools over the coming months. We endeavour to ensure that teachers and all those who work in the education system are supported in my hon. Friend's constituency as they are throughout the country.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: It was irresponsible of the Government to announce the cancellation of GCSE and A-level exams and to say nothing about BTEC exams, with no details of an alternative plan being agreed. Students and their families in Luton South have already suffered greatly over the past nine months and are deeply anxious about the continued uncertainty that has been created. Many students have contacted me to say that they are suffering negative impacts on their mental health as a result. What plans has the Secretary of State to provide additional mental health support for our children and young people?

Gavin Williamson: Of course one of the great advantages of schools being back all the way through the latter half of last year is that teachers and those working in schools have been in the best possible place to assess and work with children and to have the best understanding of their needs and some of their problems, including mental health challenges. We will work with the education sector to support them. We have already taken several actions to support schools and education settings with children who have suffered mental health problems as a result of covid and of being out of school. We will continue to do that and step up those measures in the coming months.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State not just for his statement but for the huge effort he must be putting in to try to balance conflicting priorities. As a father to an A-level student who was hoping to take her exams this year, I can relate to the anxiety that so many young people and their parents must feel in Dudley North and across the country due to the uncertainty of the situation. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will make every effort to remove that uncertainty by bringing clarity at the earliest opportunity, so that students can better focus on their studies and teaching staff on the best approach to support them?

Gavin Williamson: As my own daughter was due to take her GCSE exams later this year, I can assure my hon. Friend that we very much hope that this statement has given a clear sense of certainty and direction. We will be following this up with further detailed consultation: Ofqual will be leading a two-week consultation period,

which will be launched next week. It is very important that we get feedback from the sector to ensure that the details of this policy are properly understood, and work best not just for schools and colleges but, most importantly, for those who are receiving the grades.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) [V]: Given that the company Computacenter, which was awarded the £96 million contract with no competition, failed to deliver all the laptop kits to vulnerable children in the first lockdown, why is the Secretary of State sticking with Tory party donors from that company this time?

Gavin Williamson: I pay tribute to Computacenter, which has done an amazing job of distributing hundreds of thousands of devices right across the country. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we did a direct award on the first contract, as Computacenter was one of the few businesses that was in a position to be able to assist us at that time. Since then, tenders have gone out and Computacenter has won those tenders through fair competition.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) [V]: Some North Yorkshire schools are operating a full, formal timetable, with checks and balances including roll calls and marking, but some schools are not. Does my right hon. Friend agree that all schools should use this kind of best practice to ensure that students work as hard and as effectively remotely as they do when they physically attend school?

Gavin Williamson: As a former North Yorkshire County councillor and former member of the education committee of North Yorkshire County Council, I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is vital that we keep as much formal education in place as possible. Schools have moved forwards in leaps and bounds in what they are able to offer, but we recognise that there has been variability. That is why we have taken the actions that we have, including the actions that we will take with Ofsted, to ensure that good, high-quality remote education is delivered in all our schools, right across the country.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: I would like to place on record my thanks to the National Education Union and to Unison for the work that they have been doing to keep school staff and pupils safe. In my constituency of Liverpool, Wavertree, I have been inundated with inquiries from worried parents and nursery staff about nurseries remaining open, and the risk that that poses, particularly when elderly grandparents, as part of support bubbles, are often used to pick up children. I am afraid that the narrative from the Secretary of State that this group is the least at risk is not enough and does not instil confidence. Will he fully explain to my constituents why nurseries and early years settings are not closing, with the exception of providing services to the children of key workers?

Gavin Williamson: Early evidence from SAGE has shown that early years provision had a smaller relative impact on transmission rates than primary schools, which in turn had a smaller relative impact than secondary schools; that is why the decision was taken. The hon. Lady mentions the National Education Union. I thank the National Education Union and Unison for recognising that the action they took and the advice that they gave

to their members on Sunday was incorrect, and for withdrawing that advice. It was the wrong advice, and I am glad that they have reflected on it and recognised that it was the wrong advice.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con) [V]: Ministers will know how bitterly disappointed I was when schools were so abruptly closed, because of the impact on mental health, the attainment gap and safeguarding. To give certainty and to enable schools to plan ahead, will the Secretary of State make the February half-term the default target date for return, barring any new crisis? And for those schools remaining open for key workers and vulnerable children, can we make sure that this time they are not turning away children on an education, health and care plan, in particular, on the basis that schools could not safely look after them? I am already hearing complaints from parents that their children who are entitled to attend are being placed on waiting lists.

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that children on an EHC plan are entitled to, and should be allowed to, go into school and receive the care and support that school provides to those incredibly important children, so I absolutely, categorically make that totally clear to all schools and all colleges as well. I would like to see schools open tomorrow, as he will know. I never want to see schools in a position where they are not able to welcome children, but we have had to take this incredibly difficult decision. I want to see all schools opening on 22 February, but we obviously do have to take into account the scientific and health advice. Certainly, from a Department and a schooling point of view, every one of us is working towards welcoming all children back on 22 February, but we obviously continue to have to listen to the advice of both the scientific and the public health community as to how we continue to beat this virus.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: The Secretary of State has made a timely decision to scrap GCSEs, AS-levels and A-levels, and I very much hope that we can avoid the heartache that some of my constituents suffered last year when their algorithm-adjusted grades caused them to miss out on university places they had worked so hard for. This year, since exams are not being sat or needing to be marked, there is no need to delay the announcement of grades until August. An earlier announcement will help students and parents to plan their next steps and universities to manage a fair admissions process, and it will leave time for appeals and resits, so will the Secretary of State, in his discussions with Ofqual, consider bringing forward the date on which assessment grades are released?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady raises an important point, and it is something that I have already raised in discussions with Ofqual. We obviously have to make that judgment call in line with the whole system. We do not want the whole system of awarding to be dictated by the date when youngsters get their grades, but it will be one of those issues that is in active consideration, because, as she says, it gives students more time if there is a need for appeals, and it also gives them more time to make the best choices for them and their future.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con) [V]: The Secretary of State should know the incredible dedication and self-sacrifice shown by teachers and staff throughout Romford and Havering since the start of this pandemic. Their determination to reorganise the schools to keep everyone safe and to continue to provide the highest standard of education must be commended, but with schools now closing as part of the lockdown, they will have to do everything they can to move classes for the majority of students online to minimise the impact on their education. However, as in-person teaching will still be going ahead for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, will my right hon. Friend please clarify whether only one parent or both need to be critical workers in order for their children to continue to attend school in person?

Gavin Williamson: I very much join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to not just the teachers in Romford, but all those support staff who open up the schools, welcome the children and are such an important part of the fabric of that school community. In answer directly to his question, if one parent is a critical worker, it is deemed that they would have access to that school place for their child.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab) [V]: Many of my university student constituents have contacted me because they are desperately worried about the impact that covid restrictions are having on their learning, research, educational success, future careers, finances and mental health and wellbeing. Does the Secretary of State believe it is fair for them to continue to pay full fees and full rent when they are not receiving the university experience they expected, and what will he do to support students, especially those facing financial hardship?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady will probably be aware that just before Christmas, the Government announced additional support for university students, with an extra package to help those youngsters who are most vulnerable. We will continue to work with the sector to look at how best we can support students and the sector as a whole.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con) [V]: I cannot hide my disappointment and sadness to see school gates closed to so many students from across Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke. Remote learning has many challenges, from unsuitable learning environments to no online connectivity and not having the necessary digital devices. Will my right hon. Friend continue discussions with me and the Minister for School Standards to get textbooks distributed to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they do not fall victim to the digital divide while learning remotely?

Gavin Williamson: I have asked officials to organise a meeting between my hon. Friend, my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards and me next week to discuss this. We all recognise what an important role textbooks play in helping and supporting learning, and there has been some brilliant work and investment in producing exceptionally high-quality material. I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend next week to discuss how we can get textbooks distributed, especially to some of the most disadvantaged communities across our country.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab) [V]: I welcome the Secretary of State's U-turn on GCSEs and A-levels, late though it was, adding to the pressure on schools and teachers. I am sorry that his approach on BTECs appears to be an afterthought and an abdication of responsibility, but I want to ask him about primary assessments. Does he accept that proceeding with SATs this year would place an unnecessary and pointless burden on schools, and will he take action to cancel this year's tests and to do so in good time?

Gavin Williamson: I always enjoyed working with the hon. Member, in terms of the work we did with the Motor Neurone Disease Association over a number of years. He often speaks a lot of good sense—just, sadly, in the wrong party. I can confirm that we will not be proceeding with SATs this year. We recognise that that would be an additional burden on schools, and it is very important that we are focused on welcoming students back into the classroom at the earliest opportunity.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for the work being done to roll out online learning, but for a significant proportion of my constituents there is a small practical problem: up to 13% of households either have very slow broadband or no access to it at all, and mobile data is non-existent in many villages. What practical support can he offer pupils living in such households, competing against other members of the household and trying to work or learn with no or little broadband?

Gavin Williamson: This is an incredibly challenging problem for many people living in rural communities. I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss what further measures we could take. I am beginning to think about some of the additional resource of textbooks and other resources that can maybe be made available to families and communities that have these acute problems, where it may not be something we can work around in terms of a technical solution. There may be other routes forward, but I will ask my Department to organise swiftly a meeting between him and me to discuss this issue and any other educational issues in his constituency.

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind) [V]: The pandemic has highlighted the injustice of tuition fees. Students are incurring on average £57,000-worth of debt to be isolated in university halls and to be restricted to online learning, and beyond that, education must be a universal right, not a costly privilege. The last decade of extortionate tuition fees has saddled young people with debt, deterred working-class people from gaining higher education and reduced our universities to profit-seeking businesses. Will the Government take this opportunity to support students by refunding rents, scrapping tuition fees and cancelling student debt for good?

Gavin Williamson: The statistics bear out something rather different from what the hon. Lady said. We have seen a massive expansion of the university sector, with more young people going to university than ever before. If she took the time to look at the statistics and the facts, as opposed to not basing her question on the statistics or facts, she would discover that more children from the most disadvantaged families are going to university—often they are the first from that family—than ever before. That is something that this party should

feel incredibly proud of, and I would like to see even more youngsters from the most deprived backgrounds going to some of the best universities in the country.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: Dr Adrian James, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists has described the covid-19 pandemic as the greatest threat to mental health

“since the second world war”.

As chair of the health all-party parliamentary group, I have been receiving concerned emails from parents across the United Kingdom regarding mental health. Given that children have experienced isolation and trauma—many have experienced bereavement—will the Secretary of State now take the opportunity to announce ring-fenced funding for a much-needed mental health and wellbeing strategy for children?

Gavin Williamson: I thank the hon. Lady for raising such an incredibly important point, and it would be great to have an opportunity to meet her and other members of the all-party parliamentary group to discuss some of the wider issues that we face not only in schools in England, but in schools across the whole of the United Kingdom. There have been various different initiatives, some for the higher education sector that were UK-wide, and which our universities have done so much on, but also some initiatives in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It would be really good to have a four-nations approach to how we support young people with the real challenges of mental health. I look forward to having that discussion with her, because I know she feels passionately about this issue, as so many Members of this House do. It is very much a cross-party issue, and I very much hope we can find some cross-party solutions on how we can best support our young people.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Happy new year to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I ask my right hon. Friend about early learning? The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Paula Barker) has already raised the point, but I would rather like my right hon. Friend to explain why in Bromley, early learning centres—they are semi-schools really—are still open. They have a real problem, because all of them are privatised, and there would be a certain loss of income, which would be a problem. Can I ask him—not that I dispute what he is going to say—for an explanation as to why these places are open when primary schools are not?

Gavin Williamson: I assure my hon. Friend that at every stage we will go above and beyond to keep education settings open. The Prime Minister has many times outlined the Government's commitment to and priority for education so, if we can, we will keep a sector of the education system open, because not only do the children who are in accrue enormous benefits—whether it is in a nursery, an early years setting, or a classroom in a primary or secondary school—but it is also incredibly important for parents and families, who often rely on those settings and schools to support them. When the advice came through—just to reiterate it—that the early evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies showed that early years provision had a much smaller relative impact on transmission rates than primary schools, which, again, have a much lower relative

transmission impact than secondary schools, we felt that that was the right thing to do. Yes, it is about supporting the children, but it is also about supporting the families.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) [V]: We all want children back in school as soon as possible, so why do we not work together to make that happen? With that in mind, will the Secretary of State tell me when he last met teachers' unions and what practical steps he agreed with them that the Department would take—for example, acquiring more space for schools, so that children and teachers can spread out? What steps did he agree that could make schools even safer so that we can get children back in school as quickly as possible?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Where there is a shared commitment to see schools open, it is important to work together. I meet lots of organisations, including trade unions, on a very regular basis. Nowadays, I am afraid, we do not get to meet physically, and it is all online, but we have regular meetings. Only in the past week, I have had the opportunity to speak with a number of union leaders.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con) [V]: Happy new year to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and everyone else in the House. For those students due to have sat GCSEs, and AS and A-levels later this year, we have had to make the difficult decision to cancel the exams, which will without doubt cause a great deal of anxiety. Will my right hon. Friend assure me and the House that his Department will make every effort to provide those students with the vital clarity that they will need in the weeks ahead?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend has been a great champion, defending his schools and doing everything he can to ensure that parents in his constituency benefit from being able to have access to their schools, but he makes an important point about clarity. I hope that what we have set out today brings a lot of clarity. The further detailed consultation that Ofqual will roll out in the early part of next week will be the next stage of consulting schools on the next steps. We recognise that, when that is fully completed, it is really important that we support schools, the teaching profession, and colleges and lecturers in those next steps and the awarding of grades in the summer for A-levels, GCSEs, and other vocational and technical qualifications.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) [V]: Despite serious safety concerns, we were told yesterday that BTECs were still going ahead, only to be told late last night that it was simply up to schools and colleges to decide whether it was safe. The Secretary of State ignored education unions and organisations when they repeatedly told him that it was not safe to reopen schools, colleges and nurseries on Monday, and nurseries are still open in full today, despite widespread anger and disbelief in the sector and without any robust scientific evidence from the Secretary of State that nurseries will not act as a vector for transmission of the virus.

Safety is the Secretary of State's responsibility. Up to one in 50 people now have the virus, and the number continues to climb. Will he now listen to education unions and organisations, cancel BTEC exams, urgently

take the same safety approach on nurseries as he has done with schools, and provide upgraded risk assessment guidance and vaccine access to all settings that are currently open to vulnerable and key worker children?

Gavin Williamson: May I say what a delight it is to have the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) as shadow Secretary of State? At least she seems to be enthusiastic about having children in schools, colleges and other settings, unlike the previous shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey).

At every stage—I think the hon. Lady understands this—we have put the safety and security of children and the workforce at the very heart of what we do. As the chief medical officers not just of England, but of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have said, the best place for children is in school, but we have had to take unprecedented action as a result of the advice from the chief medical officer for England that the nation had to move to covid alert level 5. When the decision was taken on Monday to move to covid alert level 5, it was right that additional actions were taken, as reluctant as I was to see us in that position.

I think it is a little unfair of the hon. Lady to imply that the safety and security of staff and children are not at the heart of all our actions. They are at the heart of all our actions, but we know that children benefit from being in school and having the opportunity to sit in front of their teacher in the classroom. That is why Conservative Members have always been so enthusiastic for schools to have children in. I hope that she will eventually become a convert to that idea, as her successor has done.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Last year, the approach to GCSEs and A-levels meant that private candidates, such as home educated children, were unable to obtain a grade. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this year they will be able to do so?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend speaks not just for her constituents, but for many thousands of youngsters right across the country who are worried about this. I have asked Ofqual to take up this issue, to look at it directly and to make sure that there are measures in place so that those students will be in a position to get a grade. I have asked Ofqual to include that as part of the consultation that it will be doing next week. We have already discussed how this can be done, and we believe that it will be possible to do so.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State clearly prefers testing, rather than vaccination, as the means to make sure our teachers and learners will be safe when schools can reopen. The Prime Minister wants that to happen in six or seven weeks' time. To have an adequate testing regime in every school by that period will require working around the clock in every minute available between now and then. Will the Secretary of State confirm that every school in my constituency has access to the support it needs to make sure that such a regime will be in place in time?

Gavin Williamson: We have already seen the mass distribution of testing kits, and all the equipment that is required, in schools and colleges that take years 7 and

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above. We will be looking at how we can roll out testing beyond secondary schools into primary settings and earlier years to support staff.

I am as enthusiastic about vaccination as the hon. Gentleman is, but we are very far forward with our programme of mass testing for children, with all secondary schools receiving the initial deliveries. All schools will be getting that level of support in secondary settings, and we are looking at expanding that in primary settings as well. That would include all the schools in his constituency, as well as those in all our constituencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I appreciate that the Secretary of State is giving thorough and detailed answers to a great many questions, but we have already taken up considerably more than an hour on this statement. There are still 13 people to participate and I would like to give everyone the chance to ask their question, but I must ask them not to make speeches or statements. Just ask a question, and if it is a short question the Secretary of State will be able to give quite a short answer.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con) [V]: Secretary of State, the future of the country is very much in your hands—the children are our future. I pay tribute to my local schools, who have risen to the challenge and continue to deliver an exemplary education. Closing schools is one thing; what is your plan to open them? What are your criteria? It cannot be to end lockdown having had a devastating effect on children's mental health. What is your vision and what is your plan for optimising children's life chances and giving a clear map of the future for children, parents, teachers, universities and employers? What, in your eyes, does good look like?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I did tell the hon. Lady not to make a speech but to ask a question. She has asked several questions, which I am sure the Secretary of State will answer, but I must insist that while we have virtual proceedings in this Chamber, people who participate virtually adhere to the same rules that we adhere to in the Chamber. Nobody calls the Secretary of State “you”. “You” means the Chair; the Secretary of State is the right hon. Gentleman.

Gavin Williamson: I will endeavour to be very brief, Madam Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to all those who work in schools, colleges and nurseries in Newton Abbot, and I add my thanks for the work that they do. We have been clear that the testing regime is a clear element in opening schools once more. We rely on the pressure that the NHS is currently feeling starting to lift, as that is one of the key reasons we had to take the difficult and unpalatable decision to close schools.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: I have been contacted by a distraught young lady from my constituency who works full time and is a private candidate studying for her A-levels. With exams now cancelled, students in standard schooling will have predicted grade assessments from their teachers, but self-taught students have no such thing. Last year, thousands of private A-level candidates went without any grade when their exams

were cancelled. Will the Secretary of State work with the exam boards to make provision for self-taught students like my constituent and to do what is necessary to ensure that they are not overlooked and that their money, time and study really do pay off?

Gavin Williamson: I certainly will do that. We have already had those discussions with Ofqual and we will have them, in turn, with exam boards. I refer the hon. Lady to the comments I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey).

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): As someone who was campaigning to keep schools open until a few days ago, I recognise how difficult these decisions have been for my right hon. Friend. I want to press him on two points. He has made his views on vaccination in schools clear, but I implore him to look again at vaccination in SEN schools, where the line between teaching and caring is very blurred. Secondly, will he review catch-up funding for schools, especially in areas of deprivation, to ensure that it is targeted and that the attainment gap does not widen as a result of this lockdown?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend and I have both championed the importance of keeping all schools open at every stage. I very much thank him for his support. I spy in the distance the Health Secretary, who is progressing slowly to the Chamber. I guarantee that I will make those arguments as forcefully as possible about recognising children and the workforce in special schools, where there is often a crossover between education and care. We will make those arguments, while recognising the broad clinical requirements under which the Department of Health and Social Care has to operate. I will certainly echo those comments to the Health Secretary.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I allowed the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell) two questions because I could not get in quickly enough to stop the second one. From now on, one question, no speeches, no statements.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: Ofqual suggests that as many as 1.78 million children do not have access to a computer. What the Education Secretary has announced today is just a 10% reduction in those numbers by the end of next week, which will still leave 1.6 million children unable to access a computer. Bridging the digital divide is essential, so when will those 1.6 million children receive their laptops, and when will he address the situation of the 900,000 children who do not have data access?

Gavin Williamson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my statement earlier, which covered most of the points he raises.

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con) [V]: I know that my right hon. Friend did everything he could to keep schools open, and that he shares my concern for the welfare of the hundreds of thousands of young people now isolated at home. Will he look urgently at the reports of harms being caused to children by social isolation?

Gavin Williamson: Absolutely. It is incredible how social isolation has a real impact on young people. Children miss out on so much from not being at school—

not just their teacher's input but socialisation with friends. I am always happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this and what more we can do to support schools, teachers and the education community to support our children.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP) [V]: Where and when will families be able to find out exactly what free services the mobile operators are providing, and how will the Secretary of State make sure that they are as straightforward as possible to access? Is he making sure that the devolved Governments are fully looped in on this and that they will get any Barnett consequential of additional spending on laptop and tablet distribution?

Gavin Williamson: We of course always work closely with the devolved Governments. The benefits of the Union are demonstrated in the fact that we are able to work together and at considerable scale to deliver benefits to all parents and children. Any additional spend on anything has Barnett consequential, which means that, again, Scotland benefits from being in the United Kingdom and the financial support that the whole UK gains from being together.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con) [V]: I know from my own children that a live lesson taught online is much more effective than learning resources being placed online. While teachers always need to be able to use their discretion to take account of specific circumstances, can my right hon. Friend assure me that the default expectation during this lockdown is for live online teaching?

Gavin Williamson: We have already set out really detailed guidance for all schools, setting the expectation levels for all schools and what they provide to pupils. We recognise that there will be a blend in the range of different teaching, but we have set clear expectations and if schools fall below them, parents can take recourse either with the school directly or ultimately through Ofsted.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: As students have been advised not to return to university for the foreseeable future, most will be left paying for accommodation that they cannot use. It is clearly unfair that students renting private accommodation will be left thousands of pounds out of pocket, and the Government's miserly £20 million contribution to the university hardship fund obviously is not enough. Does the Education Secretary agree that the Government have a responsibility to refund students their accommodation costs?

Gavin Williamson: As I have already set out, before Christmas the Government recognised the need to give additional support to students, through the universities. That is why we put the additional financial arrangements in place to support them.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I put on the record my thanks to all the teachers and support workers in Telford. My single question to my right hon. Friend is whether he agrees that just handing out laptops is no substitute for the support and guidance a child receives from a

dedicated, committed teacher. Will he do everything in his power to enable teachers to return to school, including considering vaccinations?

Gavin Williamson: I would very much like to add my thanks to all the teachers in Telford, especially as one of my daughters is very privileged to be able to benefit from those teachers in my hon. Friend's constituency. I echo her point that supporting children's learning is not just about giving them a device; it is about how that device is used and how that child is supported, and the work we have undertaken over the past few months to support that through the Oak National Academy and the resources that are available is an important part of that. In terms of vaccinations and testing, we will always be pushing at the boundaries to maximise that for our education settings right across the country.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab) [V]: The Secretary of State has placed the decision about whether to open maintained nursery schools on governing boards. Will he make public health a priority, and guarantee full funding during this crisis to relieve boards such as the Bedford Nursery Schools Federation of the feeling of being coerced into remaining open to protect their future viability?

Gavin Williamson: We recognise that there are a lot of nursery schools that want to be in a position to open their doors. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave earlier in this session about the reasons why we took that decision.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for updating the House and answering questions so fully. Could he tell me: if a university student has travelled back to their halls of residence and now is going to receive remote learning, should they stay at university, or should they return home?

Gavin Williamson: We would encourage that university student to stay where they are, in order to be able to conduct their remote learning, although obviously university students who are not doing practical subjects should not have returned to university at this stage.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) [V]: Students in Bath and across the country feel massively let down. They are paying full tuition fees on top of rent for accommodation that they are not allowed to live in—we have just heard that answer from the Secretary of State. I am aware that this question has been asked several times already this afternoon, but we have not had a proper answer yet, so will the Secretary of State now commit to the rapid implementation of a review of this academic year, with the power to make recommendations for financial compensation?

Gavin Williamson: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I share my right hon. Friend's concern over schools being closed, especially for children in Wealden who do not have access to technology. Can he double confirm that those children without access to tech are now seen as vulnerable, and

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

can immediately access physical education—I mean, attend school physically—and will not have to jump through hoops to be able to get into school?

Gavin Williamson: I can absolutely confirm that. That was issued in our initial guidance on school closures back in March last year. We have repeated that self-same guidance all the way through where schools have been in an unfortunate position, because we have had to recognise that during the latter stages of last year, there were schools that were closed, and even during that time children who did not have access to that type of education were able to access education settings.¹

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): In order to allow the safe changeover of colleagues in the Chamber, I will now suspend the House for three minutes.

2.44 pm

Sitting suspended.

2.47 pm

On resuming—

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising this day, do adjourn until 11 January 2021.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

Business of the House (Today)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at today's sitting, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union Documents), debate on the Motion in the name of Secretary Matt Hancock relating to Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 may continue until Seven o'clock, at which time the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to bring proceedings to a conclusion; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

2.48 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Can I start by thanking the Leader of the House for extending virtual participation in debates? It has made a huge difference to our colleagues to be able to take part.

Could I ask the right hon. Member, on the business of the House, whether the Government are likely to move any motion relating to virtual participation in Committees—many statutory instruments are coming through—and also whether there are likely to be any changes to sitting Fridays? Our colleagues are very keen to take part in all aspects of the House's business.

2.49 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): May I preface this by thanking the House for getting everything ready to come back today? I seem to need to amend my business statement in future to say that there will be a recall of Parliament on a frequent basis, but I hope this will change as we move into the new year.

The plan for Back-Bench business on Fridays is that it should continue. Therefore, Members will be able to participate in that, and will be able to do so remotely. Westminster Hall will continue, but will continue physically, as will Committees. There is a small broadcasting team shared between both the House of Lords and the House of Commons. When we looked into the cost of extending remote participation to Westminster Hall, it was going to be over £100,000, and there are limits to how much taxpayers' money can be spent on this. However, it is important to ensure that proper scrutiny takes place, and it is very popular with Members and the Backbench Business Committee. So private Members' Bills are to continue, Committees are to continue as they are and Westminster Hall is to continue as it is.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you for that informative piece of information.

Question put and agreed to.

1. [Official Report, 20 January 2021, Vol. 687, c. 4MC.]

Public Health

2.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I beg to move,

That the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I., 2021, No. 8), dated 5 January 2021, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 January, be approved.

The new variant of coronavirus presents us with a renewed challenge, here in Britain and around the world. Our strategy throughout has been to suppress the virus until a vaccine can make us safe, and while our collective efforts were working on the old variant, when faced with a new variant that is between 50% and 70% more transmissible, there has been no choice but to respond. I understand that these regulations have serious consequences, and I regret the huge costs they bring, but I know just as surely that these costs are far outweighed by the costs we would bear without action.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Do not viruses, especially when they become as widespread as this one, always mutate? Have the Government not planned for that?

Matt Hancock: Yes, of course, we have been not only watching for mutations but, indeed, testing for mutations throughout, and it is partly because the UK has the biggest genomic testing capability of any country in the world that we have been able to pick this one up. There may be new mutations in other countries that do not have this scale of genomic testing, and just under 50% of all the sequenced genomes of covid-19 that are deposited with the World Health Organisation are deposited by the UK because of this capability.

That leads to a challenge, which is that it is the countries that have the genomic testing capability that spot the new variant and report it. There are countries that may have variations that are not known about and are not discovered in this way and cannot be reported, but that is the nature of the pandemic. My strong view is that we should be transparent and clear with our international friends when we find a new variant that is difficult to deal with.

When I have previously come to ask for the House's support for national restrictions, we had to take it on trust that there would be an exit, because it was before a vaccine had been approved. Today I come to the House seeking approval of these regulations knowing, from the huge pressure on the NHS right now, that this action is necessary today, but also with the certain knowledge that we have a way out.

Before turning to the detail of the regulations, I want to set out the plan for how we get out of them, because that is critical. This country was the first in the world to deploy not one but two vaccines, and more than 1.3 million people have been vaccinated already, including a quarter of the over-80s.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I do not like it one bit, but I will support the Health Secretary tonight. The reason I will do it, and I suspect the reason why there is such high public support for these measures, is the position in which the NHS finds itself and the level 5 ruling. If we have, by the middle of February, vaccinated

the top four groups, who are the ones likely to overwhelm the NHS, does the logic not follow that at that point we will be able to lift the restrictions on our constituents' lives?

Matt Hancock: I will come on precisely to my hon. Friend's point, because that is a critical question that I know people are rightly asking: if we are going to have these restrictions, how do we get out of them and, frankly, how do we get out of all the restrictions that we have had to put in place?

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State mentions the vaccine as one of the crucial routes out of this, and I pay absolute tribute to all the incredible scientists and NHS staff who are preparing to deliver it. However, one of the things my constituents are asking me is how we can be sure that the production of the vaccine will meet the ambitions the Prime Minister and others have set out and that we are building the types of facility we need to continue to ramp up production to the highest levels we can. Can the Secretary of State explain what is going on, because I was concerned to hear about the factory in Wales that is not operating seven days a week? Why is that? Is it because it is not getting enough supply into its system?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the Secretary of State answers the question, let me say that we can have interventions of course—this is a debate—but they must not be long interventions. I give notice now that the time limit for Back-Bench speeches will be three minutes from the beginning, and even with three minutes not everyone on the Order Paper will be called, because there is not enough time.

Matt Hancock: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try to answer these interventions briefly, but they are important because people want to know what is the way out of these restrictions, and that is absolutely central to the case I am making.

The fill and finish plant in Wrexham is doing a brilliant job, but it can fill and finish vials only at the speed at which the vaccine material, which is a biological material, not a chemical compound, can be produced. It is doing a brilliant job at the pace that it needs to go. AstraZeneca and Pfizer are manufacturing the material itself, and they are also working as fast as they can, and I pay tribute to them and their manufacturing teams, who are doing a terrific job.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Approving these regulations today would allow for lockdown for three months, until the end of March. The Secretary of State will have heard my exchange with the Prime Minister earlier, when the Prime Minister said that he did not think we would have to wait that long for an opportunity to choose whether to end the regulations. Will the Secretary of State go further and give a commitment to a further vote at the end of January and the end of February, so that the House will have control over what is happening?

Matt Hancock: While these regulations do provide for new restrictions until the end of March, that is not because we expect the full national lockdown to continue

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until then, but to allow the steady, controlled and evidence-led move down through the tiers on a local basis. Those tier changes do require a vote in Parliament. The restrictions will therefore be kept under continuous review; there is a statutory requirement to review them every two weeks and a legal obligation to remove them if they are no longer deemed necessary to limit the transmission of the virus.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I thank the Secretary of State; I understand the reasons for the regulations, and I fully support them. Does the Health Department, in conjunction with the Education Secretary, have any intention to ensure that teachers are given priority for a vaccine because of the work that they do, along with nurseries and children's special needs? If we ensure that they have it, we can continue with some reality.

Matt Hancock: Of course we are considering who, once we have vaccinated those who are clinically vulnerable, should be the next priority for vaccination. Teachers, of course, have a very strong case, as have those who work in nurseries. Many colleagues on both sides of the House have made that point, and we will consider it.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Just to pick up one point, the Secretary of State cites the certain knowledge that there is a way out. The whole point of the intervention by the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) is that there is uncertainty. What contingency plans are there if a mutation proves resistant to either of the vaccines and we have to be in these measures for longer? In particular, will the Secretary of State consider the fact that we have barely drawn on the numerous people in the armed forces to create extra NHS capacity? We could do so much more of that if necessary. Is that part of the plan?

Matt Hancock: Yes, it is very much part of the plan; it is happening right now. On mutations and the link to the vaccine, as with flu, where mutations mean we have to change the vaccine each year, any vaccine might have to be updated in the future, but that is not our understanding of the situation now. Of course that is being double-checked and tested, with the scientists at Porton Down and, as we roll out the vaccine in areas where there is a high degree of the new variant, by the pharmacological surveillance of those who have been vaccinated, which will allow us to see for real the impact of the vaccine on the new variant. The goal, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, is by the middle of next month to have offered the first dose to everyone in the top four priority groups, and they currently account for four out of five covid fatalities. I am not sure that this point has fully been addressed, but the strong correlation between age and fatality from covid means we will be able to vaccinate those who account for four out of every five fatalities within the top four cohorts. It does then take two to three weeks from the first dose to reach immunity, but the vaccine is therefore the way out of this pandemic and the way to a better year ahead.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Matt Hancock: Yes, but then I want to make some progress on the detail of the regulations.

Mr Harper: I am grateful; it is on the specific point that my right hon. Friend has raised. He knows I understand it, because it is exactly the one I raised with him in this House last week when we were recalled, and I welcomed the Prime Minister's commitment to it. To go back to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), my right hon. Friend is clear that once we have vaccinated those four groups and they have got immunity, we have therefore taken care of 80% of the risk of death. So what possible reason is there at that point for not rapidly relaxing the restrictions in place on the rest of our country?

Matt Hancock: We have to see the impact of that vaccination on the reduction in the number of deaths, which I very much hope we will see at that point. That is why we will take an evidence-led move down through the tiers when—I hope—we have broken the link between cases and hospitalisations and deaths. We will need to see the protection in lived reality on the ground, but we will watch this like a hawk. My aim is to keep these restrictions in place for not a moment longer than they are necessary.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for everything he is doing, but the logic of his anticipating what is going to happen in two, three or four weeks' time from the number of cases we are getting at the moment is that we can do the same in reverse. That is to say that when we have a sufficient number of people vaccinated, we can anticipate how many deaths will have been avoided in two, three or four weeks' time. As this cuts both ways, that means that he will be able to make a decision on when we should end these restrictions, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) has just suggested.

Matt Hancock: The logic of the case made by my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) is right, and we want to see that happen in empirical evidence on the ground. This hope for the weeks ahead does not, however, take away from the serious and immediate threat posed now, and I wish to turn to what is in the regulations and the actions we need to take.

The Office for National Statistics has reported that one in 50 of the population has the disease, some with symptoms and some without. The latest figures show that we have 30,074 covid patients in UK hospitals and that the NHS is under significant pressure. Admissions are now higher than at any point in the pandemic, and so on Monday all four UK chief medical officers recommended that we move the country to covid-19 alert level 5. In practice, that means that they believe that without action there is a material risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed. It is for that reason that we have placed England in a national lockdown, alongside action taken in each of the devolved nations. Every single citizen needs to take steps to control this new variant, and this personal responsibility is important. To give the NHS a fighting chance to do its vital work of saving lives, it is on all of us to support it.

The regulations set out that everyone must stay at home save for a limited number of reasons permitted in law, including: essential shopping; work, if it cannot reasonably be done from home; education or childcare if eligible to attend; medical needs, including getting a covid test or getting vaccinated; exercise; escaping domestic abuse; and support bubbles where people are eligible. These regulations are based on the existing tier 4 regulations, with some additional measures that reinforce the stay-at-home imperative.

These include: stopping the sale of alcohol through takeaway or click and collect services; and closing sport and leisure facilities, although allowing playgrounds and allotments to remain open. I know that these further restrictions are difficult, but, unfortunately, they are necessary, because we must minimise social interaction to get this virus back under control. These measures came into force first thing this morning under the emergency procedure and will remain in force subject to the approval of this House today.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I have just been talking to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) who is a doctor. He showed me the ridiculous form that he has had to fill in to be able to give this simple jab—all this diversity and equality training. When he is inoculating an old lady, he is not going to ask her whether she has come into contact with jihadis or whatever. The Secretary of State must cut through all this bureaucratic rubbish.

Matt Hancock: I am a man after my hon. Friend's heart. I can tell the House that we have removed a series of unnecessary training modules that had been put in place, including fire safety, terrorism and others. I will write to him with the full panoply of training that is not required and that we have been able to remove. We made this change as of this morning, and I am glad to say that it is now in force. I am a fan of busting bureaucracy, and in this case I agree that it is not necessary to undertake anti-terrorism training in order to inject a vaccine.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I notice also a story about not delivering vaccines on Sunday. As I understand it, it is thought that there will be sufficient vaccines to be able to do seven-day inoculations. If somebody runs short, they will get topped up, which is a little different from what *The Daily Telegraph* said today.

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is quite right. The supply of vaccines can take place on all seven days of the week, but, in a regular way, we do it on six days of the week and then, on the seventh day, people can either rest or deliver further vaccine if that is what is necessary. As a result of this delivery schedule, there has been no point at which any area has been short of vaccine. We have a challenge, which is to increase the amount of vaccine available. The current rate-limiting factor on the vaccine roll-out is the supply of approved, tested, safe vaccine, and we are working with both AstraZeneca and Pfizer to increase that supply as fast as possible. They are doing a brilliant job, but that is the current rate-limiting step. As that supply increases, we will need more people to give vaccinations. We will need to get pharmacists involved in the vaccination. I very much hope to get my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), a former doctor, and

others involved in vaccinations. We will need more people, but the current rate-limiting factor is the supply of vaccines.

That is not to say that the companies are not supplying on the schedule that was agreed; they are, and they are doing their bit, but we do need to increase that supply and then the NHS will increase its delivery. I hope to make that point crystal clear, because Public Health England's work to get the vaccine out is not a rate-limiting factor, the current discussion with pharmacists is not a rate-limiting factor, and the fill and finish is not a rate-limiting factor. What is a rate-limiting factor is the amount of the actual juice—the actual vaccine—that is available, which is not manufactured like a chemical. It is a biological product. I do not know whether you bake your own bread, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I sometimes do and it is a bit like the creation and the growth of yeast. That is probably the best way to think of it. It is a complicated and difficult task and that is the rate-limiting factor. I pay tribute to those who are engaged in the manufacturing process of this critical product.

Steve Brine: My right hon. Friend knows that I am obsessed with this point. He mentioned the agreed schedule of delivery. Will he consider publishing that, so that we can see what the agreed schedule is?

Matt Hancock: I can assure my hon. Friend that the agreed schedule of delivery will enable us to offer vaccinations to everyone in the top four priority groups by the middle of February. That is why the Prime Minister was able to commit us to that schedule.

I want to talk about the support that has been outlined. We are providing an additional £4.6 billion of support to businesses, including those in retail, hospitality and leisure that have been forced to close their doors once again, on top of the £280 billion plan for jobs, which includes the extension of the furlough scheme until April.

Mr Harper: I will be brief—I do not want to try your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) raised his point because earlier this week we had a fantastic call with our hon. Friend the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, who is responsible for vaccine delivery, in which we asked a number of times about the agreed schedule but did not get a clear answer. If it has been agreed with the companies, why can my right hon. Friend not just publish it, so that we know when the vaccine will arrive? That will give people confidence that we will deliver on the Prime Minister's commitment to the country.

Matt Hancock: I will happily take that point away, but I can tell my right hon. Friend that that supply allows for delivery on the schedule and the target the Prime Minister set, to which my whole team is working.

John Spellar: The Secretary of State stressed that the problem is really in production of the vaccine. Presumably, the number of sites on which that is done is limited. Why have we not expanded the number of sites?

Matt Hancock: We have; we spent the summer working on that. The vaccine has sprung into prominence in the public debate over the past month or so, but we were

[*Matt Hancock*]

working on that though the whole of last year, and I am glad to be able to assure the right hon. Gentleman that there is further expansion still to come.

I will end my speech by reiterating that we know that if we do not act now, eventually the NHS will not be able to cope. No Member of this House wants to witness the scenes that have been seen elsewhere in the world of hospitals overrun and doctors forced to choose who to treat and who to turn away. Although the winter weeks will be difficult, we now know what the way out looks like. Accelerating the deployment of covid vaccines, making the most vulnerable groups safe, and everyone playing their part on the way is the route out of this pandemic.

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for everything he has done on this. Will he join me in thanking the residents of Wolverhampton for the community testing that they have done, especially Bilal mosque and Sedgley Street gurdwara, where people have all come together to defeat this virus?

Matt Hancock: Yes I will. I am glad I took that final intervention. The people of Wolverhampton have come together to deliver community testing in an incredibly impressive way. I have heard about the work of the gurdwara, bringing together leaders of all different faiths to make sure that we get testing out into the community. We need to do the same with the vaccine programme, because both are critical.

In the meantime, we must stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. That eventually will carry us to a brighter future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), I confirm that a three-minute limit will be imposed immediately on Back-Bench speeches.

3.13 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): We will support the regulations, but like the Secretary of State, I did not come into politics to restrict people's freedoms in this way. As one who represents Leicester, a city that has effectively been in a form of restrictions since last March, I well understand the devastating impact restrictions can have on our economy, on our way of life and on the mental health and wellbeing of our constituents. Indeed, many of our constituents will feel devastated by the prospect of weeks and weeks, perhaps longer—possibly until the end of March—in isolation, feeling anxious and lonely.

Last year, in the months following the long lockdown, 19.6 million prescriptions for antidepressants were issued—a 4% increase on the same period the year before—to more than 6 million people in England, which is the highest number on record. If we are to support lockdown we need assurances from Ministers that mental health services will be fully resourced, will stay open and can respond to people's needs throughout lockdown.

I know that many people find solace in prayer, so I am grateful that communal prayer can continue during lockdown. With the indulgence of the House, may I take the opportunity to thank Leicester City Council,

Peter Soulsby and our councillors, especially those for the wards of Stoneygate, Wycliffe and Spinney Hills, who have worked hard with our many mosques, temples, gurdwaras, synagogues and churches across Leicester to ensure covid-secure worship?

Jim Shannon: I think it is important to have prayer. Does the shadow spokesman agree with the call I have made in the past for a national day of prayer in this country?

Jonathan Ashworth: I think that that is a very good recommendation. May I extend an invitation to the hon. Gentleman to return to Leicester to watch our great football team, when we are allowed and are out of lockdown? Perhaps I will take him around and show him some of the great inter-faith work that we do in Leicester as well.

The lockdown will have a huge impact on the wellbeing of our children, so a plan to get our children back safely to school is a priority. There are thousands of children out of school in overcrowded, cramped accommodation, unable to access learning properly from home. There are other children at risk of abuse and violence. Members may know that I have spoken of my own experiences growing up in a home with a parent who had a problem with alcohol. Many children face the prospect of being locked in their home with a parent who abuses drink or drugs, so I urge Ministers to work with and fund children's advocacy and support groups such as the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, with which I have worked closely, that will do so much throughout this lockdown.

Today, I agree with the Secretary of State. We do, unfortunately, have to restrict freedoms further to safeguard freedoms for the future and save lives. As he said, the tragic reality is that the virus is out of control. To be blunt, there is no freedom for our constituents if they are in the graveyard. There is little freedom either for those who suffer the enduring, debilitating effects of long covid. Yesterday, almost 55,000 cases were reported in England—one in 50, as the Secretary of State said, have the virus. The numbers in hospital are higher than in April, with over 1,800 in intensive care. Yesterday, there were over 3,300 hospitalisations—a record—and admissions are going up in every region.

This is a national emergency, and a national lockdown is necessary. Indeed, we should have locked down sooner. We are voting this lockdown through on Twelfth night, yet in the run-up to Christmas the alarm bells should have been ringing. The Secretary of State came to the House on 14 December to report a new strain, now known as the B117 strain. He told the House:

“Initial analysis suggests that this variant is growing faster than the existing variants.”—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2020; Vol. 686, c. 23.]

The Prime Minister learned of the rapid spread of the new variant on 18 December. The New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group met that day and concluded that the new strain added at least 0.4 to the R. On 21 December, the chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, said that the new strain was “everywhere” and cases would rise after the “inevitable mixing” at Christmas. He said:

“The lesson...you have to learn about this virus...is that it's important to get ahead of it in terms of actions”.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies met on 22 December, the following day, and concluded:

“It is highly unlikely that measures with stringency and adherence in line with the measures in England in November... would be sufficient to maintain R below 1 in the presence of the new variant.”

Here we are, two weeks later, with half a million infections and 33,000 hospitalisations since 22 December. This is a national tragedy. Why does the Prime Minister, with all the scientific expertise at his disposal, all the power to make a difference, always seem to be the last to grasp what needs to happen? He has not been short of data—he has been short of judgment, and yet again we are all paying the price.

As the Secretary of State has said, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Vaccination is how ultimately we are released from these restrictions. I pay tribute to everyone involved in helping to distribute and administer 1.3 million vaccine doses so far. This is a great achievement, but we need to go further and faster. The Prime Minister has promised that almost 14 million people will be offered the vaccine by mid-February. That depends on about 2 million doses a week, on average. Both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have assured us in recent days that that is doable, based on orders, but, in the past, Ministers told us that they had agreements for 30 million AstraZeneca doses by September 2020 and 10 million Pfizer doses by the end of 2020, so I think that people just want to understand the figures and want clarity. How many of the ordered doses have been manufactured, how many of the ordered doses have been delivered to the NHS, and how many batches are awaiting clearance through the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency clearing processes? Two million a week would be fantastic, but it should not be the limit of our ambitions. We should be aiming to scale up to 3 million, to 5 million, to 6 million jabs a week over the coming months. If we can vaccinate 29.6 million people, deaths and hospitalisations will be reduced by 99%. That is what we should be aiming at now.

Steve Brine: Obviously the Opposition will support this tonight, but, further to the exchanges that a number of Government Members had with the Secretary of State, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House at what point he and the Leader of the Opposition will be calling for our constituents to be released from the restrictions? Please do not say, “When it becomes obvious it is going to happen.”

Jonathan Ashworth: The hon. Gentleman asks a perfectly reasonable question. Of course, as we vaccinate more, mortality rates will improve more and we will be able to save people’s lives, but there will be others who remain unvaccinated and exposed to the virus, and will possibly develop debilitating symptoms of long covid as a result of that exposure. I do believe that we can begin to ease restrictions once we increase the proportions of those who are vaccinated, but we will not be able to go back to normal yet, because the virus will still be circulating. Even though they may not end up in hospital and on ventilation, many who have contracted this virus have remained incredibly ill as a result.

Dr Murrison: I am really pleased by the generally positive way in which the hon. Gentleman is approaching this; it does him great credit. Can I perhaps help him

out by making a suggestion? Every year, we accept a certain amount of deaths—tragic, sad deaths—from seasonal flu, up to 28,000 in recent years. Would it be reasonable to anticipate the number of deaths that are going to be caused by this virus and try to make a political judgment—for a political judgment is what it is—on what we feel is acceptable, and that will give us our criteria for deciding on when to lift this lockdown?

Jonathan Ashworth: The right hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point, like the former Public Health Minister, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), but this is not just a simple calculation about the number of deaths that are prevented. The right hon. Gentleman has more clinical experience than I have, obviously, but we know that there are people who suffer long-term, debilitating conditions as a result of this virus, with reports of people developing psychosis, long-term breathing problems, and problems with the rhythm of their heart. It remains an extremely dangerous virus, regardless of whether people end up in hospital and on ventilation. But he is quite right: in the end, this will be a judgment for politicians and a judgment for this House. It is not a judgment for the chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser, although I would hope that our judgments, in the end, are guided by the chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I, too, commend the hon. Gentleman for the constructive approach he is adopting. He clearly has a very good relationship with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Will he assent to the proposition that public confidence in this vaccination programme is critical if we want people to comply with these lockdown measures, and we must do nothing that creates false expectations or unrealistic expectations about how the vaccination programme will go? We must be modest in what we promise and hopefully we will overachieve. Can he assist my right hon. Friend in that objective?

Jonathan Ashworth: I think that as a rule in politics it is always better to under-promise and over-deliver. Maybe the Whip on the Treasury Bench could send that advice to the Prime Minister, because the Prime Minister tends to have the opposite approach to some of these matters, I would say.

Our big target should be to vaccinate more, particularly among NHS staff. Many NHS staff on the frontline, in the face of danger, are scared. They are exhausted. Many have said to me that they feel they were sent out in the initial weeks of the first wave without the protection of personal protective equipment, and now they are exposed again without the protection of inoculation. Will Ministers move heaven and earth to get all frontline NHS staff vaccinated urgently, and can we have a clear date by which NHS staff on the frontline will receive the vaccine? If manufacturers can increase supply, what more can be done to improve distribution? In addition to GPs, our community pharmacists have tremendous links with hard-to-reach communities. We need to make full use of them.

Vaccination not only saves lives, and is not only the route out of restrictions; it is also urgent, because we are now in a race against time. The B117 strain is fast becoming dominant, and it has done so in just a matter of weeks. The more virus there is circulating, the more opportunities there are for further mutations that could

[Jonathan Ashworth]

give the virus greater advantage—possibly a variant on which vaccines no longer work, risking another devastating covid wave in winter 2021. Vaccination, both at home and across the globe, is now fiercely urgent, and the race to vaccinate is therefore literally a race against evolution.

We will also support this lockdown tonight because we know we have to reduce transmission. That is why we are asking people to stay at home. But not everyone can work from home on their laptops. There are 10 million key workers in the United Kingdom, of whom only 14% can work from home—key workers, many of whom are low paid and often use public transport to travel to work in jobs that, by necessity, involve greater social mixing, and who are more exposed to risk. Often, because of their home circumstances, they end up exposing others to risk as well. We witnessed that in Leicester, where it is suspected that a spike back in the summer was the result of a spillover of infections into the community from those sweatshops that did not adhere to proper health and safety rules.

We need to make sure that our workplaces are covid-secure; otherwise, we will not get on top of transmission. What support are the Government offering to install ventilation systems in workplaces? Will the Government introduce a safety threshold for ventilation of indoor workplaces without outside air? Given that the B117 strain is so much more transmissible, are the Government considering reintroducing the 2-metre rule? Given that fewer than 20% of those who should isolate do so fully, will the Government finally accept that sick workers need proper sick pay and support? Otherwise, those workers will be forced to work, spreading this illness.

The British public have done so much over the last year and have made great sacrifices. We are a great country, and our people can and will rise to the occasion. All anyone asks is that the Government do the right thing at the right time: make all workplaces covid-secure; vaccinate health workers as soon as possible; introduce decent sick pay and support to isolate, and roll out a mass vaccination plan like we have never seen before. This is a race against time—a race against evolution—and we will support this lockdown tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I will now introduce the three-minute limit. I remind hon. and right hon. Members that when a speaking limit is in effect for Back Benchers, a countdown clock will be visible on the screens of hon. and right hon. Members participating virtually and on the screens in the Chamber. For hon. and right hon. Members participating physically in the Chamber, the usual clock in the Chamber will operate.

3.28 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I begin by thanking the Health Secretary, his Ministers and his advisers for all they are doing, working day and night to try to keep the country safe.

While I understand the Government's health measures, I really worry about school closures. We need to know whether a risk assessment has been done of the loss of learning, the impact on mental health and the safeguarding hazards for children not in school.

Not so long ago, 1,500 members of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health wrote that school closures significantly affect children's wellbeing. We now know that there has been a huge, fourfold increase in eating disorders among young people, partly due to school closures and social isolation. Children's groups and charities have warned of a new frontier of vulnerabilities: children out of school exposed to online harms, county lines gangs, and tough situations at home, such as domestic abuse. We also know that school closures put enormous pressure on parents' livelihoods and wellbeing as they have to juggle their work while looking after their children or reduce their hours.

I urge the Government to consider the following. First, they should ensure that teachers and support workers are given priority for vaccinations alongside NHS workers, solely for the purpose of getting schools open sooner rather than later. Secondly, more resources should be put into mental health, having practitioners in all schools to help with the fallout from closures and isolation so that pupils, parents, teachers and support staff can access mental health support whenever they need it. Thirdly, the Department for Education and Ofsted should partner with schools as candid friends to ensure quality remote education for all pupils. The chief inspector of schools, Amanda Spielman, has said that one day of national school closures equals around 40,000 child years in total. That is a grim statistic.

As a country, we must make a choice: do we value the coming generation of our young children or not? Will we risk their life chances of climbing the educational ladder of opportunity by shutting real schooling from their lives? We need a guarantee that the plan for schools to reopen after the February half-term is signed in blood and not just a guideline. While we absolutely have to be careful of this awful virus, we cannot risk an epidemic of educational poverty and mental ill health affecting our younger generations for years to come.

3.31 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: A year ago, when the SARS-Cov-2 virus emerged, there was no handbook on covid. All Governments had to feel their way, but there is little excuse for repeating the same mistakes a year on. "Go early and go hard" has been public health experts' consistent advice. Michael Ryan of the World Health Organisation said at the start of the pandemic:

"The virus will always get you if you don't move quickly".

Yet just last week, the Health Secretary still refused to put England into tier 4, despite surging case numbers and the devolved nations already being under tight restrictions since Christmas.

After the late lockdown in March and rushed reopening in May, the Government allowed rates of infection in England to run seven times higher than in Scotland or Northern Ireland over the summer, and at the time, chose not to agree a zero-tolerance covid policy to eliminate community spread of the virus on a UK-wide basis. The gains of lockdown were gradually lost, as eat out to help out drove up cases in August and September, thus beginning the second wave.

The UK is one of the few countries that never closed its borders and many new strains of covid were imported by people travelling to Europe on summer holidays.

Even now, in the middle of the second wave, the UK does not have strict testing and residential or monitored quarantine for arrivals. On the contrary, the Government have sought to grant further exemptions from quarantine rules.

In September, the Prime Minister ignored the tenfold rise in covid cases and his own advisory group to listen yet again to the proponents of disease-driven rather than vaccine-based herd immunity, leading to a six-week delay in instigating the autumn lockdown. Herd immunity can be safely achieved only through the use of a vaccine, and even then, only if the vaccine prevents transmission of the virus and thus also protects the unvaccinated. That is the hope, but we do not yet know if either of the vaccines used in the UK will achieve that.

It is understandable that Governments are wary about the use of tight covid restrictions and their impact on our economy and society, but it is a false dichotomy to set public health against the economy and lives against livelihoods. People simply choose not to endanger themselves or their families and need to have confidence that the risk of catching the virus is very low. Allowing increased levels of spread—and, therefore, high rates of viral replication—also contributes to more frequent mutations, and increases the risk of generating yet more problematic new variants.

With cases growing exponentially, it simply is not possible to vaccinate our way out of the current surge so I welcome the decision for this lockdown, but it is tough on everyone, and both individuals and businesses will need support to get through it. That is why it is bitterly disappointing to hear that the £375 million of support for businesses in Scotland promised by the Chancellor just yesterday has now been rescinded, leaving Scotland with no new funding to deal with the economic impact of the current shutdown.

The Government must also consider what strategy they will follow at the end of the lockdown. It should be maintained long enough to achieve suppression of community transmission and to establish a more systematic approach to test, trace and isolate. It is critical to provide both financial and practical support to those who need to isolate, as it is only isolation that actually breaks the chains of infection.

Strict controls at external borders would avoid importing more covid cases and new variants. Such a covid-secure approach would allow the domestic UK economy to reopen fully, with the Government then able to target financial support at the industries associated with international travel, such as aviation and aerospace, which have been so badly impacted by the pandemic. Countries such as New Zealand, Singapore and Korea, which have tight travel restrictions and quarantines, have eliminated community transmission and been able fully to open up their economies and societies, including schools, hospitality and domestic tourism. We only have to look at their Christmas and new year celebrations to see what could be on offer to us here if we get things right.

3.36 pm

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): May I preface my remarks by saying that I accept that we are in a serious situation? It is worse in some areas than in others, but hospital admissions are rising across the country, albeit that improved treatments

mean that fewer people, as a percentage, are progressing from admission through to intensive care units, and fewer people as a proportion are dying as a result of the virus. Therefore, some of the pressure, I understand, is on general beds more than on ICUs.

In this context, restrictions may be necessary. We should certainly all take personal responsibility, and I share my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary's enthusiasm for an effective and rapid vaccination programme. But that does not absolve this House of its responsibility to protect the liberties of the British people or to hold the Government to account. Neither of those things would be consistent with approving regulations that would allow a full lockdown to be in place for the next three months, to 31 March. Today, both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have given me reassuring words that they do not want that, but the regulations give the power to decide that to the Government, not to this House. I urge the Secretary of State again to reconsider and see whether he might be able to promise a further vote at the end of January and at the end of February, so that this House will decide whether these extreme controls remain in place for that long, not the Government.

I share the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) about getting schools back as soon as realistically possible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows that I have considerable concerns about the fundamental human rights that are being taken away under these measures, including the right to see our children or grandchildren. These really are the most basic rights, and are now to be taken away for up to a year for some people. These points are critical, but I will not repeat them.

Finally, let me say to the Secretary of State that people will tolerate restrictions where they can see a genuine rationale—some common sense—behind them. I return to some of the questions that I was asking back in the spring, during the first lockdown. How does it make sense that I can buy flowers in a supermarket, but an open-air market cannot sell them? Why is it illegal to go out for a walk on my own twice in the same day? And why, when it is legal for two members of the same household to take a walk across a golf course, is it illegal for them to play golf while they are doing it?

3.39 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: Today, I would like to focus on one particular group who have felt forgotten throughout this pandemic: disabled people. In reading the updated regulations, I can see that no assessment of the impact of lockdown on disabled people has taken place. That must change. Disabled people must be central to our decision making, not an afterthought.

Communication has been poor. Shielding letters have been arriving far too late, leaving many unsure of what guidance they should be following. At Monday's press conference, shielding was reintroduced, yet the Government website does not have any updated guidance for shielders. The guidance that is there is not in an accessible format. People urgently need this evidence to ensure that they can continue to be paid. The Government's press conferences, which are communicating extremely important public information, are still taking place without a British Sign Language interpreter. It is unbelievable that this has not been sorted.

[Vicky Foxcroft]

At the start of this crisis, disabled people raised with me their concerns about accessing food, medicines, PPE and social care. Many have faced increased costs, yet we still have not seen any uplift to legacy benefits. Ministers originally said that this would take up to eight weeks to sort. Ten months later, no progress has been made. Will this increase ever materialise? The Women and Equalities Committee report “Unequal impact? Coronavirus, disability and access to services” calls for an independent inquiry into the causes of adverse outcomes for disabled people. ONS statistics show that two thirds of those who have died from coronavirus in England and Wales have been disabled. We also need the Scottish Government to collate this data, to enable us to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on disabled people. Sadly, the funding for disabled people’s organisations has been cut.

Being guided by disabled people’s experience is essential. I want to thank everyone who has contacted me about today’s debate; I am only sorry that time restraints mean that I cannot raise everyone’s points. I will end by asking one simple question. As the Government’s Disability Unit looks to recruit 14 disability and access ambassadors, how many of those will be experts by experience? How many will be disabled people? I hope the answer is all of them, but I fear not. The Government must ensure that disabled people’s voices are at the heart of decision making, and that is more crucial than ever during a pandemic.

3.42 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [V]: I am pleased there is more that finds common cause across the political divide in this time of national emergency than divides us. These regulations are retrospective and not amendable. That, sadly, reflects the impotence of Back Benchers, which should be rectified, and I would like to identify myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady). The regulations last until the end of March, but there should be weekly reviews and a debate on the Floor of the House at least every two weeks during this period when such draconian restrictions have been placed on our citizens.

The vaccination effort in this country is remarkable, but we need to do more, particularly when so much fake news is being circulated. Many of my constituents are constantly picking up fake stories about everything from so-called cures and drugs that protect someone from covid to conspiracy theories and priority being given to privileged people. Can we boost the Government communications effort, so that firm rebuttals and accurate information are issued rapidly and widely to prevent more fear and anxiety? Can we have a frequently asked questions section on the Government website, to help combat this fake news? Can we add teaching staff to the priority list, alongside young adults with learning disabilities and autism, as the PHE data has shown their vulnerability? The Prime Minister missed the opportunity to respond to my question about that earlier today.

Throughout the last year, Heathrow has provided a valued air bridge for repatriation flights and vital cargo, including medicines and PPE. It is facing a proposed reduction of only 7% in its £118 million rates bill, while airports in Scotland and Northern Ireland and even

supermarkets have a 100% waiver. We are lagging behind other international countries, so can we have more support for the aviation sector and review it, so that its services are not threatened?

We need more assistance for the excluded, and we need to examine how we can spread the help to that group, who have received nothing for nearly a year. These regulations stop golf and outside activities. This is patently ridiculous and we need some common sense, for goodness’ sake, as this sort of nonsense damages our credibility.

Most of all, we need an exit scenario set out and the goals identified publicly, as the most frequent question is, “When is this going to end?” The Prime Minister has set a 15 February date as a milestone and we need to know, for example, at what stage we hope to have sufficient people vaccinated to, say, open our schools safely again, or at what point the levels of incidence and spread of the virus will allow retail and hospitality to reopen.

I finish by saying, locally, how fantastic Buckinghamshire Council and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust have been throughout this terrible period. People will never know the amazing work that they have put in to keep our county functioning and our residents safe. Let us not forget what further burdens these regulations place upon them and our tireless public sector workers, and if we have to face these restrictions on our liberty, let us at least do the frontline staff the courtesy of observing them.

3.45 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: With case rates rising and hospitals under pressure, it is clear that these regulations are necessary and I will be supporting them today. The situation in hospitals is particularly concerning. In London, we are seeing the cancellation of non-covid care, including urgent cancer treatments. This was one of the most damaging consequences of the first wave, when many people had to wait months for urgent treatment and diagnostic tests. This cannot be allowed to happen again. Will the Secretary of State set out exactly what steps they are taking to guarantee that the most urgent cancer treatment can still go ahead over the next six weeks?

This lockdown also comes at a time when health and care staff have been working flat out for almost a year. They have gone above and beyond this year, from working with inadequate PPE last spring to stepping up over Christmas to ensure that patients continued to receive treatment. This week, a constituent who works in the NHS wrote to me and said this:

“I am tired as an NHS employee, I am tired of working beyond my contracted hours because there aren’t enough staff in work. I am tired of covering for colleagues who are shielding or pregnant and cannot have direct patient contact. I am tired of not having enough equipment to do my job because it is stuck in the supply chain. I am tired of having to tell bereaved women that their whole families cannot visit due to social distancing, I am very tired.”

At the start of this crisis, we came together as a nation to thank our health and care staff, but I feel that this sense of unity and support for them has been lost. Whether it is doctors being bombarded with abuse from covid deniers on social media or outside hospitals, or NHS staff not being prioritised for vaccines, we are no longer showing staff the respect and appreciation they deserve for the amazing job they are doing in this

pandemic, and we need to change this. Staff are now being asked to work flat out caring for covid patients or on delivering vaccines. The Government must take a lead on showing appreciation for staff, starting with vaccinations for everyone on the frontline.

When we debated the tier 4 regulations a week ago, I said that restrictions work only if people can and do follow them. Throughout this crisis, one of the major barriers to self-isolation has been that people cannot afford to do the right thing. The £500 self-isolation payment is available only to those with no other financial resources, so people with savings are being denied this payment. In Salford, four out of five people who applied for the payment were turned down. We are asking people to spend their savings intended for house deposits or even treatments such as IVF to support themselves and their families while they self-isolate. This is not right. Nobody should be worse off because they are doing the right thing in a pandemic. The Government should extend statutory sick pay at the level of lost wages to everyone asked to self-isolate. Anything less risks people continuing to break self-isolation through financial necessity.

These regulations are necessary, but they may not be sufficient. I hope that the Secretary of State can ensure that everyone is supported to do the right thing and beat this virus.

3.48 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I, certainly, will be supporting these regulations tonight with a heavy heart, but nevertheless, they are clearly required at this particular juncture. I doubt that there is anybody in this country who loathes and detests more the restrictions on liberties and livelihoods than these regulations reiterate than the Prime Minister. I am confident that he would not be recommending them to the House unless they were absolutely necessary in his judgment. However, I think it is important that the House is provided with more granularity on numbers and it needs to have a better idea of what constitutes an exit strategy and the trigger points that would allow for that strategy.

Jabs offered are not the same as jabs put in arms, which is what is crucial. We need to have published—I suggest daily, since Ministers must have this information—what is being contracted for, the factory-gate delivery against that contract, the jabs in arms and the jabs that are awaiting deployment because of the three-week downtime caused by batch and sterility testing. We need to know how many jabs have been applied in the past 24 hours by priority group.

Steve Brine: I will add one to that, if I may: jabs given per area. In Hampshire, we are in a good place—I expect to hear so tonight in our briefing call, because we can scale up when the supply is there—but I know, from talking to colleagues across the House, that it is not the same everywhere. We need to know where the weaknesses are—or, rather, the vaccines Minister does, so that he may address that.

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, and that data clearly has to be available, because it is gathered locally. That would be very useful, particularly for constituency Members of Parliament.

The thing that worries me most is the exit strategy. The Secretary of State, perfectly reasonably, said that we have a sort of exit strategy in that we now have a vaccine, which we clearly did not have at the beginning of last year. However, we need to decide—this is a political decision, ultimately—what constitutes the criteria for coming out of this lockdown. Generally, it has been suggested, that will happen when we have vaccinated everyone up to group 4 in the JCVI's list of priorities—that is perfectly reasonable—so when everyone over the age of 70 has been jabbed, as opposed to everyone over the age of 70 being offered a jab. The two, as I said, are quite different.

We need to challenge and push back on that, however, because notwithstanding the remarks made by the hon. Gentleman who speaks for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), long covid, awful though it is for those who are afflicted by it, does not constitute a reason for continued lockdown and the penalty that this country is paying societally, medically and economically for what we are about to vote on this evening. That does not stack up; what stacks up is the awful grisly calculus of lives saved.

We have a benchmark, which is the number of lives that, tragically, we are compelled to accept every year are lost to seasonal flu deaths. That gives a reasonable benchmark of what, politically, in society we might be capable of accepting and, because we can project how many deaths will happen—Ministers are keen to do that in recommending to the House, correctly, that we vote in support this evening—they must have an idea, given the number of people who have been vaccinated in key groups, how many deaths there will be in the ensuing month, or two months or whatever one might choose.

I will just push back, very finally, on one other issue: the people in group 4. It is reasonable, perhaps, for those who can be expected to remain safe through shielding to be considered part of group 5, because that will enable many of people over 65 to be vaccinated, which will enable us potentially to come out of this awful lockdown just a little bit sooner and to meet the challenging targets that have been set by the Prime Minister.

3.53 pm

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Thanks to the superhuman efforts of our NHS teams, and to the Prime Minister's forward thinking back in March 2020 in throwing all our UK resources into supporting industry and the global virology scientific networks in search of vaccines to becalm the threat of covid-19, there is light at the end of this lockdown tunnel. That total commitment across Government has proven worthwhile, and from all those across north Northumberland I pass on enormous thanks for the 24/7 dedication to finding a vaccine, alongside delivering that vaccine, now rolling off the production lines into glass vials in their millions, into trucks and to our hospitals, GP surgeries and, in the weeks ahead I hope, to sports centres and pharmacies.

My constituents, while frustrated at having to remain isolated from family and friends once again, are in a better place about supporting the PM's difficult decision this week, because their vulnerable family members are indeed being vaccinated. However, we are anxious about the challenges of home schooling once again for all but

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

SEND and key workers' children. There will be many a difficult moment in all those households as students struggle to make the progress they would be able to make in the classroom. We must ensure, please, that the restricted schooling part of the lockdown is as short as possible, and that all pupils from primary to tertiary are back in their classrooms as soon as the R rate decline becomes clear. We know that schools are safe places, thanks to the efforts made by all our headteachers and their teams over many months, so the damage to our next generation must be as limited as possible.

I am particularly concerned that the cancellation of GCSEs and A-levels in their usual form will leave many long-term gaps in learning, created by the loss of a definite deadline to work to. As a mother of two children, both of whom worked only to an immovable deadline, I know that this would have been a disaster in my household. I can only be grateful that they are now both grown up.

I know that compliance with the regulations in Northumberland will be high, because we appreciate the risk of our NHS being unable to deliver on the needs of all our patients if our excellent Northumbria NHS is overwhelmed. I want to end on an optimistic note. Last week I had the privilege of dropping into the Well Close surgery in Berwick to see for myself our primary care network's roll-out of the first doses of the Pfizer vaccine. I can only say it was like going into a Christmas party, with the sound of bubbling, excitable voices as my wonderful over-80s queued patiently. They were given a timer because they had to sit and wait for 15 minutes to make sure they did not have a bad reaction, and then there was a ping as they were allowed to go home again, as if they had been fully cooked in their baking oven. It was simply the most extraordinary and encouraging afternoon that I have spent in many months. I thank Hilary Brown, who runs the service, as well as Dr Ben Burville in Amble and the whole team in the Alnwick cricket club for making sure that so many of my over-80s are now protected.

3.56 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Government of the people by the people means little if it cannot persuade, yet surely lacking here is the consistency that is vital to achieve that. Repeatedly, this Government have simply offered chaos in its place. No wonder the public are fed up.

Millions still have not had any financial support. Hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs in hospitality or retail, with little alternative in sight. Clarity Products in my borough employs residents who are disabled, but despite money being claimed from the taxman for them to be furloughed by their boss, Nicholas Marks, many still have not been paid. People cannot get a new job because they were furloughed before the regulations were less restrictive. People will not go and test because they cannot afford to self-isolate. In my own community, 75% of claims for isolation payments are being reviewed.

Parents of children over the age of one but under five cannot form a support bubble, as if a 14-month-old is no trouble at all compared with an 11-month-old. Nursery staff are terrified because nobody can explain why primaries are being closed to reduce the number of community interactions but nurseries are not. This

legislation removes the school run as a legitimate reason to leave the house. Ministers tell us that that is to reduce virus transmission, but they cannot explain that to a family that has one child in pre-school and one in primary. Ministers cannot explain that to the kids in special schools, whose needs seem to be simply an afterthought at best; or to those who still do not have access to the internet, and whose teachers now have to tell them that they still do not have laptops. I pay tribute to the headteachers in Walthamstow, who told us today that their first task has been to buy sandwiches for the kids who are hungry and vulnerable but whose families do not qualify for free school meals.

Care homes are ignored in the regulations, so it is not clear whether visits are still possible. The shielded have been told again to lock down, but nobody can explain why they are not a priority within the priority groups for vaccination. The homeless are now being left out again on our streets this winter.

This Government have been consistent only in avoiding scrutiny, whether by shutting this place down or ignoring questions. Ministers have finally admitted today that they will not tell us what performance standards they are holding Serco to for the test and trace scheme, but apparently they do know that Serco has not broken them. What a kick in the teeth it is to all in the NHS who are working flat out to save lives when they see these private companies make millions from the NHS but fail to deliver. Meanwhile, NHS staff struggle for oxygen supplies, turn ambulances away and do not know when they will get the vaccine themselves.

We will vote for these regulations. We want them to work, but if we want to persuade the public to support them, Ministers owe it to the public to own up to what has gone wrong—to say, “Sorry it is so confusing. Sorry it is so chaotic. Sorry you can't hug your grandparents right now.” Every family making sacrifices deserves that apology, and they deserve to have the Government do better.

3.59 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con) [V]: It would be an understatement to say that people have restriction fatigue. I, like others, hate having to have the sorts of curtailments on people's freedoms that a lockdown means. It is right—indeed, it is essential—that these regulations be time-limited, and I welcome the stipulations on regular reviews. I support the regulations because the contrast and choice before us is not between having curtailments or not; it is about the very difficult things that we do now as a country and a society, against even harder things that we would have to do in the future.

The data are startling in Hampshire, as elsewhere, with a dramatic growth in case rates since the start of December. Without truly stringent measures, there is a real risk of overwhelming the NHS. “Overwhelming” and “overtopping” have become commonplace phrases, but we need to stop, pause and reflect on their true meaning and implications far beyond covid.

The difference now, of course, as the Secretary of State has said, is vaccination. We can see, ultimately, a way through. It has been impressive to see the speed with which the Hampshire vaccination programme has got off the ground. Clearly, all hands now have to be put to the programme. I was pleased to hear what the Secretary of State said about the removal of red-tape

barriers to volunteering. Clearly, close attention needs to be given to every stage of the vaccine's production, distribution and administration.

As well as business support during lockdown, we are clearly going to need a sector by sector plan for how to come out of this, including for pubs, hotels and so-called non-essential retail, which are essential to our high streets and to the events business. We are going to need a national effort and mission on the return to school—preparing ahead of it, repairing the impact that this period will have again on children's lives, and trying to get them back on track. It will need different approaches for different age groups and different individual children. Some will have fallen back in some subjects, not others. Some, of course, will have had truly terrible experiences in this time, and that will also put a strain on children's services departments, which we need to recognise. More generally, more attention than ever before will need to be given to the mental health of children and young people, and to a return to physical exercise in some cases.

There will need to be specific interventions in schools. The tragedy, of course, is that some of those had already started. The £1 billion fund is in place and, obviously, needs to be kept under review. I very much welcome what the Prime Minister said earlier about one-to-one tuition, but we also need to think about what needs to be done to overcome the constraints on that. In some places it is already hard to find supply teachers, let alone one-to-one tutors. There will be a more important role than ever before for volunteer readers, mentoring programmes and strengthening links with business. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can assure me that that is being considered across Government.

4.2 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) [V]: Just over a month ago, this House voted on the tier system. I voted against. It was clearly inadequate to get the virus under control. I warned that a lockdown would be needed in the new year if the Government took their foot off the brake, but they ploughed on, recklessly ignoring their own scientists, adding to our shameful death toll.

I voted against the tier system also because of the lack of economic support. This lockdown is now necessary because Government failures let the virus run out of control, but lockdown alone will not be enough to drive the virus down and keep it down. A wider public health package must be in place alongside the vaccine. That must be driven by the principles of a zero-covid suppression strategy, which has seen the virus virtually eliminated in many east Asian and Pacific countries, and which, if followed here, would have saved thousands of lives and allowed us to reopen the economy.

The lockdown must also go hand in hand with an emergency financial package for our communities. This out-of-touch Government can tell people to stay at home, but too many simply cannot afford to do so. Poverty and destitution should not be the price our communities pay for Government failures to tackle the virus. Just as the banks were once bailed out, we need a people's bail-out for our communities if we are to defeat this virus.

That means all non-essential workers who cannot work from home being furloughed on full pay. All parents who cannot work because they are dealing with childcare

should be guaranteed furlough on full pay. Sick pay should be introduced at real living wage levels so that people can afford to isolate. It means a minimum income guarantee, including for all self-employed people, and rent relief as well as an evictions ban so that no one loses their home. Every child should be guaranteed a laptop and internet access to learn at home, and with universities moved online, tuition fees should be scrapped and accommodation costs reimbursed.

This Government's actions, inactions, delays and negligence have unnecessarily condemned tens of thousands of people in our communities to early graves. I hope that justice is one day done. Their lack of financial support for people is causing wider social harm. It is shameful that that has not been addressed today.

4.5 pm

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: I am glad to be able to take part in this debate. There is no doubt that this lockdown was needed and required, and quite rightly it has now been enacted. However, my constituency covers the vast rural area of the Exmoor and the levels in Somerset, and one of the things I would ask the Government to consider is the roll-out of the vaccine. As in many rural constituencies, a lot of my area is a long way from next door, and it is very difficult for people to get to vaccine centres. At the moment, unless we have more places doing vaccines, it is very hard to see what we can do to quicken them up, especially in areas such as mine. There is no doubt that we need to do more.

I will praise, if I may, the four district councils in Somerset—not all of my persuasion. Not only have they done a remarkable job in getting information out across the districts and the county to make sure we are kept apprised of what is available, they have made sure that where hospitals are being used and where they can use healthcare, those services are being put forward very nicely indeed. However, I cannot say that about the county council. People have heard me talk about Somerset County Council in this Chamber: quite simply, it is found wanting at the very highest level. I am ashamed to say that it is of the Government's persuasion, but it is not doing the job.

There is one area that I want to concentrate on, which is of course the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. We must keep it going, not only to fulfil our commitment but because, due to the way Hinkley works and the continuous pour of cement, it is crucial. It is a national and international infrastructure project, and it is of enormous importance locally and nationally to make sure that we keep the workers there safe, but also keep them working.

This means that a lot of the people who live in the area, who are of an age where they tend to have children, are finding it very hard to get childcare while ensuring they can continue their work. Those people are crucially needed on site, so my conclusion is that when it comes to schools, we need to think about this very carefully. I am very grateful for what the Government have done and for the way in which the BBC, for once, has actually stepped up to the mark, but we need to look at what we do with those children whose parents are working. I have enormous distribution warehouses in my constituency that need people there all the time to keep the system going and keep the supply chain alive and well. I urge

[Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger]

the Government to make sure we keep on vaccinating those who need to be vaccinated to keep the economy going, and keep the vaccines local. That is crucial. If we can achieve those things, I believe we will have done our job, not only as a Government but as parliamentarians.

4.8 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) [V]: I will support these measures, but I regret the need to implement them. The public are weary of the Government's U-turns, dither and delay at crucial moments throughout this pandemic, when what we needed was decisive leadership. Nothing highlights the Government's incompetence more than their approach to education, and to schools in particular.

At the end of last term, the Government threatened legal action to keep schools open in Greenwich, while at the same time planning to keep all schools closed in January. All the time, the Government were aware that a new variant was ripping through Kent and the south-east, and today, the Government recognised that this new variant was rapidly causing schools to be a vector in our communities. It has been obvious from the start of this pandemic that education was going to be severely disrupted due to school bubbles having to regularly isolate, and that online learning was going to be a regular part of children's education, but the Secretary of State is yet again way behind the curve. He failed to get devices out to children during the first lockdown, and according to Ofqual, 1.8 million children in this country face lockdown without access to digital devices. A report in July warned the Government of a second spike this winter and also warned there was a possibility of a new variant, yet there has been too little urgency from the Government to get devices out to those who need them. Too many children are going to suffer due to the inability of the Government to read the facts before them.

Now our schools are closed, and confidence in the Government is shot through. Teachers have seen how the virus has ripped through their schools, and parents are worried for their families. To create confidence in the safety of schools, staff will need to be vaccinated as soon as possible. Teachers do not need scientists or experts to tell them the risk to which they are exposed when they are in school. Figures published today in *TES* show that the infection rate among staff in Greenwich schools was almost three times the rate of the local community. Teachers see these figures, and they need to be confident that they are safe when they return to their classrooms. They have seen at first hand the number of colleagues and pupils forced to isolate and those who have tested positive. The Government must not wait to be forced into yet another U-turn. Teachers need to be tested alongside other essential workers, and the Government should accept that now.

4.11 pm

Andrea Leadson (South Northamptonshire) (Con) [V]: I want to make a few short points about the impact of covid on babies and young people, but first can I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his excellent support for the early years review that I am chairing, which will soon announce its recommendations? My review has heard from many families what a tough time they have had in lockdown. Many struggle at the best of times with a new baby. Add to that being in

lockdown with other children who also need attention, and even the simplest of tasks can feel like a massive challenge.

First, I sincerely urge my right hon. Friend to send an instruction to all our superb perinatal workers—from health visitors to mental health and breastfeeding advisers—to keep providing the support and advice that new parents need, not just for reasons of safeguarding but for the many who are really struggling to cope right now.

Secondly, I heartily commend the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), and others in Government for their determination to keep early years settings open at this time. It is not just to help parents work from home, but, crucially, so that infants and young children do not lose out on their future development through this lockdown.

Finally, I am really concerned, as so many colleagues are, about any loss of schooling for our young people. While, like many, I applaud the BBC for introducing an element of curriculum-based teaching, I would urge my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and Social Care, for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and for Education to join forces, and press the BBC to fulfil its role as our public service broadcaster and to take on the job of committing to teaching the whole curriculum.

It is great that the Beeb will deliver reading, writing and maths to primary school children, but at secondary school the challenges are different. Students are studying a variety of subjects at different points, so the BBC should build a pick and mix package of lessons for students to choose what they need, and then teachers, who have done such a superb job under such difficult circumstances, could use those resources as a core to build from. Exercise, nutrition and even support for mental health could form a part of each day's televised curriculum, giving a bit of a boost to young people.

Our national broadcaster benefits from £157 a year from each licence. This is a chance to provide public service broadcasting at its finest, and it could remove at a stroke the twin challenges of a lack of reliable broadband and a lack of laptop access. Nothing can replace a strong family, good schooling and sound teaching, but our babies and our children and young people deserve the very best that we can provide.

4.14 pm

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to take part in this most important debate on the public health crisis facing this country.

I believe that it is right to go into lockdown and stay at home as much as possible to protect ourselves and others, and I will be supporting the measures today. However, these actions should have come much sooner. This is sadly the result of a long line of Government failures, from the lockdown coming too late in March last year, through the fiasco of test and trace, to the chopping and changing of tiers and relaxations in the lead-up to the latest lockdown. I have many concerns about the lockdown, not least economic ones, particularly in respect of people who are not supported at all by Government programmes or the Chancellor's support packages, but today I will concentrate on just one: the situation in our schools and the impact on public health.

At the eleventh hour, schools were instructed to close. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on digital skills, I have raised the lack of data and devices for school-age children throughout the pandemic—for the past 10 months—often working with my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). Ten months on, it is still not sorted. Even with today's announcement by the Secretary of State for Education, about 1 million school-age children will lack adequate data and devices to learn effectively. That is a disgrace.

Children in that position have now been classified as vulnerable, compounding the situation in our schools. Schools have been given no guidance on which children are to be in school and which are not. Do they have to impose limits? Should they include spacing? There is no guidance. I have spoken to many headteachers in my area today.

Alternative education hardly gets a mention. It has a frequently changing school population and the devices do not follow the pupils.

What is the prioritisation for vulnerable children and for children with two key worker parents, one key worker with another parent working full time or a key worker with another parent not in work? Social care and hospitals will come to a standstill if this is not sorted. Teachers cannot be in two places at once: they cannot teach what is potentially more than half the school population in lessons and teach online.

All of those issues need to be addressed for the lockdown to be effective, for our frontline healthcare and social care system to cope, and for all our children and young people to receive an equitable and fair level of education.

4.17 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con) [V]: None of us wishes to pass such restrictions on all our freedoms. We are a parliamentary democracy that cherishes freedom, but here we are about to pass draconian restrictions on our personal liberties.

Our job must be to encourage, cajole and demand of the Government that they do everything in their power for the vaccines to be manufactured, distributed and offered to our fellow citizens as soon as possible. Ministers are working at breakneck speed. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State, his fellow Ministers, senior civil servants in central Government who are managing the vaccination programme, and all the other public stakeholders—the NHS, doctors, nurses—organisations and individuals who are helping to distribute the vaccines as quickly as possible. The more vaccination centres we have properly staffed and resourced with vaccines, the quicker we can vaccinate our constituents, and thus the quicker we can consider lifting these draconian regulations.

Turning to South Leicestershire, yesterday I met the chief executive officer of the local clinical commissioning group, Andy Williams, along with his colleagues from the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust and Lutterworth GPs. I thank him for meeting me at such short notice. I have been reassured by him and his team that they are working to ensure that my constituents are offered the opportunity of receiving the vaccine in Lutterworth, Blaby and across South Leicestershire.

I know that the House will want to pay tribute to NHS stakeholders such as Andy Williams and the CCG for all the work they are doing to open vaccination

centres wherever possible in each of our constituencies across the country. I impressed on Andy Williams that the decision we are about to take today as legislators of the sovereign British Parliament in restricting freedoms and, in effect, closing down large parts of our economy and our education centres can be lifted only when he and his NHS colleagues succeed in their logistical organisation of opening and operating vaccination centres. It is right that we scrutinise the work of the CCGs across our country and all related NHS and other stakeholders involved in this mammoth task. I will be supporting the Government today, but only under the clear understanding that they are doing all they can to obtain vaccines and distribute them quickly to all our constituents.

4.20 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Millions of citizens will be watching helplessly as the Government plod towards another damaging lockdown and respond to the pied piper advisers in SAGE and their mournful dirge of fear and terror. That is where we are going with these restrictions today. Unlike the poor children of the town of Hamelin, at least we know what the destination is, because we have been there before. We have seen the economic damage that lockdowns do. We have seen the damage they do to people's mental health. We have seen the damage they do to education. We know what lockdown is doing to our country's finances, yet, despite what the Government tell us, we are doing this lockdown to achieve the aims we were told would be achieved by the first lockdown. We had suppressed the virus. We had put our foot on its neck. That was the term the Prime Minister used, yet once, twice and now for the third time we are doing exactly the same thing.

I understand that the Government have tried to support industry and people who have been affected, and that is to be welcomed. Coming from Northern Ireland as a Unionist, I know that the support measures introduced by the Assembly in Northern Ireland could not have been done had we not been part of the Union and not had the resources that the Union makes available to devolved Administrations. Those who cry after a break-up of the Union ought to remember that. It is only by being part of a bigger unit that we can ensure we at least have the support measures.

We have this lockdown, and I am fairly sure that the 31 March date is there because the Government intend it to last for that period.

Jim Shannon: Does my right hon. Friend share the concern that I and many others have about the mental health of children? It has been strained like never before. Does he feel it is time for there to be online counselling services in every school, to ensure that young people have the help they need as a matter of urgency?

Sammy Wilson: That is one of the points I was going to come on to. If we are in for this long lockdown, the Government first of all cannot continue to abandon the self-employed who have been affected by previous lockdowns and still find themselves penniless and without any support.

Secondly, the Government cannot allow children's education to be disrupted for that length of time. As a former teacher, I know how long periods—even summer

[Sammy Wilson]

holidays—can disrupt children’s education, and it is the poorest people who are affected by that, because very often they do not have the resources and the children do not have the space. The parents do not have the ability to help their children through the time off school. It is important that schools get back. Despite the impression given by some trade unions, I know that most teachers do want to get teaching their children in school. Indeed, some of them have been on to me this weekend, saying, “We want to get back to school, but we fear for our safety”—because there is an atmosphere of fear. Some priority must be given to ensuring that teachers are treated as frontline workers and are vaccinated quickly, so that they can continue to have face-to-face education with children.

Northern Ireland depends very much on aviation, because of the sea barrier between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. There needs to be a package of support for the aviation industry. There is no strategy there, and a package of support needs to be made available.

The only other thing I would say is that these restrictions, if they are going to be in place until 31 March, have to be examined regularly by this Parliament, and there needs to be a commitment by the Minister to bring them back on a regular basis, so that they can be voted on.

4.24 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): May I begin by acknowledging the difficulty of the task faced by Health Ministers and the Prime Minister in this crisis? We have a proportion of the public who want a full lockdown, irrespective of the consequences to the economy, and we have another proportion of the population who want no lockdown whatever, irrespective of the consequences to public health. However, even those who reluctantly accept the need for further restrictions must be mindful of the balance between the authority of Government and the responsibility of citizens, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) that we need to have sufficient parliamentary oversight during the period for which these restrictions are in place. I hope to hear from the Minister a Government commitment to more debate and regular votes during this period so that Parliament can express its view on behalf of the public.

I would like to say a few words about the vaccine programme. First, I congratulate the Government on having a world-leading immunisation programme, with two very difficult elements that have to be kept in balance—the supply of the vaccine and an adequate number of vaccinators. Of course, those two elements of the logistics have to go hand in hand and at the same speed—not an easy task for Ministers.

We will have to have a surge capacity in vaccinators to be able to deal with demographic and regional differences across the country and to avoid rate-limiting steps in the process. I made a point to the Prime Minister this morning about how difficult it has been for former GPs such as myself to get back into the vaccinating process and about the number of courses we have been asked to complete. I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State announce this afternoon that there will be some changes to that, and I think that is the fastest action I have ever

known from a Government in 28 years—raise the issue with the Prime Minister in the morning, and get an answer from the Secretary of State in the afternoon. Incidentally, I think there is an easy fix to this problem. We can get those who want to come into the programme to fulfil two of the better modules—Core Knowledge for COVID-19 Vaccinators and Minimum Requirements for Staff Returning to the NHS.

However, we will also require more scrutiny of the vaccine process itself if we are to be confident in endorsing the public health policy that we have. We need to look better at the modelling and the data that is out there about the effectiveness of a single dose in creating sufficient population immunity, if that is to take place rather than the two doses, and we need to look at an assessment of the Pfizer vaccine in producing continued immune response in the three weeks after the first dose, as was originally envisaged, and in the extended extend 12-week period. It is essential that we know that these things are based on proper scientific data. The key to the success of the strategy will be our ability to understand the data and to unlock the lockdown and get back to normal.

This has been a very difficult time for everyone. We must at least learn the lessons for the future, because the pandemic will not be a once-in-a-generation event.

4.27 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) [V]: The recent sharp rise in covid-19 cases across the UK makes it imperative that we have a national lockdown. One in 50 people in England has the virus. In Wirral, there were 606 cases per 100,000 in the week to 1 January—well above the rate in the average area in England, which had 481. Sadly, nearly 600 coronavirus-related deaths have been registered in Wirral since the start of the pandemic. My thoughts are with the families and friends of those people at this very sad time.

We all have to do everything we can to halt the spread of the virus, to save lives and to protect the NHS. As people right across the country play their part by staying at home, the Government must do their job and deliver the vaccine. As part of that, they must make it easier for retired NHS staff to help with the vaccination programme. One retired clinician has written to me to say that he is trying to register as a vaccinator but found the NHS Professionals website unusable. The Government must take immediate action to address that and to make it easier for those with valuable medical expertise to volunteer at this time of national crisis. He also asked whether vaccinators will receive priority for the vaccine as frontline NHS staff. That is something that the Government must do to protect these people and to encourage others to come forward.

With these national restrictions in force, the Government must step up and provide real support to the businesses and workers who will be affected up and down the country. Will the Minister impress on the Chancellor the importance of extending statutory sick pay to all workers, including the self-employed, and raising its level?

In December, Sir Michael Marmot reported:

“England entered the pandemic with its public services in a depleted state and its tax and benefit system regressed to the disadvantage of lower income groups... The levels of social, environmental and economic inequality in society are damaging health and wellbeing.”

Will the Minister take action on the social inequalities that are driving health inequalities, and join me and others on both sides of the House in calling on the Chancellor to stop the £20 a week cut to universal credit?

Last month, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care stood at the Dispatch Box and assured me that his Government are increasing the public health grant next year, but a junior Minister subsequently told me that local authority spending on the public health grant will merely be maintained, so will the Secretary of State clear up the confusion in his Department, commit clearly to increasing the public health grant and set out how much that increase will be?

We all have a part to play in tackling this virus, and the Government must ensure they deliver on the vaccine, provide businesses and workers with the support they need, invest in public health departments and protect the NHS as a public service.

4.30 pm

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): I will try to be brief. The two areas I want to focus on are getting out of the position in which we find ourselves, and how we live with this virus for a long time to come.

I think people generally accept that we are where we are because of the new strain of the virus, and that the Prime Minister had a difficult choice—lock down again or risk the capacity of the NHS—but people want to get out of these restrictions as soon as possible. The cost of this virus is written on the nation's finances and on people's livelihoods, their mental health and their children's future.

We now have a clear path out of the lockdown with the vaccine, but we need to see what the road map to recovery looks like and start delivering on it. This is a small boats moment. I very much hope that the Government will actively engage with and mobilise community pharmacies, growing the base of locations where vaccinations can take place and enabling vaccine delivery 24/7.

With every person vaccinated, we get closer to the end of the tunnel that we keep talking about. But freedom is not just about the ability to leave our house; it is about life chances and opportunities. Areas like the north, which have effectively been in lockdown for months, need a clear road map for economic recovery, too. The pandemic cannot lead to further deprivation and more closed opportunities for communities like mine in Barrow and Furness. We need to roll out stimulus packages so that we are able to build back from this.

We also need to take people with us, and I applaud the Government's efforts at transparency on the data they are sharing, but we need to go further by sharing daily vaccination levels by area and by being clear about the point on the journey when we start easing restrictions and what the journey back down the tier system will look like.

Finally, it appears that we will be living with this virus for some time. Through incredible endeavour, we have a vaccine that works against the strain that is currently in circulation in the UK. There is already disquiet about the South African strain, so we need a clear plan for how we live with this virus and its children. There is an opportunity to strengthen the bioscience and biomanufacturing industries in the UK. The vaccines taskforce has made huge strides in this area already, but

we should be looking to expand the tools on our belt, not just vaccines but monoclonal antibodies, to help those who have suppressed immune responses and for whom a vaccine may not be the answer.

We cannot afford any more delays. Every £1 spent on prevention will save many more pounds in the future, save lives and get life back to normal sooner rather than later.

4.33 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab) [V]: Even before Christmas, anxiety was building and building as scientists warned about what was ahead. The public could see what was coming, and it seemed that the only person who did not want to face up to the scale of the current covid-19 situation was the Prime Minister. At one of the MP briefings with the Secretary of State, the Public Health England lead clearly stated that the change point for London came at the end of November, yet no action was taken by Ministers until it was far too late, again.

At every point in this crisis, the Government have been reactive, not proactive, waiting until we are at a crisis point to do anything. We have over 76,000 people dead, families pushed to the edge, and hard-working healthcare workers and hospitals at breaking point. This is not the situation in other countries, yet it is here, and it is not all down to the new variant. The failure of this Government to plan more than a few days ahead means that people, organisations and businesses are given days'—sometimes hours'—notice of changes to rules. People cannot live like that and should not have to. This anxiety is perhaps most acutely seen with young people. Today, I spoke to the head of our fantastic Luton sixth form. There are 752 BTEC students, many of whom are taking exams this month. Again, they are left out of guidance, left waiting for confirmation of their futures. It is time that this Government stopped treating BTEC students as an afterthought and gave them the certainty that they deserve. If, as we all want to see, we are to be ready to get back into classrooms in Luton North and across the country at the end of February, nursery staff, teachers, school-support staff and school cleaners must be included as part of a vaccination strategy.

Will a vaccination strategy be published any time soon? Ramping up is not a coherent strategy. We should know by now how long it will take to manufacture the necessary vaccines. What measures will be put in place to make sure that they are disseminated and delivered? Why not publish a schedule of delivery? Will people who cannot be vaccinated be protected with ongoing shielding measures? What is the estimated critical mass needed to be vaccinated before we can start to relax restrictions? What measures will need to be introduced or be continued while vaccinations are rolled out, or, if vaccinations fail, to combat any new variants? These are just the very basics of any vaccination programme, yet we have heard very few answers from this Government. To provide hope and a route out of the restrictions before us, we need to see an exit strategy. The public needs to be informed at every step of the way, not only when it is too late.

4.36 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House staff for ensuring that we were able to be recalled today for the

[Mr Mark Harper]

second time in a week to debate these important matters. It is important that this House is at the centre of this debate.

I recognise that the new variant, the significant growth in cases and the resulting pressure on the NHS mean that we are in a different position than the one that we faced in November. For that reason, I will not be opposing these regulations, as I did when the Government brought them forward in November. None the less, I do agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) said, which is that running the regulations all the way to the end of March is too far a distance in the future. It seems that the obvious checkpoint for the Government to come back to this House to seek the authority to proceed is the middle of February: the Prime Minister set a very clear goal to have vaccinated the four first groups that the JCVI set out by then, and that is when the Government will have to make a decision about whether schools return after the February half-term. It seems to me that that would be the point when the Government should bring that information to the House, set out their proposals hopefully to relax restrictions and to get children back to school, and seek the House's authority to do so. I suggest that Ministers go away and reflect on that and come back to us next week when the House returns after the recess. I think that that would be welcomed by colleagues.

Steve Brine: On the point about schools, I just wonder what my right hon. Friend's view is on the vaccination of teachers. If keeping schools open is such a priority for the Government, as it is and as it should be, then surely however difficult it is to move that group up the vaccination list, it has to be something that we consider. To open up schools after half-term, it has to be something that we do pretty much pronto.

Mr Harper: I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making, and it has been made by others, but I have to say that, for me—obviously, I am not a clinical expert—the JCVI has got it right. No matter how important schools are, the priority must be reducing the number of people who are going to die and the pressure on the health service. Those are the right choices to make. The risk to many teachers—those who are much younger and those who do not have underlying health conditions—is very low. If they are in the high-risk groups with, for example, a serious underlying health condition, they will already be on the list to be vaccinated earlier according to what has been set out. That is the right approach. As soon as we move away from that, every group of frontline workers potentially exposed to the virus will make an argument that they should be higher up the list, and that would not be a sensible way for the Government to proceed, so they should stick to the process set out by the JCVI.

I have two final points. On the vaccination schedule, maximum transparency, as the Prime Minister said, is welcome. In reporting daily vaccination numbers—by daily I assume that we mean seven days a week, not just five—I urge the Government to publish as much information as possible, including by region and by cohort, so that we can see how this is going and which

regions of the country are going well. Potentially, we could have some positive competition where people are trying to do better. My own region in Gloucestershire is making good progress, and I would be pleased to see that information in the public domain. The agreed delivery schedule for suppliers ought to be published, as that would give people confidence and we could all focus, putting it in terms that the Prime Minister would use, on getting vaccination done. That should be the nation's No. 1 goal in the next few weeks.

Finally—and I know that this has been discussed outside the House—vaccinating priority groups does not just reduce the risk of death by a huge amount, by about 80%, but reduces hospitalisations by almost 60%, which reduces the pressure on the national health service. Both those factors mean that once we have vaccinated the first four groups we can be bold about looking forward to relaxing restrictions, and I hope that the Government can come forward at the earliest possible opportunity.

4.40 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab) [V]: I am immensely proud of the people of Hartlepool for the way in which they have faced up to this crisis and the spirit of determination that they have shown in overcoming the barriers of the pandemic. I especially thank all the volunteers in Hartlepool for the work that they have done. They have done so much and kept our communities together, and I would like to record my gratitude for the work that they have done.

On lockdown, there are many unresolved issues, particularly on work. There is a distinct lack of clarity regarding the rules about who should or should not work, and who should stay at home. On the recent example of schools, why did the Secretaries of State for Education and for Health and Social Care persist on Monday with their line that schools should go back, only for the Prime Minister on Tuesday to say that schools should be shut? The implications for health and safety and for work are enormous, and the lack of clarity does not help my constituents in matters like that.

On health provision, I would like more from the Government on inputs into health commitments in my constituency, particularly on mental health. The ramping up of vaccine provision is essential, and is important for my constituents' wellbeing. Like everyone else in the country, the people of Hartlepool just want to see the light at the end of the tunnel that is always being mentioned. They want the roll-out of the vaccine to be ratcheted up so that the nightmare can end for them and order can be re-established sooner, rather than later. They understand the need for the lockdown, and the majority support it, but they also want clear leadership and direction from the Government—no more dithering and delay. Given the current R rate in Hartlepool, it would be irresponsible not to support the position adopted by the Government or to disobey the rules, but I say to the Minister, please, please do not test our patience. The people of Hartlepool have survived two lockdowns. They will survive a third lockdown. They have the stamina and community spirit to do it, but I urge the Minister not to let them down: get those vaccines out there and get our people and businesses supported here in Hartlepool and the north-east.

4.43 pm

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con) [V]: I am in total agreement with the Government that the emergence of the new, more transmissible strain of the virus has, once again, changed the logic of where we stand and how we should act. This week, we have effectively ended the difficult balancing act of trying to split the difference between containing the virus and keeping as much of our economy and society open as we can. A combination of having two safe and effective vaccines and the emergence of the new covid variant means that our focus is now overwhelmingly on containment. That is the right choice and, indeed, probably the only choice that any Government could make at this moment in time. For Ministers to acknowledge this is not to show weakness, nor was it wrong to try to do everything in our power to retain some semblance of normality, especially in our schools. Let us not for a moment pretend that there are not very serious trade-offs in re-entering lockdown: the pain felt by the lonely; the struggling business owners; children unable to attend class and parents trying to raise them at home while working. This is all real and deep and miserable. None the less, the data is impossible to argue with. One in 50 people in our country is ill with this virus, and the numbers are rising. I therefore warmly welcome the Prime Minister's announcement that we will vaccinate all those in tiers 1 to 4 of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's strategy by the middle of next month.

It is great news that 1.3 million people have now been vaccinated—more than in the rest of Europe combined—but we have no time to waste in accelerating the roll-out. Every week that we are in this situation costs thousands of lives and billions of pounds. I have the highest regard for the vaccines Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), and wish him every success in mobilising every deployable resource to combat this monster. Any business that can fight weak links in the supply chain should be enlisted to help. Any building that can sensibly be turned into a vaccination hub should be requisitioned. Administering the vaccine should include the full use of the armed forces, dentists, community pharmacists, vets and retired medical professionals. We must not be encumbered by needless bureaucracy, and we must not be constrained by normal working hours. I welcome the new daily vaccine statistics that we will receive from Monday. To help monitor progress, it would also be helpful to know our projected weekly trajectory for getting priority groups vaccinated.

I want to focus quickly on one other issue: maintaining the highest quality education offer this winter. Our schools must not hesitate in accepting the children of key workers, and, if a school has an unusually high proportion of key workers' children, options should be looked at with neighbouring schools to provide support. We need to focus on ensuring rigorous attendance by children in remote learning, and to ensure that no child misses out because of a lack of internet or appropriate devices in their home. I warmly welcome today's announcement from the Education Secretary on that point.

This is a national crisis and I am absolutely confident that we will overcome it together.

4.47 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]: So here we are again: another month, another late lockdown, and all the harm that lockdown brings with it—lost learning, lost livelihoods and loneliness. Yet once again, this drastic and painful action has tragically become our only option, given the alarming rate at which the virus is tearing through our country and the immense pressure on the NHS.

A clear exit strategy from lockdown, to which vaccines are central, is critical so my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I reiterate once again our request to Ministers to publish a clear plan as to how they will meet their initial target of vaccinating the most vulnerable, but also all adults beyond that. This plan needs to involve not just the NHS, but the military, the private sector, the voluntary sector, local government and community pharmacies, whether they are big chains or independents. We need a 24/7 vaccination programme brought to every high street in the country, so that those who are in hard-to-reach groups or those who find the hubs hard to reach can access these life-saving jabs. If the Prime Minister is serious when he says that every needle in every arm makes a difference, why is a physiotherapist in my constituency who has completed all the paperwork and training yet to be called upon? We cannot afford to lose a single day.

Alongside vaccination, we have to continue finding, testing, tracing and isolating every case, and, importantly, supporting every individual with the virus and their contacts. Although we will be better protected from serious illness through vaccination, we must stop transmission, not least given the emergence of ever more variants. That is why it is utterly astonishing that none of the announcements in recent days has mentioned test, trace, isolate. Have Ministers given up on this vital and basic public health tool? People need to be paid to stay at home for 10 days if they have been told to self-isolate, and that is on full pay—not sick pay and not £500 after lots of red tape. It is far cheaper than endless lockdowns. It must come with practical support too.

Finally, compliance and trust are built through transparent communication. What are we all working towards? In particular, what do the numbers need to look like before Ministers will reopen schools? We must not underestimate the impact on children's learning and wellbeing, and the pressures and stresses that parents, who feel that they have been constantly forgotten about, are under. That is why a robust exit strategy is key, and it is about much more than just vaccination. We cannot keep blaming mutants and variants, we cannot keep blaming the public, and we cannot afford any more deadly delays and incompetence. Responsibility lies squarely at the Government's door to deliver an efficient vaccination plan, to improve test, trace and isolate, and to communicate openly with the public.

4.50 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): All Governments have to make difficult decisions, but no other in peacetime has had to restrict our freedom so profoundly, and our role as MPs is to scrutinise that. I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team for the briefings with medical experts provided to all Members to give professional interpretation of the data. However,

[Mrs Maria Miller]

every person we represent wants to know that the action that is being taken today is absolutely necessary and that there is a clear way out so that people can get their lives back as soon as possible.

The clear way out that my right hon. Friend has identified is the vaccine roll-out. The fact that the UK has led the way in getting two vaccines approved and has already had more people vaccinated than all the countries in Europe put together is a significant achievement. Paragraph 3(2) of the regulations therefore needs some clarification, because it changes the end date of the regulations to 31 March of this year, beyond the date when experts estimate that all those in the most vulnerable groups will have been vaccinated. I understand the need for caution, but will that caution give room for delay? I know that that is not the Secretary of State's intent, so will he come to the House regularly to update us on the roll-out of the vaccine programme so that we can scrutinise, raise issues that we encounter with him and perhaps identify more unnecessary red tape that needs to be removed?

With regard to the sequencing of the vaccination programme, the Government need to look again at the priority given to vaccinating teachers in our communities. We know the damage done to our children's education through this disruption and the pressure on family life when schools are closed so, in order to protect the ability of schools to reopen and continue to be open in the coming months, and to protect children's futures from more disruption, we need to think about putting teachers into the priority group.

I wholeheartedly thank the whole of our North Hampshire NHS team, our local trust, Hampshire County Council and our amazing local borough council for the incredible work that they have done to help to keep my community safe in the recent months. It is with a heavy heart that I support these measures, but we can be in no doubt at all that they are essential today.

4.52 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Cases in the Wakefield district have gone up by over a third in a week. They are still lower at the moment than in November, when Pinderfields Hospital was pushed into crisis, but they are rising fast, and none of us wants to go through that crisis again. That is why measures are clearly needed, but this is a really difficult time for everyone. I want to thank the staff of Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, the NHS healthcare staff and the key workers working non-stop to get us through this difficult time, to whom we owe so much. The community hubs we set up in Normanton, Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley, supported by Wakefield Council, are working hard again, with volunteers and neighbours helping each other, but we urgently need more support from Government for businesses and families, especially those excluded from economic support from the start.

We need rapid action to roll out the vaccine, and we need the programme to work. That is why I want to raise concerns about the potential threat to the vaccine programme from the new South African variant. Senior scientists have said that this may be less susceptible to

the vaccines because of the additional mutations. I know the Government are worried about it, but I do not understand why they are not taking urgent action to prevent it from being brought into and spreading across the UK. Rightly, the Government have stopped direct flights from South Africa, but the first wave shows that that is not enough. Genomic evidence quoted in our Home Affairs Committee report in August showed that 34% of imported covid cases came into the UK from Spain and 29% came from France. Less than 1% came directly from China. So when the Prime Minister says that we have taken strong action by stopping direct flights, he is kidding himself. The South African variant has already been identified in France, Austria, Norway, Japan and Australia. Currently, our border checks are weak and not taken seriously. Travellers are not tested before or on arrival. Untested, they get public transport from the airport and pop into the shops to get milk before going home, and the checks on self-isolation arrangements are minimal.

The *Financial Times* says that the Government's plans to introduce pre-travel testing have been delayed because the Department for Transport wants UK residents to be exempt. If true, that is ridiculous and dangerous, because covid does not discriminate, and we cannot afford delay. Other countries have strict rules including quarantine hotels, regular tests, airport testing, repeated testing and quarantine taxis with screens—look at New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Italy or South Korea. The UK has to get serious about this too. We failed to do that the first time round and, as a result, we face our third difficult lockdown. We cannot afford further waves of this virus. We have to make sure we do not make those mistakes again.

4.55 pm

Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): I again congratulate the Government on their amazing foresight and on getting so far ahead of the game with the vaccination programme. A few minutes ago, I spoke to a prominent Gravesend GP, Dr Rubin Minhas. For the last couple of weeks, he and his team have been busy contacting local over-80s to book them in for their inoculations at the surgery. In order to do that, he has had to get all his staff on the phones—all the receptionists, and husbands, wives and partners. That is having a real effect on the day-to-day work of the surgery. We should be giving GPs more help with bookings, especially since this will ramp up as more vaccine becomes available and it is given to different groups.

Throughout all this, many people have been really quite heroic, especially all the people who go to work day after day knowing that they have an underlying health condition that makes them particularly vulnerable to the virus. One headteacher in my constituency has shown what can only be described as extraordinary bravery, going into school every day and risking his life. We all know of people in our constituencies—there are perhaps tens of thousands of them around the country—who knowingly put their lives at risk every single day in the public sector and the private sector, in schools, supermarkets, hospitals and food packaging plants. I am glad that such people will soon be inoculated, but I do not think it is right that there should be any acceleration for those working in particular settings such as schools who are not in vulnerable groups. That would delay

what the Prime Minister describes as the firebreak, whereby we deal with the people who are most likely to die and stop deaths going off the cliff.

We need a can-do attitude. In rolling out this massive programme of vaccination, it is critical that everyone in the public service shows the can-do attitude that we have witnessed from all the staff at Darent Valley Hospital who have been looking after my constituents over all these months. All of us in public service should be following their example to do everything we can do to get these first four groups vaccinated. This is not the time for bureaucracy or for finding reasons why something cannot be done or why it is too difficult. I was horrified to hear that one hospital received 3,000 doses of vaccine on the Wednesday before Christmas but did not start using it until nearly five days later. Everyone in this country—especially those of us paid from the public purse—must treat this vaccination programme with the greatest urgency. This is a national emergency, and there should be no room for anyone who is not on a war footing to get these early groups vaccinated.

4.59 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) [V]: I am going to vote for this legislation; it is sadly necessary, as today's awful covid figures demonstrate. I want to speak briefly about how we help people get through the difficult period ahead as we vote today to lock down the country. If we are going to affect so many lives and livelihoods, and if we are going to ask our citizens to help the nation by doing the right thing and making sacrifices, then we as a nation have to do the right thing by them. We need to provide the support that people need to enable us all to work together to get through this.

In the short time available, I will mention three specific areas where we need to do more. The first is businesses, especially small businesses and the hospitality sector. Business rates relief and additional grants are welcome, but for many businesses, their premises costs are the biggest burden. They still have to pay rent, and for many it is unrealistic to think that they can keep building up debt without some additional support. I urge the Government to consider a scheme of shared rental burden, where the renter and the landlord, as well as the Government and the bank or mortgage lender, all take part of the responsibility. The country bailed out the banks during the financial crisis; they should step up and be part of the solution now. There are models elsewhere, such as Australia, that we can look at as a basis for that.

Secondly, as I said to the Prime Minister today, so many people still are not being helped by the self-employment income support scheme. We have now had nine months to come up with a plan to support those workers—people who have worked hard, paid their taxes and now are not getting a fair deal. There are potential solutions out there, and I urge Ministers once again to look at the proposals from the Federation of Small Businesses, among others, to find creative ways to help people who are really struggling.

Many of my constituents are self-employed, and many Mancunians work in our world-leading creative industries. Our festival industry alone is worth £1.7 billion to the UK economy and supports 85,000 jobs. Festival organisers are struggling to get insurance, and they are asking for a Government-backed insurance scheme to enable festivals to be planned with confidence. If we do

not help out, many will be cancelled in the ongoing uncertainty, and we will miss out not just on an important cultural part of our summer but on the economic benefit that helps communities and supply chains across the nation, so please; I hope the Government will look positively on that.

Finally, our councils have been at the forefront of this crisis, supporting people and co-ordinating services. The Government said that they would give our councils everything they needed to do that, but the overall impact of covid-19 in Greater Manchester is £802 million this year alone and Government funding for the pressures is £404 million, leaving a gap of £398 million. As a result, Manchester City Council faces cuts in the region of £50 million this year. That is not sustainable, so I ask the Government to fulfil their promises and give our local authorities the support they need to help us all get through this.

5.2 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I have not always been able to follow the Government line in the Division Lobby when it has come to further restrictions, because I have felt that, in parts, they have not been proportionate when looking at the wider public health concerns, the operational state of hospitals, or concerns about our loss of liberties and making things worse.

That changed when it came to the vote on introducing tier 4 measures in my county and other parts of the country, because I could see two things. First, the vaccine is in sight, so we do not have this perpetual lockdown situation; the end is in sight. Secondly, hospital operational capacity is incredibly tight; it is on the edge. I have just heard from my chief executive, who tells me that 50% of her beds are occupied by covid patients and all the intensive care units are full. Things have changed, but I believe that we are in the final chapter if we can deliver the vaccine programme. That is why I will vote with the Government this evening.

I never thought that I would see the day when I voted in the Division Lobby to deny pupils their right to attend school, but I feel that is vital. I just want to make one point about the cohort of those being vaccinated. It makes no sense at all to give a vaccination to a 40-year-old teacher rather than that teacher's 80-year-old mother. If we do so, we may be in a situation where that 40-year-old teacher, although they have been vaccinated, can still transmit the virus to their 80-year-old mother. With the vaccine in short supply, it is the 80-year-old mother who is in danger of losing her life, and that is what keeps us in lockdown. We will never reopen schools if we end up vaccinating teachers rather than that cohort. I really wish hon. Members on both sides of the House would see that that is the best way to get the schools open again.

The other message that I want to send is to young people. Members have rightly talked about their concern about the challenges for young people and their mental health. I feel that too, but I want to make sure that young people are not seen as victims—that we do not make them become victims. This could be their defining moment, when they give something back to the generations that went before them. It will be the sacrifices that they make that save lives.

[Huw Merriman]

We must make sure that we put something back. To the older generation for whom sacrifices are being made by the younger generation, I say: ask yourself what can you do to counsel and pass on wisdom to help young people to catch up in school? What can you do to offer an apprenticeship to a school leaver? What can you do to make sure that young people have the confidence to feel that they have achieved great things by making that sacrifice, like those who did during the blitz years? To all those young people, I say: you will come through this stronger. We will make sure that you are rewarded. Just as we will not let older people be killed by this pandemic, please, do not be defeated by it.

5.5 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab) [V]: This new lockdown is a position that none of us wanted to be in, and I begin by paying tribute to all our key workers.

Although there is a light at the end of the tunnel, in the form of the vaccine, this Government's inability to react quickly and with clear leadership has meant that people have lost their lives and their livelihoods. The Conservative former Chancellor, George Osborne, was right when he wrote yesterday, that in hoping for the best, we have failed to prepare for the worst. The Government must not waste the time given to them in this third lockdown. The vaccine programme must be delivered with the speed and efficiency that people have been promised, alongside an effective Test and Trace system.

The economic impact of the crisis has been catastrophic. In Barnsley East, over 3,500 people are now recorded as being on universal credit, unemployment has risen, and the local food bank has seen demand increase by 300%. This is unacceptable and avoidable. Statutory sick pay in this country is completely inadequate. The UK falls behind the standards set by some of our European neighbours. A higher earner whose wage is cut due to sickness is more likely to be able to absorb the financial blow. Statutory sick pay is currently set at a flat rate of £95.85 a week. How is someone on the minimum wage or a lower income supposed to cope with such a reduction? They cannot choose to pay less of their rent, mortgage or bills.

The UK is one of the very few European countries that still pays sick pay in this way. I acknowledge that the Government introduced a one-off payment for people on low incomes who are isolating, but there is a lot of evidence to show that it is not working and that too many people are falling through the gaps. Take for example the man in Barnsley who, when asked if he would isolate if he was contacted by Test and Trace, said, "No, probably not." When asked why, he explained, "If I don't work, my family don't eat." People want to do the right thing, but simply cannot afford to. Proper statutory sick pay would make it much easier for people to take a test and isolate, which is crucial to stopping the spread of this deadly virus.

5.7 pm

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I cannot support this legislation. I cannot support criminalising a parent for seeing their child in the park over the coming months. It is not within my DNA to do that.

Of course I will follow the law and respect the law. We have the argument in the House of Commons; the House divides and one is on the winning side or the losing side. I will be on the losing side, no doubt, but I do not wear the fact that I will support the law with great virtue, because it is easy for me to comply with the law. It is easy for most people in this House to comply with the law. We are comfortably off, we live in nice houses, we have gardens and outdoor spaces, and we have access to family. The same is true of the journalists who fill our TV screens every night with their wisdom and wit about how people should comply with these regulations, and they sneer at those who cannot. But the next three months are going to be really hard for a lot of people—people who do not have my advantages of a monthly salary and a monthly pension payment. They will be worrying about their job, their future, their mental health and their family relationships, because they will miss people terribly. They will be living in small environs that apparently they can leave only to exercise once a day. Sadly, some of those people will break. It will be too much for them. That is when we in this place—and the journalists up there in the Gallery with all their privileges—instead of sneering and dismissing them and calling them "covidiot" should show some compassion and understanding. We should wear our advantages and privileges with great humility.

I do not want to hear from another constituent who is having a good lockdown. I am really pleased that they are, but my voice is for those who are not: for those of my friends, neighbours and constituents who are struggling day in, day out, whose mental health is not in a healthy state, but has deteriorated, and who are wondering how, in the next few months, in the middle of winter, they will cope.

I ask colleagues and people out there who are so fortunate to show some compassion and understanding for those who are not so fortunate.

5.10 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab) [V]: It has been nearly a year since we began to be aware and to deal with the pandemic. We accept that no one could have predicted it, but the Government, after a whole year, keep getting it wrong. In the sixth largest economy in the world, we have no excuse for one of the worst per capita death tolls and one of the worst economic outcomes.

We need a national lockdown, but we have to lock down yet again only because every other lockdown has started too late and been lifted too early. So of course we have not been able to get control of the virus and of course the lockdowns have had the minimum effect. We have not gone far enough.

We know what needs to be done and before we can get back to normal, we need to focus on getting the infection rate down. Unfortunately, so far, the Government do not seem to have committed to doing that. We need a strong elimination strategy that drives cases down. One in 50 people in this country and one in 30 people in London, where the House of Commons is, are infected with the coronavirus. That makes me ask how many people on the estate at the moment could have the virus.

We have spent far too long looking at how successful people in other countries have been without thinking that we should also adopt a zero covid strategy. That strategy needs to be complete if the R rate is to go

down. Yes, we need the lockdown, but the Government cannot keep asking people to give up their freedoms and livelihoods and not stand by them.

The support measures have never fully met this country's needs. Yet again, they do not do so. Again, after a whole year, the Government have failed to provide for the 3 million excluded from all Government schemes. We need an effective track and trace system, but we simply do not have it. We need more funding for charities and local authorities, which have been dealing with the brunt of the virus. We need rent relief for tenants and a ban on evictions. We need an increase in statutory sick pay, and laptops and broadband for every child who needs them.

Although the vaccine is welcome news, the success of the lockdown cannot be measured by the vaccination programme alone, especially given how long it will take to reach the entire population. We need to focus on bringing the R rate down and look at the measures properly before we begin to lift restrictions. We cannot, after an entire year, keep making these mistakes. It is costing lives and livelihoods and is a complete and utter shambles, for which the Government have no reasonable excuse.

5.13 pm

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) [V]: I strongly support the Government's policies and the new public health regulations, which have been brought in to help defeat this dreadful coronavirus. They are regrettable, but absolutely necessary and require compliance by us all.

I commend the Secretary of State for all his hard work and determination during the past 10 months and for his briefings on the issues. I know that the Prime Minister regrets the need for the lockdown measures, but he had no choice because of the seriousness of the situation.

I pay tribute to Bexley Council for all its tremendous work, to all NHS staff across south-east London, who have worked for so long and so hard during the national crisis, and to the community workers who have done such great service across my borough in helping the most vulnerable.

I am extremely concerned about the rising infection rates in London, and particularly in my borough of Bexley. The new strain of the virus has had real and detrimental consequences for my Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency. I am thinking of not just the spread of the virus, but the curbing of liberties, the closure of clubs, businesses and shops, and, of course, those who have tragically lost their lives to the virus. To prevent the spread of the virus and further deaths, these measures are essential. I also highlight the growing concern over mental health issues in my area, particularly for those living in overcrowded homes and in small houses, and for those living alone, the elderly and the disabled. The closing of schools is regrettable, and there will be educational consequences. However, this crisis needs strong action and restrictions are necessary to safeguard the vulnerable, and, with the vaccination, to help beat the coronavirus.

My third point is about vaccinations and the opportunity for retired GPs, nurses and pharmacists to assist in the delivery of this massive project of mass vaccination. I have been given examples of people who have offered

their services but have either been given a plethora of forms to fill in or have not received any response to their offer of help. This has been disappointing, but today, I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's actions to cut the bureaucracy and increase the vaccine roll-out. I also welcome his comments about Sunday vaccinations. Those comments need to be widely publicised to increase public confidence. These facts need to be known, and my constituents are looking for regular updates on the progress of vaccination and, hopefully, when the lockdown will end—an exit strategy.

In conclusion, I share my right hon. Friend's determination to have a vaccination roll-out, and I support these new public health measures. My constituents will also support them, and they are necessary to save lives and defeat covid-19. We need to get the vaccination done.

5.17 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful to be able to speak in today's debate. I start by extending my deepest sympathy to my staff member, Ruzina, who today lost her mother to coronavirus. Words cannot describe the devastation that this virus has caused to so many.

There are so many concerns that I have about the impact of the Government's handling of this pandemic, and there are too many pressing issues in Lewisham East to mention, but today, I would like to raise the crisis facing our ambulance services. I have been speaking with a constituent of mine, Mr Clive Tombs, who is a technician in the London ambulance service. Mr Tombs told me of the sheer stress levels that he and his colleagues are experiencing. As the secretary of his branch of the GMB union, Mr Tombs speaks not just for himself, but for thousands of members serving the capital.

Staff sickness in the ambulance service is at an all-time high. Mr Tombs estimates that around 6,000 staff across the service are off sick, the majority with covid-19. He has lost colleagues to the virus and other colleagues are hospitalised. Many others are understandably suffering from declining mental health after seeing the very worst of the impact of this virus and the impact which it is having on our people. Post-traumatic stress disorder is also becoming commonplace.

Phone operators are having to play God in choosing who among the hundreds of callers will get an ambulance. Mr Tombs also speaks of the relentless shifts that those in the ambulance profession are working. Those on the frontline are working 12, 13 and sometimes 14-hour-long shifts, and all too often, they do not get a rest or a break before starting their next demanding shift. We cannot expect our ambulance service to work all hours of the day and night, providing high-quality care, thinking quickly, making smart decisions and putting themselves in danger, without having enough time to rest. I would be grateful to hear from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on this issue.

Many of us have been distressed by images over the Christmas period of ambulances piling up outside hospitals, particularly in London. Every one of those ambulances has someone who is in urgent need of medical care and, for some of them, their lives depend on it. A&E departments are not able to keep up with the level of demand, so ambulances, with patients in them, have to wait for hours upon hours—up to 11 hours, Mr Tombs says.

[Janet Daby]

They wait on trolleys that provide them with little comfort and are meant only for short use. Staff sit with them in vehicles but struggle to provide safe ventilation in the cold weather. There is no access to a toilet or a washbasin in an ambulance. None of us would like to imagine our parents, partners, elderly neighbours or loved ones suffering on an ambulance trolley waiting to be admitted. What is more—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry, Janet, your time is up. I apologise.

5.20 pm

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): There are a hundred things about Stroud that I could rise to stand up for today, but given the shortness of time, I will focus on education, exercise and entrepreneurs. First, I want to say that I will be supporting the Government tonight. From speaking to the Gloucestershire NHS and health teams, I am clear that our hospitals and key workers are under extraordinary pressure. Life would not be normal, and local businesses would not flourish, if ambulances were queuing around the Gloucestershire Royal Hospital or if, worse still, images of body bags were filling the news, as we have seen in other countries. I accept that drastic action is needed right now, and it is for all of us to work together to get out of this lockdown with the can-do attitude and compassion shown by my hon. Friends on either side of me, the hon. Members for Gravesham (Adam Holloway) and for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker).

However, I thought that we had reached an understanding that education needed to continue. In the first lockdown, 55% of teachers in the most deprived areas suggested that students were learning for less than one hour a day. Eating disorders are now on the rise, and mental health issues are rife. We have to be honest: there is simply no replacement for face-to-face teaching. No amount of money, whizzy technology or free devices will bridge the education gap that the covid pandemic has created. Children need time in school, and they need their families to not be fraught from juggling home working, home schooling and worse. Stroud teachers are also phenomenal, and have already jumped through extensive logistical hoops to get our schools covid safe. I ask that the Government help to reopen schools without delay, and do not let children get caught in political games.

On exercise, I want to see gyms, parkruns, fishing, and clubs such as golf, tennis, archery and swimming open as soon as possible. Living with excess weight puts people at greater risk of serious illness or death from covid-19. Government guidance says:

“Look after your physical wellbeing: Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and mentally”, so why cut off businesses that effectively help us fight covid and protect our mental health? Do not get me wrong: the rise of walking, running, cycling and online classes is positive. However, please do not underestimate the benefits of gyms and sports clubs. The professionals who work in these places know their health and mental health onions, and we need them to survive in order to produce the healthy society we know is necessary to cope with covid now and prosper in the future.

On entrepreneurs, please will the Government look urgently at the Campaign for Real Ale’s campaign regarding the sale of takeaway alcohol? As the Prince Albert pub in my patch brilliantly pointed out, it is not fair to stop this activity when supermarkets and off-licences can sell regardless. I have been relentless on the plight of the wedding and events industry, and we need a road map and pilot studies in Stroud. It was wrong to not give support to our fantastic limited companies that reside in Stroud when the virus was going to be gone in a few months, and it is wrong now.

5.23 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab) [V]: Infection levels in Liverpool are now higher than during the second peak in October. This was why local leaders called for an urgent national lockdown to try to control the spread of the virus and prevent pressure on our hospitals, which I fully support, along with a rapid increase in vaccinations. I have just been on a call with headteachers from special educational needs and disability schools in my constituency, and I say to the Secretary of State at the outset—I cannot stress this enough—that teachers and teaching staff should be offered vaccinations as a matter of urgency. They are still out working on the frontline, and they need these vaccinations now.

The Government must address inequality at the same time as implementing the third lockdown, and I will now turn to some of the many other issues that my constituents in Liverpool, West Derby have written to me about, which must be urgently tackled. The first is access to food: there are 10 million people in the UK living in food insecurity, many of whom are queuing up at food banks—we have seen pictures of that on happening Christmas Day in Newcastle. The Government must step in to provide support. They must cancel their planned £20 a week cut to universal credit, and bring in the right to food.

The next issue is that of financial support. One of my constituents, Martina, who was self-employed, has now gone 13 months without any pay. Where is the Chancellor today, and where is his financial plan to support people in Liverpool? On top of this, there have been many punishing job losses from rogue employers. Howling examples include the pernicious use of fire and rehire by British Airways and British Gas, and the treatment of a loyal workforce by Rolls-Royce at Barnoldswick. The Government must step in to fight for them and outlaw this pernicious practice, which drives people into destitution.

I must also mention support for renters and the homeless. Many renters are faced with huge arrears and have been forgotten by the Government. They must now support renters and, at the very least, extend the eviction ban beyond 11 January. Unbelievably, today we heard that the Everybody In scheme, which rightly has won praise, will not now be continued in the depths of winter and with the virus out of control.

Even before the pandemic, our communities were facing a crisis of low pay, insecure work, food and fuel insecurity, unaffordable rents, and cuts to welfare and services. So many people are already at a tipping point, and the pandemic has pushed more into unimaginable levels of hardship. Inequality and poverty are not inevitable. They are a result of political choices made by this Government, and can be solved by a Government with the will and the moral fortitude.

5.26 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): This is a difficult crisis for the Government, and no doubt the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health must each have the constitution of an ox to deal with the very difficult decisions they have to deal with every day, but I am afraid that I cannot support this legislation today. The principal reason is that, at the end of last year, I thought we had got to the point where Parliament would be consulted on a regular basis. We have regulations today set out to 31 March, which is a full three months. Although we have had warm words—“Of course, we’re going to review and we’ll come back to discuss with Parliament”—as of right we do not have any ability to influence this once it is passed. It is essentially a blank cheque for three months to Public Health England to do what it wishes, and that is why I worry about the legislation today.

If the legislation said there would be a month and then a review or two months and then a review, I might even be tempted to vote for it, but the three-month nature of the regulations seems to me too long, and I do not think it is proportionate to where we are. Parliament is sitting—the reality is that we are here—so we need to be involved in these decisions. I notice that regulations have been passed saying that if someone sits by a river with a fishing rod, they are breaking the law under the current lockdown regulations. People will follow sensible regulations if they feel it saves lives, but the bureaucratic nature of this essential lockdown is such that I think people will get frustrated and they may well actually break the regulations because they cannot understand why they are there. So we need this reviewed, we need Parliament involved and we need the Government to listen.

I was somewhat concerned earlier when the Secretary of State was talking about when this would be lifted. We need a programme, and we need the criteria for lifting it. Is it hospitals, is it infection rates or is it deaths? Is it all the vulnerable people actually being inoculated, because we heard earlier that, once they are inoculated, the Government will think about it?

I have businesses in my constituency, I have people who work and I have people trying to pay a mortgage. People have worked for generations sometimes, and certainly for decades, building up businesses, and they are being closed down and they may not survive. Taking away the freedom of people to trade is a very substantial thing to do, and there are some people who will not survive the regulations and the way in which we are locking them down. That is one reason why I will call a vote tonight. If we are going to take away people’s liberties and freedom, let us do it with our eyes open and a vote of this Chamber, because I feel very queasy about destroying people’s livings in my constituency when people work so hard. The people who make these decisions are superannuated, pensioned and public sector: they are safe and they can retire. In my constituency, there are people who do not have these advantages.

5.29 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab) [V]: Sadly, the new restrictions are as inevitable as they are necessary. The Government say that it is the new variant that is to blame for the problems, but frankly it has been obvious for months that the NHS was going to come under huge

stress during the winter. It is time for less flowery language from the Prime Minister. Too much bluster, too much over-optimism—frankly, we are all tired of it, just as we are tired of the lockdown itself.

The chaotic way in which the latest measures have been introduced has caused particular and understandable fury, because it was all so unnecessary. Leaders in educational establishments in Cambridge have been left in an impossible position, on Monday trying desperately to set up testing measures demanded by Government, and trying to reassure pupils and parents that they would be open the following day, only to get texts and emails late in the evening completely contradicting the previous advice. Now they are suddenly expected to switch to delivering teaching remotely. BTEC exams in further education colleges have had to be cancelled at the last minute.

On schools, the front page of today’s *Cambridge Independent* tells the story: “a disgrace”, say teachers. The headteacher at St Matthew’s in Cambridge, Tony Davies, describes a day of chaos and observes:

“So much heartache could have been saved if they had made this decision in a timely manner.”

Niamh Sweeney of the National Education Union rightly observes that, because of the chaos,

“the Government has jeopardised public health.”

The problems in education go further still. While local education authorities such as Cambridgeshire have stepped up, they are hampered by the patchwork of competing Government arrangements now in place. They can advise, but for multi-academy trusts the decisions in some cases are made far from Cambridgeshire—out of sight, beyond local scrutiny or influence.

The diminished powers of local authorities, particularly second-tier districts, are brought into stark focus when councils such as Cambridge City Council find that they do not have the powers necessary to deal with public health hazards. The temporary closure of Cambridge market is a case in point, where the lack of the precise powers needed has led to an overall closure that no one wanted.

I will support the legislation today, but I also want to highlight another Government failure. We have heard a lot about testing and vaccination, but precious little about isolating. Behavioural scientists advise that people do what they are asked when they are motivated and have the opportunity and capability to do so. Sadly, the Government have failed to motivate. They have not celebrated those who isolate, and they have not provided accommodation or the right financial support to ensure that people have the opportunity to do so. That is why it has not worked.

I drew the Secretary of State’s attention to that weeks ago, when I learned that just 14 people in Cambridge had taken up the offer of financial help to isolate. The Secretary of State kind of shrugged. It is that kind of failure from Government that means that the situation we are in today was not inevitable. It could have been different, but this is a Government unwilling to acknowledge mistakes or learn from experience, and we are all at risk because of it.

5.32 pm

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con) [V]: Well, covid has outwitted us again. It has come back with a vengeance and it is hitting many people. It is affecting

[Mrs Pauline Latham]

the hospitals to such a degree that the tired nurses and the tired doctors, who have been working relentlessly, are struggling. We have to do something about it, but is lockdown the answer? We have locked down before and the figures have gone up.

The answer is vaccinations, as we have been told by many people. Vaccinations are the cavalry, but this cavalry needs to come fast and with great ambition. We need people to be out there vaccinating. I am delighted to say that one of the volunteers who could not get through the form has now been accepted because she is a recently retired nurse. She, like many other people, wants to help the vaccination programme. We can ramp up those vaccinations once we have the vaccine in place. I accept that it will take a while with a new vaccine, but it needs to be ramped up. We need big ambition. We need not 2 million a week, but at least 4 million a week.

I am worried, however, that the Secretary of State and his opposite number on the Labour Front Bench both seem to think that, even though we will be vaccinated, we might not be able to go out. I asked a question yesterday about an 82-year-old couple who have not seen a brother for at least nine months and want to go to see him. They are going to be vaccinated on Saturday. They want to wait the requisite three weeks and then visit the brother, who is also in his 80s and will also have had the vaccine and will have waited the requisite time. I am told, however, that they cannot do that.

If we are told that we have to lockdown and the cavalry is coming in the form of the vaccine, we have to have some hope that we will be able to go out and resume some sort of normality, that schools can go back and that businesses can operate normally; otherwise, we are just going to be in lockdown for months and months. That might be what some people want, but it is not what I want and it is not what my constituents want. They want some freedoms, and we have to have those.

Let us get vaccinations out, let us use every community pharmacy we have, every single St John Ambulance person there is and everyone qualified and able to give that vaccine, and let us get those vaccines out fast. Let us get people moving so that we can make the most vulnerable safe, so that they will not block up the hospitals and we can relieve the health service for what it needs to do, which is routine work.

5.35 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) [V]: I will support the proposals, because of the pressure on our NHS and the briefings that I have had from the hospital trust in Sheffield that not only should we protect health service workers, but patients who need cancer and other treatments will not get that treatment unless we deal with this matter urgently.

The clinical commissioning group and GP practices in Sheffield are enthusiastic, ready and willing to get the vaccine delivered. They tell me that within a couple of weeks they can be delivering up to 30,000 to 40,000 vaccinations a week in Sheffield, so that by Easter a majority of the population will have been vaccinated. There are two caveats. First, they need the vaccine to be delivered. Already, we have had problems. This week, some of the primary care networks were told that the vaccine would be delivered on Friday; it arrived yesterday,

so the practices had to scramble around to get people to come in at very short notice in order to deal with the vaccinations within the three days. Other practices were told that they would have the vaccine this week and then that it would not arrive until next week, having made the appointments for people to come in this week. That is not acceptable and it needs to be sorted out.

Secondly, there is the bureaucracy. I was pleased that the Secretary of State said earlier that he was going to strip out the training requirements for people giving the vaccine—absolutely right, and those should not have been there in the first place. I am told that it will take about eight minutes to do one of the covid vaccinations, compared with two minutes for a flu vaccine. Why the difference? There should not be one.

The guidelines sent out with the rules even explain how GP practices should cut up the waste packaging once the vaccine has been delivered. That is the sort of bureaucracy and nonsense that we need to sort out. This week, when I asked for information about which GP practices would be giving the vaccine for the first time, I was told that I could not have that information unless someone higher up in the NHS approved it. Sorry, but I am entitled to that information; more importantly, the public of Sheffield are entitled to that information. We need to stop that bureaucracy as well.

Also, can we stop passing regulations that cannot be enforced? Wearing a face mask is very important, but I saw a group of young people walking along in Meadowhall shopping centre the other day, and they simply said, “Oh, we just tell them we have asthma, if anyone asks us.” We need the police to have powers to make people wear face masks and be required to produce evidence of an exemption, if they have one.

Finally, recently Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were in tier 4, and Sheffield was in tier 3. People were driving over the border to Meadowhall and Drakehouse to do their shopping. The police had no powers under the rules to enforce the requirement that people should not travel over the border for such a purpose. We need to sort out that type of situation as well.

5.38 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) [V]: We should vote to pass legislation that severely restricts the freedom of our fellow citizens and the legitimate activities of lawful business only if there is the most compelling necessity, the measures are proportionate and there is proper parliamentary scrutiny and oversight. On balance, and having seen in my constituency data on the exponential growth in infections caused by the new variant of the virus, I am persuaded that there is a compelling necessity for the regulations. As for proportionality, again, on balance there is evidence to support the bulk of the measures—even, regrettably, the closure of schools.

Inevitably, however, because the measures were produced in haste, some elements frankly fly against evidence and reason. They need to be reviewed, and swiftly. The obvious example is the prohibition on two people in the open air playing golf or tennis. There is no rational basis or evidence for that, and it is a mistake to include those things. It is very clear that it is not necessary in Scotland—they have not done that in Scotland—and I do not think that those activities are safe north of the border and unsafe south of it. The decision also creates a problem

for many local authority leisure centres that are struggling for income, and it ought to be revisited. Similarly, the disproportionate effect of the ban on alcohol off-sales on micropubs and small, independent public houses, as opposed to the off-licence chains, ought to be revisited.

That brings me to the point about parliamentary scrutiny. I will live with those flaws in the regulations for the broader good if there is timely scrutiny and review. Leaving it until 31 March without any review would be unconscionable. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister said earlier today that there would be the intention to bring matters back to the House as the vaccination programme proceeds. He also said that there was a legal obligation to remove redundant restrictions in the regulations as the vaccination programme proceeds. I hope the Minister will indicate what the mechanism is for that, because an obligation has to have a means of being enforced. In this instance, that means coming back to this House. If we can have that, on balance, I could give these regulations my support, which has not been the case in previous instances.

We cannot use the gravity of the situation as a reason to overrule the normal requirements of proper parliamentary scrutiny. That is necessary in the interests of democracy and the rule of law. I hope that the Minister will be able to give me those assurances as she winds up the debate.

5.41 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab) [V]: Let me start by saying that I will support these measures today, but I simply regret that the Government are acting too late again. Clearly, the measures are necessary, and so is support for those whose lives are being affected by them. Ministers will know that too many have fallen through the gaps in the support schemes provided by the Chancellor, particularly in small businesses and among the self-employed. In my constituency, that is especially true in the hospitality and creative sectors.

We have not got time today to discuss all the ill-considered rules and deadlines, but I would ask Ministers to agree to meet representatives of the excluded, along with those hon. Members who have taken up their cause. As so often in a crisis, those who have the least have been hardest hit by covid. The Government could begin to address the unfairness by making a commitment today that the temporary £20 a week increase to universal credit and working tax credit will be made permanent from April. They could also commit to extending that to the legacy benefits: employment and support allowance, income support and jobseeker's allowance.

This is a moment to pay tribute to the workers who have kept the country going, and who will do so in the weeks and months ahead. Let us remember them as we move forward by tackling the low pay and fragile employment faced by too many in the private sector, and let us give those in the public sector the pay increase that they deserve, not the pay freeze that they do not.

So much now depends on the vaccine. Let us remember that the first vaccine to enter British arms, and which we should celebrate, was developed by scientists of Turkish origin in Germany with an American company and manufactured in Belgium—an international response to an international crisis. I hope that that will be reflected in our country's wider response, and I hope Ministers will confirm that, as we roll out the vaccine in the UK,

they will work with our partners around the world to ensure it also reaches those who desperately need it in low-income countries. In agreeing to these measures today, let us also resolve to tackle the injustices that have been highlighted by this crisis.

5.44 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) [V]: I welcome the opportunity to contribute. We have heard a great deal of consensus across the House. We know that there is a terrible toll on people—on our constituents—and every Member who votes in favour of these regulations does so with a heavy heart, balancing the impacts carefully and with the recognition that the measures must be for a minimum period of time, reviewed frequently and carefully monitored.

We have heard from many speakers about the impact on children. My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) highlighted the terrible impact that the loss of social interaction during lockdown is having on young people and their mental health. I was pleased to hear from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister today that getting schools back is an absolute priority. It must be. Teachers, parents and schoolchildren themselves have reached out to me, asking that I highlight their worries, as have those in the early years sector, who feel that they have not been taken with the Government and have been neglected in the announcements over the past few days.

Back on 12 November, I called for teachers to be prioritised for vaccination. I recognise that there are competing calls from all key workers, but I make a particular case for those working in special schools, where there is a very great need and where it is hardest for children to understand the importance of social distancing.

Equally, there must be vaccination for domiciliary care workers who are employed by charities or are working independently. This afternoon, Age Concern Hampshire has highlighted to me its worry that those workers will go unvaccinated.

The death toll among those with learning difficulties has been horrific. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) highlighted the work that the Women and Equalities Committee did on that issue in our report on the impact of covid on those with disabilities. The commitment to rolling out information in a manner that can be easily understood, whether it is Easy Read, large print, Braille or British Sign Language, has been inadequate. As a result, the people who need the most help have had an information gap. That is not good enough. Gov.uk still does not have a BSL translation, when there are apps that could do it quickly, easily and relatively cheaply.

It is not just those with learning difficulties who have not been given enough information. Members of Parliament have this afternoon asked for additional details about the agreed schedule of vaccine delivery and the approach to the equation between numbers vaccinated and the consequential lifting of restrictions. People have shown a willingness to comply with massive restrictions, but they want to understand the exit strategy. Early years providers want to know that they are as valued as primary schools. Golfers want a clear explanation of why a walk with their partner with no clubs is fine, but one with their clubs is not.

[Caroline Nokes]

People are not fools. The science is difficult and graphs can be bewildering, but Ministers need to give us transparency and honesty—that is the key.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Karin Smyth by video link. [Interruption.] You are on mute, Karin.

5.47 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Retail, hospitality, care, building and trades are the biggest employers in Bristol South. There have been many job losses, but many people are working in those industries and they are keeping our city going. They have done everything the Government have asked of them and we now need to make sure that they are safe, that we get this vaccine delivered and that we open our economy.

I have worked for many years with local GPs and the NHS in the city, and I know them well. I have worked very closely with the team at Ashton Gate stadium, who are on standby to deliver the vaccine. We have a good standard of general practice in south Bristol and good collaboration. They have already started and the Ashton Gate team have been ready for weeks. However, they are all being kept rather in the dark about the expectations upon them and what is happening nationally with the roll-out.

We therefore have some basic questions that we would like the Minister to answer. They are basic project planning “why” questions. We know why we are doing this, but providers locally need to know what vaccine is coming. They need to know who is going to the GP. They need to know how far down the JCVI list we want GPs to go. They need to know how we want them to be called. I think that it is sensible to do the over-75s, care homes and perhaps the clinically vulnerable, but if GPs are going beyond that list, they need to know because, basically, they need to get back to their day job.

We need to know where people are going to be vaccinated. Are the rest of us going to our GP or to Ashton Gate? We need to know when we are going. I understand the reluctance of Ministers to commit to dates—this is a complex manufacturing, distribution and delivery process—but I agree with the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) about transparency. Crucially, those who are delivering the service need to know and we, as MPs on behalf of our constituencies, need to know when it is happening.

I have done a back-of-a-fag-packet estimation. South Bristol has about 16,000 over-65s, and GP practices can do roughly 500 to 600 vaccinations a day, so in roughly 30 days we could vaccinate all those over-65s in south Bristol. However, that depends on knowing when we are going to get the vaccine delivered and what the expectations are on the deliverers.

I will support these draconian measures tonight, but I do not want the Government to again impose on us here in Bristol the disaster of the national one-size-fits-all, crony-backed, whack-a-mole nonsense that we have had from them. Our local CCG is doing a good job. We have good collaboration on the ground in south Bristol with GPs and with the people at Ashton Gate stadium.

They know what to do; they need support and clarity to get on with it and to make our city safe so that we can resume our normal working lives.

5.50 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): This is a situation of state capture. The Government are completely in thrall to a lobby driving a policy that has manifestly failed—it has failed, or we would not be here yet again. It is a complete failure, yet we go through increasing iterations of it, with ever-tighter controls and restrictions, in the hope that it might finally work. And, then, when there is a possibility of change, as a consequence of the arrival of the vaccines, the crazed lobby has already begun to signal that the social control will not be over and that some restrictions will remain; indeed, the chiefs have pointed out that they might have to be reimposed all over again next winter.

To those colleagues who are contemplating voting for these measures this evening, buoyed up by opinion pollsters telling them that, actually, the voters are in favour of them and, indeed, that they crave even tighter restraints on their liberty, I would point out that when the devastating economic consequences of this policy come home to roost, and we see double-dip recession and years of slow growth as firms cannot take up new opportunities because they are saddled with debt, those same voters, who were so enthusiastic, will abandon them, and those colleagues will be back to point a finger of blame—and, on that occasion at least, they will be right.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Definitely not on mute, Sir Desmond.

5.52 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) [V]: I have consistently voted against these restrictions because I will not be dragged behind the banner wavers into this cul-de-sac we are being marched into. At the beginning of tonight's debate, the Health Secretary said that he has “certain knowledge that we have a way out”. Oh, if that were so, I would follow him gladly, but I do not actually believe that he does have certainty that can be relied on in terms of this virus. Will this virus mutate into something worse? Who knows? Will the current vaccines work on mutated strains? Who knows? Can the virus be transmitted by asymptomatic carriers? Who knows? How effective will the current vaccines be? Who knows? What are we left with? Well, we are certainly not left with certainty about the way out of the lockdown.

I have now lost count of the number of lockdowns I have been asked to support by this Government. The problem for the Government is this: when this lockdown drags on through February and into March and it still has not worked, what are they going to do for their encore? What is next?

I fear that this is a massive mixed message. On the one hand, we have the wonderful news being declared that we have a vaccine—indeed, we have two vaccines. And then, instead of committing to rolling that vaccine out in a very strict and fast way, we have a declaration that we need to go into lockdown. It is hardly a vote of confidence in the vaccine if, on the one hand, we are saying we have a vaccine, and, on the other hand, we are saying we need to have a lockdown. We need to offer the

vaccine urgently and quickly to key workers, whether in the health service or the education sector. We need to give it to the vulnerable and the elderly, who are the target of this disease. We should also be using the Army to roll out this vaccine in a consistent way.

Finally, I am appalled at the way in which our health service has been managed throughout all of this. It receives vast resources, yet my heart goes out tonight to the 1,300 or so people in Northern Ireland who will not be diagnosed this year with cancer because they are too frightened to go to the hospital. There are also all the misdiagnoses of coronary heart disease and stroke disease because of the total absorption of the management in the health service with covid.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon): we should have a national day of prayer, and I welcome the fact that the Labour Front Bench supported that. Let us put this rather embarrassing episode of unending lockdowns behind us, and get on with ensuring that the health of the nation comes first.

5.55 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: I am very worried about the loss of liberty. I am very worried about the economic damage. I am very concerned about all those small businesses that have been shut down, and their livelihoods undermined. I want the Government to introduce a more urgent, convincing exit strategy from these measures, and I think that we are owed more debates and more votes long before the end of March. We need to keep this under constant review, and keep up the pressure to take away those measures that are not strictly necessary or can be superseded by something better.

I hope that the roll-out of the vaccine will go well and will be speeded up. I would like more information from the Government about why they are not currently using pharmacies, why it has taken so long to welcome back to the health service recently retired people who would like to help out, and whether there is going to be a plan to train suitable volunteers so that we can greatly extend the numbers of people administering the vaccine. It would also be helpful to know more about supplies.

We need to get smarter at dealing with the virus because, unfortunately, we will have to live with it for some months to come, however successful vaccination is. Will Ministers provide more information on medical progress with treatments? We had a great breakthrough in Britain with a steroid helping to reduce the death rate. There are many more things in trial—can we know more about that? Are there supplements that people can take to buttress their immune system and make it less likely that they get the virus, or is that a fiction?

Can we get better at isolating patients and protecting staff in isolation units or hospitals? Why do we not use the Nightingales as covid-19 secure specialist units to take away some of the cross-infection dangers from district general hospitals, and so they do not have the intensity of covid-19 treatment? Can we know more about the capacity of the health service, because there are differing views on how many beds could be made available should the covid-19 wave continue to deteriorate? Can we hear more on improving infection control? What use are we making of intensive UV under suitably controlled conditions? What have we done to try to

improve the cleaning of air recycling or air extraction promptly so that we reduce exposure of people in hospitals and other locations that we might wish to use to dirty air that could spread the disease? Above all, we need much more knowledge and information about the energy that is undoubtedly going into alternative treatments and better infection control. I would like to thank all those in Wokingham and the area who have done so much to help us during this difficult period.

5.58 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I must respectfully disagree with a number of previous speakers. These lockdown measures are necessary—they were necessary when they were introduced in Wales by the Welsh Government on 20 December—because of the sheer crisis that the health service faces. If we needed any more information to underline that, we only have to look at the statistics this afternoon: over 1,000 deaths—over 1,000 tragedies for families up and down the country, and individuals who are no longer with us. That is on top of an average 700 deaths every day—people who have lost their lives to this terrible virus.

Nobody wants lockdowns or restrictions, but they are absolutely necessary. If we need any more evidence, we know that my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), is in hospital at the moment. This weekend, I had some heartbreaking conversations with people working in the health service, including in Cardiff. I spoke to someone who worked in the intensive care unit at the Heath Hospital, and the stories they told me were utterly, utterly heartbreaking. My thoughts, solidarity and support are very much with all those in NHS in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and across the country who are on the front line, and are dealing with the reality of this, rather than the fantasies that we have heard from some corners of the House.

I want to discuss two issues briefly. We have to offer people hope on a way out of this situation, and that is why the vaccines are so crucial. I asked the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care earlier on to give us some guarantees on scaling up production and distribution of the vaccines. In 1915, we faced what was called the shell crisis in world war one. I know about it because my great-grandmother was one of 12,000 women recruited from the cotton mills of the north-west to work in emergency factories, mixing nitroglycerine for munitions for the western front. It was a dangerous, complex and difficult manufacturing task, but one that this country turned itself to 105 years ago. We need to engage in that kind of effort and investment in expanding and adapting facilities for the production, bottling and distribution of the vaccine. We need greater assurances from the Government on that in the weeks ahead, not least so that we know they are doing everything they can at the UK level to get that vaccine produced and give hope to our people suffering under these lockdowns and suffering with the effects of this virus.

Secondly, we must not make the mistakes we made in previous lockdowns, one of which is about our borders, as the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), the shadow Home Secretary and others have rightly raised. In January,

[Stephen Doughty]

February, March, April and May last year, we let in people who spread different strains of covid-19 around the country. We now need measures in place at our borders, because there will be more variants and more cases coming from around the world. We need to have the best systems in place. We were told we were taking back control of our borders. We have to have health protections at our borders, and we need those measures now.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): On behalf of everyone here in Westminster, we send our best wishes to Jo for a full recovery.

6.1 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con) [V]: Supporting businesses as they endeavour to cope with covid and its multiple challenges has rightly been among the Government's primary priorities. A comprehensive package of support, including the job retention scheme, loans, rate holidays, cash grants and a temporary cut in VAT for the hospitality and tourism sectors, has provided a means of survival, but no more than that. This lifeline for livelihoods must not be cut now. Firms that depend on advertising revenue are particularly vulnerable.

Some 99% of firms in our nation are SMEs. They have a central role, whether it is pubs, family-run hotels, cafés or restaurants, manufacturers or independent local shops. They are at the heart of our economy, and they provide the lifeblood that flows through our communities. We must ensure that covid does not further widen existing disparities, advantaging the big at the expense of the small, advancing the national at the expense of the local and the urban to the detriment of the rural. In that respect, I repeat what I said earlier to the Prime Minister. We need the vaccine in rural communities. It needs to be delivered locally and accessibly for those who live a long way from large towns and cities.

SMEs, particularly those in remote areas, face a daily struggle and need continuing support. Contrast for a moment independent, family-run shops, passed down through generations and struggling to cope, with a Tesco executive rejoicing as profits continue to soar. Contrast an Amazon director celebrating a 37% increase in their earnings with the owner of a much loved bookshop dutifully distilling and distributing the wisdom of ages and struggling with the strain of debt.

Schumacher argued that small is beautiful, and small is indeed beautiful, because people are the things that matter most. The Government must try out a new orientation, in which the needs of small, independent family businesses come above the interests of faceless corporations. A new challenge brings new chances for cathartic change. At present, the Government are preoccupied with responding to covid and are defined by that to some degree, but we can chart a new normal that is fairer, freer and fraternal—a different kind of social order where social capital matters as much as economic prosperity and where the wellbeing of communities is at the heart of all that Government do. As our Prime Minister rightly reiterated, only through determination, perseverance and togetherness will the clouds of this storm clear. We must build a new nation—one nation—based on fraternity at Westminster.

6.4 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes). This morning, I and other local MPs met our local NHS leaders, and it is very clear from the pressures on the NHS in my community and up and down the country that these measures are needed for one reason and one reason alone: to prevent NHS services from being overwhelmed, with catastrophic consequences for people's lives, people's families and people's communities. No one takes the imposition of these kinds of measure lightly. We do so in the national interest, and that is why we are voting with the Government this evening.

There are three lessons that the Government needed to learn from the last nine months. The first is the importance of acting quickly and decisively. Being too slow to act, as the Government were in the first lockdown, the second lockdown and now the third lockdown, has had serious consequences for people's lives, people's livelihoods and people's learning. Had the Government acted more quickly, we would not have seen the excess death rate in this country, the rising levels of infection and the disproportionate amount of lost learning among children and young people, not to mention the enormous economic consequences that have followed. Quick and decisive action means a more manageable set of restrictions that allow businesses to carry on trading. We are all paying a heavy price in lives, livelihoods and learning.

The second lesson that the Government needed to learn from this period is that public health and the economic health of our country go hand in hand. It is simply unacceptable that we have not seen the Chancellor in this House since well before Christmas. There is a new set of national restrictions in place that are wreaking havoc with people's livelihoods. Before Christmas, businesses literally closed overnight at a time when they were looking forward to big Christmas trading. Where is the Chancellor? Where is the support for businesses and for the millions of people who have been excluded since March?

Thirdly, the impact on children and young people has been devastating. Schools should absolutely be the last to close and the first to reopen, but where is the national plan for laptops and internet connections, to support children and young people to get online? The Government have had months to prepare. We urged them to act, and they failed to do so. Where is the plan for exams? We heard warm words from the Education Secretary today but precious little for teachers, children and young people to prepare for.

As we look to a brighter future and a post-vaccination future for our country, let us make sure that we have a position where families can get together, businesses can bounce back and we provide opportunities for young people, rather than allow lost generation to be consigned to widening educational inequality.

6.7 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): In 2017, the World Health Organisation's pandemic influenza risk management guidance emphasised that any emergency measures should be necessary, reasonable and proportional. I fear that the measures we are being asked to vote for today are none of those. I was elected to represent my constituents in Romford, and I pay tribute to them for their resilience

throughout this pandemic, but I cannot justify such a fundamental assault on their liberties and livelihoods. Removing people's most fundamental rights and freedoms and confining them to their homes is a political decision. Those of us who are elected must judge not just the impact of the virus but the impact on our constituents' livelihoods, businesses, jobs, education, homes and physical and mental health.

We are constantly told by the governing, scientific and media class that we must shut down our country and that people must surrender their most basic rights and freedoms in order to save lives, yet those countries that have followed strict lockdown strategies have not all been successful in achieving that aim. There is no Member of this House who does not want to save lives. From the bottom of my heart, I thank the NHS personnel at Queen's Hospital in Romford, who have done a magnificent job in saving lives and caring for the sick. But there has to be a balance and proportionality to these decisions, considering the long-term consequences for the lives of the people we represent. I fear the impact of these shutdowns on those who run small businesses; on the 50,000 Britons with undiagnosed cancer, as estimated by Macmillan Cancer Support; on the elderly who have been cut off from their loved ones in the last years of their lives; on children from the poorest backgrounds who will fall behind as a result of schools closing; and on the victims of increased domestic violence and suicide.

The scientific advisers will never need to account for the effects of lockdown on our constituents, but we will. The shutdown that we are voting on today and the effects of these measures, while well intended, may, I fear, do more damage to the lives of the British people in the long term than the pandemic itself. I believe a complete rethink of this policy must now take place. Our country cannot go on like this.

6.10 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: I want us to learn from what has happened since March, rather than saying no, because if this lockdown is to be effective, we have to look at the gaps that have not been plugged so far. I want to talk particularly about the up to 3 million self-employed people: freelancers, people who run their own businesses and people who changed jobs at the wrong time who have had little or no financial support. It has been a burning injustice since March that they have gone without, and it continues to be. The Chancellor should be coming to the House of Commons to describe how he is going to support these people who have been left behind. It is not fair to them and it is an injustice, but it is damaging economically too. They all have a contribution to make as the economy eventually recovers, and the stronger and healthier their finances are now, the better placed they and many other businesses will be to play their part when the time comes.

There are also health consequences. One characteristic of this crisis has been that people have not been able to afford to self-isolate—individual low-paid workers and the 3 million excluded people—because they have not had the support, whether that is sick pay for people who are employed, or a lack of access to furlough, to the self-employed scheme or often even to universal credit. People have not been able to afford to self-isolate when they have been contacted, and that is a big part of the reason that less than 20% of people who were supposed

to self-isolate have so far done so. That must be fixed; to get the health benefits of the lockdown right, the financial side must be fixed at the same time.

It is therefore right that the expectations of the large retailers in returning £2 billion in unneeded business rates relief are that that money is used to support those who have so far gone without. The Chancellor should come here, and tell the House and those excluded people that that money will be used to support them through the coming weeks—and, if necessary, months. He should be providing greater business support for those areas where business has had to go without for longer because lockdown came earlier and deeper, and he must put these things right soon. If we do not do so, the ongoing crisis will be worse in the long run, the cost will be greater and those people who have gone without will continue to suffer.

6.13 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) [V]: I want to start by praising the Prime Minister for the way in which he has taken the decisions. I would rather have a Prime Minister who leaves no stone unturned before restricting our liberties and who makes closing schools the very last thing that he wants to do. Ultimately, these measures have a real effect on people's lives, and the decisions that we make today are a heavy burden. I also thank the BBC for what it is going to do to help with education; that is a real public service broadcaster.

I welcome the £4.6 billion that is being made available. This week I spoke to the landlord of a pub who told me that this is a vital injection of resources for him to use. I urge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to consider a slight extension to the rates holiday, because the hospitality sector will be one of the vital tools in our recovery. People are desperate to go out and every time they go out, the Government will get revenue because every drink sold has a duty on it. It is a golden goose of the economy, so please do not cut its head off. Let us see whether we can do more to help that industry.

I have concerns about teacher assessment for examinations. A top grade can be given to a child for what they have been taught, but there will be a lot of stuff that they have not been taught and I fear that they will suffer the consequences of that later on by having that lack in their knowledge. Personally, I would like to see exams moved to Christmas this year. That is a radical solution, but this is an unprecedented situation. Curriculum delivery is absolutely vital, as is examination. Exams are not just an academic test, but a pressure experience and part of our human development that prepares us for later life.

I am concerned about nurseries and feel that they will need more financial support. Many parents will not send their child to nursery if they are at home. Why would they spend the money on that? That means that nurseries could well go bankrupt, so I urge my hon. Friends in the Treasury to look at that matter very quickly.

I want to finish on the issue of reporting. Many people have asked to be shown the number of injections that have been carried out each day. I am not sure whether that in itself is helpful. What would be helpful is a tracking graph of what happens three weeks later when people are immune. A series of levels would show the restrictions that could be undone when so many people have been immunised

[Alec Shelbrooke]

in the demographic that they represent. In that way, the public will be able to see how we are progressing towards the target of being able to come out of these restrictions. That will give a clearer roadmap and a clearer way of getting the proper buy-in that we need to get out of this situation as quickly as we can. It gives people hope and shows a real timeline in what it means to people.

Finally, on businesses that have put money aside for tax returns that they cannot access, I urge the Government to establish a furlough scheme so that they can access that money and not have to pay tax on it.

6.16 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): In my experience, the Tories have never won elections because the public thought they cared but rather because they believed them to be competent. Black Wednesday did for John Major and I suspect that the covid crisis will deal with the Johnson regime.

No one believes that Governments get it right first time or indeed all of the time, but that does not excuse the criminal negligence of not dealing with pandemic planning, which seems to have gone by the board. It is the speed of reaction and the lessons learned that are important. The question is why do this Government keep making the same mistakes time and again? Who is in charge? Who is minding the shop? Who is dealing with the detail?

Ministers are surprised by predictable events. The Prime Minister seemed to be astonished to find out that viruses mutate. There is a timescale to when they mutate, but they very certainly do mutate. Every year, for example we have a different variant of influenza. We had already experienced a lack of capacity with personal protective equipment. At the time the crisis started, 1% of PPE used in the British health service came from this country. Stock handling was also appalling. When the crisis hit, British firms tried to make contact with the Department of Health and Social Care, but they just ran into a brick wall. They got no response and no help and yet the Government then poured money into grossly overpaid management consultants, middle men and pals at a huge cost to the public purse, causing a real crisis in the health service.

The vaccine programme has seen a magnificent effort from the scientists and their international partners, but, once again, we seem to be short of capacity. The Prime Minister's response is to act almost like a Soviet planning Minister, setting a target of 13.5 million people to be vaccinated by Valentine's day, but with no clear indication of how that will be achieved. The Secretary of State very helpfully told us today that filling the glass vials was not the problem, so is it manufacturing capacity? If it is, why have we not dealt with that in the past 12 months? We may ask whether it is MHRA testing, but the MHRA has a great record in validating the vaccines and of moving things along. Where is the problem in the system? What happens when we get a flow, as we will with the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine because that will be much easier to handle as it does not require the same degree of refrigeration? Why are we not talking to pharmacists and to retired doctors and nurses and getting them lined up now? Why force folk, especially older folk, to travel so far? What the public are asking is whether this lot really know what they are doing.

6.19 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: There have been more than 2 million confirmed covid cases in the UK, 71,000 people have tragically died, and a staggering one in 50 are now diagnosed with covid—another record high for this country. Liverpool has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The total number of confirmed cases in Liverpool for the last seven days is over 3,500, an increase of over 2,300 on the previous week.

The new variant poses more of a threat going forward, and we clearly need to take action to halt the increase, save lives and protect the NHS, but this was not inevitable. Time and again, we have seen this Government refuse to take the necessary steps to save lives and protect livelihoods. We have the second highest death rate in Europe, surpassed only by Italy. On top of that, we are currently suffering the deepest recession of any G7 country. The Government have failed to rise to the challenge of the pandemic since last year, and future generations will look back on them as having done too little, too late.

I repeat that this was not inevitable. This is what happens when those in charge disregard calls by frontline workers, teachers, scientists, unions and experts for schools to be closed and for a national lockdown to slow the spread of the pandemic. Doctors at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital in my constituency describe the situation as hanging by a thread, with major staff shortages and staff suffering exhaustion, the additional winter pressures and delayed medical demand still overdue from the first covid wave all adding to that pressure.

With hospitals at risk of being overwhelmed by the new variant and already facing this huge spike in infections with fewer staff than in the first wave, can the Minister outline what funding will be made available to bring extra support and staff into the NHS over the coming weeks? With the vaccines being rolled out as we speak, and the welcome news that the AstraZeneca vaccine has been approved to begin distribution next week, when will the Government produce a national plan for vaccinations? What steps will be taken to ensure that agency and outsourced workers in frontline jobs, such as hospital porters, cleaners and teaching support staff, will be given equal access to vaccines alongside everyone else in their workplaces, especially given that those staff are more likely to be at greater risk of contracting the virus?

Let me conclude by paying tribute to our valiant NHS, all the workers who have continued to work to keep my city safe: the council, public health, the community and voluntary sector, and the army of amazing volunteers.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The wind-ups will begin at 6.44 pm.

6.23 pm

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con) [V]: Before Christmas, I visited Gotham Primary School in Rushcliffe to see what the children had been doing in Parliament Week. Like us today, they had discussed rules and presented their ideas. I heard passionate arguments against school uniforms. I learned about the rules in Beech class designed, like the regulations we are debating today, to stop the spread of coronavirus. There were excellent campaigns for a nature reserve and a bug hotel, and a multimedia campaign for more litter bins involving leaflets, posters, speeches and a video. I am thinking of trying to make some new recruits there for my next election campaign.

I left with a strong sense of how happy and engaged the children were at school with their friends and teachers. The headteacher, Janette Allen, and her teaching team had done an amazing job to give children back the normality that lockdown last spring had taken from them. I know that they and schools across Rushcliffe will be working hard to provide remote learning and support to children and their families. I also know that it cannot possibly be the same, so it is with a heavy heart that I support these regulations today. I do not believe we have any other choice given the sky-rocketing rates of infection we are seeing from the new covid variant and the pressure our hospitals are under.

I congratulate the Vaccine Taskforce on the amazing work it has done to develop one of the largest and most diverse vaccination portfolios in the world. Thanks to it, and the incredible Oxford-AstraZeneca team, the vaccine is already being rolled out at pace. I urge the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to continue to explore every option available, enlisting both civilian and military help, for getting the vaccine out quickly, and to continue to get rid of any bureaucracy like the ridiculous training modules on anti-terrorism for volunteer vaccinators.

I am very proud of the communities in Rushcliffe who have given their all to battling this virus, but it is taking its toll. People are tired and weary. They need clarity on the conditions that must be met for the restrictions to be eased and on how they will be eased as we emerge from lockdown. They also need to see a clear plan of how schools will be opened up again. I urge my right hon. Friends across Government to make this available sooner rather than later, to give people the morale boost they need to get through this final lockdown.

6.26 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab) [V]: As we have just heard from the hon. Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards), lockdown does indeed take its toll on us all, but it affects some people more than others. It shifts huge risk to key workers in social care, the food and retail sector and, of course, the NHS, and to those living in deprived areas, overcrowded housing or poverty. If we do not provide additional support to key workers and disadvantaged communities, transmission will continue and we will not make the most effective use of this lockdown.

We must make it easier for people to do the right thing and stay at home, so we need to raise statutory sick pay to a level that covers the cost of living and makes it possible for people to stay at home and keep themselves, their families and others safe. Many thousands of staff working for private contractors in the NHS, such as cleaners, porters and caterers, are currently only entitled to receive SSP in case of illness. The Government must commit to supporting these vital NHS workers to stay at home, protect the NHS, and continue to save lives. Those working in social care take care of some of the most vulnerable in our society. They too must be able to isolate when they are ill in order to prevent spread of the virus, and must be properly funded to do so. Too many people are excluded from the current self-isolation payment. Too many low-paid people are not eligible because they are not low-paid enough, but the loss of one income in a family, even for 10 days of self-isolation, can really undermine a family's economic stability and may even lead some to just keep quiet about being unwell.

Vaccines are the way out of this terrible situation, but we have to make sure that, unlike the virus, which has had a disproportionate effect on the poorest and our most vulnerable, our vaccine strategy is fair and equitable. Vaccine programmes, when delivered through a call system, do not have an equal uptake across socioeconomic groups, often leaving behind the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, so it is crucial that the strategy takes this into account by monitoring uptake and engaging with those groups.

We know that covid-19 does not hit us all in the same way, and we know the devastating impact of poverty on children. The recent covid-19 Marmot review found that the pandemic has already widened, and continues to widen, existing inequalities. The Government must therefore continue the universal credit and working tax credit uplift of £20 per week, commit to ending the benefit cap, and extend the free school meals entitlement to those whose families receive universal credit or have no recourse to public funds. This lockdown is necessary but it is hard.

6.29 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The proposed restrictions are right. There is no greater freedom than the right to life and we are willing to suspend many freedoms to protect especially those who are vulnerable, and those who work night and day in the NHS and our care settings to protect us. They deserve and require us to abide by the regulations and rules—we owe it to them—not least because we can now see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Given that the vaccination programme is beginning, it is all the more urgent that the Government recognise the importance of supporting the economy and everybody within it throughout the coming months. We know that it is not an ill-defined and possibly indefinite period, but that this will be over at some point in the coming months. That is a source of great joy and should focus the Chancellor's mind on the support that he needs to give those who are missing out. There are many of them: people who have been self-employed for less than two years; directors of very small limited companies, such as taxi drivers; people who have been on maternity leave. They have been excluded from support. It is an outrage that those people have been left to get into deeper and deeper debt because the Government have yet to devise a mechanism for supporting them. They must do so now. We need those people to build our economy back once we are out of this situation. To let them flounder in poverty now is outrageous and unacceptable.

I would also like the Government to pay attention to the needs and the plight of our outdoor education centres, which are in serious danger of closure. Many have already lost more than a third of their workforce in the past few months. There needs to be a Scotland-style direct grant support payment for those centres so that we can keep them going and they can contribute for years to come.

I also want the Government to come up with a specific and properly funded strategy for dealing with the backlog in cancer treatment. We estimate that 60,000 years of life will be lost to cancer due to the coronavirus pandemic, and it could get worse.

[Tim Farron]

The vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel. It is wonderful and I pay tribute to everyone involved in making that come to be and in administering the vaccines as we speak. However, the Government are making that tunnel a little bit longer than they need to. It is clear that the supply of vaccine to places in South Cumbria is not as good as it might be. Places such as Sedbergh and Windermere have not yet got vaccination centres. Those sites need to be approved.

Finally, given that our teachers are teaching the children of key workers, they should also be vaccinated as a priority.

6.32 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for saving me up till last. It is difficult to say something new at No. 67 on the list.

Let me say at the outset that I recognise the seriousness of the situation, particularly given the new strain of the virus. I recognise the huge pressures on hospitals and I pay tribute to them. However, I am not convinced that another hurriedly announced national lockdown is the right solution. That is why I am loth to vote for the regulations, especially when we have had just three hours to debate the biggest infringement of our constituents' civil liberties that I have ever had to vote on as an MP, and given that Parliament could have sat all this week, and we would then have considered the regulations before they came into force.

The sunset expiry date of the regulations has been surreptitiously moved to the end of March rather than the end of January as we were earlier led to believe. The regulations have no impact assessment, and there are measures in them that were brought into law in the first lockdown, but later removed or relaxed.

I have said all along that the Government have a difficult job to balance advice about risk from the medical experts with the economic impact and the public's confidence in abiding by the regulations. After 10 months, that confidence has been sorely tested and there is a high level of lockdown fatigue. It is therefore even more important that what we ask of our constituents is logical, consistent and fair. Banning golf, tennis, angling and other outside pursuits was not considered logical previously and was relaxed in earlier regulations. Banning people from buying beer from outside closed pubs rather than crowding into supermarkets and off-licences was also inconsistent and relaxed in earlier regulations. It is therefore frustrating and regressive to see those and many other unnecessary and illogical restrictions creeping back in again. I ask the Secretary of State to be sensible and sensitive to the lobbying to remove them before they undermine confidence further.

My main point concerns the vaccine. It must be the Government's single biggest imperative. We need a national effort—a "little ships" effort—to deliver, buoyed up by the sea of vaccine the Government wisely bought up early. So when Ministers and clinicians proudly claim that we will be vaccinating 12 hours a day, seven days a week, my reaction is to ask: what about the other 12 hours—the other 50% of the day? We should be vaccinating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, until everyone who qualifies is jabbed. Many volunteers have

come forward to work shifts in the middle of the night—many little old ladies in Worthing who would readily bring tea and biscuits round at 4 o'clock in the morning, with others to run the technology. If they are offered a job at 4 am rather than four weeks hence, people will turn up.

We should be getting more juice, as the Secretary of State put it earlier, including by approving the Moderna vaccine already given the go-ahead in the US, for example. We should create drive-through jab centres, develop online booking of slots, allow walk-in services for spare appointments, allow diabetics to self-jab when they get their insulin. Only when we are vaccinating full-time can the Government claim to be doing absolutely everything they can, at pace, to get us out of this revolving pandemic lockdown door.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry Tim.

6.35 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: First, I thank our dedicated and brilliant scientists who have given us the hope of a way out of this extremely difficult period.

At the start of the first lockdown, the Prime Minister stated that the virus would be under control within 12 weeks, yet 10 months on, we are rerunning the devastation caused at the inception of the crisis. The virus is spreading exponentially, many people are in hospital and thousands of lives are at risk. This lockdown is necessary to restrict the spread of the virus and to protect our NHS, and yet again the public—my constituents in Luton South—at very short notice are doing their bit to tackle the spread of covid-19. But lockdown is a blunt tool. Being able to move out of it is contingent on the success of the vaccination programme across the country, so the Government must ensure that they carry out their side of the deal effectively, by acting quickly to make sure the programme is a success.

Meeting the target of vaccinating those in the top four priority groups by mid-February will require the vaccination of 2 million people a week and a total of 14 million vaccinations. Although we all want the vaccine to be rolled out as quickly as possible, I am concerned about the capacity of the UK's vaccine manufacturers to meet that target, given that the sustained lack of investment in vaccine manufacturing has left the UK acutely underprepared. The chief medical officer has stated that the vaccine shortage is a reality that cannot be wished away, and the Government recognise that, having already dropped the 30 million dose vaccine target set in May.

At the beginning of 2020, the UK did not have the capacity to produce vaccines to meet the demand created by a pandemic, so, shockingly, we are seeing the UK relying on repurposed infrastructure to make the Oxford vaccine. Sir John Bell has stated:

"The government has been completely disinterested in building onshore manufacturing capacity for any of the life-sciences products".

In addition, one of the companies manufacturing the AstraZeneca vaccine in bulk is transporting vaccine doses to Germany to be put in vials. A decade of Government austerity has hampered our ability to tackle this pandemic, and after the Government's failures in PPE procurement and the outsourced test and trace system, and their failure to provide sufficient economic

support, particularly to those who have been excluded, they must now not fail in the roll-out of the vaccine programme. I hope the Minister will explain to the House how the Government intend to address the frailty of the vaccine manufacturing supply chain and to rapidly increase the number of doses available.

I am also concerned that the Government have not published a detailed strategy for the vaccination of all key workers. As we go into another lockdown, we will once again see the real value of key workers, who keep our country going. There have not been sufficient assurances that teachers, posties, firefighters, police officers—all frontline key workers—will be prioritised in the vaccination process. Will the Minister outline—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry Rachel, but we are going to try to squeeze someone else in.

6.38 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con) [V]: Thank you for squeezing me in, Mr Deputy Speaker. I can think of few things I would prefer more not to do than again restrict the lives of my constituents in Gloucester, but until we have immunised those who are most likely to need hospital help, the responsible action today is to support the Government. In this third lockdown, it is incredibly important that we help as much as we can all those involved in distributing the vaccine, to get us to the exit as soon as possible.

I know that the process of sharing information locally has been a real problem for some colleagues, but that has not been the case in Gloucestershire, where for nine months now all six county MPs have met regularly with our NHS primary care, public health and county council heads. I pay tribute to them all, not just for the leadership they have given to their organisations, but for the hard work of so many of their staff in healthcare, social care and care homes. However, we are often told that the basic facts that we are being given are confidential. Therefore, I ask the Health Secretary to agree today that the number of those in the top four categories in every area, the number vaccinated, the daily rate required to meet the 15 February goals, and the situation updated daily are basic facts that should be shared with every resident in our country. We can then have confidence in what is happening and what the situation is, and that we are going to arrive at the destination that we need to. That will also give people confidence that there is a real exit strategy from the lockdown as early as possible in the spring, so that people can go back to work as usual.

Secondly, I would highlight that although we all agree how important it is to get children back to school, confidence in when pupils will be able to go back is fairly low at the moment. One way of being able to get around this problem, even though I know it contradicts the principles of how the JCVI organises its categories, would be to vaccinate the teachers, so that heads would know that all their staff would be there and would not be at risk from pupils spreading the virus inadvertently. I ask the Health Secretary to consider that, as he considers all the other important issues about supply and distribution of vaccines as soon as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Fleur, ignore the timer. We will stop you at 6.44 pm, but we are pleased to squeeze you in.

6.41 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am glad to be speaking in such an important debate. First, I thank all the staff at St George's Hospital and Queen Mary's Hospital in Roehampton, who are working so hard at the moment to deliver much of the life-saving care that we are talking about in today's debate. I also offer my condolences to the families of the over 1,000 people who have died in the last 24 hours, which really brings home why we need these measures, hard though they are. As such, I will be voting for them and supporting them. Our hospitals are under stress; we need to have these measures to save lives and protect the NHS.

I am highly disappointed about the failure of the track and trace system up to now, which I think is part of the reason why we are having to see these continuing lockdowns. We are not overcoming this disease, as they have done in other countries, so we have to get to grips with real tracking and real tracing, getting back to 100 contacts each. I welcome the roll-out of vaccines, and look forward to a "community first" way of rolling these out, in which local GPs—those who are trusted to provide and administer the vaccine—will be leading the way. I especially hope to see a vaccination centre in Roehampton in my constituency. I am disappointed that many people are still left out of economic support: a business rate holiday would make all the difference to my constituents and businesses.

Finally, there is still a failure to contract for scrubs. There are still volunteers making scrubs for our NHS providers, and this needs to be sorted out. I would really welcome hearing from the Minister whether I can meet with those who are involved with contracting on scrubs, along with experts in my community, who are still doing this on a voluntary basis when it should be done nationally. Thank you very much.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you for being concise as well, Fleur. I call Alex Norris to start the wind-ups.

6.43 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I put on record my thanks to you and your staff for what is now the second recall of Parliament for important business. I know that a lot of work goes into making that possible, and we really appreciate that, but it is important that we are here today. The daily figures that colleagues will have read while sat in this debate are sobering: 1,041 more of our countrymen and women have lost their lives to this horrible virus. It is a sobering moment, and with that in mind, we will support these regulations today. We do not think it is inevitable that we are in this situation, but it is clear that this is a very challenging moment indeed, and in these dangerous times, with our NHS working at such high capacity, it is in the national interest to protect it and make these difficult decisions.

I say to people watching: if you are one of the very many people who have been excluded from Government support so far, or if you have missed out on self-isolation support, or if you are concerned about business support or reductions in welfare support going forward, I hope that you will have seen the support from our Benches, from my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow

[Alex Norris]

(Stella Creasy), for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), for Blaydon (Liz Twist) and for Putney (Fleur Anderson), all giving you voice. Similarly, I hope that those very many clinically extremely vulnerable, who have so often felt ignored, saw in the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) that they are not. The same goes for contributions on frontline staff made by my hon. Friends the Members for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson).

Many points were made earlier today about schools, which I will not emphasise any further, other than to mention the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Eltham (Clive Efford), for Sheffield Central, for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). Important points were made about the border by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), which I will reflect on shortly.

Many Opposition colleagues—including my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) and for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth—referred to the vaccine, as did many Government Members, including the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) and the hon. Members for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger), for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) and for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke). In particular, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) and the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) made contributions about the Government committing to publish a schedule of precisely what vaccine is going to be received and when, and how that will be rolled out, and I think the Government ought to do that.

Important contributions were made by Government Members about the exit plans and support for business, as well as children and early years. Contributions were made by the right hon. Members for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) and for North Somerset (Dr Fox), the hon. Members for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady), for Poole (Sir Robert Syms), and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) about oversight, and we as an Opposition would support a further review, in shorter order, of these regulations and further debate to make sure that they are as effective as possible.

The right hon. Members for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) and the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) all made points about the scientists. I would perhaps fall back on Margaret Thatcher's maxim, "Advisers advise, Ministers decide". Ultimately, if those colleagues are dissatisfied with the actions of the Government, it is for Ministers

alone to account for them rather than the scientists, who are giving their best endeavours, even if we do not agree with them.

I thought it was interesting that not a single colleague mentioned that we are exactly where we were one week ago. I was in this place, the Minister was in her place and you were in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker, as we were discussing regulations. That failed. That seems funny, but actually, it is not funny at all when we think about it. I asked the Minister three times to say that the Government thought that their final attempt to salvage the tier system would work. I received no such commitment, so perhaps it is not a surprise that it fell over, even if it is a surprise that it fell over as quickly as it did. That is a characterisation of a failure to grip this virus, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said. The Government have been just so slow and always short, trying to do the bare minimum and never, frankly, doing enough.

In a similar vein, it was quite disappointing that the Secretary of State's contribution—his 23 minutes—could have been an intro to a general debate on vaccines, because that was all he spoke about. Of course, the vaccine is important and is our way through this, but actually, it is a failure to grasp at ministerial level that there are many things other than the vaccine, that they have control and a say over and that they simply have not done well enough on.

This lockdown, which we will no doubt support tonight, will not make our problems go away. Lockdowns do not solve anything. They buy us time to solve things, so in the limited time remaining, I will highlight some of those that I think that the Secretary of State ought to have referred to, and I hope that the Minister will in her winding-up speech.

On economic support, again, there was not a word for those many millions excluded from support so far. They have gone a long time now without support. They deserve more than the glib comment that they had from the Prime Minister this morning. I hope the Minister might do a little bit better. The Chancellor should be here giving us a chance to scrutinise those plans. He was very keen to at the beginning, but we have not seen him now for a very long time.

Test, trace and isolate remains a significant gap in our fence. What fools we all look now given that, when the virus was at its lowest ebb in the summer, that system was not sorted out. Instead, while the testing number at the beginning of the system remains a very good one, turnaround time does not hit its targets, tracing never hits its targets and we know that not enough people isolate because the support for them is not good enough. The fact that we have failed to fix those problems reflects very poorly on the Government.

On the border, I am always loth to make international comparisons, certainly beyond Europe, but our daily death total today is more than the entire death total during the pandemic in Australia. There are ways in which we are similar and ways in which we are different from them, but I think we should reflect on the fact that on 20 March, they closed their border. Anyone returning home during that time had a two-week quarantine, but that was it. Now, we are still talking about test to release and other such measures at the border. It is an extraordinary failure.

To finish, I will make a couple of points on vaccination. The development and procurement of vaccine has been a success of this Government—I have said that multiple times in this place, and will continue to do so—but whether they have a successful vaccination programme remains to be seen. There is frustration on both sides of the House that we do not yet have the sense that this will be a 24/7 service, or that we are unleashing all those people who have volunteered to contribute. It is surprising to see pharmacies on the front page of national newspapers—that is the length that pharmacies feel that they have to go to get the attention of the Government. If the Government are sure they do not need that extra support and will still deliver on time, they should be clear about that.

May I have some particular clarity from the Minister? We have been hearing the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister now saying—they have changed their form of words in the past three or four days—that everyone in categories 1 to 4 will be “offered” the vaccine by the middle of February. What does that mean? What does it mean for the modelling? Before, we thought that by the middle of February we wanted everyone in those categories to be vaccinated—within, of course, the limits of people choosing not to take it up. What this cannot be is a paper exercise; it has to be the fullest—

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately) *indicated dissent.*

Alex Norris: The Minister seems to dispute that, so I hope that she will take the time in her contribution to do so.

The vaccination programme represents a deal with the British people. We are asking the British people to ensure significant hardship for a significant period—that is the British people’s side of the bargain. The Government’s side of the bargain is an effective, safe and timely vaccination programme. They have to deliver on that.

I will finish in that spirit, with a simple message to my constituents and constituents across the country: stay at home, protect the NHS and vaccinate Britain.

6.51 pm

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): The regulations before us set out measures that none of us wants to take, yet we must take them if we are to control this new and aggressively infectious variant of coronavirus, which is spreading rapidly across the country. As we heard from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health, we are up against it, in a race of vaccine versus virus. We are vaccinating faster than any comparable country but, even as we do so, each day we have a relentless rise in the number of new infections, hospital admissions and, sadly, deaths. We now have more than 30,000 people in our hospitals with covid.

Earlier this week, the UK’s chief medical officer’s advice was that we should move to alert level 5, meaning that if action is not taken, NHS capacity might be overwhelmed within 21 days. The consequences of that and the decisions that it could lead to are not decisions that we want our doctors to have to take. Therefore, I say to hon. Members, that is why we must adopt the measures before us. Just as we do not want to impose the restrictions on people, we must of course be ready to lift them too, as soon as we are in a position to do so.

Lockdowns come at huge cost, economic and social, and in particular to the many thousands of children who are no longer going to school.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): The regulations can continue until 31 March, but will my hon. Friend confirm that, in fact, they will be reviewed fortnightly and that any regulations that are considered unnecessary will be lifted as soon as possible?

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Many other hon. Members have also asked about the duration of the restrictions and ongoing parliamentary scrutiny. I can say that the regulations provide for the restrictions until 31 March 2021 not because we expect the full national lockdown to continue until then, but to allow a steady, controlled and evidence-led move down through the tiers on a local basis. The restrictions will, of course, be kept under continuous review. We have a statutory requirement to review them every two weeks and a legal obligation to remove them when they are no longer necessary to control the virus.

I also reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady), my right hon. Friends the Members for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) and for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and others that we absolutely do not want to continue the restrictions longer than necessary. Most particularly, we do not want to keep children at home and being home-schooled. I say that as a parent with three children who have spent the day, I hope, being home schooled—my husband has been in charge of that today. We do not want that to be the situation any longer than it has to be. Schools were the last to close, and the Prime Minister has said that we want them to be the first to open. Of course, they are still open for the children of critical workers, and that should include—to pick up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger)—those involved in the construction of critical national infrastructure, such as the Hinkley Point power station.

While with great reluctance we have had to keep most children out of school, we have also had to require outdoor sports facilities, such as golf courses, to close. Several hon. Members have challenged that, and I want to tackle it head on. I say to hon. Members who have raised this issue that if we made an exemption for golf, we would also have to make an exemption for other outdoor activities, such as tennis, outdoor bowling, climbing walls, riding centres, dry ski slopes and go-karting—I could go on. People would then say, “I’m being told to stay at home but I can go and do all those things, so you don’t really mean that I should stay at home.” Quite apart from the fact that people congregate in those outdoor settings, we need to be really clear that the message now is, “Stay at home.”

Sir Charles Walker: I am pretty thick when it comes to logic. A person can go on their bicycle and that counts as exercise, but they cannot sit on their own, in a solitary way, on a riverbank. What is the problem with that?

Helen Whately: I do not believe that my hon. Friend is as he describes himself, but what I do think is quite clear. We are saying that people should stay at home,

[Helen Whately]

unless their reason for leaving home is on the very clear list of essential reasons for doing so. That covers the eligibility of the children of critical workers to be in school, healthcare appointments and, indeed, exercise. We really need to make sure that it is absolutely clear that, other than for those specific reasons, people should stay at home. That is what we need to do in order to control this raging virus. That is the message that all of us need to convey to our constituents.

Sir Graham Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Helen Whately: I have very little time and I want to cover more of the points that have been raised, including by my hon. Friend.

As hon. Members have said, this national lockdown is different from previous lockdowns because we have the vaccine and the end is in sight. We have already vaccinated more than 1.3 million people. That includes the nearly one in four of those over 80 who have had their first jab. By the middle of February, we expect to have offered the first vaccine dose to everyone in the top four priority groups identified by JCVI—namely, care home residents and staff; people over 70; all frontline NHS and care staff; and the clinically extremely vulnerable. That answers the question posed by the shadow Health Secretary as to when NHS frontline staff will have the opportunity to be vaccinated, as they, together with social care staff, are in the group to be offered the vaccination by mid-February.

The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), asked how the vaccine will be offered. He will know that vaccination is not mandatory. We are educating, encouraging and informing people of the important reasons why they should step forward and have the vaccine. That is the way in which we are going about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) rightly said that we should stop at nothing to get people vaccinated, and I could not agree more. That is why my hon. Friend the vaccination deployment Minister is working with the NHS on getting millions of people vaccinated in just a matter of weeks, involving hospitals, GPs, community pharmacies and a workforce that includes thousands of volunteers, including health professionals returning to the frontline to play their part. As the Health Secretary confirmed earlier, we have already acted to reduce some of the bureaucracy and, in particular, some of the training models required for those NHS returners, so that we are ready to vaccinate as fast as the vaccine can be supplied.

I have heard several hon. Members call for more data on the vaccination roll-out. I assure them that weekly data will be published tomorrow, and the publication of daily data will start next week. That data will show our accelerating vaccination programme protecting more people day by day, so that in time we will be able to lift many of the restrictions before the House today.

In conclusion, there are difficult weeks ahead for all of us—especially for those working on the frontline in health and social care, whom we cannot thank enough—but we are on the final stretch with the end in sight, so we must keep our resolve and get behind these restrictions,

which are needed to control the virus until the vaccine has reached those that it needs to. I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 524, Noes 16.

Division No. 193]

[7 pm

AYES

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Abbott, rh Ms Diane | Bryant, Chris |
| Abrahams, Debbie | Buchan, Felicity |
| Adams, Nigel | Buck, Ms Karen |
| Afolami, Bim | Buckland, rh Robert |
| Ahmad Khan, Imran | Burghart, Alex |
| Aiken, Nickie | Burgon, Richard |
| Aldous, Peter | Burns, rh Conor |
| Ali, Rushanara | Butler, Dawn |
| Ali, Tahir | Butler, Rob |
| Allan, Lucy | Byrne, Ian |
| Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena | Byrne, rh Liam |
| Amesbury, Mike | Cadbury, Ruth |
| Amess, Sir David | Cairns, rh Alun |
| Anderson, Fleur | Campbell, rh Sir Alan |
| Anderson, Lee | Carden, Dan |
| Anderson, Stuart | Carter, Andy |
| Andrew, Stuart | Cartledge, James |
| Ansell, Caroline | Cash, Sir William |
| Antoniazzi, Tonia | Cates, Miriam |
| Argar, Edward | Caulfield, Maria |
| Ashworth, Jonathan | Chalk, Alex |
| Atherton, Sarah | Champion, Sarah |
| Atkins, Victoria | Charalambous, Bambos |
| Bacon, Gareth | Chishti, Rehman |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Churchill, Jo |
| Badenoch, Kemi | Clark, Feryal |
| Bailey, Shaun | Clark, rh Greg |
| Baillie, Siobhan | Clarke, Mr Simon |
| Baker, Duncan | Clarke, Theo |
| Barclay, rh Steve | Clarke-Smith, Brendan |
| Barker, Paula | Clarkson, Chris |
| Baron, Mr John | Cleverly, rh James |
| Baynes, Simon | Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey |
| Beckett, rh Margaret | Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse |
| Begum, Apsana | Colburn, Elliot |
| Bell, Aaron | Collins, Damian |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Cooper, Daisy |
| Benton, Scott | Cooper, Rosie |
| Beresford, Sir Paul | Cooper, rh Yvette |
| Berry, rh Jake | Corbyn, rh Jeremy |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Costa, Alberto |
| Bhatti, Saqib | Courts, Robert |
| Blackman, Bob | Coutinho, Claire |
| Blake, Olivia | Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey |
| Blomfield, Paul | Crabb, rh Stephen |
| Blunt, Crispin | Creasy, Stella |
| Bone, Mr Peter | Crosbie, Virginia |
| Brabin, Tracy | Crouch, Tracey |
| Bradley, rh Karen | Cruddas, Jon |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Cryer, John |
| Braverman, rh Suella | Cummins, Judith |
| Brennan, Kevin | Cunningham, Alex |
| Brereton, Jack | Daby, Janet |
| Bridgen, Andrew | Daly, James |
| Brine, Steve | Davey, rh Ed |
| Bristow, Paul | David, Wayne |
| Britcliffe, Sara | Davies, David T. C. |
| Brokenshire, rh James | Davies, Gareth |
| Brown, Ms Lyn | Davies, Geraint |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas | Davies, Dr James |
| Browne, Anthony | Davies, Mims |
| Bruce, Fiona | Davies-Jones, Alex |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Davis, rh Mr David | Gray, James | Johnston, David | Menzies, Mark |
| Davison, Dehenna | Grayling, rh Chris | Jones, Andrew | Mercer, Johnny |
| De Cordova, Marsha | Green, rh Damian | Jones, Darren | Merriman, Huw |
| Debonnaire, Thangam | Green, Kate | Jones, rh Mr David | Metcalfe, Stephen |
| Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh | Greenwood, Lilian | Jones, Fay | Miliband, rh Edward |
| Dinenage, Caroline | Greenwood, Margaret | Jones, Gerald | Millar, Robin |
| Dines, Miss Sarah | Griffith, Andrew | Jones, rh Mr Kevan | Miller, rh Mrs Maria |
| Docherty, Leo | Griffith, Nia | Jones, Mr Marcus | Milling, rh Amanda |
| Dodds, Anneliese | Griffiths, Kate | Jones, Ruth | Mills, Nigel |
| Donelan, Michelle | Grundy, James | Jones, Sarah | Mishra, Navendu |
| Dorries, Ms Nadine | Gullis, Jonathan | Jupp, Simon | Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew |
| Double, Steve | Gwynne, Andrew | Kane, Mike | Mohindra, Mr Gagan |
| Doughty, Stephen | Haigh, Louise | Kawczynski, Daniel | Moore, Damien |
| Dowd, Peter | Halfon, rh Robert | Kearns, Alicia | Moore, Robbie |
| Dowden, rh Oliver | Hall, Luke | Keegan, Gillian | Moran, Layla |
| Dromey, Jack | Hamilton, Fabian | Keeley, Barbara | Mordaunt, rh Penny |
| Drummond, Mrs Flick | Hammond, Stephen | Kendall, Liz | Morden, Jessica |
| Duddridge, James | Hancock, rh Matt | Khan, Afzal | Morgan, Stephen |
| Duffield, Rosie | Hands, rh Greg | Kinnock, Stephen | Morris, David |
| Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain | Hardy, Emma | Knight, rh Sir Greg | Morris, Grahame |
| Dunne, rh Philip | Harman, rh Ms Harriet | Knight, Julian | Morris, James |
| Eagle, Ms Angela | Harris, Carolyn | Kruger, Danny | Morrissey, Joy |
| Eagle, Maria | Harris, Rebecca | Kwarteng, rh Kwasi | Morton, Wendy |
| Eastwood, Mark | Harrison, Trudy | Kyle, Peter | Mullan, Dr Kieran |
| Edwards, Ruth | Hart, Sally-Ann | Lammy, rh Mr David | Mumby-Croft, Holly |
| Efford, Clive | Hart, rh Simon | Largan, Robert | Murray, Ian |
| Elliott, Julie | Hayes, Helen | Lavery, Ian | Murray, James |
| Ellis, rh Michael | Hayes, rh Sir John | Leadsom, rh Andrea | Murray, Mrs Sheryll |
| Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias | Heald, rh Sir Oliver | Leigh, rh Sir Edward | Murrison, rh Dr Andrew |
| Elmore, Chris | Healey, rh John | Levy, Ian | Nandy, Lisa |
| Elphicke, Mrs Natalie | Heapey, James | Lewer, Andrew | Neill, Sir Robert |
| Eshalomi, Florence | Heaton-Harris, Chris | Lewis, rh Brandon | Nichols, Charlotte |
| Esterson, Bill | Henderson, Gordon | Lewis, Clive | Nici, Lia |
| Eustice, rh George | Hendrick, Sir Mark | Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian | Nokes, rh Caroline |
| Evans, Chris | Henry, Darren | Lloyd, Tony | Norman, rh Jesse |
| Evans, Dr Luke | Higginbotham, Antony | Loder, Chris | Norris, Alex |
| Evennett, rh Sir David | Hill, Mike | Logan, Mark | O'Brien, Neil |
| Everitt, Ben | Hinds, rh Damian | Long Bailey, Rebecca | Offord, Dr Matthew |
| Fabricant, Michael | Hoare, Simon | Longhi, Marco | Olney, Sarah |
| Farris, Laura | Hobhouse, Wera | Lopez, Julia | Onwurah, Chi |
| Farron, Tim | Hodge, rh Dame Margaret | Lopresti, Jack | Opperman, Guy |
| Fell, Simon | Hodgson, Mrs Sharon | Lord, Mr Jonathan | Oppong-Asare, Abena |
| Fletcher, Colleen | Holden, Mr Richard | Lucas, Caroline | Osamor, Kate |
| Fletcher, Katherine | Hollern, Kate | Lynch, Holly | Osborne, Kate |
| Fletcher, Mark | Hollinrake, Kevin | Mackrory, Cherilyn | Owatemi, Taiwo |
| Fletcher, Nick | Hollobone, Mr Philip | Maclean, Rachel | Owen, Sarah |
| Ford, Vicky | Holloway, Adam | Madders, Justin | Parish, Neil |
| Foster, Kevin | Holmes, Paul | Mahmood, Mr Khalid | Patel, rh Priti |
| Fovargue, Yvonne | Hopkins, Rachel | Mahmood, Shabana | Paterson, rh Mr Owen |
| Fox, rh Dr Liam | Howarth, rh Sir George | Mak, Alan | Pawsey, Mark |
| Foxcroft, Vicky | Howell, John | Malhotra, Seema | Peacock, Stephanie |
| Foy, Mary Kelly | Howell, Paul | Malthouse, Kit | Pennycook, Matthew |
| Francois, rh Mr Mark | Huddleston, Nigel | Mangnall, Anthony | Penrose, John |
| Frazer, Lucy | Hudson, Dr Neil | Mann, Scott | Percy, Andrew |
| Freeman, George | Hughes, Eddie | Marson, Julie | Perkins, Mr Toby |
| Freer, Mike | Hunt, Jane | Maskell, Rachael | Phillips, Jess |
| Fuller, Richard | Hunt, rh Jeremy | Matheson, Christian | Phillipson, Bridget |
| Furniss, Gill | Hunt, Tom | Mayhew, Jerome | Philp, Chris |
| Gale, rh Sir Roger | Huq, Dr Rupa | Maynard, Paul | Pincher, rh Christopher |
| Gardiner, Barry | Hussain, Imran | McCabe, Steve | Pollard, Luke |
| Garnier, Mark | Jarvis, Dan | McCarthy, Kerry | Poulter, Dr Dan |
| Ghani, Ms Nusrat | Javid, rh Sajid | McCartney, Jason | Pow, Rebecca |
| Gibb, rh Nick | Jayawardena, Mr Ranil | McDonagh, Siobhain | Powell, Lucy |
| Gibson, Peter | Jenkin, Sir Bernard | McDonald, Andy | Prentis, Victoria |
| Gideon, Jo | Jenkinson, Mark | McDonnell, rh John | Pritchard, Mark |
| Gill, Preet Kaur | Jenkyns, Andrea | McFadden, rh Mr Pat | Quin, Jeremy |
| Glen, John | Jenrick, rh Robert | McGinn, Conor | Quince, Will |
| Glendon, Mary | Johnson, rh Boris | McGovern, Alison | Qureshi, Yasmin |
| Goodwill, rh Mr Robert | Johnson, Dr Caroline | McKinnell, Catherine | Raab, rh Dominic |
| Gove, rh Michael | Johnson, Dame Diana | McMahon, Jim | Randall, Tom |
| Graham, Richard | Johnson, Gareth | McMorrin, Anna | Rayner, Angela |
| Grant, Mrs Helen | Johnson, Kim | Mearns, Ian | Reed, Steve |

Rees, Christina
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shah, Naz
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Royston
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephenson, Andrew

Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sultana, Zarah
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trickett, Jon
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt

Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wiggan, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin

Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Maggie Throup and
Tom Pursglove

NOES

Brady, Sir Graham
 Davies, Philip
 Drax, Richard
 Girvan, Paul
 Lockhart, Carla
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Paisley, Ian

Rosindell, Andrew
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Warburton, David
 Wilson, rh Sammy

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Christopher Chope and
Chris Green

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I., 2021, No. 8), dated 5 January 2021, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 January, be approved.

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.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(*James Morris.*)

7.10 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:

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|---|-------------------|
| Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con) | Chris Loder |
| Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con) | Mark Harper |
| Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|--|-------------------|
| Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy | Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|--|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP) | Sammy Wilson | Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) | Sarah Olney | John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | James Daly (Bury North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) | Sarah Olney |
| Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) | Sarah Olney | David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) | Sarah Olney | Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP) | Sammy Wilson |
| Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Robert Courts (Witney) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy | Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|---|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Gill Furniss (Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP) | Patrick Grady | Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP) | Sammy Wilson |
| Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | John Glen (Salisbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Alan Campbell (Ogmore) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell | Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell | Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Damian Green (Ashford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD) | Sarah Olney | Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) | Sarah Olney | Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind) | Jonathan Edwards | Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | James Grundy (Leigh) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP) | Ben Lake |
| | | Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy | Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|---|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | David Johnston (Wantage) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| James Heapey (Wells) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell | Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Darren Henry (Broxtove) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Anthony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) | Sarah Olney | Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| John Howell (Henley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con) | Mr William Wragg |
| Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) | Sarah Olney | Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy | Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Alan Mak (Havant) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) | Sammy Wilson | Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) | Patrick Grady |
| Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Damien Moore (Southport) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) | Sarah Olney |
| Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con) | Chris Loder |
| Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | | |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy | Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|---|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell | Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Will Quince (Colchester) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell | Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP) | Sammy Wilson |
| Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) | Sammy Wilson | Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Priti Patel (Witham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Dean Russell (Watford) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC) | Ben Lake |
| Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| | | Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| | | Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy | Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|--|-------------------|--|-------------------|
| Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) | Stuart Andrew |
| Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) | Sarah Olney | Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy | Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) | Ben Lake |
| Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con) | Stuart Andrew | Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op) | Sir Alan Campbell | Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) | Sarah Olney |
| Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab) | Rachel Hopkins |
| Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP) | Patrick Grady | | |
| Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | | |
| Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell | | |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|---|-----------------|
| Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) | Patrick Grady |
| Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |

| Member eligible for proxy vote | Nominated proxy |
|---|-------------------|
| Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |
| Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con) | Stuart Andrew |
| Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab) | Sir Alan Campbell |

Written Statements

Wednesday 6 January 2021

TREASURY

Covid-19: Support for Businesses

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): Following my announcement yesterday that the Government are providing £4.6 billion of UK-wide funding to support hardest hit businesses, I am pleased to share further details regarding these grants.

Throughout this crisis, our economic priority remains the same: to protect jobs. We have already set out our economic package of support for businesses over the winter, including: monthly grants for closed businesses worth up to £3,000 per month; 100% business rates relief for all eligible retail, hospitality and leisure premises in 2020-21; extending the furlough scheme to April; extending the 100% Government-backed covid-19 lending schemes to March; and providing further self-employment income support scheme grants to support the self-employed to April.

But given further national restrictions announced by the Prime Minister on Monday that will prevent further spread of the virus, the Government will provide additional support to the most affected businesses, worth £4.6 billion across the United Kingdom.

All business premises in England which are legally required to close, including retail, hospitality and leisure, can claim a new one-off grant of up to £9,000. The one-off additional grant each business premises will receive depends on their rateable value.

Businesses with a rateable value of £51,000 or over will receive grants of £9,000.

Businesses with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000 will receive grants of £6,000.

Businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under will receive grants of £4,000.

This one-off grant is in addition to the existing monthly closed grants of up to £3,000 per month that businesses continue to be eligible for. These grants are worth over £1 billion in total per month.

We expect over 600,000 business premises in England to benefit from these grants. Businesses can receive multiple grants, as they are eligible on a per premises basis. Local authorities will receive the funding for the one-off grants next week, and we encourage them to make payments to businesses as soon as possible.

In addition to these one-off grants, we are making available discretionary funds of £500 million to local authorities in England to enable them to support their local businesses. This builds on the £1.1 billion discretionary funding (worth £20 per head of population) which local authorities in England have already received to support their local economies and help businesses impacted.

This announcement also includes £729 million of funding for the devolved Administrations as part of the unprecedented up-front funding guarantee. The total of

the guarantee is reviewed regularly to ensure it reflects all additional funding and was most recently increased by £800 million to £16.8 billion on 24 December. The Government are likely to increase this shortly to take into account any further expected increases in support in England.

This support will help businesses get through this difficult period through to the spring. We will take further decisions about our economic response to coronavirus and how best to support the economy, businesses and jobs at the Budget on 3 March.

[HCWS690]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19 Vaccine Update

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I am tabling this statement for the benefit of honourable and right honourable Members to bring to their attention the contingent liabilities relating to the contract signed between Her Majesty's Government (hereafter HMG) and Oxford-AstraZeneca for their covid-19 vaccine.

On 29 December, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) gave its authorisation for use of the covid-19 vaccine being manufactured by Oxford-AstraZeneca. With deployment of this vaccine beginning next week I am now updating the House on the liabilities HMG has taken on in relation to this vaccine via this statement and attached departmental minute.

The agreement to provide an indemnity as part of the contract between HMG and Oxford-AstraZeneca creates a contingent liability on the covid-19 vaccination programme, and I will be laying a departmental minute today containing a description of the liability undertaken.

It has been and is the Government's strategy to manage covid-19 until an effective vaccine/s can be deployed at scale. Willingness to accept appropriate indemnities has helped to secure access to vaccines with the expected benefits to public health and the economy alike much sooner than may have been the case otherwise.

Given the exceptional circumstances we are in, and the terms on which developers are willing to supply a covid-19 vaccine, we have had to take a broader approach to indemnification than we usually would. Global approaches differ, but we are aware that many other nation states are offering indemnities as part of their contractual arrangements, or other means e.g. the US PREP Act, which provides immunity from liability to vaccine developers.

Even though the covid-19 vaccines have been developed at pace, at no point and at no stage of development has safety been bypassed. The independent MHRA's approval for use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine clearly demonstrates that this vaccine has satisfied, in full, all the necessary requirements for safety, effectiveness, and quality. We are providing indemnities in the very unexpected

event of any adverse reactions that could not have been foreseen through the robust checks and procedures that have been put in place.

Developing a vaccination against covid-19 has been an extraordinary feat which has been delivered at great pace. Given the pace of vaccine development and our ambition to deploy the vaccine as soon as it has been authorised, it has not been possible to provide you with normal 14 sitting days to consider this issue of contingent liabilities.

I will update the House in a similar manner as and when other covid-19 vaccines are deployed.

The attachment can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2021-01-06/HCWS689/>.

[HCWS689]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Prime Minister's Trade Envoy Programme

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): The Prime Minister has made a new appointment to his trade envoy programme.

This new appointment will extend the total number of trade envoys to 30 parliamentarians covering 69 markets. The Prime Minister's trade envoy programme is an unpaid and voluntary cross-party network, which supports the UK's ambitious trade and investment agenda in global markets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) has been appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Angola and Zambia.

[HCWS688]

Petitions

Wednesday 6 January 2021

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Welfare of horses in Wellingborough

The Humble Petition of the residents of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas;

Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that laws regarding the welfare of horses should be reformed and enforced to protect vulnerable horses who are mistreated by their owners on the grounds that the current laws leave the 'codes of practice' open to debate and opinion, resulting in horses being neglected by their owners as the law is open to interpretation. In particular, the horses who reside by the Embankment in Wellingborough are neglected food, water and shelter, resulting in these animals having a poor-quality life.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to introduce reforms to laws regarding the welfare of horses and to work with The Borough Council of Wellingborough and the RSPCA to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to protect the welfare of the horses on the embankment in Wellingborough.

And your Petitioners, as duty bound, will every pray, &c.—[Presented by Mr Philip Hollobone on behalf of Mr Peter Bone, *Official Report*, 11 November 2020; Vol. 683, c. 1024.]

[P002623]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):

Thank you for sharing your petition with me as Secretary of State at DEFRA. I was sorry to learn about this case of neglected horses in Wellingborough. We take the protection of animal welfare, including the welfare of horses, very seriously and we are determined to enhance the UK's already high reputation in this respect.

The horses in question, who had been left on flooded land in Wellingborough, were removed by animal welfare charities for rehoming in June 2020. I would like to thank all those involved in moving 40 to 50 horses to safety, some of whom were in a poor state.

It may be helpful if I set out the laws already in place that relate to horses left either illegally on another person's land or where the horses are kept in poor welfare conditions.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence to cause any animal unnecessary suffering or to fail to provide for its welfare. Anyone who is cruel to an animal, or does not provide for its welfare, may be banned from owning animals. They may also face an unlimited fine, be sent to prison, or both. The Government are supporting the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill,

currently before Parliament, which will increase the maximum custodial penalty for the worst animal cruelty offences (including causing unnecessary suffering) from six months to five years' imprisonment.

The 2006 Act is backed up by the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and Their Hybrids which provides owners with information on how to meet the welfare needs of their equines, as required by the 2006 Act.

Breach of a provision of the Horse Code is not an offence itself, but if proceedings are brought against someone for an offence under the 2006 Act, the Court will look at whether or not they have complied with the Code in deciding whether they have committed an offence. This includes whether adequate food, water and shelter have been provided for the horses. Local authorities have powers under the 2006 Act to act where a horse is suspected to be suffering on any land, public or private. In such circumstances, the local authority may enter the land and take control of the animal in order to alleviate its suffering. Acting in this way is at the discretion of the local authority. Local authorities will often work in partnership with welfare charities such as the RSPCA, World Horse Welfare or Redwings.

The Control of Horses Act 2015 provides powers for landowners, land occupiers and local authorities to deal with horses placed unlawfully on land (including equine abandonments). The 2015 Act allows for action to be taken quickly where horses are placed on land without the landowner's permission.

Specifically, the 2015 Act allows landowners and occupiers to seize and, if necessary, remove horses unlawfully left on their land and take them immediately to a place of safety. Local authorities have similar powers under the 2015 Act where horses are placed unlawfully on public land. In all cases, the person seizing the horse must notify the local police force within 24 hours of doing so, and if the horses' owners can be identified, the person must also notify them. If no owner can be identified within four working days, landowners, occupiers and local authorities may then decide what to do with the horses, including rehoming, either privately or via charities, or offering them for sale. As a last resort, horses may be humanely euthanised.

In summary, therefore, it is the landowner's or land occupier's responsibility to use the 2015 Act powers when horses are placed unlawfully on private land. The local authority will only use the 2015 Act powers when they are either the landowner or occupier or where the horse is unlawfully placed on public land.

In addition, the Equine Identification (England) Regulations 2018 require all equines identified for the first time to be microchipped regardless of age when they register with a Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) in England. Similar requirements are in place for the rest of the UK. This means it will be easier to trace the owners of horses that have been left on other people's land without their permission or in cases where the horses are in a poor state of welfare.

From 1 October 2020, the Regulations extended the requirement for microchipping to older equines born before 1 July 2009, with the exception of semi-wild equine populations in the designated areas of Dartmoor, Exmoor, New Forest and Wicken Fen. A similar requirement will apply in Wales from 12 February 2021 and in Scotland from 28 March 2021.

The Regulations require equine owners to notify new microchips to a PIO for addition to the passport and the UK Central Equine Database (CED) of passport records. Owners may also use the CED's Digital Stable to add a new microchip to an existing record. Therefore, once older equines are also chipped, the CED will hold the microchip details for all equines in Great Britain, which will improve traceability for welfare purposes and disease outbreak management.

Local authorities are able to search the CED to trace the owners of microchipped horses found to be straying, abandoned or stolen. The 2018 Regulations also give local authorities powers to use sanctions for offences, alongside the previous criminal sanctions which should help strengthen enforcement. This includes being able to issue fixed penalty notices and to keep the proceeds of fines.

The Government consider that the relevant legislation and guidance in place provides the right safeguards and powers in respect of protecting equine welfare. We remain committed to working with enforcement agencies and other interested parties to ensure issues of horse abandonments or neglect are effectively addressed.

TRANSPORT

Railway between Stoke and Leek

The petition of the residents of North Staffordshire;

Declares that improving rail infrastructure and providing better rail services in our city and wider North Staffordshire is vital for the growth of our local economy; notes that

over 1,000 constituents have signed a corresponding petition asking to reopen the railway between Stoke and Leek; further declares that it would create jobs and unlock the potential of unused brownfield sites in our area; and further that it would greatly benefit commuters and passengers.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take such action as is necessary to reopen the railway between Stoke and Leek.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Jonathan Gullis, Official Report, 16 December 2020; Vol. 686, c. 353.]

[P002639]

Observations from the Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris):

We announced the £500 million Restoring Your Railway Fund in January 2020 to enable opportunities to reinstate railway services such as the Stoke to Leek Line, and add new stations, to the railway network. The Restoring Your Railway fund is about connecting people and communities. It includes an Ideas Fund for those schemes that are in an early stage of development and need to explore the options for solving a transport problem.

I thank the residents of North Staffordshire for expressing their support for this proposal, as local support is an important factor in getting rail schemes off the ground. I look forward to receiving a revised bid for the Stoke to Leek Line to the third round of the Ideas Fund which will be announced in the New Year.

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 6 January 2021

EDUCATION

Exams and Accountability 2021

The following is an extract from the statement on exams and accountability 2021 on 3 December 2020.

Gavin Williamson: The fundamental problem with this year's exams is that we tried to award grades without actually holding exams. We will not be repeating that same mistake again. With the measures that I have

outlined, we are confident that every student who is preparing to sit exams this summer will be awarded a qualification.

[Official Report, 3 December 2020, Vol. 685, c. 436.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson).

An error has been identified in my statement.

The correct statement should have been:

Gavin Williamson: The fundamental problem with this year's exams is that we tried to award grades without actually holding exams. We will not be repeating that same mistake again. With the measures that I have outlined, we are confident that every student who is preparing to sit exams this summer will **have the opportunity to** be awarded a qualification.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 6 January 2021

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| INTERNATIONAL TRADE | 62WS | | |
| Prime Minister's Trade Envoy Programme | 62WS | | |

PETITIONS

Wednesday 6 January 2021

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| Welfare of horses in Wellingborough | 13P | Railway between Stoke and Leek | 15P |

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Wednesday 13 January 2021**

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