

**Monday
7 June 2021**

**Volume 696
No. 12**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Monday 7 June 2021

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two 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.]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Covid-19 Restrictions: Large Gatherings

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle large gatherings that breach covid-19 restrictions. [901000]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): We continue to work closely with the police to provide them with the powers, support and resources they need to ensure compliance with the coronavirus regulations. We have quadrupled the penalties for those attending illegal indoor gatherings of more than 15 people in England, and have created a fine regime to ensure that we can absolutely enforce the regulations and that people are following the rules.

Damien Moore: Despite clear guidance on large gatherings last month, hundreds of cars and spectators descended on my Southport constituency for an illegal car meet-up that involved cars travelling at excessive speeds. Will my right hon. Friend do everything she can to ensure that these events are stopped and that the organisers of such events receive the maximum penalty?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; these breaches are serious, as are some of the practices that we have seen with illegal car rallies. He will understand that the policing powers and the operational decisions on how these rallies are tackled are very much with the chief constable and the police and crime commissioner, but of course the police have the necessary powers. There are also road traffic offences that can and should be applied when they are committed. I am sorry to say that we have seen far too many of these rallies recently and they are in breach of the covid regulations.

Windrush Compensation Scheme

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on disbursing payments through the Windrush compensation scheme. [901001]

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): What progress her Department has made on disbursing payments through the Windrush compensation scheme. [901013]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): In December, I overhauled the Windrush compensation scheme to pay people more money more quickly; that has now taken place. We have now paid six times more than the total amount paid previously. That means that we have offered almost £30 million in compensation, of which £20.4 million has been paid to approximately 687 claimants.

Matt Western [V]: I heard what the Secretary of State said, but the recent National Audit Office report into the Windrush compensation scheme that was published on 21 May stated that just 4% of the 15,000 people who may be eligible for the scheme had received payments—way below the numbers forecast and a small fraction of the total expected payout. I have constituents in Warwick and Leamington who have been patiently awaiting compensation for almost 18 months. Given that the process takes an extraordinary 15 steps and an average of 154 staff hours, will the Secretary of State detail how many full-time time caseworkers are dealing with the compensation scheme, and how many caseworkers she estimates are required to expedite this scheme in the next two years?

Priti Patel: First, it is important to reflect on how the scheme has fundamentally changed since December. I have already highlighted the levels of payment and the speed at which the claims are being dealt with. It is important to recognise that the changes I put in place in December have had an immediate effect; within six weeks of making the changes we had offered more in terms of payout and compensation payments than were made in the first 19 months of the scheme. I say openly to the hon. Gentleman and all Members of the House who have constituents who are awaiting claims: provide me with the details and I will look into those cases.

The fact of the matter is that we have been reaching out to those who are entitled to compensation. We are working across the board. We have overhauled the team; we have more caseworkers than ever. Another £9 million has been offered to claimants, and we are awaiting responses from those individuals.

Kate Osamor [V]: “Sitting in Limbo”—a drama about my constituent Anthony Bryan, who had his life turned upside down by the Windrush scandal—won a BAFTA yesterday. At the time of its release, the Home Secretary rushed to meet Anthony and told him that he would be given a voice. Yet it was not until two days ago—18 months after he made his claim—that Anthony finally received an offer of compensation. Will the Home Secretary tell us how long the hundreds of others like Anthony will have to remain in limbo before the Home Office gets its act together?

Priti Patel: If the hon. Lady heard my earlier remarks, she will have heard that fundamental reform of the Windrush compensation scheme has taken place. She will also recognise that when the scheme first launched, it was put together very quickly, but in consultation with members of the Windrush generation and representatives from the community. She asked me how long it takes for people to be paid. Due to the changes that I have put in place, it now takes an average of three weeks from receipt of an acceptance to payment. Finally, I am delighted to hear that the hon. Lady's constituent has finally received the payment that he deserves.

Police Officers: Harm in the Line of Duty

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to protect police officers from harm in the line of duty. [901002]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): The Government are completely committed to ensuring that our brave police officers receive the support and protection they deserve. We have proposed legislation to enshrine in law a police covenant and to double the maximum sentence for assaults on emergency workers. We also continue to invest in direct support to the police through the National Police Wellbeing Service.

James Daly: I welcome the commitments this Government have made to cut crime and to get more police on to our streets. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that our police have the tools to tackle violent crime and antisocial behaviour in Bury, Ramsbottom, Tottington, and throughout the country?

Kit Malthouse: I know from conversations with my hon. Friend that he is a powerful supporter of the police, particularly in his own constituency, and he wants more of his constituents to meet more of the police officers who are being recruited into his local force at some rate of knots. While it is true that having the police officers will make a huge difference, so will giving them exactly the kind of tools that he has talked to me about in the past to do their job, as will the support of Members of Parliament such as him. Police officers out on the frontline doing an incredibly difficult and challenging job need to know that we stand with them in defending them and promoting them.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab) [V]: The latest figures from the National Police Chiefs Council show that on this Government's watch, assaults on police officers have been rising since 2015 and there has been a 26% increase in assaults on emergency workers in the months leading to April 2021 compared with the same period in 2019. There have been 30,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales in a year. I am glad that the Government have finally listened to calls from Labour to increase sentences for people who assault emergency workers, but why are they doing absolutely nothing to stop the assaults in the first place? If I was in government, I would commission Home Office research into exactly who is assaulting our officers and why, I would tackle single-crew patrols, and I would make sure that officers have the right kit to be protected. Will the Minister do the same?

Kit Malthouse: You will have to advise me, Mr Speaker, on whether it is in order for a Member to speak in support of something she voted against, but I welcome the hon. Lady's belated support for the doubling of sentences for assaults on emergency workers, which was included in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, against which the Opposition voted. She is right, though, to raise the issue, which has been of serious concern to us for some time, of the rise in assaults on emergency workers, and particularly on police officers. Sadly, during the pandemic we saw, in particular, the awful phenomenon of people coughing or spitting at police officers and claiming that they were infectious

when they did so. Happily, we saw a number of significant sentences handed out for that particular offence and the courts dealt with them quickly. But there is always much more that we can do. Under the police covenant, which again the hon. Lady voted against, one of the key planks of the work that we will be doing is looking at safety, welfare and support for police officers.

Foreign National Offenders

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to remove foreign national offenders from the UK. [901003]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Foreign national offenders who abuse our hospitality by committing crime absolutely should be deported and removed from the United Kingdom, and our determination and resolve is to do exactly that. Since January 2019, we have removed nearly 8,000 foreign national offenders, and our new plan for immigration will make it easier for us to deport those who harm others and have no right to stay in the United Kingdom.

Bob Blackman [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for her very firm position on removing people from the UK who have no legal status to be here and indeed abuse our hospitality. Can she confirm that the proposed one-stop-shop appeals process will reduce the number of baseless claims that continue to frustrate our courts—and indeed, I am sure, all those involved in the Home Office who wish to deport these foreign criminals who have no place here in our society?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have already referred to our new plan for immigration, which will reform the system to bring in a one-stop shop to tackle the endless appeals that come forward and also the various claims that prevent us from removing foreign national offenders. It is also worth reminding him, and the House, that Labour has consistently opposed every single attempt, such as when we had charter flights to remove foreign national offenders, to do the right thing by the victims of these awful individuals who have caused so much pain and harm.

EEA Nationals: Settled or Pre-settled Status

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What guidance she plans to put in place for EEA nationals eligible for settled or pre-settled status whose applications for that status have not been approved by 30 June 2021. [901004]

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What guidance she plans to put in place for EEA nationals eligible for settled or pre-settled status whose applications for that status have not been approved by 30 June 2021. [901019]

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What guidance she plans to put in place for EEA nationals eligible for settled or pre-settled status whose applications for that status have not been approved by 30 June 2021. [901028]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): With permission, I will answer these questions on behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who is dealing with a family bereavement today.

I am glad to say that the EU settlement scheme is going extremely well. So far, 4.9 million people have been granted status. Only 1% of applications have been refused. It is a true United Kingdom success story. Those who have applied prior to 30 June will keep their status until such time as their applications are decided, so I strongly encourage anybody who is eligible to apply for EUSS status before 30 June to make sure that their status is indeed protected.

Alan Brown: The reality is that the Minister will know that covid has impeded outreach work to EU nationals who are still to apply. Covid has also caused other issues, such as hampering my constituent's efforts to travel to London to renew his passport at his embassy. That caused real anxiety. If the Minister will not heed our call to grant automatic status, will he at least look at extending the deadline for a year in order to avoid another Windrush scandal?

Chris Philp: Of course, the EUSS has been open since March 2019, so it has been over two years now and significantly predates covid. There are a number of documents people can use if for any reason they do not have their passport or European ID card, and we have given grant funding of £22 million to 72 organisations to help people who need assistance in making the application. I would just say to anyone in the United Kingdom who is entitled to EUSS status to please apply by that deadline. Even if their status is not decided by 30 June, providing they have applied by that deadline, their status will be protected until the decision is made.

Patricia Gibson: Many of the tens of thousands of essential NHS EU workers across the UK may not even be aware that there is a problem with their lack of settled or pre-settled status until their employer or landlord, or another agency, tells them. Does the Minister not agree that there should be an obligation or duty on organisations to signpost individuals to independent advice on the possibility of a late application whenever they encounter an EU national who may be eligible?

Chris Philp: I am not sure I entirely agree with the hon. Lady's suggestion that somebody may not have noticed Brexit happening. But, quite seriously, we have grant-funded 72 organisations with a total of £22 million to do outreach and to make sure that people who are vulnerable or require assistance, including outreach, are helped to make the application, and 5.4 million people have applied already, which shows that the scheme has been an enormous United Kingdom success story. However, I repeat that anyone who is eligible should please apply by 30 June. It is about three weeks' time. Now is the time to apply if they have not applied already.

Kirsten Oswald [V]: We have already heard about IT problems, meaning that EEA citizens have been unable to prove their settled status, which the Home Office only allows them to do by digital means. The UK Government are happy providing printed proof of vaccination for

those who have no smartphone, or letting people print a PDF if they want back-up in case their phone dies at the airport, so why can something similar not be done for EU settled status?

Chris Philp: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. Fundamentally, this is a UK success story. This system is working, as evidenced by the 5.4 million applications and the 4.9 million grants. To be honest, given all the prognostications of gloom and doom that we heard a couple of years ago, this has been an astonishing success story. If any Member of Parliament has any particular case where a constituent has encountered difficulties, please send it in to my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, or to the Home Secretary, and we will make sure it gets dealt with quickly. We are completely committed to making sure that everybody who is entitled to EUSS status, which is many millions of people, gets that status, which they deserve.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): First, we pass on our condolences and best wishes to the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and his family.

Despite our fundamental disagreements about the design of the scheme, we do all want it to succeed, but we are concerned that a lot of questions still remain outstanding at this late stage. One of the most fundamental is what happens when tens—possibly hundreds—of thousands put in a late application and have to wait for a decision? Will an EU national still be able to keep working as a carer in our NHS in the meantime, for example, or to rent the flat that they are staying in while they are waiting weeks and possibly months for a decision? Surely the answer to that must be yes. But is it?

Chris Philp: The answer is yes. Providing the application is received by 30 June, while the application is being considered—and if it is made on 30 June, clearly it will be decided after 30 June—that particular person will be able to continue working and living as normal with status. So the critical point is to make sure that the application is made by 30 June.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): On 26 May, in response to a question from the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry), the Prime Minister told the House that the law would be “merciful” to any EU citizens left in a “difficult position” after the EU settlement scheme deadline passes on 30 June. Further to that, I note that today the Home Office website says that late applications to the scheme will be accepted if there are “reasonable grounds” for missing the deadline. Can the Minister assure me that the mercy that the Prime Minister spoke about will guarantee that no one who is entitled to EU settled status but has missed the deadline will lose their rights or access to benefits, or be forcibly detained or removed? Can he tell me how long the late application provision to the scheme will remain open for?

Chris Philp: I reiterate the critical point that people should apply before the 30 June deadline, which is already six months after the end of the transition period. The shadow Minister is right and, indeed, the Prime Minister was right as well. If somebody does apply late and there are reasonable grounds for them to have done

so—for example, they might have been ill—then latitude will be shown. There is no hard time deadline to that. A reasonable approach will be taken, but again, the best thing to do for any constituent who is entitled to EUSS is to apply for it before 30 June.

People Smuggling

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle people smuggling. [901005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to this. People smuggling is a wicked and vicious activity that puts lives at risk. Indeed, a young family tragically drowned in the channel last autumn. We are prosecuting people who are involved in people smuggling. Since the beginning of 2020, there have been 65 prosecutions related to small boat crossings for those people facilitating that sort of activity. We are now explicitly going after the people who drive these boats, and our objective is to prosecute as many of those wicked facilitators as we can get our hands on.

Sir Edward Leigh: Does the Minister recognise the public anger at our being made fools of in this? Border Force is little more than a taxi service for illegal migrants—it is ridiculous. Will the Minister assure me that he will use his powers under the Immigration Act 1971 to arrest all illegal immigrants, put them in detention, prosecute them, imprison them and deport them, so that we can stop this horrible trade dead in its tracks?

Chris Philp: I completely share my right hon. Friend's anger at the situation, and the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister do as well. As I say, we are actively prosecuting the facilitators. In the forthcoming sovereign borders Bill, as part of the new plan for immigration, we plan to significantly strengthen the section 24 illegal entry offence in the 1971 Act, to which he refers, to make it easier to use and easier to implement in practice. At the same time, we will increase the sentence for illegal entry and the sentence for facilitation under section 25 of the Act. I look forward to working with him on getting that Bill passed as quickly as possible and then implemented.

Mr Speaker: We have another substantive question for Minister Philp.

EU Citizens: Settled Status

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): What steps she is taking to ensure that EU citizens with indefinite leave to remain will not be required to apply for EU settled status. [901006]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): It is my lucky day today, Mr Speaker. It is, of course, open to EU citizens with indefinite leave to remain to apply for EU settled status. Some of them choose to do so because the rules are slightly better for EUSS in terms of the ability to leave the country for a particular period and the family reunion rules. There is no obligation on people with

ILR to apply for EUSS, but it is a choice that each individual may or may not choose to make according to their own personal wishes and circumstances.

Sarah Olney [V]: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, and I would like to offer my condolences to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster).

Many constituents of mine who have previously been granted indefinite leave to remain have received letters suggesting that they should apply for EU settled status instead. This has created a great deal of consternation and a fear that their indefinite leave to remain status may not be valid in the future. Can the Minister tell me why those letters were sent? It is not clear to people whether or not they should be applying for EU settled status. Could he give a clear answer to my constituents on this matter?

Chris Philp: My understanding is that those people with ILR who are also eligible for EUSS can continue to enjoy ILR whether or not they apply for EUSS. Letters were sent out to people who might be eligible for EUSS, but I believe those letters did make it clear that someone who received those letters who was already naturalised as a British citizen or indeed had ILR needed to take no further action. If the hon. Lady thinks those letters were unclear, I will be happy to look into it further, but I understand that they were worded in such way as made it clear that no further action was taken in the circumstances she describes.

Investigations into Police Conduct

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What steps she is taking to reduce the length of time taken to conclude investigations into police conduct. [901007]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): Last year, the Government introduced wide-ranging reforms to the police complaints and discipline system, including a 12-month trigger requiring the investigating body to provide a written explanation for any delays. Significant improvements have already been made, and we will continue to monitor the timeliness of investigations conducted by both forces and the Independent Office for Police Conduct through data collection.

Jessica Morden: Even under the new Home Office system, only around 80% of police conduct investigations are resolved within 12 months. The remaining cases linger on far longer, with a detrimental effect on those involved. Does the Minister agree with the Police Federation that we need action to fix the system now—not, as the Minister has said, allowing it to bed in—as no one benefits from long drawn-out investigations?

Kit Malthouse: I share the hon. Lady's view that no one benefits from long drawn-out investigations, and it is absolutely our aspiration to shorten investigation times as much as we possibly can, bearing in mind the impact on both the officer who is under investigation and those who are making the accusation. It is worth bearing in mind that delays in investigations often happen for complex reasons, particularly in very difficult investigations, which are not necessarily within the control of the investigating body. While I understand and

sympathise with the Fed's desire to shorten investigation time, it is worth bearing in mind that our overriding interest should be in quality and thoroughness, rather than in hitting some kind of arbitrary deadline. However, I do meet regularly the director general of the IOPC and we do monitor very closely how long investigations are taking. It did inherit 538 investigations from the Independent Police Complaints Commission, which it has now managed to get down to three, and I think currently it only has 30 investigations that have taken longer than 12 months.

New Sentencing Powers: Levels of Crime

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of new sentencing powers on levels of crime. [901008]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): This Government are serious about fighting crime and making sure the criminal justice system is one the public can have confidence in. That is why the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill currently going through this House sees the sentences for causing death by dangerous driving being increased to life. It is why many of the most serious offences, including rape, will see the perpetrators spend longer in prison, while at the same time we make sure that those people with drug and alcohol addictions get the treatment they deserve. I hope my right hon. Friend will agree that these are measures that will build public confidence and keep the public safer.

Esther McVey: I want to congratulate the Government on their plans to extend sentences for the deplorable crime of assaulting our emergency workers. Is not it now time for a specific offence of assaulting shop workers and other customer-facing frontline workers, given that the number of assaults on them since this pandemic started has doubled?

Chris Philp: My right hon. Friend is right: we are of course doubling the sentence for assaulting—for the common assault of—an emergency worker from one year to two years, which I think is widely welcomed across the House. In relation to other people who deal with the public—not just retail workers, but transport workers, teachers, postmen and women and other people who deal with the public—that is already taken account of in the Sentencing Council guidelines, which makes it an aggravating factor if the victim deals with the public. Therefore, judges can reflect that when handing down sentences. There is a Westminster Hall debate later on today on this very topic, and I am very much looking forward to discussing it in more detail then.

EU Settlement Scheme

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): What rights will be protected for EU citizens and non-EU family members unable to apply to the EU settlement scheme by the 30 June 2021 deadline. [901010]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): In relation to EU citizens who are granted EUSS status, where their family who are not EU citizens reside in the United Kingdom,

they can apply for EUSS status as well. For close family members who are not in the United Kingdom at present, they are able to join the person who is granted EUSS status. If it is a child under the age of 21, that is automatic. If it is parents, grandparents or children over the age of 21 where there is a degree of dependency, they can join as well. So I think those are extremely generous arrangements—far more generous than the arrangements for other cohorts of people.

Clive Lewis [V]: I thank the Minister for his answer. Even where the guidance provides a route back to status, it will not protect EU citizens who missed the deadline from hostile environment policies, or prevent them from being denied access to homelessness assistance and free NHS care, as recently confirmed by other Departments. Will the Minister assure the House that EU citizens and non-EU family members who miss the deadline will maintain the right to such assistance, and be able to continue working without fear of criminal liability?

Chris Philp: On the deadline, I will repeat what I said earlier: the critical thing is to encourage constituents, very strongly, to apply by that deadline. If somebody misses the deadline, of course they can apply where they have reasonable grounds to do so. Guidance is about to be published on precisely what will happen to those who miss the deadline. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government intend to take a reasonable and proportionate approach, and I ask him to wait just a short time until that guidance is published.

Immigration: British Armed Forces Interpreters

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that interpreters who assisted British armed forces overseas will be included as part of reforms to the immigration system. [901011]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government owe an immense debt of gratitude to the brave interpreters who worked alongside our armed forces overseas. In April we launched the Afghan relocations and assistance policy, under which any current or former staff members in Afghanistan who are at risk are offered priority relocation to the United Kingdom, regardless of their employment status, rank, role, or length of service.

Mr Davis: It is a real pleasure to submit a question asking for a change in policy, and for that to happen one week later, so I congratulate the Government, and particularly the Home Secretary, on this long overdue change of heart. It is right that we accelerate the relocation scheme for Afghan interpreters and their families—people who have protected us and our country so well for so long. In view of worrying reports in the press last week, will my right hon. Friend clarify that not only Afghan interpreters directly employed by the Ministry of Defence but sub-contracted interpreters will share the right to those Afghan relocations?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the entire House should pay tribute to those who worked alongside our armed forces in Afghanistan, in harrowing conditions. The Defence Secretary and I were determined to ensure that this policy went through.

In light of what is taking place in Afghanistan now, with further withdrawal and drawdown, it is right that we reach out to those who, as my right hon. Friend said, are part of that wider support network and have worked with our armed forces.

Online Harms

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling online harms. [901012]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): The Home Office is working across Government to tackle online harms through the online safety Bill and other measures. That Bill will be a truly world-leading and much needed piece of legislation to make the UK the safest place to be online. Although the draft Bill will be scrutinised by Parliament, the Government continue to work nationally and internationally to tackle online harms, including through the G7 and Five Country Governments.

Fleur Anderson: The ease with which even primary school-aged children can access extreme but legal pornography is frightening, and it is warping a whole generation's view of healthy sexual relationships. Will the Minister assure me that the longstanding issue of age verification for legal pornography will finally be addressed in the online safety Bill?

Victoria Atkins: This issue concerns many Members across the House, and it has been voiced by many parents across the country. We must consider not just the online safety Bill, but the wider question of education and ensuring that our children are taught what is a healthy relationship and what is not. The hon. Lady will know the massive progress made by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which set out clear parameters regarding the so-called rough sex defence as well as non-fatal strangulation. She will know that discussions are ongoing with the Departments for Education and for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about how we can cement that approach in legislation and, crucially, through education.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): The director general of MI5 has said that Facebook is giving terrorists a "free pass" by introducing end-to-end encryption, which effectively blocks the security and intelligence services from monitoring suspects and potential plots. Despite what the Minister said, the online safety Bill is very vague—in fact, some might say it is a bit wishy-washy—when it comes to measures to counter these dangerous activities, so will she commit today to treating this matter with the seriousness and urgency that it requires and that Ken McCallum has demanded?

Victoria Atkins: I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands the seriousness with which the Home Secretary, and also the Prime Minister and the Government, take such matters. I do not agree with his description of the online safety Bill. Indeed, he will note the confidence with which the Government have put it forward as a draft Bill in order to allow Parliament to scrutinise it. On Facebook and its activities, it should be in no doubt that under the new Bill as it stands at the moment, it

will be held to account for its activities. The development of its systems is a matter for it, and it must justify that to the public and to this Government.

Child Safety Online

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure children are safe on the internet. [901014]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I, too, am earning my salary this afternoon, Mr Speaker! We are working across Government and internationally to ensure that children are safe on the internet. We continue to encourage companies to endorse and implement the voluntary principles to counter online child sexual exploitation and abuse, which we launched in March last year in collaboration with Five Country Governments, and we are engaging the G7 on how we go further in our collective response to protect children. We have published our draft online safety Bill, and companies will be required to take stringent action to tackle the growing and evolving threat of child sexual exploitation and abuse on their platforms.

James Sunderland: Will the Minister please outline the support that her Department is giving the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport with the online safety Bill and confirm that internet companies that break the law will be heavily prosecuted and heavily fined?

Victoria Atkins: Indeed. Of course the Home Office has been working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, at both official and ministerial level, in developing the draft Bill. We remain fully committed to making the UK the safest place to be online while defending freedom of expression, and we believe that the Bill achieves that. The strongest protections in the Bill are reserved for children, and I can confirm that Ofcom, the independent regulator, will have a range of tough enforcement powers to use against companies that fail to fulfil their duties. Those include fines of up to £18 million or 10% of qualifying annual global turnover, whichever is greatest.

Allegations of Rape: Effective Investigations

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to ensure effective investigations by the police of allegations of rape to help improve the number of cases that result in charges being made. [901015]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): Supporting victims of sexual violence and abuse is an important priority for this Government. In the past five years, we have seen a significant decline in the number of charges, prosecutions and convictions for rape. That is why we have carried out a robust end-to-end review of the criminal justice response. The review will be published shortly and will set out clear action to reverse this trend and to ensure that victims receive the support they deserve and that perpetrators face justice.

Rebecca Long Bailey [V]: There is currently a backlog of 57,000 cases in the Crown court, with victims of rape and serious sexual violence often left to wait years to go to trial. Sadly, they are the minority who received

sufficient support to bring a case forward in the first place. Will the Minister commit to bringing forward urgently proposals for the fast-tracking of rape and serious sexual assault cases? Will he also confirm the creation of specialist rape and serious sexual violence units in every police force to ensure that cases are brought against alleged perpetrators?

Kit Malthouse: Two of the key planks of the work that we will be undertaking in this area—indeed, we have started already—are, first, yes, to shorten the timeframe between a report and a case getting to court, and secondly, to develop expertise throughout the system to ensure that victims get the justice they need, but in particular that investigations focus on perpetrators.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): To follow up on what has just been said, rape prosecutions in England and Wales are at their lowest on record. One third of all the violent crime recorded by the police is domestic abuse-related, and now only 1.6% of rape cases are even being charged, let alone convicted. That is all according to the latest figures from the Home Office. This situation is untenable and it is worsening on the Home Secretary's watch. The Government are leaving dangerous rapists and violent offenders on our streets and in our communities, so will the Minister and the Department back calls to ensure that violence against women and girls is included in the definition of serious violence in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, including domestic abuse-related violence and all sexual violence?

Kit Malthouse: In the urgent question that I answered on this subject not two weeks ago, I expressed serious regret about the conviction numbers that the hon. Lady mentions. It is not a situation that any of us should be happy with, and we have confirmed as a Government that we will do our utmost to turn that around. She will understand, I know, because she is from the west midlands, that we will need the assistance of police and crime commissioners and chief constables to do so. I hope that she will join us in urging them to play their part in what will be the enormous task of turning this particular challenge around.

As for the serious violence duty, that will no doubt be debated by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), during the Bill Committee, but I would hope, whether or not there is a statutory duty for everybody to play their part in dealing with this problem, that all those other organisations—whether that means health or local authorities, or, indeed, police and crime commissioners—will step forward anyway, because the moral case is strong and I know that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) will make it with us.

Immigration Detention for Women

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to reduce the use of immigration detention for women who have survived torture, rape or trafficking. [901016]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): The use of detention, including the detention of women for immigration purposes,

has reduced significantly over the past few years. In particular, for women who have survived torture, rape or trafficking it is used extremely sparingly, if ever. There is an adults-at-risk policy, which makes sure that people who have suffered in that way are detained only in extremely rare cases where the vulnerability is outweighed by very serious risk, for example, to public safety. Those exceptions are extremely rare.

Kate Osborne: The Minister says that these cases are extremely rare, but an immigration removal centre for women is set to open in the north-east on the former Medomsley detention centre site, despite, as he said, the Home Office previously committing to reducing its use of detention for women. Research shows that many detainees are survivors of torture, rape or trafficking, and detaining women in this way severely impacts on their mental health. Does he agree that reopening the Medomsley site should be reviewed and that immigration cases can be resolved more humanely and at less cost in the community?

Chris Philp: First, I remind the hon. Lady again that the use of detention in general and for women in particular has reduced very significantly already over the past few years. Secondly, Hassockfield is replacing the Yarl's Wood facility, which is being converted for mainly male use and, therefore, the number of female places for immigration detention as a result is going down dramatically. Thirdly, no, we are not going to review the use of Hassockfield—first, for the reason I have just mentioned, it actually represents a reduction in total numbers, and, secondly, because the adults-at-risk policy very actively, carefully and thoughtfully weighs up vulnerability against questions of detention. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) has been fully engaged on this issue. The new centre will create local jobs, and, as I said, it will also represent a reduction in the women's detention footprint.

EU Settlement Scheme: Children in Care

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that children in care can apply for settled status after the EU settlement scheme deadline has passed. [901017]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): We will take steps to ensure that children in care are handled sensitively. As I mentioned in answer to previous questions, if someone misses the 30 June deadline, where they have reasonable grounds for doing so—that could conceivably very well apply to children in care—discretion will be exercised and a late application accepted.

David Simmonds [V]: I welcome the Government's commitment that we will learn lessons from Windrush and ensure that vulnerable people, especially children, do not find themselves with a question mark over their status in years to come. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the offer of support to care leavers making applications out of time includes those who were aged 18 to 25—and therefore had care leaving status under the Children Act 1989—before 31 December 2020, not just those

who were under 18 at the time? Will he consider tweaking the case study provided in the Home Office guidance to make that absolutely clear?

Chris Philp: As I mentioned earlier, we are doing a great deal of active outreach via grant-funded organisations, in particular with local authorities, to make sure that vulnerable people of the kind my hon. Friend describes are reached. I can give him an assurance that the care leavers he describes are potentially included, because the reasonable grounds provision potentially applies to anybody. Anyone who misses the deadline, whether they are a care leaver or, indeed, anyone else, can make the case that they have reasonable grounds for having missed the deadline, so they are absolutely included. The list of case studies is, of course, non-exhaustive; it is designed not to list everything, but to give a few examples. Anybody can apply for the reasonable grounds exemption. I repeat that anyone who thinks that they are eligible should apply by 30 June. That is the best way to make sure that their case is handled properly and fairly.

Topical Questions

[900970] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Since the House last met for Home Office questions, the anniversaries of several terror attacks have passed. I know that the House will want to join me in marking them and remembering those who have lost their lives in these terrible atrocities.

On 29 April 2013, Mohammed Saleem was stabbed to death as he returned from worshipping at his mosque. On 22 May 2013, Fusilier Lee Rigby was murdered near the Royal Artillery barracks in Woolwich. Exactly four years later, a bomb at the Manchester Arena killed 22 concertgoers and wounded hundreds more. On 3 June 2017, eight people were murdered and many more were wounded around London bridge and Borough market. Another anniversary is imminent: that of our much-loved and widely admired colleague Jo Cox, who was murdered on 16 June 2016. Last month saw the verdict of the inquest into the terror attacks at Fishmongers' Hall in November 2019, which claimed the lives of Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones.

The Government and our operational partners have taken action to strengthen the supervision of terror offenders on licence and end the automatic release of terrorist prisoners. We have improved information sharing and established world-leading counter-terrorism operation centres.

We all recognise how truly evil all those acts were, because they were directed at innocent people going about their daily lives, who were worshipping, listening to music or seeing their friends, as well as—at their best—doing public service for others. Yet the outpouring of grief and love that followed, the heroism of the first responders and the resolute way in which the British people refused to be cowed have shown the best of our country. Terrorists can hurt us, but they will never win. We will always honour those who were killed and the people who love them, and the Government will continue to give every support to the police and security services, who have worked tirelessly to keep us safe.

Sir Edward Leigh: Does the Home Secretary recall that I wrote to her on 20 April on behalf of Aid to the Church in Need about the case of Maira Shahbaz? I still await a reply. Maira is a 15-year-old Christian girl from Pakistan, who was raped, abducted and kidnapped, and is now in hiding. We need to help her. Will the Home Secretary meet Aid to the Church in Need and me?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend raises an incredibly important case. I have been working with colleagues in the House on this for a considerable period of time. I would be very happy to meet him and others. There have been some barriers around the case in the past, but I give him an assurance that we are proactively looking at all the help that we can provide.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I join the Home Secretary in remembering all the victims of terrorism to whom she referred. We send out a strong message from across the House that those who seek to divide us with hatred will never win. The words of our late friend and colleague Jo Cox that we have

“more in common than that which divides us”—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 675.]

seem particularly apt as we remember all those victims.—I would also like to pass on my condolences to the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster).

Yet again, on the weekend, there was briefing about the easing of restrictions on 21 June possibly being put back to 5 July. It is the delta variant, first discovered in India, that is causing such great concern, after the Government dithered and delayed in adding India to the red list. Now we have had dangerous mixed messaging about the amber list. The Opposition have warned about this time and again. Can the Home Secretary tell us how many travellers from India arrived between 9 and 23 April, and how many people have arrived here from amber list countries since 17 May?

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. Specifically with regard to health measures at the border, he will recognise that throughout this pandemic the Government have taken all the essential and necessary steps to protect the public and to help prevent the spread of the virus, and even more so as we emerge from the incredible vaccine roll-out programme.

The right hon. Gentleman will also recognise that we have the most stringent border measures in the world to protect public health because of that vaccine roll-out programme, and we have always followed scientific advice. That absolutely relates to the Indian variant and to the very strict border measures that have been backed by strict enforcement measures, along with compliance checks, not just by Border Force, who are checking 100% of all passengers coming into the country and leveraging fines of up to £10,000, but by the isolation assurance service. I would also point out that after topical questions, the Health Secretary will be making a further statement on covid and covid restrictions, which the right hon. Gentleman will be interested in and will want to pay attention to.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I did not detect an answer to either of my questions in that response, and the Home Secretary knows perfectly well that we do not have the most stringent border measures in the world. The only

reasonable conclusion is that the Government are not learning from their mistakes and that our border protections are in chaos. It is a clear and dangerous pattern: late to home quarantining; late to mandatory testing at the border; late to hotel quarantining; and today, she cannot even say how many people arrived in the UK from India as the delta variant was taking hold. This is a Government who like to talk tough on borders, but is it not the truth that when it comes to protecting people from covid and its variants, this Government's policy is weak, weak, weak?

Priti Patel: It goes without saying that I fundamentally disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. I disagree with his assertion, which is absolutely incorrect, that the UK's border measures are lax. From January last year, the Government set out a comprehensive set of measures ranging from Foreign Office advice and guidance right through to the development of the passenger locator form and the managed hotel quarantine service. That service now includes not only Heathrow airport but a range of airports such as Birmingham and Manchester because of the level of red-listing since April, which we have rightly taken seriously, and because of the Indian variant. We have followed all the scientific advice that has come from Government advisers with regard to the red-listing of India. This is well-trodden ground, and, alongside that, all the facts have been published on the number of passengers who have come to our country from red-listed countries and the way in which the Government lists red countries and amber countries.

Mr Speaker: I remind those on both Front Benches that topical questions are meant to be short and punchy, so we do need to get on. I have quite a list.

[900972] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I am sure that the Home Secretary must share my frustration and that of my constituents about the volume of migrants coming across the channel by dinghy, often being escorted here in the process. Can she assure my constituents when real action will be taken to stop this flow, and will she introduce a regime whereby people who try to claim asylum, and who come here from an already safe country such as France, will be automatically deported and sent back there? That will make a big difference in stopping them coming here in the first place.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is already making the case for a Bill that has yet to be introduced in Parliament, which contains the new plan for immigration. The date is coming for its introduction and Second Reading. He is absolutely right: the British public are fed up and demoralised by what we have been seeing. I have been very clear to my Department over the last 12 months about operational activity from Border Force, and I have now asked the Department to urgently investigate the circumstances behind the incidents at the weekend that have been reported on. My hon. Friend makes a fundamental point, which is that people who are seeking to claim asylum should claim asylum in the first safe country. They should not be making these dangerous crossings, which, as we have heard today, have led to catastrophic and devastating loss of life too many times.

Mr Speaker: May I congratulate the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), on her forthcoming trip to Wembley?

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. When I asked the Home Secretary in February whether she followed public health advice when putting people in large dormitories in Napier barracks in the middle of a pandemic, she told our Committee that it was

"all based on Public Health England advice"

and that

"we have been following guidance in every single way".

Last week, however, a damning court judgment said:

"The 'bottom line' is that the arrangements at the Barracks were contrary to the advice of PHE... The precautions which were taken were completely inadequate to prevent the spread of Covid".

It stated that the outbreak was "inevitable". Will the Home Secretary now correct the record and explain why she did not follow public health advice in the middle of a pandemic, thus putting people's health and lives at risk?

Priti Patel: First, let me be very clear to this House that at every single stage I have been clear about the need to protect public health and to stop the spread of the virus, and that is in relation to Napier barracks, which the right hon. Lady is referring to. Of course we will study the judgment and, in the light of that, look at various measures we may need to bring in. However, the Department did work fully with Public Health England—I have maintained that, and I still maintain that point. When it comes to delivery and putting in place the wide range of covid-compliant measures that were in place—everyone in this House and across the country would expect that of the Home Office—we were absolutely dealing with the pandemic in the right way, working with PHE and other stakeholders. For the benefit of the House, let me say that that also included rigorous cleaning, hand sanitiser, social distancing and a range of healthcare provisions and welfare provisions that were put in place at Napier. So I come back to the point that at every stage I was clear about—

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us go to Henry Smith.

[900973] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con) [V]: I welcome the fact that the recent Queen's Speech said that the sovereign borders Bill will come forward in this Session, but in recent weeks thousands of illegal migrants have crossed the English channel, as we have heard. What actions will the Department take now to ensure that both the French authorities and the UK Border Force are not aiding and abetting such illegal and dangerous crossings?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right again on this point. I have mentioned that in my own instructions, I have been very clear with my Department and with the commander who oversees these Border Force operations that they should not be going into French territorial waters—that is absolutely wrong and there is now an investigation into that. Fundamentally, our work with the French continues, but, working with our counterparts in Belgium and in the Netherlands, where I was last week, we have to work upstream to stop these illegal crossings and break up the gangs who are facilitating illegal migration.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): May we have apologies from the Home Secretary, first, to the thousands of destitute asylum seekers across the UK who have endured days and weeks without any support because of the botched handling of the Aspen card handover and, secondly, to the people she placed in danger, including through an inevitable coronavirus outbreak, by sending them to Napier barracks, against clear PHE advice? What has been done to fix these latest asylum system scandals?

Priti Patel: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments I made earlier about Napier barracks. Let us be clear that the Government are absolutely doing everything possible—I make no apology for this—within my powers, to meet our legal duties to provide shelter and accommodation to those in need during the exceptional times of this coronavirus pandemic. Of course, that is in line with the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, and that also refers to the way in which we financially support and house asylum seekers.¹ When it comes to Napier barracks, the provisions had been put in place in terms of welfare, catering, accommodation, cleaning, laundry facilities and non-governmental organisation support, along with other recreational facilities, such as yoga classes, and migrant helplines. That is all in line with our statutory duties and responsibilities, so I simply do not agree with the representation of the hon. Gentleman.

[900974] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): This year, more than 3,500 men, women and children have illegally crossed the channel, after paying thousands and thousands of pounds to evil human trafficking gangs. If the Home Secretary were the President of France, would she not be totally embarrassed by the complete failure of the French Government to properly look after asylum seekers in France, to such an extent that they risk their lives to flee France to get to England?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. We are working with our French counterparts—I will be very clear about that—and we should recognise that upstream migration flows into France are a serious issue. But, of course, asylum seekers should be claiming asylum in the first safe country; that does include France, and it includes many other EU member states that, because of the open borders policy across the EU, people are just transiting through. Our French counterparts absolutely must do more, and we are constantly impressing this point on them.

[900971] **Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Lab): In January I asked the Home Secretary about Napier barracks, highlighting the unsafe, inhumane conditions. She told me

“to listen to the facts”—[*Official Report*, 26 January 2021; Vol. 688, c. 178.]

Well, here are the facts. On Thursday the High Court ruled that the conditions were unlawful. They were described as “squalid” in court, and evidence suggests

that Public Health England guidance was not, and is still not, being followed. So I ask the Home Secretary: how many people are currently sleeping in each dormitory, why is Public Health England guidance still not being followed, and why did she claim that the standards were very high when they were unlawful?

Priti Patel: That is absolutely incorrect in terms of the misrepresentation from the hon. Lady. I have already made it abundantly clear that I have been vigorous in following and making clear the need to protect public health and stop the spread of the virus. Not only that: I make no apology for doing everything in my power to fulfil our legal duties to provide shelter to people who otherwise would have been destitute; to provide accommodation to people who otherwise have been sleeping in dirty, makeshift tents in France and in other European countries, on the streets; and to provide them with beds, food, clean sanitation, access to healthcare and access to welfare provision. That is not putting forward squalid conditions.

[900976] **Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): The Home Secretary will know that I am a steadfast supporter of hers, but I now need her help. How can I explain to my constituents, and indeed to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mrs Elphicke), that the repeated images of Border Force vessels bringing illegal immigrants to our shores, and judges’ ruling that Army barracks are not good enough for those immigrants when they are for our brave armed forces, are events aligned with taking back control of our borders and laws?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend makes a very important, and in fact poignant, point about some of the reforms we will be making through our new plan for immigration, which will absolutely tackle many of these issues, bringing in a one-stop shop and stopping the appeals that we face again and again, which stop us actually removing individuals who should not be claiming asylum in the United Kingdom or who are here illegally. Fundamentally, these reforms, when they come through the House, will absolutely set the tone for reform of our asylum system and send a very clear message to those seeking to claim asylum and come to our country illegally that they should be claiming asylum in the first safe country and not taking dangerous and perilous journeys across the channel.

Mr Speaker: Can I just say that I really am disappointed that we only got 10 questions in within 15 minutes? All Members deserve an opportunity to get their question in. I hope that those Members who took longer than normally expected will think about others next time. So please, Front Bench, we need speedier replies.

We are now going to suspend the House for a few minutes to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

3.32 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.[*Official Report*, 17 June 2021, Vol. 697, c. 4MC.]

Speaker's Statement

3.37 pm

Mr Speaker: Before we move to the statements, I want to say something about the selection of amendments and new clauses to the Advanced Research and Innovation Agency Bill.

I told the House in my statement on 29 January 2020 that as Speaker of the House, I am committed to transparency and I respect and trust the advice from Clerks in this House. As the House knows and as “Erskine May” states:

“The Chair is not expected to give reasons for the decision on selection of amendments.”

However, on an exceptional basis, I want to say something about why new clause 4 has not been selected. I am doing so on this occasion because of the high level of interest in the new clause in the House and outside it.

Amendments and new clauses that are not within the scope of the Bill are out of order. “Erskine May” states:

“The scope of a bill represents the reasonable limits of its collective purposes, as defined by its existing clauses and schedules.”

In this instance, having taken advice from the House’s senior Clerks and the Office of Speaker’s Counsel, I have deemed new clause 4 to be outside the scope of the Bill. New clause 4 is therefore not selected and may not be debated today.

I wish to make a further point. As we all know, the Government have, through our Standing Orders, significant control over the business the House considers on any given day, and its control is particularly strong when it comes to the initiation of public expenditure. Under the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015, it is the duty of the Secretary of State to ensure that the target for official development assistance to the amount of 0.7% of gross national income is met by the United Kingdom each year. Until now, however, the House has not—I repeat, not—had an opportunity for a decisive vote on maintaining the UK’s commitment to the statutory target of 0.7%. I expect the Government to find a way to have this important matter debated and to allow the House formally to take an effective decision.

I should say that, on an exceptional basis, I will hear and consider for debate, to be held tomorrow, any applications made under Standing Order No. 24 by 5.30 pm today. Applications should reach my office no later than 5 o’clock this afternoon.

Having taken this exceptional step of explaining my decision on selection in this case, I will take only one point of order, from the lead Member for the proposed amendment, Andrew Mitchell.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to your statement, of course I completely accept that you are the referee on these matters, and that is that, but the Government Front Bench are treating the House of Commons with disrespect. They are avoiding a vote on the commitments that each of us made, individually and collectively, at the last general election on a promise made internationally, and in the opinion of some of Britain’s leading lawyers, the Government are acting unlawfully.

Had we secured a vote on the new clause tonight, I can assure the House that it would have secured the assent of the House by not less than a majority of nine, and probably of around 20 votes.

In the week of the British chairmanship of the G7, the Government’s failure to address this issue will indisputably mean that hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths will result. It is already attracting criticism from all round the other members of the G7. What advice do you have, Mr Speaker, for my right hon. and hon. Friends and I to seek to stop the Government riding roughshod over Parliament in this way and seeking to thwart our democratic rights as Members of the House of Commons?

Mr Speaker: Can I first thank the right hon. Member for the courtesy of giving me advance notice of this point of order?

On the first point—that Government may have behaved unlawfully—I have to advise the right hon. Member that that will be a matter for the courts to determine, not me, as he is well aware. I know that he has worked very hard in looking at that, if it were needed.

On the right hon. Member’s more general point, I have already expressed my view that the House should be given an opportunity to make an effective—I repeat, an effective—decision on this matter. I have also indicated that I would, exceptionally, be prepared to accept an application today for an emergency debate tomorrow.

I would say that I share the House’s frustration. It is quite right that this House should not continue to be taken for granted, but we must do it in the right way. I believe the Government need to show respect and need to come forward—I totally agree with the right hon. Member—because not only the House but the country needs this matter to be debated and aired, and an effective decision to be taken.

I have now put that on the record, and I hope that the Government will take up the challenge and give the House its due respect, which it deserves. We are the elected Members. The House should be taken seriously and the Government should be accountable here. I wish and hope that that is taken on board very quickly. I do not want it to drag on. If not, we will then look to find other ways in which we can move forward. I am taking no more points of order.

Covid-19 Update

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, I would like to point out that the British sign language interpretation of the statement will be available to watch on Parliament TV.

3.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I would like to update the House on our work to beat this pandemic and to make sure that the world is prepared for the pandemics of the future.

Tomorrow, we mark six months since the world began vaccinating against covid-19 at Coventry Hospital. In that time, we have vaccinated over 40 million people here in the UK, and 2 billion doses have been delivered across the globe. As of today, 76% of UK adults have been vaccinated at least once, and 52% of adults have had two jabs. The pace of the vaccine roll-out has been extraordinary. This Saturday alone, the team delivered over 675,000 jabs, and I am delighted to be able to tell the House that, from this week, we will start offering vaccinations to people under 30, bringing us ever closer to the goal of offering a vaccine to all adults in the UK by the end of next month.

From tomorrow morning, we will open up vaccination to people aged 25 to 29. Over the remainder of this week, the NHS will send texts to people in those age groups, and, of course, GPs will be inviting people on their list to come forward. I am sure we have all been cheered by the images we have seen of so many eligible young people coming forward and lining up to get the jab, showing that the enthusiasm for the jab is not just the preserve of older generations. The people of this country know what it takes to keep themselves and the people around them safe. The latest estimates indicate that the vaccination programme has averted over 39,000 hospitalisations and over 13,000 deaths. So the vaccination brings us hope, and I am sure the whole House will join me in thanking people for their perseverance and patience as they have waited for their turn.

For all that great progress, there is no room for complacency. The delta variant, first identified in India, has made the race between the virus and the vaccination effort tighter. Although the size of the delta variant's growth advantage is unclear, the recent best scientific estimate is of an advantage of at least 40% over the previously dominant alpha variant—the so-called Kent variant. The delta variant now makes up the vast majority of all new infections in this country.

Over the past week, we have seen case rates rise, particularly in the north-west of England, but we know also that our surge testing system can help hold this growth. In Bolton, case rates over the past fortnight have been falling. We have expanded the approach taken in Bolton to other areas, and we will roll it out to other areas as necessary. I encourage everybody in those areas to get the tests on offer, no matter where they live. Regular tests can help to keep us all safe, and we know that the test, trace and isolate system has a vital role to play in keeping this all under control.

Of course, the most important tool we have is that vaccination programme. We know that the vaccine is breaking the link between infections, hospitalisations and deaths—a link that was rock-solid back in the

autumn. Despite the rise in cases, hospitalisations have been broadly flat. The majority of people in hospital with covid appear not to have had a vaccine at all. I want to update the House on some new information that we have on this. As of 3 June, our data show that of the 12,383 cases of the delta variant, 464 people went on to present at emergency care and 126 were admitted to hospital. Of those 126 people, 83 were unvaccinated, 28 had received one dose and just three had received both doses of vaccine. We should all be reassured by that, because it shows that those vaccinated groups, who previously made up the vast majority of hospitalisations, are now in the minority. So the jabs are working, and we have to keep coming forward to get them. That includes, vitally, that second jab, which we know gives better protection against the delta variant.

The confidence in our jabs comes from the fact that they are working and the knowledge that they are the best way out of the pandemic. No one wants our freedoms to be restricted a single day longer than is necessary. I know the impact that these restrictions have on the things we love, on our businesses and on our mental health. It is still too early to make decisions on step 4. The road map has always been guided by the data and, as before, we need four weeks between steps to see the latest data and a further week, to give notice of our decision. So we will assess the data and announce the outcome a week today, on 14 June.

I know that these restrictions have not been easy. With our vaccine programme moving at such pace, I am confident that one day soon freedom will return. To do this, we must stay vigilant, especially at this time when schoolchildren are returning to classrooms after the half-term break and when we are seeing the highest rises in positive cases among secondary school-aged children. With schools returning today, it is vital that every secondary school-aged child takes a test twice a week to protect them, to help keep schools open and to stop transmission. That is crucial to stop the spread and to protect the education of their peers. While the evidence shows that the impact of covid on children is usually minimal, we also know that there is higher transmissibility among children, so the message to all parents of secondary school-aged children is: please get your child tested twice a week to help keep the pandemic under control and to help on the road to recovery.

The House will also be aware that our independent medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, has conducted a review of the clinical trial data for the Pfizer-BioNTech jab. Having already concluded that the vaccine is safe and effective for people over the age of 16, it has also now concluded that the jab is safe and effective for children aged between 12 and 15 years old, with the benefits of vaccination clearly outweighing any risks. I can confirm to the House that I have asked the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, the committee that advises us on immunisations, to come forward with clinical advice on vaccinating 12 to 17-year-olds, and we will listen to that clinical advice, just as we have done throughout the pandemic.

People in this country know that vaccines are the way out, but this pandemic will not be over until it is over everywhere. This week, the Prime Minister will host G7 leaders in Cornwall, where he will work to persuade our allies to join the UK in our historic commitment to

vaccinate the whole world against covid-19 by the end of 2022. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine has already proved to be a vital tool in this effort, with more than half a billion doses now released for supply around the world and, crucially, delivered at cost. In my view, this approach—providing vaccines at cost—is the best way to vaccinate the world. Developing a vaccine and allowing countries to manufacture it at cost is the greatest gift that this nation could have given the world during the pandemic.

In Oxford, ahead of this week's G7 leaders summit, I met G7 Health Ministers and guests from some of the world's largest democracies. Our new clinical trials charter, agreed in Oxford, will help end unnecessary duplication of clinical trials and ensure greater collaboration across borders, resulting in faster access to approved treatments and vaccines. We reached agreement with industry leaders to cut to just 100 days the time that it takes to develop and deploy new diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. As a result of what we have agreed in Oxford, there will be people who will live who otherwise might have died, and I can think of no greater outcome than that.

In summary, beating this pandemic is not only an international imperative, but a domestic duty that falls on each one of us. We must keep up the basics, such as hands, face, space and fresh air, get regular tests and, of course, when we get the call, get both jabs, because that is the way that we can stop the spread and get out of this and restore the freedoms that we hold dear safely and together. I commend this statement to the House.

3.52 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. I am also grateful that he has confirmed that the Government's approach continues to be driven by the data, not by dates. We face some uncertainty, as we often have done throughout the past 15 months, but we do know that the delta variant is now the dominant variant in the UK. We know that 73% of delta cases are in unvaccinated people. We know that one dose offers less protection against this particular variant, and we know that, although hospitalisations are low, an increase in hospitalisations will put significant pressures on the NHS as it tries to deal with the care backlog. We also know, of course, that long covid is significant and debilitating for many people.

I am an optimist and I strongly believe that, ultimately, vaccination is our way through this. Can the Secretary of State go further on vaccination? Is he able to do more to drive up vaccination rates in those areas that have seen the delta variant take off and where uptake remains low, such as Blackburn or my own city of Leicester? Can he narrow the timeframe between the first and second dose, given that we know that one dose is not as protective as we would like? We have seen that Wales will be vaccinating everyone over 18 from next week. Can he tell us when England will follow?

Yesterday, the Secretary of State talked about the outbreaks among schoolchildren and young people. We know that children can transmit the virus and that children can be at particular risk of long covid. In that context, may I ask again why mask wearing is no longer mandatory in secondary schools? I am pleased that he has asked the JCVI to look at vaccination for children;

it is something that I have pressed him on a number of times at the Dispatch Box. Can he give us a timeframe on when he expects the JCVI to report on that front?

The Secretary of State talks about the G7. The pandemic has certainly shown that in an interconnected world where climate change and biodiversity loss drive zoonotic spillovers, working internationally to prevent future outbreaks is in our interests. None of us is safe until all of us are safe. That is not a slogan; it is the fact of the situation that we are in. That means working internationally. For a start, it means not cutting international aid, but it also means working globally on our vaccination efforts. He will have seen today that Gordon Brown, Tony Blair and other ex-world leaders have put forward a G7 burden sharing plan that would vaccinate the world. Will the Government support it?

Finally, I welcome what the Secretary of State said about research. Research and science are our way through this pandemic, and our way through to curing so many other diseases and ailments. However, he will know that while we are in this pandemic—while GPs and frontline staff are stretched—patients are unaware that a whole load of GP-held patient data is about to be transferred to NHS Digital.

Now, I am not opposed to NHS data being used for public good research, but some of the most sensitive personal data shared with GPs by patients in confidence several years ago—potentially when in a state of vulnerability, such as termination of pregnancy, matters of domestic or sexual abuse and issues of substance misuse or alcohol abuse—is set to be shared with NHS Digital and potentially to be used by commercial interests, and yet hardly anyone knows about it. There are worries about safeguards and patient confidentiality. Given the secrecy, the haste and the difficulties in opting out, will the Secretary of State now consider abandoning this plan, pausing it for now and launching a transparent consultation process with patients and clinicians on how confidential data can best be shared for research purposes?

Matt Hancock: First, the right hon. Gentleman raised the question of ensuring that we reduce transmission among children. It is true that the increase in case rates has predominantly been among children, especially secondary school-aged children. The testing regime among secondary school-aged children has been enthusiastically taken up by schools across the country. It is very important, as we return from half-term, that that is reinstated in full—that every child is being tested twice a week. It made a big difference in helping to keep schools open. If somebody tested positive at home before they went in, it meant that the whole bubble did not have to go home. It also prevented transmission up to older people, who might be more badly affected. Testing in schools is incredibly important to ensure that we can keep as much education as possible between now and the summer.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the JCVI advice on children's vaccination that will be available in a matter of weeks. I know that the JCVI is working hard on it now. I will of course come to the House, Mr Speaker, to explain the proposed approach as soon as we have that formal advice.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asked about the use of patient data. I am glad that he said how important he thought research based on data is within the NHS,

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because it is life-saving. It has been used incredibly powerfully during the pandemic. In fact, one of the reasons why the UK is the place where we discovered some of the life-saving treatments for covid, such as dexamethasone, is the powerful use of data. Just that discovery of dexamethasone, which happened through the use of NHS data, has saved over 1 million lives around the world.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of data, which he said belonged to GPs, being passed to NHS Digital. The truth is that data about his, my or anybody else's medical condition does not belong to any GP; it belongs, rightly, to the citizen—the patient. That is the approach that we should take. I absolutely agree that it is important to do these things right and properly, but I am also very glad that the vast majority of people are strongly on side for the use of their data to improve lives and save lives. That is the approach that we are going to take in building a modern data platform for the NHS, so that we can ensure that we use this modern asset to improve individuals' care and to improve research and therefore all our care, while of course preserving the highest standards of safety and privacy, which will be enhanced by a more modern use of data. I am glad that he is on side for the use of data in the NHS, but you have to be on side when that is actually put into practice. It is not just warm words; it is about making it happen.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): It is incredibly encouraging that just three out of 12,000 cases of the delta variant were double-jabbed, but is the debate inside Government now about a potential short, temporary extension of the restrictions to allow more people to get both jabs or a more permanent slowing down of the easing of restrictions? That is a massive difference to all our constituents in terms of what may happen following the announcement next week.

Secondly, could the Secretary of State look at one particular group who have been very hard hit over the last year: the parents of disabled children? He will know about my constituent Laura Wilde, who took her nine-year-old daughter, who has cerebral palsy, to Lanzarote for physio that she was unable to get in England and is looking for flexibility in the quarantine rules when she comes back. Can we show more flexibility in exceptional cases such as that?

Matt Hancock: On the latter point, I am very happy to look at how the case of my right hon. Friend's constituent Laura Wilde can fit with the exemptions that already apply for travel for medical purposes, along with the testing regime, to ensure that that is done in a safe way. I am happy to talk to colleagues at the Home Office about allowing that to happen.

On my right hon. Friend's first point, it is reassuring that there is such a clear breakage of the previously inexorable link from cases through to hospitalisations. That is very good news, and it is why we have this race to get everybody vaccinated as soon as possible. If I can address those people in their late 20s who will be able to book a jab from tomorrow and others who might feel that, in their age group, they are unlikely to die of covid, the honest truth is that the best way for us to get our freedoms back and get back to normal is for everybody

to come forward and get the jab. It really matters that we all come forward and do this, because that is the safest way out.

On my right hon. Friend's specific question about our thinking on the 21 June step 4, not before date, the honest answer, which I will give to any question about this, is that it is too early to say. I tried to give a studiously neutral answer on the TV yesterday, which some people interpreted as gung-ho and others interpreted as overly restrictive. That is the nature of uncertainty, I am afraid. It is too early to say. We are looking at all the data, and the road map sets out the approach that we will take, which is that there is step 4 and then there are four distinct pieces of work, which are reports on what should happen after step 4 on social distancing, international travel, certification and the rest. We will assiduously follow the road map process that has been set out with the five-week gap—four weeks to accumulate the data, then taking a decision with a week to go. The Prime Minister will ultimately make those decisions and announce them in a week's time.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: I note that the Secretary of State is still considering ending all social distancing measures on 21 June, but does he not think that that would be dangerous in the face of rising cases of the significantly more infectious delta variant? Would it not be better to adhere to the Government's mantra of being guided by data and not dates?

While it is welcome that half of adults are fully vaccinated, and Scotland has already started vaccinating those over 18, the Secretary of State must be aware that one dose of the current vaccines only provides 33% protection. Does he accept that that means we cannot rely on single dose vaccination to control this variant without social distancing measures? I and many other MPs repeatedly called for hotel quarantine to be applied to all arrivals in the UK to prevent exactly the situation we now face. He repeatedly claimed that home quarantine was working, but does he not accept that the importation and now dominance of the delta variant shows that is not true? With the current rise in cases of the delta variant threatening the progress made during almost five months of lockdown, does he regret the decision to delay adding India to the red list?

In light of the disruption caused by the shambles of changing Portugal's classification this week, does the Secretary of State recognise that it has done neither holidaymakers nor the travel industry any favours? Will he now get rid of the traffic light system and tighten border quarantine policy so that we can avoid importing more vaccine-resistant variants and safely open up our domestic economy and society?

The Secretary of State talked today about the UK vaccinating the world, so can he say how many doses the UK has donated to COVAX? Does that mean the Government will support the sharing of intellectual property and technology and the trade-related intellectual property rights—or TRIPS—waiver so as to increase global vaccine production?

Matt Hancock: There is quite a lot that needs sorting in that. The first thing I would say is that the hon. Lady complains that I acted on Portugal when we saw the data, yet she complains that I did not act on India before we had the data. She cannot have it both ways. She asked

me to follow data not dates, but then asked me to prejudge the data by making a decision about 21 June right now. I am a bit confused about that one, too, because I notice that the Scottish Government have themselves been reopening. That is a perfectly reasonable decision for the Scottish Government, but it is a bit rich then for the SNP spokesman to come to this House and have a go at us for deciding to look at the data over the next week, rather than prejudging that decision. It is quite hard to listen and not respond to explain what is actually going on.

The third point I will make is on international vaccination. Absolutely this country has stepped up to the plate. Of the 2 billion doses delivered around the world, half a billion have been the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which was developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford, with UK taxpayers' money. It is, as I put it in my statement, a gift to the world. Of course we do not rule out donating excess doses as and when we have them, but only when we have excess doses, and I am sure the hon. Lady will accept that position is agreed not only by the UK Government, but by the devolved Administrations, because we all want to make sure that the people whom we serve get the chance to be vaccinated as soon as possible. That is our approach.

Finally, when it comes to intellectual property, we support intellectual property rights in this country. We could not get drugs to market in the way we manage to without support for intellectual property, because it is often necessary to put billions of pounds into research in order to get the returns over the medium term. What we did, more than a year ago, was agree with Oxford and AstraZeneca that there would be no charge for the intellectual property rights on this vaccine right around the world, and I am delighted that others are starting to take the same approach. Last month, Pfizer announced that in low and lower middle-income countries, it will not charge intellectual property, but we have been on this for more than a year now, so it is a bit rich to hear a lecture from north of the border.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State about his Department's role in the latest international travel restrictions? First, what happened to the green watch list, giving more time to prepare for a switch to amber? Did he receive scientific advice that Portugal should be moved to amber, and, if so, will he publish that advice? Has the World Health Organisation recognised the Nepal delta mutation as a variant? Can he confirm that there were just 12 cases of this mutant in Portugal and three times as many in the UK? Ultimately, can he give me a milestone for when we can unlock international travel—perhaps the double-jabbing of over-50s and the clinically extremely vulnerable? Without that milestone, it is difficult to see how we can ever give this industry and workforce hope for their future.

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend rightly asks these important questions about the decisions we had to take on Portugal. The truth is that we acted, yes, on the scientific advice: the advice of the joint biosecurity centre, based on the best information we had about this new variant—so-called delta AW, because it is a variant on the delta variant itself. We took that advice.

Restoring international travel in the medium term is an incredibly important goal that we need to work to. It is going to be challenging and hard because of the risk

of new variants, and variants popping up in places such as Portugal that otherwise have a relatively low case rate. But the biggest challenge and the reason this is so difficult is that a variant that undermines the vaccine effort would undermine the return to domestic freedom, and that must be protected at all costs.

Thankfully, the delta variant itself, after two doses, gets effectively the same coverage as the old alpha variant or indeed the original variant, so the fact that that is now dominant in the UK does not put our strategy at risk. It makes it more of a challenge of getting from here to there, but that is a challenge for the decision this week and how we handle things in the short term; it does not put the strategy at risk. A variant that undermined the vaccine fundamentally would put us in a much more difficult place as a country, and that is why we are being as cautious as we are.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): As the Secretary of State has pointed out himself, data has been key in the pandemic. I agree with him, having previously worked briefly for NHS Digital, that data saves lives. I also agree with him that patient data belongs to the patient, and one of the things I learned during my time working in data is that public trust is key. So why will the Secretary of State not pause this data collection programme, which patients must opt out of by 23 June, to mount a full public information and communication campaign and be explicit about how people's sensitive data might be used and by whom?

Matt Hancock: We are explicit about that. I appreciate what the hon. Lady said about the importance of data and data saving lives, and I agree with her about the importance of trust and bringing people with you. In fact, a large majority of those in the NHS are now actively enthusiastic about using data better. I very much hope we can keep it that way, not least because everybody has now seen the importance of using data to manage a crisis. One of the reasons for the vaccine success—why it has been rolled out so effectively—is that the data architecture that underpins the vaccine roll-out is extremely effective, and I pay tribute to the people who built it.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: In Harrow, because of the delta variant, we have surge testing in our schools: 13,000 young people have been tested at school and 12,000 relatives at home. This weekend, 3,280 vaccinations took place because we had two new pop-up vaccination centres for 18-year-olds and over. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the entire team who have made this massive project, so diligently followed, to enable people to be safe in Harrow, but will he also consider having further pop-up clinics for 18-year-olds so that we can get everyone vaccinated as soon as possible?

Matt Hancock: I pay tribute to the team at Harrow, and especially for the testing expansion. My hon. Friend said that there were 13,000 pupils and 12,000 of their relatives, and that includes me, because one of my children goes to school in the Harrow area. We got our PCR tests at home, we sat around the kitchen table and we all did them together, and I am glad to say they were all negative. This showed me—I felt like a mystery shopper—how effective this surge testing can be in making sure

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that we tackle these problems. We have seen that surge testing can work. We saw it in south London, where it worked. We have seen it in Bolton, where the case rate has come down. It has been used in Hounslow. It has been used in other specific areas, and I am glad it is now under way in Harrow to try to keep this under control.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, as always. He has been clear in the approach that has been taken to the Indian variant, which is currently posing difficulties. I am anxious to understand the level of co-operation and data-sharing with the devolved Assemblies. In particular, I am aware that we are dealing with possible cases in Kilkeel in County Down in Northern Ireland, where 1,000 homes have been visited and 900 tests carried out by a specialised mobile unit. It is clear that the Indian variant problem must have a UK solution presented.

Matt Hancock: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We talk about this when the Northern Ireland Health Minister and the Scottish and Welsh Health Secretaries join me on a weekly call. We are acutely aware of the importance of tackling the delta variant, as it is now called, and it is something we work on very closely together across the UK.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that what he said on “The Andrew Marr Show” was not a change of policy—a sudden retreat from the road map—and that no final decisions have been taken on what happens on 21 June? Can we still hope, in particular, that events involving big gatherings—weddings and all those kinds of things—can start up again, because they are so important both for our economy and jobs and for our quality of life?

Matt Hancock: Absolutely. As I said then, it is too early to make this decision. We have to look at the data and we will announce the decision next week. When answering a logical question of, “Are you open to delay?”, if you have not made a decision on whether to delay or not, by dint of logic, you are open to delay. That is, I think, a perfectly reasonable and logical answer to a question. It is an absolute classic: a politician answers a straight question with a straight answer and it causes all sorts of complications.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): We have seen in the past year unprecedented restrictions on our freedoms, for reasons that we in this place predominantly entirely understand—the pressure on our national health service and the escalating hospitalisations and death rates. Given the statistics that the Secretary of State has just published and the tremendous success of the vaccination programme in preventing hospitalisations of people doubly vaccinated, what additional freedoms are won for those people, and should we now be considering whether people who have been doubly vaccinated should be able to get additional freedoms as it appears that they will not be the cause of large numbers of hospitalisations in the future?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is obviously a mentor of his former leader, Tony Blair, who made this case at the weekend. We are looking into this question

for certain occasions. It will be necessary for international travel. However, in this country we have moved together—everyone is treated equally—in the same way that the virus treats us equally. I note that Israel, which did bring this proposal in, has now removed it.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Secretary of State’s announcement that we are opening up appointments for 25-year-olds will be warmly welcomed by many in the NHS in my area, so I thank him for that. On any possible delay to stage 4 of the road map on the 21st of this month, I totally get the logic that he is talking about; he is absolutely right to reserve judgment until one week before, as was always to be the case when the road map was published. However, may I gently press him to tell the House what we would be delaying for? Would it be a world without covid and therefore without any possibility of a variant of concern in the future, which I do not think is his belief? Can he see, though, why, for many, that would be to write covid a blank cheque and just continually delay?

Matt Hancock: That is an excellent question astutely put. The purpose of the road map, and the purpose of following the data within the road map and therefore having not-before dates, is that we are in a race between the vaccine programme and the virus, and with the delta variant the virus got extra legs. Our goal, sadly, is not a covid-free world, because that is impossible; the goal is to live with covid much as we live with some other unpleasant diseases, including, of course, flu. That does mean that there will be vaccinations long into the future; it means that, especially in winter, in hospitals for instance, we will have to be very careful to prevent infection from spreading; and it means that we will have to live with this virus and manage our way through it, but with the supreme power of science and the vaccine at our hand. That will be so powerful, and it is already proving, including through the data that I announced to the House just now, to be an incredibly powerful ally in getting us through this. However, at the moment, only 76% of people have had the jab and only 52% of people have had both jabs, and unlike with the previous variant, the second jab appears to be even more important this time around.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) [V]: The Government’s former chief scientific adviser and the chair of Independent SAGE, Sir David King, warned today that current covid figures are

“evidence of another wave appearing”,

while the Office for National Statistics estimates a 76% increase in cases in England in the week ending 29 May. Given that the delta variant is more transmissible, has a higher risk of hospitalisation and has more vaccine escape than the Kent variant, can the Secretary of State explain why he is not ruling out now any further lifting of restrictions on 21 June, so that we can get more adults double vaccinated first? Given that he acknowledges greater transmissibility among secondary pupils, will he look again at reversing the decision to end mask wearing in classrooms and at funding schools to enable them to increase ventilation? He says that he wants to keep schools open, and so do I, so why not take all the necessary steps to ensure that we can, and follow the advice of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, Indie SAGE and many experts?

Matt Hancock: But why? Why on earth would you say, “I’m going to rule out doing something in two weeks’ time,” when we know that the extra data that we will get over the next week will help to make a more refined and more careful decision? I do not understand this argument that has been put by the SNP and the Green party that we should just make a decision now, when we will know more in a week’s time, so that is what we are going to do.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Now then, I see that our NHS has published its very own woke alphabet, which includes terms such as “white fragility” for the letter W. Not only is this a load of nonsense, but it is very divisive. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the vast majority of our brilliant NHS staff are more interested in keeping the nation healthy than in learning the ABC of wokery?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. He puts it well. This so-called glossary appeared on the NHS website. I have raised it with the NHS and it has been taken down.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): On 15 May last year, the Secretary of State said at a press conference:

“Right from the start we’ve tried to throw a protective ring around our care homes.”

Instead, we have seen over 40,000 families lose elderly and vulnerable loved ones in care. His unwillingness to accept what care workers, doctors and relatives were telling him led to shortages of personal protective equipment and a revolving door from covid wards to care homes. Will he guarantee that care homes will be properly protected in subsequent surges, and will he accept his own failings and apologise to the families who tragically lost loved ones in care?

Matt Hancock: I am, of course, part of a family who have also lost a loved one who lived in a care home, so of course I take this very seriously. We followed the clinical advice when the world knew far less about this virus, and it was a challenge. The clinical advice and data since have shown that, in fact, community transmission was the major source of the incursion of the virus into care homes. I am delighted that, through the enormous efforts to increase testing, including the 100,000 testing target, we were then able to introduce the very significant staff testing that we have today, which is the main reason that there has been a fall in the second peak and much lower incidence in care homes. It is vital that we learn the lessons—it is vital that we learn the right lessons—and I am glad to say that, over the summer, we were able to put in stronger protections based on the updated clinical advice.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): The case rate in north Lincolnshire is 19 per 100,000 and we have seen incredibly low levels of hospitalisation since the middle of May. That is due, I am sure, to the vaccination effort and all those people who have had their jab. People in Scunthorpe have done everything they have been asked to do, so does my right hon. Friend agree that unless we meet an incredibly high bar of evidence, we will proceed with the opening on 21 June?

Matt Hancock: We will look at that evidence and make that judgment. Of course I want to proceed, but we must proceed safely and not see this go backwards. When the Prime Minister set out the roadmap, he said he wanted it to be “cautious and irreversible.” So far, we have succeeded in making it irreversible, and I hope we can keep it that way.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This Government are keener to protect borders with regards to immigration than they are regarding public health. The right hon. Gentleman says he is considering the data, but had hotel quarantine been in place for all travellers, we would not have this delta variant spike. Will he reconsider what the Scottish National party is asking for, which is quarantine for all travellers, as well as protection for the travel industry with the right support? That will get the UK economy up and running in a more sustainable manner.

Matt Hancock: We have brought in this incredibly strong travel regime, including the need for all travellers to be tested, and calls and home visits to those quarantining at home. That is based on risk, and we have taken the approach of being tough at the borders so as to protect the success of the vaccine roll-out here at home.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): My right hon. Friend should take great credit, as should his team, for the progress of the vaccination programme, and I congratulate him on it. Is it true that the Joint Biosecurity Centre said that Malta could be put on the green list?

Matt Hancock: It is true that a number of balanced cases are put before Ministers, and we always look at the pros and cons of each one. Ultimately, those decisions are for Ministers.

Mr Speaker: Welcome back Andrew Gwynne.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. In his statement, the Secretary of State mentioned the rising cases of the delta variant across north-west England, and the impact of the vaccination programme on reducing hospitalisations. That is positive news, but the consequence of increasing covid rates, even without hospitalisations, is not totally positive. May I ask him about long covid—something that is close to my heart, having had it for 12 months? Beyond the actions he has already taken, what more will he do to help those who, inevitably, will develop long-term consequences and symptoms of covid from the latest wave of the delta variant?

Matt Hancock: This incredibly important subject is close to my heart too, and perhaps we can work with the hon. Gentleman, with his personal experience of long covid over such a period, to ensure that we drive that agenda as hard as possible. The NHS has stepped forward and we have put more money into research, but this is an unknown condition as a result of a novel virus. It is a complicated condition and there are many different types of long covid. I would be keen to ensure that the hon. Gentleman engages with the NHS work on this.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I represent a very international constituency where people travel for business, family and personal reasons, and not just for two weeks in summer in the sun. I am concerned that the cost of PCR tests is prohibitive, and the lack of certainty beyond three weeks under the traffic light system has a material effect on business and wellbeing. Will my right hon. Friend's Department consider further whether lateral flow tests can be substituted for PCR tests to at least alleviate that concern and cost?

Matt Hancock: Part of the purpose of the international testing regime is to get genetic sequences to spot variants, which we cannot do from a lateral flow test. That is the literal answer to my hon. Friend's question. More broadly, the approach we are taking instead is to try to drive down the costs of PCR tests. Bringing a private market for PCR tests for travel has led to a significant reduction in cost, and that is another good example of harnessing private markets to improve people's lives. The companies involved are strongly incentivised to deliver tests for a lower price. That is the approach we have taken for the reason I set out, and that is the decision we have made.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Royal College of General Practitioners, the Doctors' Association UK and the British Medical Association have all expressed concern about the adequacy of communication with patients about the proposals for data sharing. From the answer that the Secretary of State gave to the Opposition Front Bench—the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth)—and to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), he obviously disagrees with that, but in the interests of making data-based decisions, can he tell the House what his Department is doing to assess the level of patient awareness about what will happen if they do not opt out by 23 June?

Matt Hancock: We are doing work in this area and talking to all the relevant bodies. Aside from some who have not yet understood the full importance of high-quality usage of data in the health system, actually, the vast majority of people, including the BMA, the Royal College of GPs and others, can see the benefit of getting this right. So we are working with them. The goal, though, is really clear—to use data better in the NHS because data saves lives.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): The Secretary of State laid out a number of decisions that will be announced next Monday, and the most significant of those will be on social distancing. If that remains, whatever else changes, we will not have gone anywhere close to back to normal. However, can I press him a bit on vaccine efficacy? The SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), said that the first dose was only 30% effective. I believe that that is correct for transmission, but as for what is actually important, which is reducing serious disease and hospitalisation, the first dose is significantly more effective than that. Will the Secretary of State set out to the House his and the Department's current understanding about the efficacy of the vaccine on the first dose and the second dose against serious disease and hospitalisation?

Matt Hancock: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the figure for transmissibility reduction from the first dose. The figures for the reduction in

serious disease and death are, as he says, higher than that, but since I do not have the precise figures in my head, what I propose to do is set them out tomorrow at the Dispatch Box at Health questions.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP) [V]: The Secretary of State seems to be the master of mixed messages. Today, he tells us that the vaccination programme is going well, cases are down and hospital admissions have fallen, yet at the weekend, he was telling us that he is still open to removing the date for freedom day—21 June—and keeping restrictions in place. A few weeks ago, he was telling people that they could go to Portugal, yet, despite Portugal having lower infection rates than we do and only 1.5% of people being tested positive on return from Portugal, he has now put it on the amber list, costing the airline industry millions of pounds and putting holidaymakers to great expense. Does he understand the frustration that businesses and individuals have at the way in which, acting on his advice, they take precautions, spend money and take actions that they think are right, yet find that, when he changes his message, they are placed at a disadvantage?

Matt Hancock: Of course I understand those frustrations—of course I do—and that is why we would all like to be out of this pandemic, but John Maynard Keynes' famous dictum comes to mind, which is: "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?" A pandemic is a hard thing to manage and communicating uncertainty in the public sphere is difficult. When answering questions about uncertainty, I think the fairest thing that any of us at the Government Dispatch Box can do is answer fully and frankly to the best of our knowledge and understanding, and that does include things where there is evidence on one side and evidence on the other. We had a question from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) that described only the negative side of what we are seeing in the data, but on the positive side we are seeing the impact of vaccinations that the right hon. Gentleman just mentioned. There are two sides to the story, and that is why some of the judgments are difficult. That is why we will wait until we have the most data possible, with a week to spare, so that people can implement the decisions we make regarding 21 June.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I reassure my right hon. Friend that, since last we spoke in this Chamber, I have received my first jab. As the age limit lowers, the more youthful of us in this House benefit—although the years have not been kind. His announcement that the limit is to go down still further, to 25, is excellent news. I thank everyone in the vaccination centres in Hazel Grove, Woodley and Offerton and other places in my constituency for their tremendous work. Will my right hon. Friend go further with his surge of vaccinations? That is how we will end this pandemic. Will he commit to reducing the time between first and second jabs and do all he can to secure greater supply? Give us the jabs and we will finish the job.

Matt Hancock: A propos my previous answer, there is again a balance here. Obviously, we want to go as fast as possible, but, on the other hand, the strength of overall protection people get grows, on the latest clinical advice, up to an eight-week gap. So a longer gap gives them better overall long-term protection. That is why we have

reduced the gap from the 12 weeks we had at the start, because we wanted to get as many first jabs done with the early doses we had, to eight weeks; but the clinical recommendation is not to go below eight weeks, because people would end up with weaker overall protection from both jabs. That is the reason for our approach, but ultimately we want to go as fast as we clinically safely can with the programme. For that, we need all the good folk of Hazel Grove who are doing so much to make this happen and to deliver jabs in arms, and I thank them all.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab) [V]: A number of my constituents were out in Portugal and were taken completely by surprise by the Government's about-turn on their advice and rules on travel to Portugal. It has cost some of them many hundreds of pounds. It is important that we remember that hundreds of thousands of jobs depend on the travel industry, and many people in my constituency work in that industry or rely on it. The Government must start to be clear about what they are going to do about travel overseas. Given the high number of people in this country who have been vaccinated, subject to the countries they are going to having high rates of vaccination and low rates of covid, there is no reason why they should not be able to travel.

Matt Hancock: I cannot say any more than I have already said. We take a cautious approach to travel because of the risk of new variants, which could undermine the whole thing. We have a traffic-light system because some countries are safer to travel to than others.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Children and young people have missed out on so much over the past 15 months or so—both educational opportunities and opportunities for important social development. Today, my right hon. Friend received a letter from a number of Jewish youth groups that run residential summer camps. They are desperately worried that, if the rule of 30 remains after 21 June, what they do simply will not be viable. I am sure that the same is true of many other youth groups. Can he give some reassurance that those safe, regulated, largely outdoor activities will be able to go ahead for groups of much more than 30?

Matt Hancock: Yes, of course, as part of step 3, those activities were reopened for school-based groups. I absolutely take the point that my hon. Friend is making. That is of course part of step 4. He has made his point clearly.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): In April last year, Government guidance in relation to hospital discharges clearly stated:

“Negative tests are not required prior to transfers/admissions into the care home.”

One month and many deaths later, the Secretary of State very clearly said on national television that

“right from the start we have tried to throw a protective ring around our care homes.”

Since then, the guidance seems to have disappeared from Government websites, and this weekend he has denied making those claims, yet again today he expects us to trust this Government's judgment in deciding how we should continue to live our lives. Why on earth should we?

Matt Hancock: I am terribly sorry: all the policy and all the guidance was, of course, set out in public around care homes. It was a very challenging policy, not least because—as the hon. Lady implied in what she quoted—the tests were not available to be able to do this, and the clinical advice was that asymptomatic transmission was highly unlikely. That was the basis on which these decisions were taken. The challenge in care homes was equally a challenge in Scotland and a challenge in Wales—a challenge all over Europe, in fact. The decision making in this area is a matter of record. A huge number of people were trying their very best to solve the problem as best they possibly could, based on the very best science and clinical advice.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): The Secretary of State will recall telling us that the first lockdown was needed to give time to build capacity in the NHS. Can he therefore tell us how many more hospital beds are available in the NHS now than in March last year?

Matt Hancock: That is a good question, but the main capacity that we built was the Nightingales, a very successful project. The Nightingale project was one of the finest examples of rapid action in the NHS that has been seen. Thank goodness we had the Nightingale hospitals, because the people treated in them got treatment that was otherwise likely not to have been available. It meant that we could keep that promise all the way through—that nobody was denied treatment for covid. People got the treatment they needed because we managed to build that capacity so quickly.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I hope that the Health Secretary will understand the frustration that there will be right across the country if the 21 June date ends up being delayed by the Government because their own border policies failed to prevent the delta variant from spreading, because they were too slow in putting India on the red list and because of gaps in the amber list policies. Given the confusion that there still is about the way in which the Government are taking decisions on individual countries on the border, is it not time that he accepted the recommendation that the Select Committee on Home Affairs made last August that he publish not just the data, but the analysis and advice from the Joint Biosecurity Centre? The analysis and advice from SAGE is published, so why is the Joint Biosecurity Centre's advice being kept secret?

Matt Hancock: The right hon. Lady and I have had this exchange before. I respect her enormously, but she continues to imply that we should have taken decisions based on data that we did not yet have. That is simply not a reasonable position for the Chair of any Select Committee to take.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The statistical snapshot that my right hon. Friend gave in his statement showed that just over 2% of people hospitalised with the Indian variant had had both jabs. In order to encourage everyone to get vaccinated, will he in future publish on a daily basis how many patients in hospital with covid have previously had one jab, two jabs or no jabs at all? If that information is not held centrally, should it not be?

Matt Hancock: I am delighted by that question, because the data that I put in my statement was right off the press—it is new data. I am absolutely happy to look at how it is published and on what basis. I hear my right hon. Friend's call for it to be published daily; we do update most of this data daily on the website. We have not got to that point yet—we have done a first cut of the data up to 3 June, as I read out—but the critical question is how many cases are translating into hospitalisations and then into deaths. I am very glad that we were able to do the first cut today, and I will see what I can do on publication.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: The Government are pushing through a data grab that will see GP patient records held on a central database, which will, in turn, be available to private companies. Anyone getting the covid-19 vaccine from 1 July will have their GP record updated and so uploaded to that database on that day, often without their knowledge. There are enough fears adding to vaccine hesitancy and the Government are now adding concerns about data privacy to that, so will the Secretary of State agree to stop this data grab, undertake a full consultation with patients about sharing their personal data and publicise just how they can opt out?

Matt Hancock: The way the hon. Lady characterises this policy proposal is not accurate. People listening to this debate should be reassured that the privacy and security of their data are absolutely paramount. I look forward to her working with the NHS and with government to reassure people about the use of their data, because, ultimately, by making sure that we can understand what is happening, we can find better treatments, improve individuals' treatment and save lives. This is all about making sure we use the best of modern technology to save lives and, in the process, improve the privacy and security of data. I hope she will take that message and reassurance and pass it on to her constituents and others with whom she is working, because, ultimately, improving and saving lives is the NHS's historic mission and this policy proposal is just another small step in that.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]: I welcome the Secretary of State's confirmation that we will hit the end of July target of vaccinating all adults in England. Will he give us a bit of a forward look to what he is planning for the autumn in terms of the flu season and any covid booster jabs? Is he expecting all adults over 50 to have a third jab? Does he think that that will be at the same time as a flu jab? Will it be combined? Or will we have to have two separate healthcare visits?

Matt Hancock: We are working on exactly that question. Of course, there is the question in advance of that of the vaccination of 12 to 18-year-olds, on which we are taking advice from the JCVI. We are conducting trials as to what are the best jabs to give, given which two previous jabs people have had, to give them the strongest protection. The third thing we are doing is working with AstraZeneca to develop a vaccine specifically targeted

at the variants—that was part of the G7 work and announcements last week. If we can give a flu jab and a covid booster jab at the same time, that would be great. That is also under clinical evaluation, because, obviously, it would make the logistics so much easier over the autumn. Likewise, I am taking advice on which age groups and which groups it should be for: whether it should just be for the over-50s or for everybody; how to vaccinate; what group to put health and social care workers in; and whether there is a special regime for those who live in care homes, as there was in the first round of vaccination, where care home residents and staff came first. All of those are live questions on which we do not yet have answers, but that is the scope of the decisions we need to make ahead of the autumn for the autumn vaccination programme.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): The progress with the vaccination roll-out is really to be welcomed and I give my thanks to all the staff, vaccinators and others who have been responsible for that progress. There are understandable concerns about how we manage and deal with variants, and my questions are centred on that today. What surveillance is taking place on the following measures or what is proposed? These are really important issues: the longevity of immunogenesis and how that is going to be captured; the adaptability of the virus and how that is going to be countered; and the need to modify or develop new vaccines as we progress into a position where the majority of the population are vaccinated.

Matt Hancock: I join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating all those involved in the vaccine roll-out, everywhere in the UK. In Scotland, it has been a remarkable effort, with the UK Government working with the Scottish Administration, the NHS across the country, local councils and the armed services—it has been a big team effort, and that has been part of the success of the vaccine roll-out.

The hon. Gentleman asked about three critical areas of the science. Reviews of all three areas are ongoing. They are led by Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, the deputy chief medical officer, whom the hon. Gentleman may have heard of, who is an absolutely brilliant clinician in this space—there are a lot more people involved who are doing excellent scientific work on these questions. That surveillance on immunogenicity, the work on the next-generation variant vaccine and the work on understanding the variants as we spot them is all going on. Public Health England has done a huge amount of work, working with public health colleagues right across the country, and I am grateful to them all.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today and for responding to 31 questions in just over one hour.

Before we move on to the next statement, we will suspend for three minutes.

4.50 pm

Sitting suspended.

Education Recovery

4.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement regarding the latest phase of our education recovery programme.

Helping our children recover from the impact of the pandemic is an absolute priority. Pupils, parents and staff have all experienced disruption, and we know that continuous actions are required to help recover lost learning. That is why we have already made provision available to support children to catch up. As a result, a quarter of a million children will receive tutoring this year who would not have been able to access it beforehand; over half a million pupils will be able to attend summer schools; and schools have access to both a catch-up and a recovery premium to enable them to assess what will help their pupils catch up on lost learning and to make provision available to ensure that they do so.

The evidence we have shows that disadvantaged children and those who live in areas that have been particularly hard hit by high covid rates, such as the north-east of England and Yorkshire, are among those whose learning is most likely to have been affected. We have always been clear that we will continue to take the action that is required. That is why we continue to pledge significant packages of investment and targeted intervention to help them to make up on their lost learning. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sir Kevan Collins for his contribution to these efforts, his thoughts and his inputs over the past few months.

Last week, I announced the details of the next step in our efforts to ensure that children and young people catch up after the disruption of the pandemic and to support our ongoing education recovery plans. We have announced an additional programme of extra help and support, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which focuses on areas that we already know are going to be most effective. They are high-quality tutoring and more effort, more work and more programmes to support great teaching. This brings our total recovery package to more than £3 billion. The lion's share of this new money—£1 billion of it—will fund a tutoring revolution, delivering 6 million 15-hour tutoring courses for schoolchildren and the equivalent of 2 million 15-hour courses for 16 to 19-year-olds who need additional support to catch up. Year 13 pupils will also have the option to repeat their final year where this is appropriate.

The evidence shows that one course of high-quality tutoring has been proven to boost attainment by three to five months, so additional tutoring will be vital for young people in recovering the teaching hours lost in the past year. This represents a huge additional teaching resource, putting it among the best tutoring schemes in the world. It means that tutoring will no longer be the preserve of the most affluent but will instead go to those who need it most and who can get the most benefit from it. Schools will be able to provide additional tutoring support using locally employed tutors, and that will build on the successful national tutoring programme, which is on target to provide a quarter of a million children with tutoring in its first year.

I can also tell the House that it is not just data that shows us that tutoring works; we are seeing the positive impact on children at first hand. As we go around the

country, speaking to children in different schools, we hear how it is helping them to learn, to catch up and to achieve the very best of themselves. We hear time and again how these activities are helping young people to make up for the time they lost through not being in school. It is also giving them the increased confidence and self-esteem that they develop through the extra tutoring and the extra attention.

I have said that we are determined to fund these catch-up activities based on the evidence of what works, and the next stage of our recovery plan will include a review of time spent in school and college and the impact that that could have on helping children and young people to catch up. Schools already have the power to set the length of the school day, but there is a certain amount of disparity in approach across the sector. I know it is not just the Government who are thinking about the length of the school day; it is an important issue with so much catching up still to do. When that is the case, I question whether it is justifiable that some schools send their children home at 2.45 pm when others keep them in for much longer. The findings of the review will be set out later in the year to inform the spending review, and a broad range of reforms and changes to our school system will be set out.

I said that we would be concentrating this huge investment on two areas that we know work, and the second of them is to give our teachers more professional support. Teachers have done so much for children in the pandemic. Now it is time for us to do even more for those teachers. An extra £400 million will be made available to help provide half a million teacher training opportunities across the country, alongside professional development for those working in early years settings. We will make sure that all of them can access high-quality training, giving them the skills and tools to help every child they work with fulfil their potential.

Of that funding, £153 million will provide professional development for early years staff, including through new programmes that focus on key areas such as speech and language development for very young children, and £253 million will expand existing teacher training and development to give schoolteachers the opportunity to access world-leading training, tailored to whatever point they are at in their careers, from new teachers to aspiring headteachers and headteachers themselves.

We know from numerous studies that the most powerful impact on a child's learning is made by the teacher in front of them in the classroom. By investing in our teachers, enabling them to grow professionally and develop their skills, we invest not just in them but in every pupil in every class. It is worth adding that we have not lost sight of our main aim, which is to provide world-class education for every child, whatever their background, and to set them up with the knowledge and skills that they need to fulfil their potential and look forward to a happy and fulfilling life. The recovery package will not just go a long way to boost children's learning in the wake of the disruption caused by the pandemic, but help bring down the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers that we have been working so hard to get rid of for so long.

This is the next stage in what will be a sustained programme of support, building on the landmark £14.4 billion uplift in core schools funding that was

[Gavin Williamson]

announced in 2019 and the more than £3 billion in addition that has been announced so far for recovery. As the Prime Minister said last week,

“there is going to be more coming down the track, but don’t forget this is a huge amount that we are spending”.

For that reason, I commend the statement to the House.

5.2 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. However, I am sorry to say that its lack of vision and ambition lets down our young people. Our children’s futures, and the future of our country, depended on the Government getting the education recovery right, but the Secretary of State, and indeed the whole of the Government, have failed to rise to the challenge. They have failed the school leaders, teachers and staff who last March adapted overnight to deliver remote lessons, while hand-delivering workbooks and food parcels to families. I pay enormous tribute to the staff who did so much to support our children and who continue to do so.

The Government have failed the parents, who have thrown themselves into the task of home schooling and supporting their children’s learning. Most importantly, the Government have failed children and young people, who were promised that their education was the PM’s No. 1 priority. They have been betrayed by a Secretary of State who has let them down once again and by a Prime Minister who will not lift a finger for them when it comes to a row with the Chancellor about prioritising the investment needed in their future. That comes after a decade in which successive Conservative Governments have delivered the largest cut to school budgets we have seen in 40 years.

I was frankly embarrassed to hear the Secretary of State proclaim that the funding announced last week will deliver a revolution, when what his Government announced will amount to just £50 per pupil for the next three years, compared with £1,600 in the USA and £2,500 in the Netherlands. It will deliver less than one hour of tutoring a fortnight for children who have missed more than half a year of being in school in person. Getting tutoring right is important when schools have said that the national tutoring programme is too difficult and too inflexible to use, and when it has so far reached less than 2% of pupils, but taking that programme out of the hands of experts and giving it to Randstad, a multinational outsourcing company, is not the right answer to schools’ concerns about reach and quality. They fear the contract is being handed out on the cheap. Can the Secretary of State confirm reports that the contract value is £37 million less than originally offered? Will he confirm that that is to cut costs, to the detriment of our children?

While tutoring and investment in teacher development featured to a degree in last week’s announcement, what is really noticeable is how much is missing. Where is the bold action needed to boost children’s wellbeing and social development, which parents and teachers say is their top priority and which is essential to support learning? Where is the increased expert support to tackle the rise in mental health conditions among young people? Where is the targeted investment for those

children who missed most time in class, struggled most to learn from home and were left for months without access to remote learning? Where is the funding needed for the pupil premium to replace the stealth cut to school budgets that the Government imposed when they changed the date of the census?

The Secretary of State says that this is just one step on the road, but the Government’s own catch-up tsar Sir Kevan Collins, a highly respected education expert, says action is needed now to protect children’s futures, so why is the Secretary of State waiting? Last week’s announcement fell so far short of what Sir Kevan had recommended that he resigned on Wednesday evening, ashamed to have his name connected to such pitiful proposals. He said the Government’s response was too small, too narrow and too slow. He was appalled by the lack of ambition and vision—a lack of ambition that betrays the optimism and aspirations that children and young people themselves have for their future.

Last week, I was proud to publish Labour’s children’s recovery plan—a plan that would deliver the investment Sir Kevan has said is essential and which recognises that children and young people are excited to be back with their friends and teachers, and hungry to learn and prove their potential. Our responsibility as adults is to match the ambition children have for their own future. That is why Labour’s bold plan proposes new opportunities for every child to play, learn and develop. When we say, and when the Leader of the Opposition says as he did last week, that education is Labour’s top priority and that Labour wants this to be the best country in the world to grow up in, unlike the Government, we actually mean it.

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady talks about vision. Let us be blunt: the Labour party has opposed every single one of the education reforms that this Government have brought forward, with the one exception, I believe, of T-levels. Every time that this party and this Government strive to drive quality and standards, making sure that there is discipline in the classroom, what does the Labour party do? It turns round and looks to the press releases of the unions and its paymasters. This party believes in delivering a revolution and change in what we actually do. That is why we have always delivered a laser-like focus on what benefits children, what makes a difference and what means that a child will be able to get a better job on leaving school. That is what this party does. The Labour party merely parrots what the union paymasters ask it to do.

At every stage in our recovery plans over the last 12 months, we have set out investment worth over £3 billion aimed and targeted to deliver the very best results for children. We recognise that children have missed out, but we have made sure that where we spend that extra money, it will make a real difference to children. We have looked closely at what will deliver for those children, and that is where we have focused our investment, and that is what we will continue to do.

As we move forward over the next few months, we will face significant challenges. We talk about the school day. We have seen too many schools going down a route of restricting the things that children can do—restricting the things that they could benefit from doing. The school lunch hour is being increasingly restricted to a school lunch half-hour. We want to ensure that, as we carry out

this review, we look at all the options, so that children benefit not just from better academic attainment and extra support in English and maths, but from enrichment and the other activities that they can get from being at school. I very much hope that the Opposition will support that, but I very much doubt that they will; they have always failed to support any reform or any change that delivers real results for children.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for securing the £3 billion for catch-up; it is a significant amount of money. Does he agree that the heart of levelling up must be education and getting young people to climb that ladder of opportunity?

What more evidence is needed to convince the Treasury to implement Kevan Collins' proposal to extend the school day? Do we need pilot programmes? Do we need evidence from the 39% of pre-2010 academy schools that successfully implemented longer school days? Do we need more from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, as extra school activities have been seen to increase numeracy by 29%, or from the Education Endowment Foundation, which has shown that extending the school day increases educational attainment by two months? Will the Secretary of State bring about longer school days and complete the programme that he started once the comprehensive spending review has been completed?

Gavin Williamson: I share my right hon. Friend's views: there is a body of evidence that can be collected that shows that extra time in the classroom can deliver real benefits for pupils. It is about getting the combination right. As we have seen from the evidence, parents are very concerned about what their children have missed out on in terms of English and maths. We want to see how we can boost those subjects, as well as some of the additional enrichment activities that go on in schools.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and I are working with some of the great sporting bodies in this country to see how we can bring more enrichment activities into schools. A number of schools have piloted something called session 3, which enables them to run these activities as additional add-ons to the school day, delivering real benefits to children. I think of Thomas Telford in my neighbouring county of Shropshire, which has pioneered the scheme and delivered real benefits to children not just in terms of sporting activities, but in terms of academic activities. We want to compile this evidence as we approach the spending review to see what interventions deliver the best results for all our children.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) [V]: Many students have suffered greatly during covid and the lockdown. Many children in large families in overcrowded flats have had no access, or very limited access, to computers and the internet, and have therefore lost out massively on educational opportunities. I am very unclear as to how they will be helped with the very small amount of money that the Secretary of State has offered. A total of £50 per pupil is nowhere near what is needed to help these young people catch up on the hundreds of hours of education that they have lost over the past year. Will he please look at it again?

Will the Secretary of State also assure me that the money being spent on tutoring will be paid only to qualified tutors who will be carefully selected and vetted by local education authorities, so that we do have the best possible educational opportunities for all our children, and particularly for those who come from the poorest families in this country?

Gavin Williamson: I know that the right hon. Gentleman, like all of us in the House, cares passionately about the education of all children. I can assure him that there will be high-quality tutors as part of the scheme. That is very important to us, because we want to ensure that children are getting the very best, and the way to do that is through the quality of tutors. We are not planning to do that monitoring through local education authorities, but part of what we are doing, as we have outlined, is enabling schools to take on tutors themselves.

I would be happy to sit down with the right hon. Gentleman to talk through some of our proposals and what we are looking at doing. Tutoring has been the preserve of the affluent classes, as he will have seen in his constituency for many, many decades. The children from less affluent parts of his constituency in Islington will not have had that same benefit. Affluent families have always seen the benefit that tutoring has brought their children, and we do not want this to be something that is purely their preserve. I would be delighted to sit down with him and talk through what we are doing, what we are aiming to deliver and how we believe this will improve the lives of children, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): As we recover, improving school standards in Stoke-on-Trent remains more important than ever, and it is vital that all young people can reach their full potential, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. I thank my right hon. Friend for the support he has given to our plans for a new free school in my constituency. Will he also support our plans for an education challenge area in Stoke-on-Trent, to help all our schools continue to drive up standards?

Gavin Williamson: It is fair to say that my hon. Friend has an enormous appetite for more and more investment in his constituency. If it had not been for his campaigning, his constituency certainly would not be getting the free school that will be built to deal with the needs there and to ensure that we continue to raise standards. I am already working with him and his colleagues, as well as the leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Councillor Abi Brown, on how we can deliver higher-quality education providers in the city of Stoke-on-Trent. I would be happy to continue that work, building on the opportunity area in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, on how we can reinforce the already good work and accelerate it over the coming months and years.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: The Department for Education has reported that a decade of progress on reducing the attainment gap has been eradicated in the last year, yet the Government seem to be under the impression that catch-up can be achieved on the cheap. By failing our nation's children now, we will pay a high price in the future, with growing inequality, lower productivity and poor social mobility. We cannot

[Afzal Khan]

afford to get this wrong, so will the Secretary of State urgently address the meagre funding set aside in this recovery plan?

Gavin Williamson: As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say in my statement, we are very much targeting the interventions at those areas that will deliver the most impact on children across his constituency and right across the country. It is the latest stage of a rolling investment over the last 12 months, already amounting to over £3 billion, plus over an additional £1 billion that has gone to schools to support them with covid measures. We very much plan to continue to make that investment in education over the coming 12 months, as we have been doing over the past 12 months.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating those schools that adapted rapidly to the virtual and hybrid world and taught extensive timetables sticking to exam syllabuses? What more can be done to spread best practice, while offering targeted support for those schools that faced special difficulties?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend absolutely hit the nail on the head; the children who benefited most were those in schools that kept a clear focus on supporting children with a strong and rich knowledge-based curriculum. That has very much been based on the reforms that have been rolled out by this Government over the last 11 years. There are sometimes siren calls to reduce the standards and quality of our curriculum and what is taught, but that most disadvantages children from the most disadvantaged areas. I reassure my right hon. Friend that every action we take will be about reinforcing the evidence as to what actually works and how we can benefit children, including through tutoring, driving up teacher quality and ensuring that teachers have the right materials, support and training to deliver the very best for their children.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) [V]: Sir Kevan Collins has a distinguished 30-year career as an expert in education, while the Secretary of State has spent 18 months presiding over nothing but blunders, putting the future of our young people at risk. Does the Secretary of State think that the right man resigned?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady sort of points out that we are very grateful for the work that Sir Kevan has done. Some of the key elements have been done working side by side with him—for example, the tutoring and the driving up of teacher quality and standards, which are very much at the heart of this package. As we look to the future and the comprehensive spending review, we are very much looking at how we can drive that third element—the element of time in the school day—and best use it to give children from all backgrounds the best advantage.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and his colleagues for the recent £50 million investment in a new high school at Tarleton, which means we can get rid of dangerous and dilapidated buildings. But levelling up also means that we must close the attainment gap between rich and affluent pupils

and those who come from slightly more disadvantaged backgrounds. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that South Ribble will benefit from this multi-billion-pound investment not only to catch up on the time that we have lost during the pandemic, but to help close that gap?

Gavin Williamson: I am sure that all my hon. Friend's constituents owe her a great debt of thanks for all the campaigning she did to get the refurbishment of and investment in the new school in her constituency. She is absolutely right about the need to close the attainment gap; it is vital. However, achieving that is not about lowering standards in schools, nor saying that children should have a lower-quality academic curriculum or teaching. It is about driving those standards up and ensuring that children—whatever background they come from and whichever school they go to—get the highest quality academic support, tutoring and attainment. Tutoring is such an important part of helping all our constituents.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) [V]: The level of Government investment in education recovery announced last week fell woefully short of the £15 billion needed according to the Government's former education recovery commissioner Sir Kevan Collins, who has now resigned from his post. It remains so in the light of the Secretary of State's statement today. The National Education Union has described the Government's investment as “paltry” and has quite rightly asked:

“Where in these plans is the funding for extra-curricular activities to support children and young people to regain their confidence in their abilities and talents? Where is the funding for drama and music, sport and skills development?”

Will the Secretary of State go back to the Chancellor and urge him to invest more so that schools can run fully funded extracurricular clubs and activities to boost time for children to play and socialise after months away from their friends?

Gavin Williamson: I am sure that the hon. Lady is very aware of the holiday activities and food programme that we rolled out across the country at Easter, as well as the continued expansion of our scheme into the summer. She is obviously also aware of the work that we have done on the recovery premium, which we have been putting in to support schools in additional work.

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): Education is, without doubt, one of the big legacy issues from the pandemic, so I welcome my right hon. Friend's pledges to invest billions of pounds and millions of hours, and his determination that we should use evidence of what works. We know that education is not just about moments of time, but about timeless moments. Our outdoor learning and education centres are experts in creating those experiences for children and young people. Centres such as Marle Hall in Llandudno Junction stand ready to help them to catch up and make up that lost ground. Will my right hon. Friend therefore give consideration to including outdoor education centres and residential stays as part of the delivery of his education recovery plan?

Gavin Williamson: We can certainly look at that very closely. I know my hon. Friend worked incredibly hard to ensure that our outdoor education centres were

included as part of the lifting of restrictions so that children are now able to access those outdoor education centres residentially as well as for day visits. We can certainly look at that consideration in future plans.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Aidan from my Weaver Vale constituency has been shielding with many of his friends over the pandemic owing to his health and additional educational support needs. He deserves the very best education and needs that additional support. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me about his particular case?

Gavin Williamson: Of course I will meet the hon. Gentleman. Would he be kind enough, prior to the meeting, to send some more details about Aidan and some of the challenges? I would be very happy to meet him.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con) [V]: All the research shows that money we spend in the early years has the biggest impact throughout the time a child spends in formal education. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the £153 million of investment in early education, intending to provide early years practitioners in Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner and across the country with world-class and evidence-based professional development, reflects the high priority we should place both on the current generation of young students and on the legacy for generations of students to come?

Gavin Williamson: As always, my hon. Friend makes a very thoughtful point. The challenges for children in early years have, proportionately, been very great for them. This is why we wanted to target this significant investment in the early years sector, recognising the importance of it not just in helping children who are in those early years settings today, but in leaving a very positive and lasting legacy in driving up standards and actually giving practitioners in the sector the very best tools to do the job for future generations.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Educational recovery spending is £1,600 in the US and £2,500 in the Netherlands, but with this Conservative Government it is just £50 per pupil. With an old Etonian, Bullingdon boy Prime Minister, a Chancellor whose old school's fees are in excess of £40,000 per year and an overwhelmingly privately educated Cabinet, it is no surprise that working-class kids across the country are being failed. I ask the Education Secretary, if he truly cares about the education of all children: will he fund their futures with a £15 billion recovery plan, investing in children, schools and teachers, as demanded by the National Education Union, the Labour party and, it is reported, his very own education recovery commissioner?

Gavin Williamson: As a comprehensive lad who went to a good and decent comprehensive school in Scarborough, at the very heart of everything I do I actually want to make sure that children, like the children of so many friends I went to school with, do incredibly well. We recognise that doing that is not about reducing standards; it is in fact about driving up standards in every school across the country. We are not here to make excuses for failure like the Labour party—the Labour Government—did when it was in power. We saw before this pandemic that real change and difference was being made with a

closing of 13%—13%—in the attainment gap in primary schools, and that was on the back of clear policies that deliver results for children. I am afraid I have to tell the hon. Lady that all these changes were opposed by her party, and they were very much opposed by the National Education Union, which very kindly supplies her with suggestions as to what to ask. I would happily provide her with the opportunity to sit down with the Minister for School Standards, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Nick Gibb), who has done so much to drive up standards in the school system. He can talk to her extensively and explain what he found after many years of Labour neglect and how we have gone about transforming that and making real sustained improvements over the past 11 years. I will make sure we can get that in the diary. It will probably be four hours for us to cover the first session.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): During a recent visit to Greenpark Academy in King's Lynn, I heard from Mrs Graver, the headteacher, about how important the provision of speech therapy was for the most disadvantaged pupils in normal times, and how covid has made that need even more pressing. Can my right hon. Friend clarify that schools can use catch-up funding for extra therapy sessions, and how this welcome package will increase capacity and access to these vital services?

Gavin Williamson: I thank my hon. Friend for asking such a thoughtful question on an issue that affects constituents across the board. Speech therapy is important, and I know from having had the experience as a child of having to go through speech therapy—as has my daughter—how important those interventions are at a very early stage to help children. I am pleased to clarify that that support is accessible as a result of the recovery premium. If he would be happy to do so, I ask him to send details of the school through my private office, and we will be able to put that clarification in writing if it would help his school.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I start by thanking all the teachers and non-teaching staff—all the school staff—for the tremendous work they have done in supporting the children in my constituency of Blaydon to get on with learning. It has been a tremendous effort. The Secretary of State has come out with some fine words about the recovery plan, but what it amounts to is £50 per child, and that simply is not enough to make a real difference and produce the catch-up that the children of my constituency need. What will he be doing to persuade the Chancellor to come up with some more money for education?

Gavin Williamson: I feel as if I spend most of my ministerial career having the pleasure of asking Chancellors for more money. The right hon. Member for North East Durham had that experience many times when he was in government.

I would like to gently correct the hon. Lady. The figure that she mentions is not the correct figure, because we have actually made multiple commitments on catch-up funding over and above that. So far we have committed more than £3 billion. I would also like to join her in thanking all the teachers who have done such an amazing job all the way through this pandemic and have done so much work and put so much effort in. I have seen it with

[Gavin Williamson]

my own family members, who have been making their own contribution, whether as teaching assistants or as teachers themselves. We want to continue to build on the interventions that really work—interventions that I genuinely believe will deliver significant benefits for her constituents in Blaydon, because they are all aimed at delivering the best outcomes for children.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): As another proud comprehensive school-educated Conservative Member, may I prick further the prejudices of the hon. Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana)? My right hon. Friend has rightly focused on academic catch-up and the role of teachers and professional educators, but we know that lost classroom time has impacted on the mental health, physical health, socialising and team activities of thousands of children. Given the undoubted importance of the huge army of volunteers mobilised to help with the vaccine roll-out, how will other young people and volunteers be used to help with extramural and summer school activities? They could include, as I suggested last year, undergraduates, gap-year students, National Citizen Service recruits and youth leaders. They could also help with outdoor education centre and residential experiences, which are so important as part of that catch-up as well.

Gavin Williamson: When my hon. Friend entered the Department for Education back in 2010, he was probably very conscious of the fact that state schools sadly lacked the education standards in private schools. As a result of our reforms—reforms that he himself led—we have made such a difference over that time. We want to do that in enrichment activities as well, because we recognise that while this is about the academic, it is also about the confidence that we can give to young people in terms of building their belief in themselves.

That can be done through additional activities in school that may happen in the lunch hour or after school, such as the most brilliant Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme, which I want to see significantly expanded throughout our state school system. It can also be done through combined cadet forces, once the preserve almost purely of private schools but which we have massively expanded. We to continue to build on these things, because we recognise that they give a direct benefit for children. On the holiday activities programme that we will be rolling out, we have been working very closely with local authorities so that they are able to bring in volunteers from all backgrounds—obviously properly Disclosure and Barring Service-checked, and quite rightly so—in order for them to be able to help and assist as part of that programme.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It seems clear to everybody apart from the Government that, as noted by Kevan Collins, £22 per primary school pupil is insufficient. Less than two hours of tutoring per pupil every two weeks will not be sufficient. Is the Secretary of State saying that Kevan Collins asked for too much money? Is he saying that the £3 billion that the Government have put in is sufficient? Why does he think that he knows better than Kevan Collins?

Gavin Williamson: We are doing a comprehensive plan, and there has been over £3 billion over the past year. We recognise that there continues to be more to do.

That is why we are doing a review of how the school day can be best used as we work up to the comprehensive spending review. Every undertaking that we have made as part of this has been based on the evidence and what we believe is going to deliver the best results for pupils.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What measures will the Secretary of State take to ensure that the tutoring is indeed of high quality and the teaching great?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend knows a lot about tutoring having done much of it himself. I look forward to seeing in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, maybe in a year's time, payments that he has received for all the tutoring he has done for state school children up and down the land, bringing a quality, an eloquence and a panache that has been missing from education as a result of his not being involved in it over the past few years.

My right hon. Friend is right that we need to ensure that there is high quality in everything we do on tutoring. That is why, as we have rolled out the national tutoring programme, we have always emphasised the need for quality tutors who are able to deliver, because that is what will bring the biggest benefits to these children.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) in thanking teachers, support staff and parents, who, certainly in my North Durham constituency, have worked tremendously hard in very difficult circumstances. They tell me that they know the kids who need the help, but what they need is the finance to be able to put those plans into action. Sir Kevan Collins laid out a very ambitious programme for catch-up. The Secretary of State mentioned the north-east as an area that is being adversely affected, so can I urge him to keep arguing for that extra funding? Without it, this will not be about levelling up but about a disadvantage that will continue not just this year but for many years to come. The life chances of children are going to be permanently damaged, and we cannot afford to do that.

Gavin Williamson: I slightly rechristened the right hon. Gentleman's constituency to North East Durham. I am not sure whether that was a boundary change in advance, or something like that, so I do apologise.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the issue of children in the north-east of England, as I did in my statement. He is also right to say that teachers will have the best feel as to what will be the best interventions. That is why we have put in extra flexibility through the national tutoring programme to ensure that they are able to use that cash in order to bring in tutoring on-site themselves instead of through the national tutoring programme.

Just to pick up on the right hon. Gentleman's latter point, this is a programme of things that we are doing, and we wanted to put in place the interventions that can have the biggest effect most rapidly. We know that tutoring can do that, and that is why we have progressed with that part of the programme most immediately. But I must confess that, like all Secretaries of State, there is sometimes a tendency to just want a little bit more, because we are all incredibly ambitious to deliver more for those we represent.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Nobody who has been watching this today would doubt the Secretary of State's commitment and passion for the life chances of young people. I bumped into a headteacher from my constituency on Friday in Hitchin, and he told me two things he wanted me to bring to the House. The first was that he still needs a bit of time to work out exactly what the interventions for all his children would be and which children would need exactly what interventions. The second was that he is concerned that the catch-up plan, when it comes into force, should be bottom-up, teacher led and individually tailored around each of those individual children. Could the Secretary of State respond on those two points?

Gavin Williamson: We very much want this to be teacher and school led; we recognise that they will have the best understanding of their pupils. That is an important part of this—there are the challenges we have had of many children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and the support they need to catch up, but there are also many children who have learning needs and who have had great challenges in their learning in more normal times, including many in my hon. Friend's constituency. There has been a significant impact on them. The only way we are able to target them is by giving teachers and headteachers the flexibility to understand what those children have lost and what they have missed out on, to make sure that the intervention is targeted to that child. That is what we will be doing.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The Secretary of State has managed to fail even the targets he set himself. He promised that a minimum of 65% of tutoring provision would reach pupil premium children, but the National Audit Office found that only 44% of those accessing tutoring could be classified as disadvantaged. That failure to provide support for the children who need it most will only further entrench the disadvantage attainment gap. The Secretary of State has admitted that what has been offered so far is not enough, so how much exactly will he ask the Chancellor for when he enters negotiations?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Member will be aware that the reason we want to expand the national tutoring programme is that the benefits it brings are so incredibly extensive. Yes, many children from disadvantaged backgrounds need that intervention, and they will benefit from it, but there are a lot of other children who have suffered. I am sure she will find in her constituency and across Hull that many children need that additional intervention; it is not just children who are on free school meals.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the commitment to the £3 billion investment in catch-up funding so far. Will he confirm that it forms just one part of the wider package of support and, further, that his Department recognises the value of outdoor education centres such as Keppleway in Broughton-in-Furness? Young people's team building and leadership skills have atrophied over the last year, and such centres play a crucial role in building those skills. Could my right hon. Friend confirm his Department's support in that regard?

Gavin Williamson: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the amazing work of so many outdoor activity centres in his constituency. Of course, he is particularly blessed with a most beautiful area—I would not say outdoor activity centres are abundant there, but there are many of them. It is really important that they play a part in our education recovery, and we certainly hope that many schools will be looking at that. I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and other colleagues to discuss in further detail how they can play their role.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) [V]: Why are the Secretary of State's powers of persuasion so inadequate that he has been able only to persuade the Chancellor to fund a mere one-tenth of Sir Kevan Collins's admirable catch-up plan? Do children not deserve a better champion fighting their corner than this Secretary of State and his risible efforts, which are letting children down across the country? If I was marking his homework, I would give him an F for fail.

Gavin Williamson: We are investing heavily in teacher quality, so it is very doubtful that the hon. Lady would ever get the opportunity to be a teacher.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): Some of the students who have missed out most because of the pandemic have been those doing technical and vocational courses. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating staff and students at Buckinghamshire University Technical College on all they have achieved, despite the challenges of coronavirus? Will he confirm that the Government support he has announced will help them to gain the skills that employers are looking for?

Gavin Williamson: From conversations I have had with my hon. Friend I know about the importance of Buckinghamshire UTC to his constituency, and the many youngsters who go there and get such a quality education. I reassure him that the interventions we have announced, and the additional funding, will benefit Buckinghamshire UTC and those youngsters who wish to pursue a brilliant technical education that opens doors to so many opportunities and incredibly high earnings—often much higher earnings than from pursuing a graduate route. Those youngsters will benefit from that, as will all schools across my hon. Friend's constituency.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Anne Longfield, the former highly respected children's commissioner, said in her final speech this year that there is an "institutional bias against children" in this Government, especially in the Treasury. Does the paltry education recovery package that has been announced, and the rejection of the ambitious plan put forward by the Prime Minister's hand-picked adviser, prove that Anne Longfield was absolutely right?

Gavin Williamson: I know the hon. Lady was not a Member of the House at the time, but since we got rid of Liberal Democrats in Government we have invested far more in education than we were ever able to do when they were there. Perhaps that is a result of having a Conservative Chief Secretary to the Treasury rather than a Liberal Democrat one.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): It is the beginning of Infant Mental Health Awareness Week, and I know my right hon. Friend is incredibly

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

aware of how painful a time it has been for many new parents during the pandemic lockdown. For many, a real lifeline was the opportunity to zoom their health visitor and get virtual advice from their GP. With his determination to build the family hubs policy for the Government, will my right hon. Friend take account of that wing of virtual support for families, and ensure that family hubs restores the vital face-to-face support, while not losing sight of the important virtual support that families have found to be a lifeline?

Gavin Williamson: I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work she has been doing with her report, and in setting out an inspiring vision of how we can go that little bit further to help children in the earliest stages of their lives, as well as—importantly—the mothers and families around them. Family hubs is a key element of that, and she is right to highlight the benefits that can be given virtually. We must consider how to expand and grow that concept across the country, bringing many services together, so that those families most in need of support can access it. We must bring health visitors closer to schools, and the Department for Work and Pensions and everything together, properly to support families. There are real benefits to that and real change that we can make. My right hon. Friend outlined much of that in her report, and I look forward to working more closely with her to deliver far more over the coming years.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I know that it would be hard to spot it in what the Secretary of State has said this afternoon, but I have a sneaking suspicion that when the Chancellor of the Exchequer rang him and said, “You know that request for £15 billion? You’re only going to get one and a half”, he was not exactly over the moon. I can imagine some of the words that he might have expressed, and perhaps he would, in private, do so again. Will he please try to ensure that this money, which I think he knows perfectly well is not enough, is just a down payment? The truth is that there are only two routes out of poverty: one is education and the other is employment, and the two are intertwined. If we fail this generation of young people, we will have failed their opportunities for the future. Will he just tell us—he can tell us now; we will not tell the Chancellor—how disappointed he was not to get the full amount that he wants?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman is, as always, incredibly eloquent. We are seeing a substantial investment—we have seen that laid out—of £3 billion over the next 12 months, but he asks whether we think further investment will be needed, and yes, we do. Obviously, as he is aware, for every pound that is gained for English schools there is a benefit to Welsh schools too. I am very conscious that ensuring that we get this investment of additional resources into our schools benefits the whole United Kingdom and shows the strength of our being a United Kingdom.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Over the next 12 months, how will the Secretary of State assess the impact of the measures that he puts in place on both education and cost-effectiveness and the use of resources?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is right to flag up the importance of ensuring that the interventions that we are taking are actually delivering dividends for children. We have commissioned Renaissance Learning to do extensive tests and continuous assessment to see what the impact is. We saw that when children went back into school, there was an immediate benefit, an uplift and a catch-up. Obviously, we had the additional lockdown, which none of us wanted or foresaw, but we will continue to monitor this incredibly closely, and it will inform further investments that we make to help children, to ensure that the money is being spent wisely and well.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: This Carers Week, I am concerned that disabled children are being left out of the conversation on recovery. The needs of every child, not just those without special educational needs, should be considered. How will the Secretary of State ensure that the Government’s covid-19 recovery plans meet the complex needs of disabled children and their families and allow them to heal?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady is right to highlight the importance of that, and I reassure her that it has certainly been at the forefront of my mind and that of the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). That is why, as we have worked up the allocations and the formula, there has been a particular tilt towards those schools that are supporting children with special needs, recognising that they have extra demands on their shoulders.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend’s enthusiasm for making this package of catch-up measures work. In thanking all our teachers and educators for what they have done during the pandemic, does he agree that it will be vital to get those educators to commit to the package—to the extra time that they need to spend in the classroom from the early years right up to university—to make sure that it works?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is very important that we continue to drive the quality of teaching staff, making sure that they are there in the classroom, delivering that world-class face-to-face learning, and that we continue to learn the lessons of how we have driven improvement in attainment. We have seen England rise up the PISA rankings while some nations of the United Kingdom have, sadly, gone the other way as the result of a less thoughtful and considered approach.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for responding to 30 questions in exactly one hour.

I will take the application under Standing Order No. 24 first. We will then go straight on to points of order before I suspend the House for three minutes.

Official Development Assistance

Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I now call the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) to make an application for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration under the terms of Standing Order No. 24. The right hon. Member has three minutes in which to make such an application.

5.55 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I seek leave to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely the matter of the 0.7% official development assistance target.

I seek this emergency debate today because, for reasons that Mr Speaker has clearly set out, the much anticipated debate over a technical amendment—new clause 4—to restore the 0.7% target through the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill will not now go ahead. I make it clear to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that I very strongly support the Bill; indeed, the House will have noticed that the effect of the new clause, had it been selected, would have been to stuff the Bill with an enormous amount of 0.7% money, which of course it could have spent.

We now face a situation in which Parliament has not had its say on this vital matter. That is not right. Had the new clause been selected, it would have passed the House by at least nine votes, and probably around 20; I have some experience of these matters, and I assure the House that that is correct.

The problem for the Government is that the House of Commons maths is not going to go away. We have seen over recent days a massive outpouring from civil society about the damage that is being done by these cuts. An organisation called Crack the Crises, which would have

had far more attention had it not been for covid, is following in the footsteps of Make Poverty History and will have an immense effect on opinion in our constituencies. I remind the House that paid-up members of environment non-governmental organisations and charities, and of development NGOs and charities, average out at 10,000 per constituency; there are not 10,000 in every constituency, of course, but there are very many of them.

It is the view of lawyers including Lord Ken Macdonald, the warden of Wadham College, that the measures taken by the Government are unlawful. A promise was made at the United Nations before the G7 about what Britain would do, and we have heard what the senior official Mark Lowcock has said about the Government's failure to stand by their promise. That is a promise that every Member of this House—all 650 of us—made at the last general election.

This is a humanitarian aid cut. It will cut global health security in a pandemic by more than 14%, it will cut funding on HIV/AIDS by 80%, and it will cut the Prime Minister's flagship policy on girls' education by 25%. None of that should go ahead without the matter being considered by the House.

I very much hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you will consider granting my application under Standing Order No. 24 because of the seriousness of the issues involved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Member asks leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely the matter of the 0.7% official development assistance target. Mr Speaker is satisfied that the matter raised is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24. Has the right hon. Member the leave of the House?

Application agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Member has obtained the leave of the House. The debate will be held at the commencement of public business tomorrow and will last for up to three hours. Members wishing to participate in tomorrow's debate should email the Speaker's Office by 8 pm today.

Points of Order

5.58 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is not about the previous matter, and I have given you notice of the point I am about to raise.

As you know, “Erskine May” makes it very clear that any hon. Member visiting another hon. Member’s constituency on official business is required to notify that hon. Member. I know it sometimes sounds like we are being terribly pompous when we try to reassert that convention, but I think it is important that when Ministers in particular are coming to a constituency, they give full and proper notice that they are coming and explain why, not least because we are all friends here and we would all like to invite Ministers to visit our constituencies; we would like to welcome them fully and properly, especially in the Welsh valleys, and show off everything we have to show.

Unfortunately—I have notified the Member that I would raise this today—the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government did not notify me until 6.53 pm the night before his visit to my constituency last week. He did not tell me where in my constituency he was coming to, nor why he was coming or what he was going to look at, so I was not able to offer him tea and Welsh cakes or show him the things that we in the Rhondda would like to show him, so that we can get some money out of the shared prosperity fund. I think this was a gross avoidance of the precise rule that is part of the “Ministerial Code”. I just hope that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, will be able to reinforce the importance of this common courtesy from hon. Member to hon. Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): There is nothing better than home-made Welsh cakes, Mr Bryant—

Chris Bryant: You haven’t eaten mine!

Mr Deputy Speaker: —and there is nothing pompous about the point of order you have raised. Thank you for giving notice of your intention to do so.

The document, “Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons” deals with this exact matter. When a Member visits another Member’s constituency, except on a purely private visit—we all know what that entails—they should take reasonable steps in advance to tell the Member in whose constituency the visit is taking place. That guidance also states that

“failing to do so is regarded by colleagues as very discourteous.”

The guidance applies to Ministers as well as to other Members. Indeed, the “Ministerial Code” also states that

“Ministers intending to make an official visit within the United Kingdom must inform in advance, and in good time, the MPs whose constituencies are to be included within the itinerary.”

I trust that Ministers on the Treasury Bench will make sure that this is brought to their colleagues’ attention, but I should also make it clear that Mr Speaker and I expect all Members—not just Ministers—to inform their colleagues of such visits. Not to do so is discourteous.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice on what parliamentary mechanisms are available to help to secure

an expedited response from the Home Secretary and the Work and Pensions Secretary on an urgent constituency case.

My constituent is a pensioner who has been a British citizen since 1981, yet last week she received a letter from the Government informing her that her state pension will be stopped at the end of this month, and that once stopped it cannot be restarted. It has been, at best, challenging for me and my team to get prompt responses from the Home Office over the past year, including on constituent cases that are urgent and time-sensitive, as this one is. I would welcome any advice you can offer on how to secure a swift response to this instance of maladministration and an apology from the Minister for the distress caused.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Again, I thank the hon. Lady for giving notice of the point of order. Although I do not know the specifics of the case, I can confirm that Ministers should deal with Members’ representations in a timely way, especially in a case that is time-sensitive. I think the Minister on the Treasury Bench will be very busy, because he has heard the point of order and my response. The hon. Lady should receive a reply as soon as possible. The Table Office will advise her if she wishes to pursue this matter.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice about an answer given by the Home Secretary earlier today in the House.

In an answer to me during Home Office questions, the Home Secretary said that data is available for the number of passengers that have arrived in this country from red and amber list countries. However, when looking for these statistics, it appears that the statistics on the Government website are not up to date and, indeed, they are for all arrivals generally, rather than specifically on who arrived from red list countries and who arrived from amber list countries.

This data is critical to our fight against covid, so I seek your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker, on how best I can ascertain where the data is located and on whether there is any way to ensure that the data is made available, given the very firm statement the Home Secretary made on the matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Member for his point of order. While the content of Ministers’ answers to oral questions is a matter not for the Chair, but for the Ministers concerned, I am sure that his point has been heard on the Government Benches again—Mr Davies—and will be relayed to the Secretary of State. If the right hon. Member wishes to proceed with this matter, the Table Office will be able to advise him.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On 26 January in the Chamber I highlighted to the Home Secretary the unsafe conditions at Napier barracks. She replied by telling me to “listen to the facts” and claimed that the barracks were of a “very high standard” and “in line with” public health guidance. Last week, the High Court ruled that the conditions at the barracks were unsafe and unlawful. The judge wrote:

“The ‘bottom line’ is that the arrangements at the Barracks were contrary to the advice of PHE”—

Public Health England. Today, at Home Office questions, I brought this to the Home Secretary's attention, but she accused me of "misrepresentation" without specifying how anything I said was false. I ask for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker, on how to ensure that the record is corrected and that it was the Home Secretary, not me, who misrepresented the facts to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: First, I hope we are not saying that the Home Secretary intentionally misled the House, but I hear what the hon. Lady has had to say about the response that she received. There again, I am not responsible for those comments and I was not in the Chamber when they were made. However, those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Lady's point of order, and if the Home Secretary needs to correct anything that was said in the Chamber, I hope that she will do so as quickly as is possible.

I now suspend the House for three minutes.

6.6 pm

Sitting suspended.

Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill

[Relevant documents: Third Report of the Science and Technology Committee of Session 2019–21, A new UK research funding agency, HC 778, and the Government response, HC 1363, and oral evidence taken before the Science and Technology Committee on 17 March 2021, Session 2019–21, on A new UK research funding agency, HC 778.]

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

"No ARIA resources may be used in any way that would contravene human rights."—(*Stephen Flynn.*)

This new clause is intended to ensure that ARIA is not able to contravene human rights.

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.10 pm

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*ARIA's primary mission: health research and development*—

"(1) The primary mission of ARIA is to support scientific research into human health and the development of new medicines and health technologies.

(2) In carrying out its primary mission under subsection (1), ARIA must prioritise research and development according to the policy objectives of the Department of Health and Social Care."

This new clause would set ARIA's primary mission as supporting health research and development and would make the Department of Health and Social Care the Agency's main client.

New clause 3—*Transition to net-zero carbon emissions*—

"(1) ARIA must be certified carbon-neutral at the end of each financial year.

(2) 25% of ARIA's annual budget must be directed towards scientific research and development that will support the UK's transition to net zero carbon emissions by 2045.

(3) In exercising any of its functions under this Act, ARIA must have regard to the requirement under subsection (1) and the UK's transition to NetZero carbon emissions by 2045."

This new clause requires ARIA to be certified carbon-neutral annually, and to direct 25% of its annual budget to research and development that will assist the UK's transition to net-zero. In carrying out its functions, ARIA must have regard to its carbon-neutrality requirement and the UK's transition to net-zero.

Amendment 1, in clause 2, page 1, line 7, at end insert—

"(A1) ARIA's primary mission will be to support the development of technologies and research that support the UK's transition to net zero carbon emissions or reduce the harmful effects of climate change."

This amendment sets the primary mission for ARIA to support the development of technologies and research that support the UK's transition to net zero carbon emissions or reduce the harmful effects of climate change.

Amendment 2, page 1, line 17, at end insert—

"(2A) Where ARIA provides financial support or makes rights or other property available under subsection (2) to an individual who has a family or business connection to a Minister of HM Government—

- (a) that individual must make a declaration of the connection as part of the application for support or property; and
- (b) the Minister must make an oral statement to the House of Commons within 3 months of the decision being made under subsection (2)."

This amendment would allow for Parliamentary scrutiny of any contracts awarded by ARIA to a person connected to a member of the Government.

Amendment 12, page 1, line 17, at end insert—

"(2A) In exercising its functions, ARIA must have regard to its core mission.

(2B) In this section "core mission" means—

- (a) for the period of ten years after the date on which this Act is passed, undertaking activities which support the achievement of the target established in section 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008,
- (b) thereafter, mission or missions which the Secretary of State establishes by regulations every five years, and
- (c) regulations under this section—
 - (i) shall be made by statutory instrument, and
 - (ii) may not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament."

This amendment would require ARIA to consider its core mission in exercising its functions. For the ten years following the Act passing, that core mission would be supporting the achievement of Net Zero. Thereafter, its mission will be established by statutory instrument subject to the draft affirmative procedure.

Amendment 13, page 2, line 18, at end insert—

"(7) In exercising its functions, ARIA must have regard to its impact across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and each region thereof.

(8) The annual report prepared under paragraph 15 of Schedule 1 must contain—

- (a) the geographical distribution of ARIA's investments over the past year, and
- (b) the economic impact of this investment in each region and nation of the United Kingdom including the number of new jobs created."

This amendment would require ARIA to have regard for the benefits of its activities across the nations and regions of the UK in exercising its functions and includes a reporting function, with Parliamentary oversight, on the impact of those activities in each nation and region of the UK.

Amendment 4, in clause 4, page 2, line 25, at beginning insert—

"Subject to paragraph 3(1B) of Schedule 1,"

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 3.

Amendment 6, page 2, line 25, at beginning insert—

"Subject to paragraph 2(3B) of Schedule 1,"

This amendment is consequential to Amendment 5.

Amendment 9, in clause 6, page 3, line 2, at end insert—

"(2A) ARIA must provide the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee with such information as the Committee may request."

This amendment would require ARIA to share information with the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee when requested.

Amendment 14, on page 3, line 15, at end insert—

"(7) ARIA shall be—

- (a) a public authority within the meaning of section 3 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and Schedule 1 of that Act shall be amended accordingly, and

- (b) a central government authority within the meaning of regulation 2(1) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and Schedule 1 of those Regulations shall be amended accordingly."

This amendment would make ARIA subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

Amendment 10, in clause 8, page 3, line 26, leave out ", and" and insert—

"(ab) the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, and"

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to consult the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee before dissolving ARIA.

Amendment 5, in schedule 1, page 6, line 22, at end insert—

"(3A) The Secretary of State may not appoint a person as chair unless the appointment of that person has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(3B) ARIA may not exercise any functions under this or any other Act, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA under section 4 of this Act, until its first chair has been appointed."

This amendment requires both Houses of Parliament, under the affirmative resolution procedure, to approve the name of the proposed Chair. ARIA may not exercise any functions, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA until its first chair has been appointed.

Amendment 3, page 6, line 26, at end insert—

"(1A) The Secretary of State may not appoint a person as Chief Executive Officer unless the appointment of the person has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(1B) ARIA may not exercise any functions under this or any other Act, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA under section 4 of this Act, until its first Chief Executive Officer has been appointed."

This amendment requires both Houses of Parliament, under the affirmative resolution procedure, to approve the name of the proposed Chief Executive Officer. ARIA may not exercise any functions, nor may the Secretary of State make any grants to ARIA until its first Chief Executive Officer has been appointed.

Amendment 11, page 7, line 1, at end insert—

"(6) The Secretary of State may not make executive or non-executive appointments to ARIA, nor determine the remuneration of appointees, without approval by resolution of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee."

This amendment would require the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee to approve the Secretary of State's nominated executive and non-executive members, as well as their remuneration.

Amendment 7, in schedule 3, page 13, leave out paragraph 11.

This amendment would remove ARIA's exemption from the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Amendment 8, on page 14, at end insert—

"(12) In Part VI of Schedule 1 to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("Other public bodies and offices: general"), at the appropriate place insert 'The Advanced Research and Invention Agency'."

This amendment would make ARIA subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Before I call Stephen Flynn, I must point out that there has been quite a significant number of withdrawals from this debate, for obvious reasons. Should anyone else wish to withdraw, will they please do so through the Speaker's Office so that we can be notified? Also, anybody who is working off the call list and thinks that they are, say, five off, will need to think again. Anyone intending to participate in the debate physically really should make their way to the Chamber.

Stephen Flynn: I cannot imagine why so many people have withdrawn, given the exciting topic that we are going to discuss here this evening. I will speak to amendment 1 and in favour of all the following amendments and new clauses in the name of myself and my honourable colleagues. Of course, the context for what we are about to debate has changed markedly from this morning and, indeed, much of the last week. For the avoidance of any doubt, my colleagues and I were very much in favour of new clause 4, and while the Government may have not been defeated today, their card has certainly been marked.

To the matter at hand, which is of course the Advanced Research and Invention Agency. Much of what I seek to say will repay repetition. Many of the points were covered on Second Reading and in Committee, but I feel it is important that we cover them again, because, despite the concerns that we have expressed on these Benches and that have been echoed by the official Opposition, the Government have not sought at any stage to amend the Bill up until this juncture. That is something of a missed opportunity. The reality is that across the Chamber, nobody is criticising the ethos of the Bill or the aim of the Bill to try to improve the UK's standing in relation to this specific topic, but we feel that the Government can and should be going further.

The first matter on which that is fairly obvious is the lack of a mission, a purpose, a *raison d'être* for the Bill. There is no clear mission for ARIA as it stands, despite much to-ing and fro-ing on this topic. The Government have been clear on their reasoning as to why they do not want that to be the case, but I find it extremely regrettable, when we know there is a climate emergency—hopefully everyone across the Chamber is in agreement on that—that the Government still refuse to make the climate emergency a core purpose of ARIA to ensure that meeting our net zero targets is the aim of this agency.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): On a point of clarification, could the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether there is no mission for ARIA, or is it just that ARIA does not have the mission he has just outlined?

Stephen Flynn: That is an interesting point. I believe it is regrettable that there is no set mission. The mission should be to combat climate change and to meet our net zero targets.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As the hon. Gentleman knows, we had these exchanges in the Bill Committee. It is not so much that ARIA had not got a mission; its mission is to discover areas of research that could be high risk but deliver high rewards, but we do not know what those will be. That is its mission, and tying it to specifics such as health research or climate change, although they are very important, could hamper its ability to find that cutting-edge science and make the most of it.

Stephen Flynn: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, and I am loth to repeat what I said in Committee. I certainly will not mention any of the “Star Trek” references that he made in relation to that specific point. The reality is that we have seen, with the likes of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, how successful things can be when there is a

specific mission. I accept that we disagree, and disagree on good terms, in relation to that point, but I re-emphasise that this is a missed opportunity for the Government.

6.15 pm

Richard Fuller: I was not on the Committee, but there is a fundamental point here. I recall from the debate on Second Reading that the objective of ARPA is to think beyond what is normally thought about. The issue about the climate emergency is that we know it is a problem. We know that there are multiple solutions in multiple areas, which people are already working on. We also know that there is tremendous commercial interest, from the point of view of people investing in relation to the climate emergency and companies that are trying to sell products in that area. To what extent does the objective that the hon. Gentleman proposes fit that “beyond beyond” mission that I thought was the original purpose of ARPA?

Stephen Flynn: I think it absolutely fits that point. Of course, there could be new solutions that we are not aware of at this moment. On Second Reading, the hon. Member made a similar point, and I said that he should not be so narrow in his view of climate change because to meet net zero we need to operate in a vast landscape. The Government do not seem to be acknowledging that through ARIA. To repeat myself, I believe that that is a missed opportunity.

The Government will point to their energy White Paper and point to the 10-point plan, and perhaps they will point to the North sea transition deal in terms of their aims in relation to combating climate change. That is fair and reasonable, but—notwithstanding the arguments we might have on those points, of which there are many—it does not mean that we stop there, particularly in the year of COP26. I urge Government Members to reflect on that as we move forward in the debate.

That covers amendment 1, which we hope to press later, but we have tabled other amendments. Perhaps the clearest, and the one that needs to be debated in this Chamber, notwithstanding what I have already said, relates to scrutiny—the fact that the Government have sought to put ARIA outwith the Freedom of Information Act 2000. It is no longer going to be applicable to public procurement regulations. That is simply unacceptable and there is no justification for it.

I listened closely to what the Minister had to say in that regard in Committee and on Second Reading, and I have read on numerous occasions remarks made in relation to that point by those on the Government Benches, yet I simply do not understand the logic of why they are doing this. From looking at DARPA, we know that there are 40-odd freedom of information requests—40-odd for DARPA, which is on a scale vastly superior to that of ARIA—yet the Government still seek to move away from that scrutiny. From a public perspective, that does no one any favours. I am sure that, if the Government had their time back, they might do things differently, because ultimately this benefits nobody. All it does is create more clouds of suspicion around what the Government's activities are.

That ties in with our amendment 2, which relates to cronyism and the need to avoid it. The Government's record and reputation over the last year and a half have been deplorable. The hon. Member for North East

[Stephen Flynn]

Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) shakes his head, but that is the reality. There is a reason that his Prime Minister is so disliked and distrusted in Scotland: it is what we have seen over the pandemic—not just from the Prime Minister himself, but from his Ministers and friends, the donors, and the family members who have benefited from contracts. What we do not want to see—what we cannot see—is ARIA becoming a vehicle for that to happen. Our amendment would clearly stop that.

On FOI and procurement regulations, the Labour party has said something similar to us, just with a lot more words. It is within the Labour party's gift to do so, although I am not quite sure why it did not just agree with us. It can do so on occasion; we will not take it personally.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for his kind words. Of course, the SNP amendments were simply agreeing with Labour's amendments during Committee. We sought to improve—as we should do—from Committee to Report.

Stephen Flynn: If I heard that correctly, the Labour party is not agreeing with the amendments that it tabled in Committee and that the SNP has agreed to at this point in time, so it had to add more words. But I suppose that is the nature of this place.

That takes me to transparency and scrutiny, and a key token and standpoint of those on the Government Benches: to take back control. I do not suspect that they will agree to the SNP's view on a mission for ARIA. That being the case, the mission—to all intents and purposes, what ARIA seeks to do—will be determined by the chair and chief executive officer. They will decide what happens. In that regard, the House will, of course, have no say and we suggest that the House should have a say. It is important that this place has a role to play in the process. I would be incredibly surprised if Members who fought so hard to take back control did not seek to have their say on such matters.

Stephen Metcalfe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Flynn: Och, why not?

Stephen Metcalfe: Why not? I am grateful to him. If we had too much influence over the agency, we could breach the Haldane principle, which I am sure he holds close to his heart, as do I.

Stephen Flynn: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, but we will have to heartedly disagree on this point. The House, and we as democratically elected representatives, should seek to play as key and active a role as possible. Of course, all this could be avoided by the Government simply agreeing on what ARIA's mission should be in the first place.

Our new clause 1, on human rights, would ensure that ARIA's record in that regard is of the highest standing. I certainly hope Members across the Chamber would agree to that. If they did not, I would be somewhat concerned. We saw that in Committee, which took me a bit by surprise, but perhaps some of the Government's Back Benchers were not galvanised enough to encourage the Government to take a different stand. The SNP tabled the new clause because ultimately we do not

know where ARIA will seek to put its investments. We do not know what it will seek to invest in, where it may even take a share in an organisation. It will have the freedom to do that, but that freedom means it may delve into areas we find unsuitable in relation to human rights. That is particularly pertinent when we look at the situation in China with the Uyghurs. I encourage Members on the Government Benches to take cognisance of that fact this evening.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention the role of Scotland in relation to the Bill, because I very much like talking about that. The reality is that, where the Government are seeking to spend money, that Government money should be spent fairly and evenly across the United Kingdom—that is, while we still remain a part of the United Kingdom. To that end, there should be a Barnett share of money spent on Scotland. Where that money is spent, it should not seek to bypass devolution, as the Government seek to do in a number of areas, from the shared prosperity fund to the levelling-up fund and the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. Scotland should have its fair share.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): May I reiterate again that anybody who wishes to withdraw from the debate—we have had 35 people withdraw already—should please do so through the Speaker's Office? If you are on the call list, please do not assume that the people above you have not withdrawn. The chances are that they have.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether your reiteration just before I stood up to speak, that you hope that anybody who wants to withdraw will do so, was a hint. When I put in to speak in the debate, I had intended to speak on a new clause that has not been selected, but after looking at the other amendments and new clauses, there is one aspect that I want to speak on briefly.

I apologise to those Members of the House who were on the Committee, because I can see that there was quite an exchange on these matters in Committee, but I want to pick up on an issue that was raised by the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), who talked about the need for a mission and, in a sense, to restrict this organisation's mission. He spoke particularly about climate change, which I know is a key issue. I was the Prime Minister who put the 2050 net zero emissions target into legislation, and the UK can be very proud of having been the first major country to do that.

An enormous amount of work needs to be done to ensure that we can take the decisions individually, as businesses and as a Government that will lead to net zero. Part of that will be about research, but as my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) said, there are enormous numbers of people out there doing research and companies looking for products to sell that will help to get us to that position. It seems to me that we should not restrict the mission of ARIA. It is important to give this organisation the freedom to look widely. I say that not just in a blue skies thinking way, but also because I had some interaction with the American equivalent of ARIA, on which ARIA is based, when I was Home Secretary because it was doing some really interesting research and innovative work on issues of security.

In evidence to the Committee, Professor Bond suggested that ARIA should be about

“radical innovation, which is different from grand missions and grand challenges.”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 20, Q16.]

That reference to “grand challenges” was, I am sure, a reference to the modern industrial strategy, sadly now cast aside, which set out grand challenges but also set out the aim for the UK to be the most innovative economy, and ARIA can have a real impact in that area.

The challenge for ARIA is that it needs to be truly innovative, it needs to have blue skies thinking and it needs to be doing what other people are not doing, but it has to have a purpose in doing that. What I hope we will not see is an organisation where lots of scientists and people get together, think lots of wild thoughts, enjoy talking about them and possibly publish a few papers, but at the end of the day, there is no practical difference to people’s lives as a result of that. The aim of this is to do that innovative thinking but, in due course, for that innovative thinking—whether it is taken up by other scientists, business or whoever—to lead to a real improvement in people’s lives.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I agree with the line that the right hon. Lady is taking, but she is missing out one really important factor in achieving the desirable objectives she has listed, which is that ARIA must be prepared to fail on a number of occasions and take high risks. Does she agree with that?

Mrs May: I do agree with that. Indeed, at the risk of scratching a sore for the Government, I would add that the modern industrial strategy made the point that, in terms of Government support for different areas of research and development, we must be willing to see some fail, because we cannot possibly know from the beginning everything that will be a success. That is important, but of course, I hope that ARIA will not be an organisation for which everything fails. It has to be prepared to have some failures, but obviously what we want to see is some really positive work coming out of this that can be of real benefit.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I absolutely agree with the right hon. Lady about wanting to see ARIA be successful. She talked about scientists sitting around, having a chat and producing some papers but having no real impact. Does she agree that, given the way in which ARIA is currently set up, without any freedom of information requests being allowable, that could be the reality?

Mrs May: No, I do not agree that there is a natural causal relationship between the two. We will see whether ARIA is successful by what actually comes out, because at some point these ideas will come out. I recognise that there are issues for scientists who are really treading new ground, to ensure that they are able to do so with freedom—without that ability being taken away by others. That will be important for this organisation.

It is exciting that this agency is being set up. With the right people, it can do really good things, but it should not be restricted to a particular area of mission. When it does that blue skies thinking, we should ensure that the aim—the reason that the Government are setting it

up—is to improve people’s lives in this country. That is what we all want to do and it is what the organisation should be about.

6.30 pm

Chi Onwurah: It is a pleasure and honour to follow the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I am certain that the current Conservative Government could benefit enormously from her championing and promotion of an industrial strategy, and I hope that they are listening.

I thank all those who worked so hard to improve this Bill in Committee, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), as well as the Clerks and House of Commons staff for their excellent support.

It is vital that we get the Advanced Research and Invention Agency right. Today we will hear many Members—although not as many as we had thought—raise a wide range of important issues such as climate change, regional and national economic development, international development and democratic accountability, but at the heart of this debate is science, which now plays such a critical part in all our lives.

The UK has a proud tradition in science, engineering, innovation, research and development. We are renowned across the world for scientific breakthroughs and discoveries that pushed humanity forwards. From the discovery of penicillin to the invention of Stephenson’s Rocket in my constituency of Newcastle upon Tyne Central, again and again UK scientists pushed forward the boundaries of knowledge, shrinking the vast expanse of ignorance, which, as this pandemic has shown, may threaten humanity’s very existence.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend refers to some of that world-beating research. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS. There has been a great degree of concern among some of our global health all-party groups about the cuts that were and are coming to global health research. I totally support the amendments that we have tabled on climate change; there is also a critical link between climate change and global health. Does my hon. Friend agree that we absolutely need to continue that world-beating research, because it has so many benefits for health not just globally, but in this country too?

Chi Onwurah: I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend’s all-party parliamentary group, with which I am quite familiar. I wholeheartedly agree with him about the importance of that research, and about the link between that important research and this agency. I will develop that point further in a few moments.

As hon. Members have indicated, UK science is not only inspiring; it can also be groundbreaking and is a key economic driver. Our university research base alone contributes £95 billion to the economy, supporting nearly 1 million jobs in scientific institutes, charities and businesses of all sizes. Research by Oxford Economics commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy found that each £1 of public research and

[Chi Onwurah]

development—such as the money to be spent on ARIA—stimulates between £1.96 and £2.34 of private research and development, and we cannot recover from the pandemic without inspiring and initiating more private sector investment in research and development. Together, private and public sector research can help to address the key challenges facing humanity—from climate change to inequality, from pandemics to productivity.

That brings us very neatly to the broken promises of this Conservative Government on overseas development aid, as raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), and how that betrays the poorest among us and the critical challenges faced by us all. With over £4.1 billion slashed from overseas development aid, the £120 million cut from science and research programmes may appear minor, but that has already had a devastating impact on science here and abroad. Cutting funding from global challenges research fund hubs, for example, threatens researchers at Newcastle University in my constituency, as well as scientists in developing countries working together on water security. These cuts are a consequence of the Government's decision to scrap the legally binding 0.7% of GDP target for overseas development aid.

New clause 4 tabled by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), which sought to reverse that decision, has not been selected for debate, though a debate on the issue may follow; certainly, the debate is not going away. Particularly in relation to ARIA and the amendments before us, it is really important to emphasise that for UK science, research and credibility, these cuts have a significant impact. The UK has been the only G7 country to cut aid in the middle of a pandemic, and in so doing it has united hon. and right hon. Members across this House who are horrified by the harm done—harm such as, in the world's worst humanitarian crisis, in Yemen, slashing aid by 60% without conducting an impact assessment, and harm such as cutting bilateral funding on water, sanitation and hygiene—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I would like the hon. Lady to return to the Bill.

Chi Onwurah: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, because that is exactly the point to which I am going—to the amendments. Just to say that the funding for coronavirus research, which is the kind of world-beating or leading research that we would hope ARIA will be looking at, has been cut by 70%, which will kill the project. A Government happy to withdraw support for vital research projects across the globe are not a Government who wish to act in the best interests of science, the country or the world.

On ARIA itself, we have many serious concerns. We recognise the need for new mechanisms to support high-risk, high-reward research in our science sector, and as such ARIA is a step in the right direction. ARIA can transform our scientific landscape and we can build an institution that furthers our societal aims for decades to come, but we have concerns, which our amendments seek to address, about the lack of direction, strategy and accountability in the Government's current proposals.

Without such improvements, we fear that the agency could be used to pursue vanity projects disconnected from the public interest.

The first major issue with the Bill is the absence of a mission for ARIA, which has already been raised. What is ARIA for and what is it working towards? Labour's amendment 12 would require ARIA to have a specific mission for ARIA's first decade, and we want that mission to be climate change.

Richard Fuller: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for reverting to items that are in order today. On amendment 12, she mentioned that that should be the "core mission". The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) talked about its being part of a bigger whole, but it is still a relatively small amount of money. Does the amendment mean that that is the only mission? Essentially, when she says "core mission", what she means is the only mission and the agency cannot do anything else other than that for 10 years.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the hon. Gentleman for seeking to aid Madam Deputy Speaker in determining what is in order. I am not sure whether that was necessary.

On the hon. Gentleman's intervention, I fail to see why he thinks that pedantry can make up for a lack of argument. Climate change is a core mission. We are not seeking to hem in the agency with absolute linguistic barriers for what exactly should be done, but we want it to have a direction. We want to know where it is going and what it is seeking to do. The core mission, as I intend to set out in detail, will be climate change. I do not intend to limit its interpretation of climate change, but I will set out the reasons why climate change will be its core mission.

Stephen Metcalfe: As the hon. Lady will recall, we had similar debates in Committee. Does she completely dismiss the idea that the mission is to find cutting-edge science, to explore it, and to go where no other agency is willing to go at the moment, because they will have to follow too many metrics to prove their effectiveness? That is its mission. This agency does not have to have a mission beyond trying to find something exciting, new and potentially really beneficial to mankind.

Chi Onwurah: I have a huge amount of respect for the hon. Gentleman, but I fundamentally disagree with him on this issue. To go where no one has gone before is not a mission or a direction; it is a deliberate absence of direction. I spoke earlier about the vast expanse of ignorance that can present us with huge, existential challenges. The history of science has been about trying to reduce that huge expanse of ignorance, and for us to leave ARIA without any mission or direction in addressing that vast expanse of ignorance that is before us will severely limit its likelihood of success. That, together with other aspects of the Bill with regard to accountability and transparency, leave it open to cronyism as well as other issues.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): The hon. Lady talked about lessons learned from the pandemic. May I ask her to think about the fact that we were prepared for a flu pandemic but not a coronavirus pandemic? By stating that we have to have a core aim or principle for the ARIA Bill, is she not heading for the same problem? She says that this agency must be focused on environmental

matters, but if something else were to come along of equal importance, would we not have limited ARIA already?

Chi Onwurah: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention, which gives me the opportunity to clarify again that the difference between a flu virus and a coronavirus virus may be significant in medical terms, but it is not what we are talking about. We are talking about climate change—the existential challenge. We are not saying that it should be one part of climate change. To say that it is like preparing for one virus as against another virus is not an equivalent comparison. This is a much vaster challenge. Indeed, I think that she answered her own question. If something more important than climate change comes along in the next 10 years, with climate change being the existential challenge of our times, we would have significant issues to face as a Parliament. If she can think of something more important than climate change coming along in the next 10 years, would she like to intervene on me and suggest what that might be?

Dawn Butler: The UK Government have set the most ambitious climate change target, which is to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035. Would it not be ridiculous if ARIA were to pursue something that undid that good work?

Chi Onwurah: Absolutely. As my hon. Friend says, the UK has set the most ambitious climate change target, but the Committee on Climate Change has said that the Government are currently on course to miss their manifesto commitment of achieving net zero by 2050. Amendment 12 aims to support the Government in that mission.

I now wish to make some significant progress in my comments, so I will not take any more interventions for a while. The lack of mission is a concern shared by many. The renowned economist Mariana Mazzucato suggested during the evidence sessions that achieving net zero should be ARIA's mission. The Secretary of State said that ARIA needs a "laser-like focus", but failed to provide it. The Institute of Physics said that a clear mission is "essential", and the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), raised concerns about ARIA's lack of focus and purpose. The president of the Royal Society said that

"£800 million is not a large sum of money, so if we have a plethora of missions, then I think we will go wrong. ARIA has to have focus of mission and a commitment to the model over the long-term".—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 63, Q62.]

6.45 pm

Finally on amendment 12, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) said, we are at a critical moment for our planet and for our country in respect of climate change. We should be leading by example, bringing forward a comprehensive, fair and credible plan, with the policies and investment to deliver on our legally binding targets. Science can play a central role in solving the problems presented by the climate emergency and develop solutions to accelerate the UK's progress towards net zero. We can harness the UK's science and research to address this great challenge. This is an opportunity for the Government to establish a mission-led

funding agency that can benefit us all, but with no mission and the whole realm of science to choose from, the risk is that ARIA will be directionless, provide no societal return for taxpayer investment or be prey to vanity projects.

Labour's amendment 13 addresses another hole in the Bill. During and since the general election, there has been significant discussion about the importance of ensuring that our whole country benefits from economic prosperity and from the transformational impact of science and research. This amendment presents the Government with the opportunity to take their so-called levelling-up agenda beyond warm words and bungs to Conservative MPs, and set the foundations for long-term regional prosperity.

ARIA's funding is between 1% and 2% of the UK's science spend, yet it is expected—indeed, required—to have a transformational impact on all our lives. If that impact is going to be transformational, surely it should be equitable—or is ARIA to make us yet more unequal as a nation? The current economic inequalities between nations and regions are certainly exacerbated by regional imbalances in research and development spend. Last year, the innovation foundation Nesta calculated that it would require £4 billion each year to bring per capita spending on science in the north-east, Yorkshire, Wales, Northern Ireland and the north-west up to the level of that seen in the south-east, east and London, and that equalising spending across nations and regions in this way would leverage a further £8 billion from the private sector.

So we have a £12 billion deficit in science spend for our nations and regions, yet the Bill does not take any action to stop ARIA making the same mistakes. In fact, there is not even a desire to measure spend across our regions and nations. No wonder Nesta characterises the Government's public R&D spend as

"currently acting as an anti-regional policy".

We believe that science and research can be the engines of progress for our society, but that needs to be for and by everyone, not just for the few. Amendment 13 simply requires reporting so that the Government can measure the impact that ARIA is having on the very important desire to reduce the regional inequalities in our country. Currently, the Bill does not even mention devolved nations and does not outline any reflection of the geographical realities of the UK.

Amendment 14 would make ARIA subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. We want to deliver greater oversight of ARIA and greater accountability for the Government in order to increase public confidence, particularly at a time when the Government are in the midst of multiple cronyism scandals.

ARIA's current blanket exemption from the Freedom of Information Act and the public contracts regulations cannot be justified. Some £800 million of public money will be spent by ARIA. We have heard that ARIA needs to fail, but without transparency and accountability, the public will not have confidence in what it is doing or the reasons for those failures, and we believe that ARIA would provide the Government with a side-door to sleaze in science. I therefore hope that the Minister can explain what is the appropriate oversight for procurement of research if she is intending to exempt ARIA from

existing procurement regulations. We have heard that DARPA is subject to FOI requests, and the Campaign for Freedom of Information has said that ARIA

“will spend hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ money on high risk projects but the government apparently wants it to be less accountable to the public than parish councils—which are subject to FOI.”

The Government have a track record of cronyism, and accepting our amendment would help them to change course.

To bring my contribution to a close, I want to make it clear that Labour wants ARIA to be a success and that we support its creation. We believe that science is an engine of progress and that ARIA can accelerate that progress, but we also believe that the Bill in its current form does not provide the optimal conditions for ARIA to work. Without our key amendments, the agency risks losing its way, so I hope they will receive support on both sides of the House. These are not partisan issues; these are issues rooted in an unwavering belief in science and democracy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

Although a number of people have withdrawn from this debate, there are still a fair number of speakers. That means that if everybody takes about six minutes, we will be able to get everybody in. We need to think of each other in conducting the debate. Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 on the call list have withdrawn, so we now go to Layla Moran.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) [V]: As a physics graduate and the MP for Oxford West and Abingdon—a constituency proudly at the heart of this country’s scientific innovation—I welcome much of what ARIA hopes to achieve. Time and again, the lack of funding for genuinely high-risk, high-reward science is a common refrain in conversations I have with scientists I meet, so on the face of it ARIA is a good idea.

Nevertheless, the Liberal Democrats have concerns about the Bill, and I will quickly raise just two. First, we are very concerned about the Secretary of State’s unchecked powers to choose who leads this highly independent agency. On top of that, it was recently revealed that the Government’s intention is to exempt ARIA from freedom of information legislation. Transparency is at the core of good science, as it should be for good politics. If we want this organisation to succeed, the public should have faith in how taxpayers’ money is spent. That is why the Liberal Democrats have proposed a strong accountability mechanism in amendment 11, which would give the Science and Technology Committee the power to approve nominees for the position of chair and chief executive officer.

Secondly, it is beyond disappointing that the Government have failed to use ARIA’s potential to tackle the climate emergency. New clause 3 would therefore ensure that ARIA’s research did not lead to any increase in the UK’s carbon emissions. Moreover, a quarter of ARIA’s annual budget would be directed specifically to the development of green technologies.

In conclusion, transparency and the climate emergency are two of the very many important aspects that are missing from this Bill—ones that we seek to fix. This new agency has great potential. Let us not mess it up now.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): No. 10 on the speakers’ list has withdrawn. No. 11 is not here and Nos. 12 and 13 have withdrawn, so I call Richard Fuller.

Richard Fuller: It is a surprise to be called so early, but it is nevertheless welcome. I was not on the Public Bill Committee, which I know will have been a sadness for all its members, but for me it was of particular sadness because for the future of our country and most other countries, the way in which we nurture and promote innovation is crucial. Although this is a small Bill that generally has wide support across the House, it is rather important that we get it right. It is therefore important that today we debate some of the issues on which the Committee was not able to reach a full conclusion.

Innovation is crucial for our success, and I hope that the Minister and the Department will move on from the fact that we have innovation to look at ways in which we can promote the implementation of innovation, particularly through the removal of barriers and the promotion of competition, so that we can see the fruits of this investment in tangible economic and social success for our country.

Looking through the amendments, I would group them into three areas that it seems were not fully resolved in Committee: first, the extent of oversight; secondly, the issue of purpose or mission; and, thirdly, appointments. On oversight, although each of the proposed steps might be worthy, each of them is also an impediment. If there is one driving value that I hope we have for the Bill at this stage, it is to have the courage to enable this new and additional form of innovation investing to have the freedom to grow and do what it wishes to do.

If, at some point in the future, we find that the programme has gone off the rails somewhat and gone beyond what we know, it would perhaps then be useful for us to put more bureaucratic layers on top of it, but we certainly should not do so from the outset. If we do that from the outset, essentially we are killing the idea in its entirety. It is so easy for us here to say, “We really believe in this, but we would like this or that.” It is quite natural, as protectors of taxpayers’ money—that used to be a role of this House, but sadly it is one that has been lacking for about 40 years—that we want to take that responsibility seriously and to be thorough, but with this Bill we have to accept that if we are going to take that step, we have to put trust in this group. I would be interested to hear what other Members, particularly the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) with his long experience, have to say about whether this is the right step. I will come back to that point later in respect of appointments.

On the issue of purpose, the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah)—I know she has a strong and real passion for science, and I have listened to her speak up for science over a number of years, so I know her intention is right—has tabled an amendment saying that the core mission should be about the climate change goals. The SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), who opened the debate, similarly said that we should focus on the environment.

It is important to ask what impact it would have if we made the environment the focus. We currently have \$30 trillion-worth of environmental, social and governance assets in the world. The Bill is proposing to add a flow

of approximately \$1 billion a year, or 1 in 30,000 of the assets that are already there. In terms of where moneys are flowing, this year's flow of ESG in the private sector is about \$130 billion to \$140 billion. If we were to make the environment the core mission, we would essentially be tossing £800 million on top of an enormous pile of assets that is already there and an enormous additional inflow this year that is already happening. By its very nature, we would be doing the thing that we are not supposed to be asking ARIA to do, which essentially is to do what everybody else is doing. The whole purpose of ARIA is to do those things that other people are not doing. I feel that it is a mistake to say, "This is a really important mission—aren't you terrible for not saying that we should focus on it?", rather than "There are other missions—there is a bigger mission out there that perhaps we as politicians do not have the insight to understand." That is the whole purpose of setting up ARIA, because with our bureaucratic fingers and our tiny political minds we just are not able to think of those things. It is worth our while considering that, so I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) that it should not have a mission. The whole purpose of ARIA is to do those things that other people are not doing. I feel that it is a mistake to say, "This is a really important mission—aren't you terrible for not saying that we should focus on it?", rather than "There are other missions—there is a bigger mission out there that perhaps we as politicians do not have the insight to understand." That is the whole purpose of setting up ARIA, because with our bureaucratic fingers and our tiny political minds we just are not able to think of those things. It is worth our while considering that, so I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) that it should not have a mission.

7 pm

The Opposition spokesperson, whom I count as a friend, noted that the Secretary of State had said that ARIA should have a "laser-like focus"; she said that he had failed to provide it. She saw that as a criticism, but I think it is exactly the point. It is not for the Secretary of State to tell ARIA, "This is what you shall do." We have lots of other things that do that; we have the UKRI and we have the remnants of an industrial strategy that, whether we like it or not, is still shaping a lot of what the Government are doing. I therefore ask Opposition Members who say that ARIA should have a mission whether they really believe in an ARIA that is different, or whether they want ARIA to be something over which they can continue to put the same sort of controls that they have put over other aspects of UKRI and other funding.

I look forward to listening to other Members, particularly the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton, who has more experience than me in these matters.

Graham Stringer: I generally agree with the comments of the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller). Before I get on to the core of the Bill, I would like to pick up on two or three points from the debate.

The hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), with whom and under whose chairmanship I am happy to have served on the Science and Technology Committee, will not be surprised to

hear me not quibble but disagree with his interpretation of the Haldane principle, which we have talked about many times. The Haldane principle does not—and never did, from when Haldane proposed it at the end of the first world war—prohibit politicians from saying that we should prioritise health over defence, defence over transport, or anything over anything else. It is to stop politicians interfering in the detailed technical decision of who the best person is to do that research. When we get on to the core mission of ARIA, I would want politicians to do some of that, but not all.

Unfortunately, the SNP representative, the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), is no longer in his place, but it was absolutely extraordinary that he prayed the Barnett formula in aid of regional levelling up. I used to travel on the train from Manchester to London almost every week with Joel Barnett, who regretted the Barnett formula almost more than anything else he had done in his political career. Without getting into a debate, let me say that he understood that it meant people in Glasgow got more public subsidy or support than people in Manchester or Birmingham in very similar situations.

Finally, I would make a point about priorities. Hon. Members have talked about climate change being the top priority; politicians are notorious for having lots and lots of top priorities, but as far as I have noticed, the top priority over the past 15 months has been dealing with covid and the coronavirus. Incidentally, after 25 conferences of the parties, the only thing that has had any impact on the steady increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been covid: the response to covid has reduced carbon dioxide for the first time since people started talking about it, essentially.

Let me move on to the core issue of ARIA and the points that have been made about it. Now that new clause 4 has been taken off the agenda, the debate is much less controversial than it otherwise would have been, but that does not mean that it is not difficult. As the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire said, we may not need a mission statement. I go some way along that path with him, having looked at the practical evidence from what happened with ARPA and DARPA in the United States. They were given—certainly at the start of the process when the Americans got frightened when the Sputnik satellite went up—almost complete freedom and a lot of money, and that led to the development of part of the internet. Some of the messenger RNA work that has led to the vaccines we have now came out of the ARPA process, as did drones and many other things. That was not because people were given a mission statement that said, "Develop messenger RNA"; it was because they were looking for problems to solve and to make the United States a more secure society, so they had the most general statements.

What UKRI has done is excellent in many ways, but it has lots of accountability systems. The person who put forward the original idea for doing work on quantum computers stated in evidence to the Committee that he would not get through the process now. Lots of questions are asked, some of them ridiculous. Several Science and Technology Committees ago, Professor Brian Cox came along and we talked about impact assessments whereby every research project has to state how much impact it will have on society. He said, "I have no idea how to answer that question and nor do my colleagues."

[Graham Stringer]

The normal metrics are about citations and numbers of papers. Even when I was a scientist, a long time ago, I used to see chemists churning out papers, sometimes on ridiculous things or with only slight variations just so that they could say, “We got our 10 papers this year.” That is not really a good way to do science. Compared with the complete freedom process, there is a rather bureaucratic system that is delivering good science—we win Nobel prizes in this country—but is not pushing back the frontiers of science as quickly as we might like. Having an organisation with a great deal of freedom is very important.

I differ slightly from the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire on one point, as did the Science and Technology Committee in two recommendations in the report that we produced in February, both of which effectively said that there should be a client side to the organisation. The reason for having a client side is not to stifle innovation. Having a client is useful, not in telling scientists what to look for or stopping them looking for completely new things, but in situations where they develop something. One of the problems with all the different ARPA in the United States is that they find it difficult to get product to market because they do not have a client, whereas DARPA, which has the Department of Defence as a client, can take many of the innovations and inventions and develop them straight away. So there is another side to the total freedom approach.

I suppose that most politicians want the best of all possible worlds, so the ARIA I would like would, as in my new clause 2, have the Department of Health as a client Department. It could be something else, but I think that what we have been through over the past 15 months means that health almost speaks for itself. It should also have freedom to find problems that nobody else has thought of—that nobody in this House has thought of and many scientists will not have thought of. When Dominic Cummings came to the Science and Technology Committee, in less controversial terms than his last visit to the Joint Committee session, we talked in detail about how the science develops and we heard something really interesting that I suspect is true. Finding somebody who can chair a body such as this is more difficult than finding Nobel prize winners or people who are likely to win Fields medals. That is what will make this organisation successful or not—somebody who is bright or clever enough to understand questions that have not been asked before. Will that lead to cronyism? When we asked the current chair of UKRI, she was clear that very few people in this world could do this job, and we could probably sit down and write their names. Am I worried about cronyism? No. I am worried about not getting the right person.

Does anybody ever think about what networking means? At the top of science, the best scientists, and the people who get the grants and funding, are basically the great and the good and the really well networked. If Einstein cannot get a job in science and works in a patent office, or whatever the 21st-century equivalent would be, they cannot get into cronyism because those elites in our top universities, which are excellent, swallow up all the funding, and in many cases exclude the young and the brightest scientists. I am not worried about cronyism; I am worried about this body not getting the freedom it should get.

Under schedule 2, the Secretary of State basically keeps control. What makes the Bill difficult is that all politicians who vote to raise taxes want to control public money. That is in our nature. It is right, part of the democratic process—no taxation without representation—and a fundamental issue in a democratic society. To say, “Go off with £800 million and do your own thing” is difficult, but evidence from the States suggests that that is the best way to push forward the frontiers of science. My worry about the Bill is that there is too much control, not too little, and it might stifle initiative.

Finally, on initiatives, when the vaccine taskforce was set up we invited it to the Science and Technology Committee. I was not impressed that somebody was appointed without proper process, but the woman did an extraordinarily good job and she is now getting honoured. Sometimes in an emergency risks were taken—it worked a lot less well with the test and trace system. Sometimes we have to take risks. If we understand the way that scientific advances have been pushed forward, freedom as opposed to bureaucracy tends to work.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I served on the Bill Committee, and I tabled various amendments at that stage, a number of which we have carried forward to Report. I was interested in a number of things that were said. On the supposed mission and purpose of ARIA, the Bill says only:

“In exercising its functions, ARIA must have regard to the desirability of doing so for the benefit of the United Kingdom, through...economic growth...scientific innovation...or improving the quality of life”,

and that it must

“have regard to the desirability of doing so for the benefit of the United Kingdom.”

It does not even have to do things for the benefit of the United Kingdom; that is not written in the Bill.

The former Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), spoke about high risk and high reward. I understand where he is coming from, but I do not know what that reward means or looks like. The reward is not identified in any way. I am happy for there to be a high reward, but I would like some idea of what that is supposed to be, so that we can measure whether it is successful.

Stephen Metcalfe: If I am honest, I do not know the answer to that question. The reward might be the next internet, GPS or, as we heard from the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), mRNA technology; we do not know. But what we do know is that if we give scientists the ability to explore an area, to fail and to report back, some of those things will stick, and some of them could become massive new industries of the future. The challenge—I accept this—is to keep those industries and that technology here in the UK, spread all over the country, to the benefit of us all.

7.15 pm

Kirsty Blackman: And what we are doing is just what the hon. Gentleman suggests: pointing scientists in a direction, saying, “Please could you do something about climate change? Please could you do something about our commitment and our journey to net zero?” and then letting them go. It is not about restricting them.

One of the things that has bothered me throughout is that most people seem to think that all this agency will do is invent widgets. Science is not all about making things. One of the biggest things that we need to do to tackle climate change is to convince every single person to change the way they live so that we can reach our targets. We will not be able to do that without scientific research into how people work and what changes they will make. That is not about creating widgets; it is about ensuring that we are on the right track and making the right changes for people to be able to do things in their lives in order that we can move towards net zero. I think that restricting ARIA to dealing with the most important challenge in our lifetimes is not too much of a restriction. It is a huge, wide thing.

One thing that really concerns me about progress to net zero is that an awful lot of folk are going to be left behind. An awful lot of these things that are made will be sold. Yes, great; that is going to make a lot of difference to the lives of people who already have money, but people who currently have nothing will find it even more difficult if we approach climate change with the stick method and require them to make changes or pay more for their energy when they already have very little money. Those are the challenges that I would like to see ARIA tackle, so that none of our constituents are left behind when we are moving to net zero.

I wrote to the Chancellor last week after a meeting with Aberdeen Climate Action about net zero organisations. Lib Dem new clause 3 suggests that ARIA should be net zero in every year. ARIA absolutely should be net zero in every year—that was one of the amendments we moved in Committee—because we should be saying that anything new should not add to our carbon emissions but reduce them or, at the very least, leave them neutral. The Government were not willing to accept that amendment in Committee. I am glad that the Lib Dems have put it forward again, because it is so important. If we are saying that we are going to be leaders and we are going to make a difference, new organisations such as ARIA should be net zero from the very beginning, and we should commit to that. If we are going to be net zero by 2050, everyone will have to make a contribution to that, and that includes ARIA.

On scrutiny, I am afraid that I disagreed with quite a lot of what the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) was making about the Barnett formula was not that it is the best thing since sliced bread, but that we have the rules that we have. The rules mean that the Barnett formula does exist. We have been screwed over with regard to the Barnett formula a number of times in recent years, and we do not want that to happen in this case.

We would rather not have the Barnett formula—we would rather be an independent country—but if we are going to have those rules and the Government do not stick to them, there is a major element of unfairness. We are asking the Government to stick to their own rules in this regard. We have seen with legislative consent motions in recent times that they have completely ignored what the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Parliament have said. They are not sticking to the rules, so we are just trying to get them to live up to the trust that they expect us to have in them.

On scrutiny, public procurement and FOI, I was really pleased that in Committee, the Minister confirmed that in the estimates process, ARIA will have a discrete line in the supply estimates, so we will at least be able to see how much money ARIA has in any given year. I do not disagree that ARIA should have the ability to fail—it is incredibly important that it does—but we need to be able to have scrutiny of the money that is being spent and that we as a House are agreeing to spend on it. I am very glad that the Minister confirmed that.

Finally, I am hugely concerned about the Einsteins—about the people who work in patent offices who have not been able to gain grants. I do not think that ARIA will fix that. There is still going to be the issue where if someone is networked—if they are a white man in research—they are much more likely to be able to get research grants than if they are a woman or a person of colour. Unfortunately, with the lack of ability that we have to FOI and to scrutinise some of ARIA, we cannot see what is going on with that. We cannot see whether ARIA is further entrenching the current inequality in science and technology and academia or doing a positive job towards breaking down those barriers and ensuring that people who live in the most deprived communities in Scotland are given the opportunity because they have the best possible ideas, rather than because they have the best possible friends. It is hugely important that we have more scrutiny. That is why we tabled the cronyism amendment and the amendments relating to us as Houses approving both the chair and the CEO, because those roles will be so important and because we are so excluded from the scrutiny process in relation to ARIA.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I wish to speak in support of amendments 14 and 8 in relation to bringing ARIA within the scope of the Freedom of Information Act. It seems extraordinary to me that there is an exclusion for a body of this kind, although, to be honest, I have a long-standing interest in freedom of information, and for Government Ministers—this is not exclusive to this Government—to look to exempt bodies from that piece of legislation for one spurious reason or another is not that unusual.

I have worked closely with the Campaign for Freedom of Information. Three years ago I introduced, unsuccessfully, a Bill to bring the third of public sector expenditure that is carried out by private contractors within the scope of the Act. That has gained some currency recently with, as we have heard in this debate, the upsurge of cronyism, the scandals over test and trace and the employment of huge numbers of consultants on inflated salaries. The Bill is equally subject to some of the same concerns and rings the same alarm bells.

We hear about high-risk, high-reward research and ARIA being allowed to fail, and there is nothing wrong with those as functions, but there has to be transparency, and, frankly, having that in the public eye, rather than hidden away, is more likely to lead to better decision making. The parallel body that we have heard about—DARPA in the USA—has had scandals and ethics violations that have been brought to light because it is subject to the equivalent Freedom of Information Act in that country. I believe that this is the right thing to do and in the interests of good research and the good use of public money.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

The excuses that are given are the usual sorts of excuses that are pulled out at this stage—that this is a small, cutting-edge body on which it will be too burdensome to impose freedom of information. Leaving aside whether a body given £800 million of public money is indeed a small body, we have heard from my Front-Bench colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), that parish councils are subject to freedom of information. So are dentists and internal drainage boards. I am not quite sure what an internal drainage board is—it sounds quite painful, actually—but I doubt that such bodies get £800 million of public money. I would take an intervention from anyone who wants to explain what an internal drainage board is, but I think it would take us off the subject.

This is just nonsense. The idea that ARIA will not have back-office functions and that its status at the cutting edge of a science superpower—I am not making those phrases up; the Minister has used them—will be hampered by making it subject to the Freedom of Information Act is fanciful. The Science and Technology Committee did indeed say that there was a danger of ARIA being stifled by bureaucracy, but it was referring not to freedom of information requests from the public and other interested parties, but to micromanagement by Government. That sounds far more likely and realistic.

The US body, DARPA, is subject to FOI. As one would expect, its budget is considerably larger, yet it gets about 50 FOIA requests a year. Comparisons have been made with UK Research and Innovation—a much larger organisation that brings together many different bodies in the sector. It gets about 20 FOIA requests per calendar month. There is no expectation that ARIA will be swamped by FOIA requests. Where they are appropriate, such requests are telling and essential, and they can bring important facts to light.

The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I cannot see how ARIA will not be subject to environmental information regulations, which are the parallel regime of discovery. It seems to me entirely anomalous that one should be in and one should be out, and it may be that we would be breaching our Aarhus convention obligations. Breaching international treaties from time to time does not seem to bother this Government—I am not sure what other explanation there could be.

It is in the public interest for freedom of information to be exercised where possible. In this instance it is certainly possible, and I hope I have given some reasons why it is entirely appropriate. It was a good action by the Labour Government at the time to bring the FOI Act into force. Since then, successive Governments and Ministers—not only Conservative Ministers—have railed against it, but there have been independent investigations. The Burns commission, which was widely perceived to be a case of the Conservative Government trying to do a hatchet job on the Act, found that the Act was working well. In its inquiry, the Justice Committee—a fine body of men and women—also found that the Act was working well. The Supreme Court has spoken very strongly in favour, saying that there is a strong public interest in the press and the general public having the right, subject to appropriate safeguards, to require public authorities to provide information about their activities. That is right, and it is particularly right that it applies to

ARIA. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will think again about the rather misguided steps they are taking.

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): The UK has a long and proud tradition of science and innovation, and nowhere has this been seen more clearly than in the success of the NHS vaccine roll-out. It is because of our existing science and technology infrastructure that vaccines have been both successfully produced and rolled out in the UK and, indeed, further afield. It is British vaccines developed across the regions, including my own region, the north-east, that are allowing us to return to some form of normality. They show us all the incredible benefits that cutting-edge science and technology can provide. Any further investment in long-term, high-ambition research and development is of course welcome, but the proposals for ARIA in the Bill do not provide it with a clear purpose or mission.

I believe that ARIA must have a clear mission to offer a societal return on taxpayer investment. The Bill is an opportunity for the Government to establish a mission-led funding agency that can benefit everyone in every part of the country. ARIA must not be used to pursue vanity projects that offer no return for the public.

7.30 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) and others across the House have highlighted, the Bill as it stands has a lack of direction, strategy and accountability. The Government could set a clear direction and use ARIA to address the greatest challenge we face in the shape of the climate and environmental emergency. Fighting the climate emergency should be ARIA's mission within the broad objective of achieving a net zero economy. I do not think that I or Opposition Members should apologise for proposing that we focus on the biggest single issue facing us and our future generations.

Last month, the Secretary of State told the Science and Technology Committee that the Government want ARIA to

“reflect the wide talent and geographical spread of the United Kingdom”,

but there is nothing in the Bill to ensure that happens. In the Queen's Speech earlier this year, the plans for an industrial strategy were conspicuously absent. We know that research and development can be a key driver in building the economy of tomorrow and creating new jobs as others are overtaken by automation. If the Government are serious about levelling up and unlocking potential, they must start to get serious about their industrial strategy and use ARIA as an effective tool to deliver high-skilled, high-paying unionised jobs in every region.

I am also concerned that ARIA will escape scrutiny as it will not be subject to the same transparency rules as other public sector-funded bodies. We know that ARIA is broadly modelled on the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said, unlike its US counterpart it will have a blanket FOI exemption. How can the Government justify that when they are in the midst of a cronyism scandal? I am worried about that, and I share the concerns of my hon. Friend and other Members. Transparency must be at the heart of ARIA, because taxpayers have the right to know how £800 million of their money is being invested.

Overall, ARIA will not be put to good use if its purpose remains unfocused. If ARIA is to succeed, it must have a well defined mission, which the Government must play a key role in setting. I had prepared further comments on the foreign aid budget, but I will leave my contribution there.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): The general concept behind the Bill is a welcome one. Support for ambitious research where the real-world application is not always clear could bring massive economic benefits if successfully applied, not least to my own constituency and the world-leading institutions in Midlothian. The Midlothian Science Zone is at the cutting edge of global research across many disciplines, particularly in the fields of animal health, human health and agritech and their related technologies. The ideas behind ARIA will be especially welcome to the world-renowned Roslin Institute, for which blue-sky research funding could allow it to investigate, for instance, how integration and transformation of the food system could contribute to solving global hunger and climate change and develop our preparedness for potential future pandemics.

Those are just a few of the positive real-world impacts that the principle behind the Bill could bring about, but principle can often fall victim to a lack of clarity and purpose. On Second Reading, I raised concerns about the Bill's lack of clarity and focus and the effects that could have on ARIA meeting its aims in the future. Given that we are talking about public money, it would be wise to signal to the public exactly what ARIA is setting out to do—a guiding aim that acts as the body's ruler and sets a general course of travel. That is not controversial; it reflects best practice elsewhere around the globe.

We know that DARPA, the US defence research body that inspired the model, has a mission focus. Likewise, Horizon Europe and the Scottish National Investment Bank have mission focus: namely, to reduce inequalities and tackle climate change. Why are the Government therefore so content for the UK model to be an outlier to those other schemes? Although it is disappointing that the Government have taken no steps to address that lack of purpose, the legwork has thankfully been done by Members on this side of the Chamber. I welcome the proposals tabled by the dream team from Aberdeen, my hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), whose amendment 1 states that

“ARIA's primary mission will be to support the development of technologies and research that support the UK's transition to net zero... or reduce the harmful effects of climate change.”

Why do the Government remain so insistent on giving ARIA as unspecified a remit as possible in the face of best practice everywhere else? Perhaps the answer lies in the clauses related to the planning, oversight and governance of the new agency. It is hard not to feel as though I am watching history repeating itself when I read that ARIA will be exempt from freedom of information provisions and public contract regulations, especially given the Government's woeful record on accountability and transparency.

In setting up the new funding body, especially for high-risk funding such as this, surely it is imperative that safeguards are built in to protect against the risk of corruption. There is an urgent need for more oversight,

not less, of public spending decisions. We have been here before; we are all well versed in the Government's rebuttal on less scrutiny—that speed and efficiency are the necessities. It looks as though similar lines are being trotted out on this Bill.

Ministers are saying that the exemptions will reduce bureaucracy for ARIA. Bureaucracy looks increasingly to be the convenient byword for the bypassing of scrutiny by the Government—a Government who, I might add, have dramatically increased damaging bureaucracy for international businesses and academia since leaving the EU.

It is important to remind ourselves that speed and scrutiny are not mutually exclusive if the Government are willing to think creatively, and in the previous Session of Parliament, I set out a model for balancing the two in my Ministerial Interests (Emergency Powers) Bill and was devastated when it failed to secure a date for Second Reading. However, we have on the amendment paper today amendment 2, which stands in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen North and for Aberdeen South. It would allow parliamentary scrutiny of any contract awarded by ARIA to a person connected to a member of the Government. That would not increase bureaucracy for ARIA, nor hinder efficiency, as the parliamentary scrutiny would be retrospective.

To me, this is a no-brainer—an amendment that would increase the scrutiny powers of Members in this place to keep ministerial decision making in check and ensure that grants truly go to the best projects. I urge Members to back the amendment. I have said many times that if there is nothing to hide, there can surely be nothing to fear. A refusal to back the amendment would surely set alarm bells ringing among the research community and anti-corruption organisations alike. It would send the signal that this is the same old crony Tory Government reducing ideas for world-changing good to slush funds for pals or donors.

A body dedicated to high-risk research funding has clear benefits, but to ensure that the outcomes benefit all society and the world, and not just Ministers' mates, we need to give it a guiding focus. By giving this place more power to understand decisions taken on funding allocated, we would strengthen, not weaken, mechanisms for scrutiny as well as ARIA's effectiveness. Strength comes with openness, and I hope that Members will make ARIA as strong as it ought to be by backing these amendments.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): When I saw the list of speakers this morning, I thought I would keep my comments brief. Perhaps unusually, I will stick to that.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): Hear, hear!

Daniel Zeichner: Absolutely.

I was happy to be a member of the Bill Committee and we had constructive, good humoured discussions, many of which have been echoed in this evening's debate. One thing that particularly struck me was the quality of the evidence that the witnesses gave. I have a question for the Minister: if she, like me, was so impressed by what we heard, particularly from the representatives of DARPA, what did she learn from it and what changes could be made to the Bill to reflect the wisdom imparted by the witnesses?

[Daniel Zeichner]

I shall speak in support of all the Opposition amendments, but I want to address in particular amendment 12 and the need for a mission. I was struck by the outline of the Haldane principle by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), who is my good friend. He is absolutely right that there is no need for the Government to get involved in the detail, but equally there is no obligation to withdraw from a having a general sense of what we are trying to do. The key issue is whether we say, “We’re just not going to have a view on what it is going to do” or we have some sense of where this might go.

I spent much of last week reading Professor Dieter Helm’s book on net zero, which I commend to hon. Members. He is quite influential on the Government, I think, but it is pretty depressing reading regarding where we are on achieving net zero. We are nowhere near doing what is needed. One of the key areas is science, innovation and research, so it would not be unreasonable to suggest putting our great scientific minds to work on the great challenge of our times: what to do about the climate crisis.

I am fortunate to chair the all-party parliamentary group for life sciences. When I chaired a meeting this afternoon, one question that I asked the people before us was, “Why was it that you were so successful in tackling the vaccines crisis?” It was because they worked in a different way, with a mission and a purpose, and I think exactly the same thing would happen if we set our great scientific minds to work on this great challenge of our times.

It is important to support amendment 12, as well as the other amendments. What a difference it could make, and what a political opportunity for the Government as we head towards the G7 this week and COP26. Unless something like this is adopted, frankly, we will not get where we need to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nos. 28, 29 and 30 have withdrawn, so I call Ruth Jones.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; yes, it is a surprisingly fast debate tonight, which is good.

I am grateful to be able to speak in this important debate and to say a few words on behalf of the people of Newport West. I commend the high level of debate, which has been impressive; I have learnt a lot.

Like other Opposition colleagues, I welcome the creation of ARIA. The UK has a proud tradition in science and innovation, but Labour has long called for further investment in long-term, high-ambition research and development. I join Opposition Members who have raised concerns about the Bill in its current form. Most concerning, the Government’s proposals for the agency do not provide it with a clear purpose or mission. For the new agency to succeed, it must be given a well-defined mission and Ministers must play a role in setting that mission. In setting that mission, the creation of ARIA, which will only account for a fraction of the overall science spending, must not serve as a distraction from the country’s wider research and development priorities.

It is a matter of regret—but, alas, no surprise—that this 11-year-old Tory Government are reportedly on course to miss their target of spending 2.4% of GDP on R and D by 2027. They have also failed to provide the support needed to medical research charities during the pandemic, forcing them to make sweeping cuts. I say to the Minister that we need real clarity on how the devolved Administrations will be engaged with and supported to ensure that people across the whole United Kingdom benefit in the months and years ahead.

Labour’s amendment 12 on mission has a welcome focus on net zero, which, as a shadow environment Minister, I welcome very strongly. The greatest challenge that we face as a country and as a planet is the climate and environment emergency, so I applaud and thank the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), for proposing that the fight to preserve our planet and protect our environment be the new agency’s mission for the first 10 years. Achieving net zero offers a broad mission and ARIA’s new CEO would have plenty of discretion in choosing which aspects of the climate and environmental emergency to address.

I turn to oversight and accountability. As has already been mentioned, it is important that people know what is happening, how and when. By making ARIA subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, we would be drawing open the curtains and shining a light where it is absolutely necessary.

Let me turn to regional and national empowerment. As I indicated, I want my constituents in Newport West to benefit as much as those living in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. As such, it is vital that the Minister supports amendment 13, which would require the agency to have regard for the benefit of its activities across the nations and regions of our United Kingdom.

I am in the privileged position of having the Intellectual Property Office located in my constituency, and I am proud to stand up and shout on behalf of the next up-and-coming Einstein, to ensure that they can work on a level playing field. This Bill may be small, but it is important and we must get it right now.

I turn to the new clause in the name of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who has a long track record on fighting for the rights of the poorest in our world. I commend him and his many right hon. and hon. Friends—notably the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May)—for standing up and doing the right thing. So many colleagues on both sides of the House have spoken eloquently in this debate about who we are as a nation and about the values that drive what we do and when we do it. Although I would of course never question a ruling by Mr Speaker, I do want to place on record the fact that I regret that the new clause was not selected. However, I am really pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has secured his debate tomorrow, and I look forward to its outcome.

7.45 pm

This last year has been like no other in living memory, and we have seen pain and suffering not just here at home but around the world. We have sought to respond to the ravages of coronavirus and to rebuild and move forward. That is why so many of us in Newport West

were outraged when the Secretary of State announced that the Government would be scrapping the 0.7% target. However, although I could go on at length about this, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am content to know that we have the three-hour debate tomorrow. Therefore, I will keep my powder dry until then.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nos. 32, 33 and 34 have withdrawn, so we go to Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I cannot recall a time when we have rushed so fast through the speakers, Madam Deputy Speaker. At the beginning, as No. 35, I thought I would have three minutes. You have asked us to keep to six minutes, and we will do our best—indeed, I will keep to that.

I value the opportunity to speak on this matter of utmost importance. I also welcome the Chancellor's announcement—I have my instructions for tonight as the one who will do the proxy votes on behalf of my party—that the UK Government will invest at least £800 million in this new agency as part of the Government's wider commitment to increase public research and development funding by £22 billion by 2024-25 and to increase overall UK spending on R&D to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. It would be churlish not to welcome that and not to say how good it is to have those figures on the record here tonight. It is clear that the Government have given a commitment to ensure that this agency will be a success story.

When I see that many of our shops have been tied up not simply by Brexit but by the over-dependence on overseas manufacturing and production, I lament that because we were at one time the greatest industrial nation, with the greatest innovators. I believe we can be that again; all we need to do is follow the Government's policy and strategy, as set out here tonight, and then we can all benefit across this great nation. I still believe that that title is ours, but for us to become all we can become in terms of leading groundbreaking blue-sky projects, we must put the money in, and the Government are clearly putting their money in.

I want to ask the Minister—last time, we did not have much time, and she was unable to respond—to ensure that the R&D and the spend benefit all the regions. The hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) and others referred to that. I want Northern Ireland very clearly to be a recipient of the R&D so that we have some of the benefit from this whole project. Technology does not come cheap, but the rewards are extensive. What we have achieved with the covid vaccine through investing money is an indication that greatness still awaits. The Government have been extremely successful in the coronavirus vaccine roll-out and in how they have benefitted and helped all the companies, whether with furlough or the grant scheme. Many businesses in my constituency are here today because of the Government's commitment, and I want to put on record my thanks to them for that as well.

We all have a great affection for our mothers, and I have a particular affection for mine. She always said that her greatest investment was the time she invested to believe in her children. It is important that we take note of those wise words, and I hope that my mother will be very pleased with the investment she made in her

four children. If God spares her, she will be 90 on 14 July, so she has had a long and very good life. When I phone her, as I did at about 6 o'clock tonight, she always asks me what is happening over here, and I always tell her, because she is really deeply interested. We are very fortunate to have a 90-year-old mum who is sound in body and mind and still able to tell this big boy what to do when the time comes. That is what a mother does—she tells you off no matter what age you are, and I am always very conscious of that.

We must invest in our own people and in their ability. That is why I support this Bill and why we will be voting with the Government tonight. I want to take this opportunity to press the Minister for an assurance that the investment to which I referred earlier will take place across the UK, and will allow the wonderful research and development that takes place in Northern Ireland to continue. We have a great scheme in Northern Ireland, which works really well, to avail us with increased support and funding. I believe that the Minister will be happy to give that assurance and I will be happy to hold her to that assurance. I look forward to her response.

Northern Ireland has the best education system in the United Kingdom. I thank my colleague Peter Weir, the Education Minister, for the great job that he has done in trying to secure our children's ongoing education through covid. As a result of this education, we have highly skilled young people who have so much to offer in terms of vision and goals. I meet those young people every day in my constituency of Strangford and across Northern Ireland. We have some wonderful people. We need to encourage them and to ensure that they can be part of that future as well. We do this as well for my grandchildren and, indeed, for everyone's grandchildren.

We should also allow those with grand projects to take on young apprentices, who will learn how to take innovative approaches. It is very important that we do these things. The R&D projects to give young graduates a place at the R&D table would benefit from their wisdom, experience, enthusiasm and learning. Again, I commend the Northern Ireland Assembly, and particularly Minister Dodds and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for all that they have done, working alongside the Education Minister to ensure that we in Northern Ireland can be part of this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—always better together and always better if we can share what we have. I see my colleague and friend, the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), having a smile to himself. But I mean it. I want him to stay in the United Kingdom. I do not want him to leave; I want him to be a part of it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nos. 36 to 40 on the speakers' list have withdrawn, so we go to Virginia Crosbie.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate on ARIA and to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who always speaks so eloquently and passionately. I particularly liked the fact that he mentioned his grandchildren.

I was proud to serve on the ARIA Bill Committee and I would like to thank the Minister and all those who have contributed to this landmark legislation.

[Virginia Crosbie]

Setting up this agency will deliver on yet another manifesto commitment from 2019 and I wholeheartedly support the Bill. The last year has shown us the power of science to deliver solutions, and now is the time to further invest in the ideas of the future that will allow us to continue to make scientific progress.

ARIA needs to have as broad a remit as possible, not to be restricted in its scope, which would be the outcome if new clause 2 were accepted. Scientists need to have space and time to research new technologies without restrictions about the agency's mission imposed upon them. In the words of Professor Bond in the evidence sessions of which I was part, this is about "radical innovation".

In my constituency of Ynys Môn, there is already the infrastructure in place for research and innovation, hosted by the Menai Science Park, which is the innovation hub for Bangor University. Businesses such as Tech Tyfu, a vertical farming pilot project in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn delivered by Menter Môn, provide the opportunity for the UK to increase UK food production. We need to encourage more people with an innovative and entrepreneurial mindset, such as those at Tech Tyfu and the others located at M-Sparc, to engage with research in order to solve the problems that the world faces today and in the future. We need to recruit the right people and trust them, not micromanage them.

Amendments 1 and 12 look to focus ARIA's core mission on achieving net zero and the impact of climate change. I am fully supportive of the goal of achieving net zero, as was laid out in the manifesto on which I proudly stood in 2019. Indeed, Ynys Môn—also known as energy island—will play a key part in delivering this target. However, restricting ARIA's mission to this goal is not necessary, as we have already legislated for the net zero target by 2050, with ambitious interim targets and a cross-governmental framework in the Prime Minister's 10-point plan.

ARIA also gives the opportunity to level up around the country, be truly inclusive and involve the brilliant minds from all over the United Kingdom, including those in Wales. It needs to be able to do that without being weighed down by bureaucracy. I spoke in Committee about why ARIA should be free from the freedom of information regime proposed in amendments 8 and 14. In Committee, we heard evidence about the potential burden of administration. UKRI told us that it had a team of staff purely to deal with the 300-plus FOI requests it receives annually. As Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser said, UKRI is "happy" to be able to respond to FOI requests, but

"there is a judgment call about the burden of administration".—
[Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee, 14 April 2021; c. 9, Q4.]

With its unique freedoms and independence to enable transformational research, ARIA will inevitably receive a disproportionate number of FOI requests relative to its size. Our vision for ARIA is that it should be lean and agile. Do we really want it encumbered by that level of administrative burden? Do we want ARIA's brilliant programme managers to be stifled by bureaucratic paperwork?

We also heard about whether ARIA will be able to deliver the game-changing R&D that we want if it is subject to FOI. It was Tony Blair who gave us the Freedom of Information Act and who subsequently described it as

"utterly undermining of sensible government"

To use his words:

"If you are trying to take a difficult decision and you're weighing up the pros and cons, you have frank conversations...And if those conversations then are put out in a published form that afterwards are liable to be highlighted in particular ways, you are going to be very cautious."

Professor Philip Bond put this view into an R&D context in his discussions with the Committee:

"if you are asking people to go out on a limb to really push the envelope, I would assert that there is an argument, which has some validity, that you make it psychologically much easier for them if they do not feel that they are under a microscope."
—[Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee, 14 April 2021; c. 29, Q21.]

Mr Blair and Professor Bond perfectly highlight the fundamental reason why ARIA should be free from FOI: the last thing our scientists need when they are looking for the next internet is to be held back by caution.

The Bill already contains very strong statutory commitments to transparency: an annual report will be laid before Parliament; ARIA's accounts and spending will be published; non-legislative mechanisms will be set out in a framework document; and there will be a thorough and transparent selection process to ensure it is led by respected individuals who will uphold public honour. Freedom of information requests can still be submitted to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and any organisation that ARIA works with. Any contracts awarded by ARIA will be publicly available.

ARIA will give the United Kingdom and the island of Ynys Môn the opportunity to grasp and shape our future on a global stage. It will help drive innovation and investment, and secure our status as a science superpower. I am proud—I am proud to support this Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Nos. 42 to 49 on the speakers' list have withdrawn, so we go to Angela Richardson.

Angela Richardson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is such a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), who is so passionate about this area. That came through in the Bill Committee, as it does whenever she speaks on behalf of her constituency.

It is a pleasure for me to speak on Report, as it was to be a member of the Committee and to speak on Second Reading. It is a relief to speak to amendments that pertain to the Bill today, even if I do not support them. I particularly want to speak to the procurement amendments tabled by both the Opposition and the Scottish National party, but first I wish to address the amendments that want to make ARIA's primary mission health and research, or our net zero aims. We already have knowledge of and have committed significant resources to those two areas, and we understand the importance of tackling them. The benefit of freeing ARIA from those specific missions is the ability to go into the

unknown—to the areas we do not have knowledge of. I have no issue with ARIA seeing successes or failures in those areas, but prescribing for those areas through ARIA may not necessarily be the cure we are looking for.

Turning to procurement, the exemption from the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 places freedom into the hands of the leaders and programme managers who will be recruited to run ARIA as an independent body. ARIA's procurement will be at arm's length from Government and Ministers. Procurement rules do not apply to the traditional R&D granting used by UKRI, but ARIA, like DARPA, will work in a different way by commissioning and contracting others to conduct research. ARIA will often be procuring research and development services, which can be in the scope of the procurement regulations.

8 pm

If activities were subject to procurement rules, ARIA would be required to put contracts out to open tender, often for many weeks, even if it knew its preferred supplier. That would slow down ARIA's programme managers. We want to avoid their needing to consult lawyers routinely to determine which niche contractual arrangements must go to open tender. If ARIA wished quickly to gain expert consulting advice on a technical issue, the procurement process might bias it against seeking expert advice on spending decisions, which might harm its ability to operate and use money. The most important check and balance in the Bill is in schedule 1, paragraph 14, in which the Government have made a commitment to ensure that ARIA internally audits its procurement activities, so the up-front flexibility afforded by the exemption will be balanced by reporting at a later point.

The idea was mentioned quite a lot in Committee—it was mentioned again today by the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah)—that ARIA could become a side door to sleaze; others mentioned that they were worried about cronyism. I think that it is a real shame, in talking about our scientists, who are world-class, to suggest that they would receive contracts for political favour rather than on the merit of their scientific ideas and expertise. It is a shame to put them in that sort of shadow, especially after the year that we have had and the huge amount of work that we have seen on the pandemic. I hope that as we go forward, we will put some faith in our scientific community and not accuse them of being potentially open to sleaze.

As I said on Second Reading, Guildford would be an excellent home for ARIA. Just over a week ago, I met the people who run Surrey Research Park. I know that they would be keen to have ARIA.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Minister celebrated a significant birthday yesterday, and I wish her many happy returns. After the time, care and attention that she has given the Bill, I cannot think of a better gift than to see it go unamended to Third Reading and on to the other place.

Aaron Bell: It really is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson), who is one of my best friends in this place; it was a pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee with her and with so many other hon. Members present. Along with

the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), my hon. Friend and I served both on the Science and Technology Committee when it conducted a report on what at the time we were calling ARPA, and on the Bill Committee, so I have felt a real sense of personal involvement in the process as it has developed.

Since I will not speak on Third Reading, I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of the process, particularly the Clerks of the Bill Committee; the Minister for her dedication; and the Whip, whom I see in his place, for his help on our side of the Committee. It was a very good-natured Bill Committee, as others have said. Some amendments that we are debating today are rather similar to those that we rejected in Committee, but obviously that is how Report works. I will not labour all the same points again, but I will speak briefly on them later in my speech.

Science is cool again, because science has saved us in the past year. It is not just about the vaccines—extraordinary though they are, particularly the mRNA advances. It is also about what we were able to achieve with Sarah Gilbert's Oxford project, which I am very proud is being manufactured in my constituency at Keele science park in Newcastle-under-Lyme; what we have done scientifically in finding therapeutics through our world-leading recovery trial; and the advances that we have seen in rapid tests to enable the incredible amount of testing that we now have in the UK.

However, I would like to add a note of caution, because covid has also exposed some of the problems we see in science and some of the problems in the networks that the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) spoke about earlier. I am talking particularly about the so-called lab leak hypothesis—the theory that covid emerged from the Wuhan Institute of Virology rather than from a zoonotic transmission. We saw some of the worst of science and the media over that, but it was essentially shut down by a letter to *The Lancet* organised by the EcoHealth Alliance and its president, Peter Daszak, which squashed the theory on 18 February last year. Let us face it, the theory was assisted by Donald Trump and Senator Tom Cotton in the States taking the opposite view, and there was this whole politicisation of something that should have been about scientific inquiry. Speaking as a Bayesian, and based on everything I have seen, including the fact that the virus was in Wuhan in the first place, and on everything we have seen since, I believe it probably was a lab leak. I would go as far as to stake an 80% probability on that, and I think we should bear that in mind when we think about what we are asking of ARIA.

We do not want ARIA to get politicised and legalised, and we do not want it to fall into the same group-think that we have seen in some science, with a tendency to defend your mates and the people you know in your network and stick up for the institution rather than the principles behind the science. Instead, the DRASTIC group—the decentralised radical autonomous search team investigating covid-19—a bunch of people on the internet, correspondents and scientifically inquisitive people around the world, have managed to bring the lab leak hypothesis back to public attention to the point where it is clearly being actively considered by our intelligence services and our scientific community. I think we need some of that spirit in ARIA. We need that spirit of

[Aaron Bell]

inquiry and of people outside the system getting their fair say in the system—the Einsteins in the Patent Office, as others have said.

On the amendments about cronyism, what we saw with the appointment of Kate Bingham was a complete disgrace. That is the sort of thing I worry about with some of the amendments to the Bill. I think “everyday sexism” is the term to describe the abuse she got on her appointment. We had the Runnymede Trust trying to go to court to get her appointment declared unlawful, the so-called Good Law Project seeking to crowdfund against her appointment, the leader of the Liberal Democrat party saying that she must resign and Labour’s deputy leader saying “this cronyism stinks”. The truth is that she was the best qualified person for that job. She was appointed at speed because of the circumstances we were in, and she has delivered in spades. If the rumours about her damehood are correct, she richly deserves it and we all owe her an enormous debt.

Graham Stringer: On the Science and Technology Committee, we often share similar views and attitudes to science, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the violence of the language that is sometimes used; it is completely unacceptable. When emergency decisions are taken, as they were with the vaccine taskforce and with Test and Trace, there needs to be an assessment afterwards. I hope he agrees that it would be a very different assessment for Test and Trace than it would be for the vaccine taskforce.

Aaron Bell: I thank the hon. Gentlemen for raising that. As a member of the Science and Technology Committee, he knows that we were looking at producing further reports into both Test and Trace and the vaccine programme as a result of our inquiry. I think the Test and Trace programme has actually got to a very good place now: the number of tests we are achieving is the envy of many other countries around the world. We could quite happily say that the vaccine taskforce is an exemplar for everything that went well, and that the Test and Trace programme has been more mixed—[*Laughter.*] The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) on the Opposition Front Bench laughs, but I think that the Test and Trace programme has helped our recovery from the worst of the covid pandemic. It is not the case that all that money has been wasted, as some Opposition Members say, and it is certainly not the case that it has all gone on cronyism; it has gone on the cost of the tests. That is what it has gone on. Contact tracing is hard. Some people do not want to be contact traced, but the role that Test and Trace has played is still significant, although perhaps not as significant as we hoped initially. I am sure we will move on with that in our inquiry.

Returning to what I was saying about the amendments seeking to give ARIA a mission statement, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) gave the House some good reasons to reject them. First, there is no point spending just a little bit of money on things that already have billions thrown at them; we should be looking at the things we do not necessarily even know about yet. I also think we should avoid circumscribing ARIA’s freedom. Likewise, on all the amendments that are trying to impose more bureaucracy on ARIA, the

whole point is to do things differently, with freedom from all the usual processes and pressures that act on these sorts of bodies.

We need to empower scientists. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) quoted Professor Bond, who said of freedom of information in his evidence to the Bill Committee:

“In terms of the level of transparency, transparency is a good and wonderful thing in most areas, but if you are asking people to go out on a limb to really push the envelope, I would assert that there is an argument, which has some validity, that you make it psychologically much easier for them if they do not feel that they are under a microscope. Many people tend to step back when they are there.”

Some of the burdens that people are seeking to put on ARIA would potentially circumscribe it and reduce its effectiveness. The Bill does still have a statutory commitment to transparency. We will have regular reports, and I am sure that our Committee will be regularly engaged not only with the Secretary of State, who is in his place, but with the chief executive and the chairman of ARIA, who will come to speak to us as well.

ARIA needs to have the freedom to fail. In that sense, it needs to be a macrocosm of all its individual projects that also need to have the freedom to fail. Let us truly empower ARIA by rejecting these amendments. Let us let ARIA take flight and shoot for the stars, not weigh it down and prevent it from ever reaching the escape velocity it needs and the chance that it has to boldly go—returning to the “Star Trek” references we had in the Bill Committee—not into outer space but to the very cutting edge of scientific research and discovery. If we pass this Bill today, it will be a great day for science in the United Kingdom.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I shall try not to come up with any more “Star Trek” references as we will probably run out in a minute.

I am grateful to the Minister for all her hard work on such an interesting piece of legislation that is going to be truly transformative. It has been a pleasure to be involved in the Bill, having spoken on Second Reading and been a member of the Bill Committee. I want to deal with a number of amendments and also to make this general observation: the Opposition amendments in Committee were, in the main, tabled to hinder much of the Government’s primary intention in what ARIA was set up to do in the first place. If we recognise that ARIA is set up with the sole principle of operating at pace, with flexibility, and with freedom to aid our position in the world in continuing to be a leader in innovation and science, then we absolutely must not stifle it by filling it with bureaucracy around regulation and oversight, thereby harming its very intention. Yes, there will be failures, as we have heard today. We all recognise that; it is almost part and parcel of what is built into the fabric of the agency to help it to operate without restrictions. From board compositions to freedom of information stipulations, even to dictating the agency’s priorities over health and climate change, it is quite revealing to be met with the level of shackles that were to be imposed rather than the vision to encourage our next generation of pioneering inventors.

Amendments 8 and 14 would make ARIA subject to FOI requests. If they were to be passed, we could immediately lose the competitive edge of innovative or

potentially cutting-edge scientific developments brought about by risk. Instead, we are thrusting them into the spotlight whereby that ingenuity could be uncovered by FOIs. If we restrict people's creativity, they will play it safe. They will not take the risk that is the very essence of ARIA in the first place in being an incubator for creativity to flourish.

New clause 3 and amendment 1 take us back to the ring-fencing of ARIA's remit by constricting its freedom across all facets of science and research. Across the entire country and across all sectors, from automotive to farming, society is striving to decarbonise. We are already a world-leading Government in our commitment to decarbonise to net zero by 2050. To make the agency specifically concentrate its efforts on particular areas is again to dictate as to its uniqueness, and that will not give it the true freedom that is at the very heart of this Bill.

Finally, any organisation is only as good as the people that make it up. ARIA will need a visionary CEO to lead the culture and set its direction. Amendments 3 to 6 would require, among other matters, that Parliament approves the CEO. However, we know that if a small organisation is to be nimble, those decisions need to be made quickly. I do not see that there is a need for approving the board with Government representatives if that process is fair and open, which we are told it will be.

As I said on Second Reading, my constituency of North Norfolk was home to one of our greatest living inventors, Sir James Dyson. I hope that ARIA will be our launchpad to uncover the very next greatest inventor.

8.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Amanda Solloway): It is a pleasure to be here on this special occasion, and not just because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson) pointed out, it was a very special birthday yesterday—40. [*Laughter.*]

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have tabled amendments and new clauses, and who have contributed today.

The UK has a world-class science system, and a proud history of research and invention. Today, in our continuing fight against coronavirus, the importance of those skills has never been more apparent. What is it that makes ARIA so special? It is the fact that we are strengthening our science system, enhancing our capabilities and finding a new level of ambition. That means that it will be a small, agile organisation with autonomy from Government and unique powers that equip it to support groundbreaking ideas, with the potential to profoundly change all our lives for the better.

The Bill brings forward a bold and ambitious policy that seeks to deliver the transformational benefits of high-risk R&D for our economy and society. I have spoken to many colleagues who share my genuine excitement about the possibilities that ARIA could bring. We have heard on the Floor of the House and in every previous debate that all parties support the principle of ARIA and what it will try to achieve. I am glad that today we are able to give ARIA the focus that it deserves.

A focus of today's debate that has been raised by the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), among others, has been giving ARIA a primary research topic, through new clauses 2 and 3, and amendments 1 and 12. Given the challenges that we face today, those amendments understandably focus on climate change and health. Nobody in the House should have any concerns about the Government's credentials on tackling climate change. We are proud to be the greenest Government ever. The Prime Minister's 10-point plan and our COP26 presidency, to which the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) referred, are demonstrating that at home and abroad, the UK is leading efforts to accelerate action on climate change.

Without doubt, the covid pandemic has clearly illustrated the critical role that R&D plays in the health and wellbeing of our population. Our vaccine roll-out is the envy of the world. The Government already invest around £2 billion annually in health and care research in the UK. It is therefore right that such priorities are taken forward by Government Departments and agencies, with clear direction and involvement from Ministers. That includes the important role that UKRI plays in delivering Government priorities for R&D. We do not want to duplicate those responsibilities.

Instead, as many colleagues have put it much better than I could, ARIA must make its own distinct contribution to be effective. That means being an organisation led by brilliant people with strategic autonomy—not directed by Ministers. The continued chopping and changing of ARIA's mission set out in amendment 12 would hamper ARIA's ability to commit to long-term programmes.

New clause 3 also seeks to impose obligations on ARIA regarding the transition to net zero. ARIA is covered by the Government's existing net zero commitments and will be required to make information available through the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter).

I turn to the contribution of the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) on the role of Parliament. Amendments 3 to 6 would require the proposed chair and CEO of ARIA to be approved by both Houses of Parliament. Amendment 11 would require the Commons Science and Technology Committee to approve appointments by the Secretary of State and the remuneration of the appointees. I am extremely pleased that the recruitment campaign for the CEO was launched on 1 June and that we will launch the campaign for the chair on 5 July. All applications will be reviewed by an outstanding expert panel, which will include the Government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance. The Government's guidance sets out that the ultimate responsibility for appointments rests with Ministers who are accountable to Parliament, as is the case with UKRI. There is no precedent for requiring the approval of both Houses for appointments.

I am grateful for the contribution that the Science and Technology Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), has made on this issue. However, I guarantee that this is an open, fair and robust recruitment process, and it is completely appropriate to find the right people to make ARIA a success. Amendment 9 would require ARIA to

[Amanda Solloway]

provide the Science and Technology Committee with the information it requests. The Osmotherly rules provide guidance on how Government bodies should interact with Select Committees, and they are clear that such bodies should be as helpful as possible in providing accurate, truthful and full information when giving evidence. I believe that that is sufficient to ensure a co-operative and constructive relationship between ARIA and the relevant Committees.

Amendment 10 would require the Secretary of State to consult the Committee before dissolving ARIA. Clause 8 already sets out the broad requirement on the Secretary of State to consult any persons they consider appropriate, and I am sure they will always consider it appropriate to consult the Science and Technology Committee about changes to the R&D landscape. The Secretary of State's power to dissolve ARIA is subject to the draft affirmative procedure, which will ensure that Parliament has the opportunity to debate that decision.

Amendments 7 and 8 tabled by the hon. Member for Aberdeen South and amendment 14 tabled by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central seek to remove the exemption from the public contracts regulations and to subject ARIA to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We have covered procurement extensively before, and I will reiterate why the exemption is so important. There are three key points.

ARIA is expected to commission and contract others to conduct research in pursuit of its ambitious goals. Often, ARIA will procure research services. That commissioning and contracting is a fundamentally different way of funding R&D to traditional grant making, and procurement rules do not apply. Secondly, this way of funding research is core to DARPA's approach—the successful US model from which we learned when designing ARIA. As we heard in Committee, DARPA benefits from what is described as “other transaction authority”, which offers flexibility outside standard US Government contracting standards. By taking that innovative new funding approach that is so fundamental to its objectives, ARIA will benefit from similar flexibilities.

Let me turn to amendments 8 and 14. ARIA is about creating a certain culture of funding and groundbreaking research, as I heard time and again throughout my engagement with the R&D community. As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) put it so eloquently, that kind of culture is difficult to achieve within all the rules that would usually apply to public bodies. We have thought carefully about alternative ways to ensure that high standards of conduct are upheld within this unique context.

The Bill requires ARIA to submit an annual report and statement of accounts, which will be laid before Parliament. ARIA will be audited by the National Audit Office and will be subject to value-for-money assessments. ARIA will interact with Select Committees in the usual way, and it will draw up a framework document detailing its relationship with BEIS. There will be further reporting requirements, such as the details of what is published in the annual report. Together, those provisions will ensure that the public are informed of ARIA's activities and where it spends its money. Although the Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows

for exemptions in certain circumstances, the request must still be processed, and that administration runs contrary to the lean and agile operation of ARIA.

I turn to amendment 2 on conflicts of interest. Schedule 1 allows the Secretary of State to make regulations “about the procedures to be adopted for dealing with conflicts of interest”.

The framework document between BEIS and ARIA will commit ARIA to the code of conduct for board members of public bodies, which includes the obligation to publicly declare any private financial or non-financial interests that may or may not be perceived to conflict with one's public duty. This principle-led, non-legislative approach is appropriate. It is the standard approach taken by many other arm's length bodies, including UKRI, and I have no reason to believe that it is inadequate here. In addition, we have the existing reserve power in schedule 1, should it ever prove necessary.

On the issue of human rights, I recognise the intent behind new clause 1. Human rights are already protected in law in the UK through the Human Rights Act 1998, and ARIA will be subject to public authority obligations under that Act. I therefore reassure the hon. Member for Aberdeen South that ARIA will operate in a way that is compatible with the convention on human rights. It would be unlawful for it not to do so under existing legislation.

Amendment 13 would require details of ARIA's geographical impact to be included in its annual report. I believe that it is incredibly important that ARIA's funding benefits those who are not always reached by the current system. That is the Government's policy and priority, as well as a priority for me personally. The R&D place strategy, due to be published this summer, will set out how R&D will contribute to our levelling-up ambitions. Details of ARIA's operation will be set out more fully in a future framework document, and that is the appropriate place to stipulate the contents of ARIA's annual report, including geographical information, rather than legislation.

Jim Shannon: The Minister is being generous with her time tonight. In my contribution, I was very keen, as were others, to ensure that all the levelling up that the Minister refers to will happen in the regions as well—in other words, that Northern Ireland will get its share. It is important, as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, that we all benefit. May I seek her assurance that that will be the case?

Amanda Solloway: Of course, I give my assurance that we will issue the place strategy shortly, which will indicate all of this.

I am very grateful for the contributions that right hon. and hon. Members have made today. The interest in the passage of the Bill in the House and in the R&D community is testament to the important role that ARIA will play in our future R&D landscape, creating a space in the system that is free to fund groundbreaking science in innovative ways, independent from ongoing Government intervention.

This is an incredibly significant moment, because the opportunity that ARIA affords us is truly limitless. By unlocking a new level of ambition, and by enabling truly bold and adventurous ideas to flourish, ARIA will allow us to take a huge leap into the future. Yes, this will

mean embracing the unknowns that come from ARIA being free from Government control, but we should make that leap confidently, knowing that the brilliant people that ARIA will fund will change the world in ways that none of us in this Chamber would dare to imagine today. This is therefore a truly exciting time for all of us here in the Chamber—for ourselves, for our children and for our grandchildren—and I feel particularly excited for my young granddaughter, who will feel the benefits of the major breakthroughs that we will unlock through this Bill. I am sure that this opportunity is recognised by all hon. Members.

I hope I have demonstrated the reasons that I cannot accept the new clauses and amendments that have been tabled, and I hope that Members will agree not to press them.

Stephen Flynn: Madam Deputy Speaker, you will be glad to know that my final remarks will be brief, particularly because although we were expecting a rebellion tonight, I did not expect it in any way, shape or form to relate to any of the amendments that I proposed, which is disappointing. Maybe next time—we can only live in hope.

There are two clear and fundamental issues to do with the Bill on which we disagree with Government Members: where they are passionately and vehemently against public scrutiny, and where they are passionately and vehemently against ARIA having a mission. I believe the lack of a mission is a missed opportunity, and I am deeply concerned to hear that public scrutiny in the shape of an FOI request is regarded as an impediment to a public organisation. That should strike fear into all of us about what public money is to be spent on, not just now but in the future.

With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion on new clause 1, but I wish to press amendment 1, which stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), to a vote.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: 1, in clause 2, page 1, line 7, at end insert—

“(A1) ARIA’s primary mission will be to support the development of technologies and research that support the UK’s transition to net zero carbon emissions or reduce the harmful effects of climate change.”—
(*Stephen Flynn.*)

This amendment sets the primary mission for ARIA to support the development of technologies and research that support the UK’s transition to net zero carbon emissions or reduce the harmful effects of climate change.

Question put, that the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 364.

Division No. 19]

[8.30 pm]

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Bardell, Hannah
Abrahams, Debbie	Barker, Paula
Ali, Rushanara	Beckett, rh Margaret
Ali, Tahir	Begum, Apsana
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Benn, rh Hilary
Amesbury, Mike	Betts, Mr Clive
Anderson, Fleur	Black, Mhairi
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Blackford, rh Ian
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Blackman, Kirsty

Blake, Olivia	Foy, Mary Kelly
Blomfield, Paul	Furniss, Gill
Bonnar, Steven	Gardiner, Barry
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Gibson, Patricia
Brennan, Kevin	Gill, Preet Kaur
Brock, Deidre	Glendon, Mary
Brown, Alan	Grady, Patrick
Brown, Ms Lyn	Grant, Peter
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Green, Kate
Bryant, Chris	Greenwood, Lilian
Buck, Ms Karen	Greenwood, Margaret
Burgon, Richard	Griffith, Nia
Butler, Dawn	Gwynne, Andrew
Byrne, Ian	Haigh, Louise
Byrne, rh Liam	Hamilton, Fabian
Cadbury, Ruth	Hanna, Claire
Callaghan, Amy	Hanvey, Neale
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Hardy, Emma
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Carden, Dan	Harris, Carolyn
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hayes, Helen
Chamberlain, Wendy	Healey, rh John
Champion, Sarah	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Chapman, Douglas	Hendry, Drew
Charalambous, Bambos	Hillier, Meg
Cherry, Joanna	Hobhouse, Wera
Clark, Feryal	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cooper, Daisy	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cooper, Rosie	Hollern, Kate
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hopkins, Rachel
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hosie, rh Stewart
Cowan, Ronnie	Howarth, rh Sir George
Coyle, Neil	Huq, Dr Rupa
Crawley, Angela	Hussain, Imran
Creasy, Stella	Jardine, Christine
Cruddas, Jon	Jarvis, Dan
Cryer, John	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Cunningham, Alex	Johnson, Kim
Daby, Janet	Jones, Darren
Davey, rh Ed	Jones, Gerald
David, Wayne	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Ruth
Davies-Jones, Alex	Jones, Sarah
Day, Martyn	Kane, Mike
De Cordova, Marsha	Keeley, Barbara
Debonnaire, Thangam	Kendall, Liz
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Khan, Afzal
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Kinnock, Stephen
Dodds, Anneliese	Kyle, Peter
Doogan, Dave	Lake, Ben
Dorans, Allan	Lammy, rh Mr David
Doughty, Stephen	Lavery, Ian
Dowd, Peter	Law, Chris
Dromey, Jack	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Duffield, Rosie	Lewis, Clive
Eagle, Dame Angela	Linden, David
Eagle, Maria	Lloyd, Tony
Eastwood, Colum	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Edwards, Jonathan	Lucas, Caroline
Efford, Clive	Lynch, Holly
Elliott, Julie	MacAskill, Kenny
Elmore, Chris	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Eshalomi, Florence	Madders, Justin
Esterson, Bill	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Evans, Chris	Mahmood, Shabana
Farron, Tim	Malhotra, Seema
Farry, Stephen	Maskell, Rachael
Ferrier, Margaret	Matheson, Christian
Fletcher, Colleen	Mc Nally, John
Flynn, Stephen	McCabe, Steve
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCarthy, Kerry
Foxcroft, Vicky	McDonagh, Siobhain

McDonald, Andy	Rodda, Matt
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
McDonald, Stuart C.	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
McDonnell, rh John	Shah, Naz
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Sharma, Mr Virendra
McGinn, Conor	Sheerman, Mr Barry
McGovern, Alison	Sheppard, Tommy
McKinnell, Catherine	Siddiq, Tulip
McLaughlin, Anne	Slaughter, Andy
McMahon, Jim	Smith, Alyn
McMorrin, Anna	Smith, Cat
Mearns, Ian	Smith, Jeff
Miliband, rh Edward	Smith, Nick
Mishra, Navendu	Smyth, Karin
Monaghan, Carol	Sobel, Alex
Moran, Layla	Spellar, rh John
Morden, Jessica	Starmer, rh Keir
Morgan, Stephen	Stephens, Chris
Morris, Grahame	Stevens, Jo
Murray, Ian	Stone, Jamie
Murray, James	Streeter, Wes
Nandy, Lisa	Stringer, Graham
Newlands, Gavin	Sultana, Zarah
Nichols, Charlotte	Tami, rh Mark
Nicolson, John	Tarry, Sam
Norris, Alex	Thewliss, Alison
O'Hara, Brendan	Thomas, Gareth
Olney, Sarah	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Onwurah, Chi	Thornberry, rh Emily
Oppong-Asare, Abena	Timms, rh Stephen
Osamor, Kate	Trickett, Jon
Osborne, Kate	Turner, Karl
Oswald, Kirsten	Twist, Liz
Owatemi, Taiwo	Vaz, rh Valerie
Owen, Sarah	Webbe, Claudia
Peacock, Stephanie	West, Catherine
Pennycook, Matthew	Western, Matt
Perkins, Mr Toby	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Phillips, Jess	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Phillipson, Bridget	Whitley, Mick
Pollard, Luke	Whittome, Nadia
Powell, Lucy	Williams, Hywel
Qaisar-Javed, Anum	Wilson, Munira
Qureshi, Yasmin	Winter, Beth
Rayner, rh Angela	Wishart, Pete
Reed, Steve	Yasin, Mohammad
Rees, Christina	Zeichner, Daniel
Reeves, Ellie	
Reeves, Rachel	
Reynolds, Jonathan	
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	
Rimmer, Ms Marie	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Richard Thomson

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Badenoch, Kemi
Afolami, Bim	Bailey, Shaun
Afriyie, Adam	Baillie, Siobhan
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Baker, Duncan
Aiken, Nickie	Baker, Mr Steve
Aldous, Peter	Baldwin, Harriett
Allan, Lucy	Barclay, rh Steve
Amess, Sir David	Baron, Mr John
Anderson, Lee	Baynes, Simon
Anderson, Stuart	Bell, Aaron
Andrew, rh Stuart	Benton, Scott
Ansell, Caroline	Beresford, Sir Paul
Argar, Edward	Berry, rh Jake
Atherton, Sarah	Bhatti, Saqib
Atkins, Victoria	Blackman, Bob
Bacon, Gareth	Blunt, Crispin
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bone, Mr Peter

Bottomley, Sir Peter	Ellis, rh Michael
Bowie, Andrew	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Bradley, Ben	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Bradley, rh Karen	Eustice, rh George
Brady, Sir Graham	Evans, Dr Luke
Braverman, rh Suella	Evennett, rh Sir David
Brereton, Jack	Everitt, Ben
Bridgen, Andrew	Fabricant, Michael
Brine, Steve	Farris, Laura
Bristow, Paul	Fell, Simon
Britcliffe, Sara	Fletcher, Katherine
Brokenshire, rh James	Fletcher, Mark
Browne, Anthony	Fletcher, Nick
Bruce, Fiona	Ford, Vicky
Buchan, Felicity	Foster, Kevin
Buckland, rh Robert	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Burghart, Alex	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Burns, rh Conor	Frazer, rh Lucy
Butler, Rob	Freeman, George
Cairns, rh Alun	Freer, Mike
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Fuller, Richard
Carter, Andy	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Cartledge, James	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Cash, Sir William	Garnier, Mark
Cates, Miriam	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Caulfield, Maria	Gibb, rh Nick
Chalk, Alex	Gibson, Peter
Chishti, Rehman	Gideon, Jo
Churchill, Jo	Girvan, Paul
Clark, rh Greg	Glen, John
Clarke, Mr Simon	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Clarke, Theo	Gove, rh Michael
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Graham, Richard
Clarkson, Chris	Grant, Mrs Helen
Cleverly, rh James	Gray, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Grayling, rh Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Green, Chris
Colburn, Elliot	Green, rh Damian
Collins, Damian	Griffith, Andrew
Costa, Alberto	Griffiths, Kate
Courts, Robert	Grundy, James
Coutinho, Claire	Gullis, Jonathan
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Halfon, rh Robert
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hall, Luke
Crosbie, Virginia	Hammond, Stephen
Crouch, Tracey	Hancock, rh Matt
Daly, James	Hands, rh Greg
Davies, David T. C.	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Davies, Gareth	Harris, Rebecca
Davies, Dr James	Harrison, Trudy
Davies, Mims	Hart, Sally-Ann
Davies, Philip	Hart, rh Simon
Davis, rh Mr David	Hayes, rh Sir John
Davison, Dehenna	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Dinenage, Caroline	Heapey, James
Dines, Miss Sarah	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Henderson, Gordon
Docherty, Leo	Henry, Darren
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Higginbotham, Antony
Donelan, Michelle	Hinds, rh Damian
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hoare, Simon
Double, Steve	Holden, Mr Richard
Dowden, rh Oliver	Hollinrake, Kevin
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Holloway, Adam
Drax, Richard	Holmes, Paul
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Howell, John
Duddridge, James	Howell, Paul
Duguid, David	Huddleston, Nigel
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hudson, Dr Neil
Dunne, rh Philip	Hughes, Eddie
Eastwood, Mark	Hunt, Jane
Edwards, Ruth	Hunt, rh Jeremy

Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy

Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Jupp, Simon
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel

Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles

Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Scott Mann and
Michael Tomlinson

Question accordingly negated.

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

Amendment proposed: 12, page 1, line 17, at end insert—

“(2A) In exercising its functions, ARIA must have regard to its core mission.

(2B) In this section “core mission” means—

- (a) for the period of ten years after the date on which this Act is passed, undertaking activities which support the achievement of the target established in section 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008,
- (b) thereafter, mission or missions which the Secretary of State establishes by regulations every five years, and
- (c) regulations under this section—
 - (i) shall be made by statutory instrument, and
 - (ii) may not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.”—(*Chi Onwurah.*)

This amendment would require ARIA to consider its core mission in exercising its functions. For the ten years following the Act passing, that core mission would be supporting the achievement of Net Zero. Thereafter, its mission will be established by statutory instrument subject to the draft affirmative procedure.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 364.

Division No. 20]

[8.40 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian

Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew

Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Hanvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward

Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar-Javed, Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve

Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stevens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Liz Twist and
Jessica Morden**

NOES

Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona

Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David

Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura

Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne

Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Michael Tomlinson and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

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

Clause 6

INFORMATION

Amendment proposed: 14, page 3, line 15, at end insert—

“(7) ARIA shall be—

- (a) a public authority within the meaning of section 3 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and Schedule 1 of that Act shall be amended accordingly, and
- (b) a central government authority within the meaning of regulation 2(1) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and Schedule 1 of those Regulations shall be amended accordingly.”—(*Chi Onwurah.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 364.

Division No. 21]

[8.49 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian

Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha

Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Hanvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike

Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar-Javed, Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela

Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Sarah

Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Liz Twist and
Jessica Morden

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham

Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen

Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke

Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyins, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherylyn

Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean

Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Michael Tomlinson and
 Scott Mann

Question accordingly negatived.

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.

Third Reading

8.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

When it comes to the future of the United Kingdom, this Government are unapologetically ambitious, and one of our greatest ambitions is to secure the UK's position as a science superpower. Through this Bill to create ARIA, a new agency to support the most ambitious research, we are really focusing on delivering on that agenda.

The Bill provides ARIA with broad functions and powers to take an innovative approach to funding high-risk R&D so that each programme manager can provide effective funding to their talented research team. Critically, the Bill allows a balance between oversight of ARIA's activities and the independence and autonomy that the evidence tells us is so important for its success.

The Bill creates an agency with a unique role to play and the capabilities it needs to do so. ARIA will sit alongside UKRI and other funders in our R&D landscape. It will provide something additional and complementary, and I believe that its offer will indeed significantly improve the UK's research and development offer in the long term.

I am grateful that today's debate has focused on making the most of this ambitious new agency. I would like to recognise the efforts of those across the House and in my Department who have got us to this point. I thank the Science, Research and Innovation Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway). I know that she celebrated her 30th birthday yesterday, and I congratulate her on having achieved this signal success and that significant milestone. I am delighted that she should be such a focused colleague and have delivered what is a really important piece of legislation. I also thank the Bill team for their work at each stage of the proceedings, and parliamentary counsel for drafting such an admirably concise and, dare I say, elegant Bill.

As we continue our progress towards a more normal way of working in this place, I would like to thank everybody who, in the meantime, has ensured that our proceedings have been able to continue with minimal disruption despite these exceptional circumstances. I would like to place on record that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all the House staff and your colleagues have done a remarkable job in keeping the lights on—so to speak—and making sure that we progressed in a very expeditious and calm way through these proceedings and through previous stages of the Bill. Everything has been to order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I also thank the members of the Public Bill Committee from across the House for their extremely constructive and welcome approach to scrutinising the Bill. I particularly thank the Chairs of those Committees: the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) and the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg).

I also thank a number of speakers on the Government Benches. I am referring only to the speeches that I saw myself. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) gave a very positive account of why this Bill is so important to her constituents. My hon. Friends the Members for Guildford (Angela Richardson), for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), who is not in his place, for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) and others did a remarkable job in presenting the case for ARIA and in ensuring that the Bill proceeded smoothly.

I would also like to thank a number of Opposition Front-Bench speakers. When I saw her speak, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) gave a customary expert and well-considered view. We have our differences and disagreements, but no one, I think, can doubt her sincerity. I thank the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). I am sorry that the rebellion that he anticipated was not as dynamic as he would have liked, but there you go.

Everybody really has supported the principle of this legislation and the creation of ARIA. While we do not agree on all the details, I think that everybody has brought to the debate a spirit of constructive inquiry and scrutiny, and we have greatly appreciated that.

I am confident, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, as the Bill continues its passage, our parallel progress to realise ARIA and to make it happen will elicit further debate and further questions. As the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North, said on Second Reading, and as we have heard again today, the UK is home to brilliant invention and innovation, and we should be able to shape ARIA in a way that can deliver on that promise. The creation of ARIA will, I firmly believe, make our outstanding UK R&D system even stronger and more dynamic, more diverse, and it will help us to innovate and level up across the country. On that very firm basis, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am delighted to commend the Bill to the House.

9.3 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab) [V]: In this Third Reading debate, I want to start by putting on record our support for this Bill and the establishment of ARIA. The UK is a global scientific superpower, with a proud past, present and future, of innovative scientists, businesses and entrepreneurs. The success of the vaccine roll-out—I pay tribute to everybody associated with that—demonstrates our world-leading science and research power. What we have seen in the debate today and through the passage of this Bill is that we all want to build on this platform. ARIA has the potential to help fill the gap of high-risk, high-reward scientific investment, which is why we welcomed the Bill and sought to play a constructive role in its passage through the House.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah)—I thank the Secretary of State for doing so—for the superb job that she has done in constructively seeking to improve the Bill on behalf of the Opposition. I also put on record my thanks to my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), for Luton North (Sarah Owen), and for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) for their diligent work in Committee, and all hon. and right hon. Members on both sides of the House who

have contributed to this Bill. I join the Secretary of State in also paying tribute to all the House staff who have kept this Bill going and on track and all those associated with it. I want to single out the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway). I was going to wish her a happy 50th birthday, but I am happy, on this occasion, to be outdone by the Secretary of State. I say a very happy birthday for yesterday to the Minister.

As the Bill goes to the other place, we continue to believe that improvement is necessary and possible. As we heard in the debate, the biggest improvement to it would be a clearer sense of mission for the agency. We do not believe that the Bill as drafted provides ARIA with a clear enough mission. Ministers have suggested that it is for the chief executive, once appointed, to establish its priorities. We heard this a lot in Committee and again today, but this is not in our view the best way to meet our national priorities, which we believe should be set by Government. There is also a danger, we believe, that ARIA's resources will be spread too thin. The greatest challenge we face, and this is shared across the House, is the climate and environmental emergency, and that is why we have proposed that fighting it be ARIA's mission for the first 10 years, but however that mission is set out, I hope this is something that will be returned to in the other place.

Secondly, we believe that the freedom provided to those running ARIA should be accompanied by greater transparency and accountability. We do not believe the agency has anything to fear from this, nor is there justification for the blanket exemptions from the Freedom of Information Act and public contract regulations. The Government's reason for exempting it is that it will be overwhelmed by requests, but that is not the US experience with DARPA. If the Government want ARIA to carry the confidence of the public, we hope they will think again on accountability in the other place.

Thirdly, as we have heard in the debate, it is essential that each nation and region of the UK benefits from the creation of ARIA—we believe that ARIA should have regard to that when exercising its functions. We have suggested that that could be done through the annual report that is already provided for under the Bill.

These are our issues with the Bill, but we cannot ignore in this Third Reading debate the Bill's wider context, about which I want to speak briefly. ARIA is an important innovation, but it cannot be detached from the wider landscape of Government policy. Today's amendment on overseas development aid—new clause 4—may not have been selected, but the argument is not going away. We should not be slashing overseas aid to the world's poorest people. It is not right morally, and it is not right on grounds of self-interest either. With coronavirus and the climate crisis, our fates are bound together.

What is more, these cuts are impacting directly on British scientific researchers doing the right thing for the world on everything from research on infectious diseases to the development of clean water technology. Some £120 million has been cut from the BEIS budget because of the cuts to ODA. As the Sainsbury Laboratory, one of the country's leading scientific research institutes, puts it, these cuts have

“pulled the rug out from under many scientific projects that were paving the way to solve urgent challenges in some of the poorest countries in the world.”

[*Edward Miliband*]

All this is in the year of COP26, when we are the hosts trying to persuade other countries to accept our moral authority on the climate crisis and development.

As someone who was at the ill-fated Copenhagen climate summit of 2009, I want to tell the House that mistrust between developing and developed countries was the biggest reason it failed and is one of the biggest risks at COP26. The cut in aid spending undermines our efforts and undermines trust; the Government are wrong to be doing it, and it is self-defeating for our country. There is a very strong feeling about this across the House—quite possibly a majority—and the Government should reverse this cut in funding forthwith. My general experience is that when there is a majority in this House for something, it will find a way to express itself one way or the other. I suggest that the Secretary of State and the Government take heed.

ARIA should not come at the expense of cuts to the core science budget administered by UKRI. This year, UKRI's budget will be £7.9 billion, a cut from the budget last year of £8.7 billion. That is why Jeremy Farrar said recently:

"There's a growing gulf between rhetoric and reality in the government support for science."

It massively ill serves British science and our country to be cutting science spending, and ARIA, welcome though it is—£800 million over five years—simply does not make up for that.

To conclude, we support this Bill, but hope, in the spirit with which we have approached it, that the Government will reflect on the constructive concerns raised throughout its passage on the urgent issue of aid spending by Members on all sides, on science spending and on the detail of the Bill. We hope that the other place can build on and improve the Bill as it progresses.

9.9 pm

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). It is a particular pleasure as Chair of the Science and Technology Committee to warmly congratulate the ministerial team for bringing this important Bill to such a happy conclusion in this place. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State, the team of officials in the Department and the Clerks in the House, and to the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), whose enthusiasm and charm contributed in no small part to the sense of consensus, good feeling and good will that there is about the Bill. The fact that its House of Commons stages culminate after the weekend of her birthday is absolutely fitting, and I congratulate her on that.

As Members know, the Select Committee took extensive evidence on the Bill and published a report. We had some fascinating sessions, including a rather less high-octane performance from Dominic Cummings when he came to talk about science policy, as opposed to covid. I think it is a fair reflection to say that the suggestion of this agency, and indeed the important role that science played in the manifesto on which Conservative colleagues were elected, was an important contribution, whatever disagreements and disputes there may be on other aspects.

We can agree on several things. First, it is desirable and appropriate, when we are a science superpower, that we have agencies that do things differently from others. Diversity is a strength, and it is a good thing that we are having a very new agency doing things in a very different way. I think that that has been evident in the contributions we have had.

We took the view on the Committee that it is important that ARIA does not spread itself too thinly. Although £800 million is a lot of money, when it comes to substantial, world-changing projects of inquiry, it can soon go. It seemed for a time today that the budget would be rising not to £800 million but to perhaps £4 billion a year, in which case the advice of the Committee to—in the words of the book by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North—go big on a smaller number of projects may have been redundant, and we may have been able to do everything. However, it seems that that is not going to be the budget for ARIA, and the advice that the Committee has given the incoming chair and chief executive does stand: we should make sure that we do a few things well, rather than many things superficially.

On the subject of the chair and chief executive, leadership is crucial. The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) emphasised the difficulty and the importance of choosing them, comparing it to electing a Nobel prize winner. That is quite a high bar, but I hope we will find people equal to the task, and they should be encouraged. I hope that those people, when they are appointed, will come before our Select Committee, not because we want to tie them down in any way and to constrain them with bureaucracy, but quite the reverse: our Committee champions science—we are enthusiasts for science—and we want to understand the ambitions and the motivation of the new team.

Achieving stability for a long-term agency such as ARIA is of great importance. In a Parliament that is limited to five years, and when Governments change from time to time, finding mechanisms to entrench institutions and policies that are there for the long term can prove challenging. David Cameron thought that passing a law to require 0.7% of GDP for aid spending was a solution to precisely that, but we found that there are circumstances in which it is not possible to achieve that. In office, I set up the Industrial Strategy Council to inject a bit of stability, but that is not continuing. So these things are challenging. I know that the intention of Ministers and the whole House is to achieve longevity. I think how this very desirable objective can be implanted will require a bit of thought.

The reforms that are embodied in this legislation—low bureaucracy, risk taking and the ability even to fail—are important to encapsulate in ARIA, but that is not to say that the rest of the research landscape could not benefit from those reforms. I hope that the Minister's appetite, demonstrated through the passage of the Bill, to reform science funding and find ways to do things better and vigorously will not be completely satisfied with the passage of this Bill, but that, with the Secretary of State's enthusiastic support, she will apply herself to the funding landscape more generally in order to have that same principle of vigour there.

The proposal for this new research agency was included in our party's 2019 election manifesto and then the Queen's Speech at that time. Two years on, we are at the point of recruiting the chief executive and the chair,

and sending the Bill to the other place to make further progress. I hope that the Lords will give it their customary scrutiny with rigour and enthusiasm, but that they will not detain for too long because this is an important institution, which we want to see up and running and strengthening further our great attributes in British science as soon as practically possible.

9.16 pm

Stephen Flynn: It is a pleasure to follow the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), and the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). The points that have been made by both, although varied, have certainly covered off many of the points that I would seek to address. I have no desire—and I am sure that Government Members have no desire—to hear many of the arguments that I have expressed previously tonight on Report, in Committee and on Second Reading.

I would like to place on record my thanks to all those involved in proceedings over the course of recent months. They have done an outstanding job, particularly those in the House Service. I also thank our research team—in particular Scott Taylor and Jonny Kiehlmann, who have been a tower of strength, and provided us with a great deal of assistance and information.

I do not intend to keep the House much longer, as I am keen to get home myself, so I will leave it at that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That is one of the best conclusions to a speech I have ever heard.

9.17 pm

Daniel Zeichner: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). On Report, I said that I would be brief because I was going to make a contribution on Third Reading, so I hope the House will accept my apologies for making a few points.

I have been on this Bill throughout its passage, as others have been. It has been a really positive experience as far as I am concerned. The only puzzlement to me is that the Bill was so perfectly drafted that it is in exactly the same state today as when we started; clearly it was impossible to improve. Now, I do not think that is the case. We heard some really important contributions, particularly during the evidence sessions. I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) in hoping that improvements will be made in the other place and that the Government will listen to some of the suggestions.

I looked at the job adverts for the chair and chief exec. I am grateful to research professionals, as ever, for pointing this out this morning: a remarkably vague canvass is being painted. Tonight it is being presented as a great opportunity. We have had the discussions in Committee, but, frankly, all we really know about it is that this is a unique and unprecedented opportunity. The right person may be out there. I thought this point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) and referenced by the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark). There may be such an exceptional person, but I rather suspect that, in the process of choosing whoever is to do the job,

some of the issues that they will pursue will inevitably follow. I think that, as we trace it back, we will find that the decision to give direction and mission, which has been ducked by this House, will inevitably have crept in during that process.

To some extent, as the shadow Secretary of State picked up, there has been an elephant in the room in our discussion. During the entire process of discussing the Bill, there has been a background rumble of unhappiness in the research community as we have seen some of the issues around BEIS allocations unfolding. There was uncertainty in my constituency running through March as people were very worried about the ODA cuts; perhaps many of us had not quite appreciated just how much that money was being spent in our constituencies on research programmes. For large numbers of people, it was left to the very last with projects having to be cancelled.

One of the moments that will stick in my mind from the evidence sessions was when I asked the chief exec of UKRI

“if you had £800 million to spend...would you spend it on this?”—[*Official Report, Advanced Research and Invention Agency Public Bill Committee*, 14 April 2021; c. 13, Q8.]

Of course, it is all about the timing, because she is an impeccable and superb public servant. She hesitated just long enough before coming up with the right answer for the entire room to know that of course she would not—and nor would anyone else in the room.

If the money were genuinely new and extra, it would be a different debate from the one in which it is being taken from elsewhere. My worry—we are seeing this week in, week out with the rumours and debates about what is happening to Horizon Europe—is that it is deeply unsettling the research community. These are long-term issues, and I am afraid that they are doing huge harm.

My conclusion is that, if the funding is new and extra, of course we support it, but my fear is that over the months and years ahead it will get pulled into the general discussion and debate about where budgets are allocated from. It is all too familiar. Governments over many, many years have tried to lift spending on research and development, but sadly there is almost an inexorable law that we fail to do it. We need to do better in future.

There was also advice from the Americans about how to make this work, which was not really listened to. They have a model that seems to work in their system; whether it can be transported into ours is a moot point, but it is sad that we are not even listening to their advice.

Finally, it seems slightly curious that the Government continue to pursue a scheme that, basically, was pursued by a now discredited former adviser. I just hope that they will reflect, take the opportunity to change course, give this new idea a real mission, make that mission the climate emergency, and make something of it.

9.22 pm

Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con) [V]: How many times do we see politicians tweeting, Facebooking or, for that matter, speaking in the Chamber and saying, “I welcome—” or “It is with great delight that—”? The irony is that I have tried to ban such things from my previous external communications, but today I am both proud and delighted to welcome the Government’s

[Mark Logan]

Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill. Along with the Secretary of State, I thank everyone who has been associated with getting us to this unique moment this evening.

A framework in the future, as the Minister said, will ensure that all parts of the United Kingdom will benefit from ARIA, which is why I continue to extend my hand of friendship to ARIA for it to be headquartered in Bolton. Bolton is a town of invention. We have a steady supply of inventors, long-standing institutions of invention, the appropriate infrastructure for future inventions and the mother of all invention: I have already secured a premier office location in Bolton that is ready for ARIA to move in. Essentially, invention is in Bolton's DNA, and ARIA is made for Bolton.

ARIA is not just for Bolton or for Britain, but for the world and for the brainchildren of tomorrow. Invention blossoms from competition and diversity, so ARIA needs a range of cultural backgrounds to catalyse that creativity. We have the human capital, and people will come from far and wide to this new centre of invention, from all walks of life. I very much welcome the job advertisement, which I think went live last week, for the position of CEO of ARIA.

In conclusion, we have the tools ready to welcome a world-class invention hub. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the points I have raised with the Department, the ministerial team and, of course, the new CEO once they come on board. With that, I very much congratulate everyone who has been involved in getting us to this point this evening.

9.25 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: I promise not to detain the House much longer. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome the Bill. We support all science and technology spending. We support what the Bill is trying to do, and we wish it safe passage through the other place.

I beg your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I want to take just a couple of minutes to talk about my new clause on climate change and some of the other amendments on similar themes. I have listened to what those on the Government Benches had to say about why they did not want to support those amendments. Broadly speaking, that seems to be around not wanting the agency to be constrained in any way and wanting it to have full rein to take the science where it leads. Obviously, that is a laudable enterprise, but the point I wished to make in tabling that new clause was that nothing innovative can stand the test of time if it does not meet net zero targets or respond to the challenge of climate change.

If any of the new inventions or new research that come out of this new agency do not respond to that challenge, they cannot be a sustainable part of our future economy and society. That is why climate change has to be a baseline, and that is what I was trying to achieve. The need to tackle climate change is going to be a constraint anyway on the agency, so why not have that in the Bill?

During this debate, there has been a lot of reference to the vaccine roll-out, which has obviously been a great success. The research and how it has been carried out is

obviously a fantastic example of science and technology really succeeding, but the key point is that the research and the vaccine were responding to a very clear and present challenge. The scientific community has responded amazingly, but the lesson to learn is that the science was responding to a challenge. We have no greater challenge ahead of us right now than tackling climate change. We will find, I believe, that even without the climate change amendments in the Bill, that is what the agency will be doing anyway. It will be responding to the challenge of climate change and it will need to take account of carbon emissions.

I briefly want to talk about scrutiny. I understand the reluctance to allow too much scrutiny and not allowing freedom of information requests. I know that scrutiny can sometimes be vexatious or opportunistic, but science answers questions. That is what science is for; that is the function of science, and it should never shy away from questions. At its best, scrutiny can be constructive and improving, and that can only be of benefit to the agency being set up by this legislation.

To sum up, we support the Bill. We absolutely want ARIA to succeed. We very much look forward to seeing what it can produce, and we support the Bill's passage to the other place.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 2 to 8 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

PROCEEDS OF CRIME

That the draft Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Investigative Powers of Prosecutors: Code of Practice) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 22 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Search, Seizure and Detention of Property: Code of Practice) (Northern Ireland) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 22 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Cash Searches: Code of Practice) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 22 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Investigations: Code of Practice) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 22 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

That the draft Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Recovery of Listed Assets: Code of Practice) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 22 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Pollution Prevention and Control (Fees) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 21 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

SANCTIONS

That the Myanmar (Sanctions) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 2021, No, 496), dated 26 April 2021, a copy of which was laid before the House on 29 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*(Alan Mak.)*

Question agreed to.

Preserving Heritage and Statues in Cities

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Alan Mak.)*

9.29 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Today marks a year to the day since the name Edward Colston first crossed my consciousness, and no doubt that of many millions of others, when his statue in Bristol was ripped down from its plinth and rolled into the waters where I imagine his slave ships once docked, in the wake of the brutal racist murder of George Floyd in the US. Events in Minneapolis reverberated everywhere and copycat topplings ensued. In east London, a statue of slaver Robert Milligan was pre-emptively removed by Tower Hamlets Council before any damage was done, and in Brussels King Leopold, who oversaw genocide in the Congo, was dethroned. Confederate generals fell in Birmingham—Birmingham, Alabama—in Portsmouth, Virginia, and in New South Wales, Australia; place names that give a twist to UK geography. The felling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 proved memorable because statues confer respectability and are highly symbolic. Nearly 40,000 individuals have signed three separate petitions on the gov.uk website, so we can see that people attach a lot of significance to statues.

As for Colston, a man who made his wealth from trading in human beings and the enslavement of Africans, putting them in chains, he was once venerated as a benefactor to Bristol, with a school and even a type of cake named after him. Where is he now? No longer imposing in the city centre, his watchful eye over everyone, but horizontal in a museum, in a graffitied, defaced state. Apparently, when the council fished him out of the river, the damage done to his pedestal was so great that it could not take the weight of his standing on it. If we think about it, in some senses it is far better now that he is an educational tool, an exhibit furthering teaching, than a statue everyone walked past obliviously.

The incident of last year and its postscript is history. Colston's latest chapter parallels how the statue of Viscount Falkland just outside this Chamber, off Central Lobby, has been missing a foot spur since 1909, because a suffragette chained herself to his feet, and in the melee before security and the police escorted her off the premises—crying “Votes for women!” all the way—the spur snapped off. That missing spur has, unintentionally, become a symbol of feminism, giving people like you, Madam Deputy Speaker, me and the Minister hope that we might one day make it into this place. It is always part of the Rupa tour—the unofficial tour I give when taking constituents around. I also show them the DIY plaque that Tony Benn screwed into place down in the dungeon, with the help, I believe, of our former leader, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). The plaque commemorates Emily Wilding Davison, another suffragette. It is fitting that, like that snapped-off spur, the spray-painted version of Colston was not restored to its former glory. These one-time acts of vandalism have become matters of historical record.

There is also that larger-than-life Churchill passed by all us MPs when we come into the Chamber. It was going a bit green, because too many Conservative MPs were rubbing it for good luck. It now has a “Do not touch” notice affixed to it. Hon. Members will remember

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

that a year ago the statue of Churchill outside in Parliament Square was first boxed up and then heavily guarded—people said he was the most guarded man in England—for fear of his being attacked by Black Lives Matter protesters. Yet it was only a week ago that that statue had “Chelsea” daubed over it. Chelsea had won some championship or another, and Chelsea fans, who I think are normally associated with the political right—remember John Major and the headhunters—took advantage of the fact that security’s eye was off the ball. That shows how we can sometimes imbue these acts with too much significance.

Granted, there could be a bit of evening up the score for womankind going on. It is shocking that it was only in 2018—quite recently, considering the first arch in Westminster Hall dates back to 1080, I believe—that we got the first woman commemorated in the environs of Parliament in the form of the statue of Millicent Fawcett. We could do better to even up the score, given that until then there had just been an unofficial plaque, not on public view, and a snapped spur to represent womankind in this Parliament.

The same is true of black and minority ethnic figures. I know that there was an almighty fight by a predecessor of mine, Lord Soley, to get a statue of Mary Seacole over the way at St Thomas’s. All these figures are quite complex. My late Dad hated the statue of Lord Clive on Whitehall because of Clive’s corruption and imperial butchery. At the same time, my dad was not a fan of Gandhi, who is one of the few colonial subjects who has a statue out there. I cannot quite remember why, or if I have misremembered, but my dad is not around to ask.

Another joke of my dad’s was, “The British Museum? That’s a funny word when all the stuff in there is nicked!” So yes, the British Museum.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I think that was an extra prompt, Madam Deputy Speaker, but anyway, the hon. Lady and I spoke beforehand.

I recently attended a meeting regarding the statue of Hans Sloane, the famous inventor of hot chocolate who was also responsible for advances in medicine. He was a son of Killyleagh in my constituency of Strangford. I find it incredible that his bust in the British Museum can be moved, especially considering the collection of 71,000 items that he bequeathed to the British nation, thus providing the foundation of the British Museum, the British Library and the Natural History Museum in London. The fact that his wife was connected to a Caribbean plantation was enough entirely to discredit anything else.

Does the hon. Lady agree that we must not seek to remove or dispose of our history, but rather should allow it to have its place and seek to address where we as a nation are going as a matter of great importance? I congratulate her again on introducing the debate and on the way she has introduced it.

Dr Huq: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. What an honour it is to be intervened on by him in an Adjournment debate. I think this is a first for me; we may have done this in Westminster Hall, but not here in the Chamber.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It is not the first time.

Dr Huq: No, it is the latest of many for the hon. Gentleman. This shows that I do not come up in the draw very often. He makes a good point, and I would say that we should not remove such statues, but contextualise them. Busts and statues are maybe not what people would use to memorialise today. They do seem a bit so last century, or even the century before. I know that Mrs Thatcher, God rest her soul, did not like the statue out there, so they are not for everyone, but we should keep them because they are part of history and they need to be put in proper context.

Statues are perhaps less common now because, with the passage of time, we see what reputational damage can occur to individuals. Take Winnie Mandela or Cyril Smith or Prince Andrew or Jimmy Savile—we might have made statues of any of those individuals only for them to turn out to be not what they seemed.

I understand that the Bristolians resorted to direct action because all the official channels failed, even though they had been trying for years. The Minister will recognise that all local authorities have much more complex and overflowing “in-trays from hell” in their inboxes nowadays, so statue reappraisal is probably not top of the list of things for councils to do. For example, pandemic management is an unforeseeable that has occurred in the past 15 months, although many councils are now reassessing. The London Borough of Ealing is doing that. I say fine, so long as it is not a distraction from real reform. To be fair, demolishing racism is going to be a lot harder than deracinating statues.

It is kind of simplistic to divide the world into heroes and villains because all complex characters, such as Churchill, had good and bad sides. History needs to be taught warts and all. We should not be blinded by hagiography, so we should teach, “We will fight them on the beaches,” and “their finest hour”, but also the Bengal famine and Tony pandy, rather than abridge or airbrush out one side.

I tend to feel that, recently, an atmosphere of hysteria prevails instead. An MP from the other side of the House held a similar debate to this in March, and it started with the alarmist claim, “Britain is under attack.” That was all because the London Mayor launched a statues commission to reassess past and present, as well as future, effigies. It does sometimes feel—I hope the Minister will allay my fears and put my mind at rest—that a confected culture war is being waged. Other elements include BBC bashing, obsessing about the Union Jack and how big it is in a Zoom call, laying into Meghan Markle and laying into taking the knee. Sometimes some of these straw men or bogeymen or targets are imaginary, including the banning of “Rule Britannia” at the last night of the Proms, which apparently was never a consideration by the corporation.

The edict that the Union flag should fly from all official buildings feels a little bit un-British to me, because it is the kind of thing that we witness in less self-assured recent states, rather than in a mature democracy such as our own. There was an old claim that this country has lost an empire and was searching for a role, and I feel that if we are having to whip out the Union Jack at every moment, maybe that claim is coming true. There have been news stories of Tory MPs insisting that

citizens must love the flag and the Queen or move to another country, and even besmirching the internationally revered “Auntie Beeb” because there are not enough flags in its annual report. This seems to be going down the road of totalitarian edicts. After all, Churchill did defeat European fascism.

The prominence that statues have assumed in this war on the woke is seen in the way that they got additional protections in January this year in the rushed legislation to necessitate planning consent for anyone who wants to mess with them. The parallel was drawn that the minimum sentence for rape in the UK is five years—it is double that in India—but someone can get 10 years for pulling down a statue. That implies that dead white men, mostly, in bronze and stone are valued more than living, breathing women. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill includes the word “women” zero times in its 295 pages, yet it contains more mentions of statues, memorials and monuments than you can shake a stick at. Shall we say that the optics of that are bad? It is no wonder that one female wag, following the tragic murder of Sarah Everard, tweeted that she would just dress as a statue, because that way someone might take her safety seriously.

It is not just the lives immortalised by statues that are contested in this struggle. The crusaders who feel under threat, and who play to some imagined gallery of statue lovers who wrap themselves up in the Union Jack, are also promising a purge on progressives on boards. We know that the BBC has an ex-Tory candidate at the helm, but it seems a bit sinister that he is saying that he wants to silence contributors from having opinions on social media. We also know that the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport held a seminar in February for 25 organisations to set out the Government-approved version of Britain’s past. It was trailed in *The Daily Telegraph*, quoting the Secretary of State’s words that they must

“defend our culture and history from the noisy minority of activists constantly trying to do Britain down”.

Again, this sounds alarmist. Who does he mean? Chelsea fans? The meeting had a slight air of secrecy around it. The attendees, the agenda and the discussions were not published, and I know that certain people, including members of the Council for British Archaeology, the rank and file archaeologists, did not get an invite, so if it is repeated, it would be good to broaden the audience list.

It is a slightly unedifying spectacle when 50 MPs known as the Common Sense Group go on the offensive, maybe as Government outriders, attacking the National Trust and Leicester University’s Professor Corinne Fowler for their joint research uncovering the fact that nearly 100 National Trust properties had slave wealth behind them. That feels like an attack on academic freedom. It feels like the opposite of common sense.

Crucially, wider heritage assets also need protection, not from lynch mobs but from the developer’s bulldozer. Public buildings and land are increasingly being flogged off to the highest bidder by cash-strapped councils, meaning that we have vanishing community centres, libraries and playgrounds. Council houses that were sold off under the right to buy are now in the hands of private landlords who pocket housing benefit bills footed

by local authorities, and the cycle of slum landlords that council houses were meant to end continues. It seems sad that what was founded for the public good is being turned into private profit.

When my office diaried in the Acton town hall opening for me, I had to explain to them that it is not a civic structure. We have this grand 1910-founded building where the Clash played, and it is being reborn as apartments behind the original facade. There were some add-on ones that did not quite work and some dodgy conversions, and I now get emails all the time about quite basic things like the waterworks not functioning. These are too big to be snagging. I marvelled at the refurb because it looked shiny, but at the same time I felt a twinge of sadness, really. So, if you are watching, OneHousing, sort it out!

Next on the hit list of lost municipal heritage in Ealing is a car park and an ’80s council office building set to be flattened and replaced by 477 mostly private sale flats in seven towers, the highest of which will be a most un-Ealing 26 storeys. We have an 1800s Gothic town hall, which is often used in shoots that pretend it is the House of Commons because it has got the same archy bits—the architecture is quite similar. Anyway, that will be overshadowed by this hideous thing.

There was a *Times* article at the weekend called “Our cities gained riches but lost their soul” on similar developments. It observed that there is always a statutory, separate affordable bit to such schemes, but it is “always begrudged” and “bartered down by greedy developers”.

In this case, they are stretching the definition of “affordable”, because someone would have to be on £58,000 to get the three-bedroom, family-sized version, but those on £60,000 are ineligible. I hope that the Minister’s colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will exercise their call-in powers before our skyline is ruined forever.

There are many examples of where local authorities have been forced to do this. That same Gothic town hall will be leased to a hotel chain, because it will foot the repair bill. I feel that is, to quote Macmillan, “selling off the family silver”

to the highest bidder. The end product is often marketed to overseas buyers, while Ealing has a five-figure council waiting list of local families.

Notwithstanding post-Grenfell fears of tall buildings, perhaps surprisingly, of more than 500 high-rise buildings in London that were granted planning permission or that began construction last year, a whopping 215—nearly half—are in outer boroughs. The current planning system, which incentivises high densification development in proximity to rail hubs, needs rethinking in the light of people choosing accommodation over location, with white-collar homeworking the new norm—at least for part of the week—as a lasting post-covid effect. In the meantime—I keep quoting Tory Prime Ministers—John Major talked approvingly about “invincible green suburbs” alongside warm beer and dog walkers as epitomising Englishness, and I feel that is in danger of being lost, particularly in somewhere like Ealing, which has been long known as queen of the suburbs.

Moreover, the Government have decided that London is not on the Tory target list, so levelling up does not apply. It is exempt from the towns fund, overlooking the

[Dr Huq]

fact that the capital is where inequalities are starkest, deprivation is deepest and poverty is at its worst in the UK. Between London's constituent bits, there is enormous diversity within.

A decade of decline in local infrastructure has left scarring effects such as youth stabbings, with closed youth clubs. Sadly, at times, it feels like the Government are hellbent on an anti-woke crusade of knee-jerk, populist bandwagoning. It looks like pandering, with the square root being what they think will deflect from any mistakes and win them votes. We have seen it again today with the aid cuts. I know there is a Standing Order No. 24 debate tomorrow—there is no vote—yet the 0.7% commitment, which, after all, Conservatives created and not only pledged in their manifesto but said was safe as recently as September with the Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office merger, is gone.

The Culture Secretary vowed in his most recent interviews to have more statues erected to unspecified British heroes, blocking what he sees as a kind of Britain-hating, statue-toppling metropolitan bubble that controls cultural institutions. He wants to replace it with red wall voters in the latest “war on the woke”—or front, battle, cultural cleansing or whatever we call it. Again, it looks like Government interference in a traditionally independent sector motivated by electoral calculation. I think people are saying the same about today's cricket controversy.

I have some asks for the Minister—it is a kind of top 10—and she will be relieved to know that I will end after giving them. First, the expression “not set in stone” should apply in that we should not be afraid to revisit, reinterpret and re-evaluate what has been handed down by previous generations. Reputations have not proved foolproof, so it pays to future-proof. I feel that the London Mayor's commission is a positive thing, because future monuments will be in sympathy with architectural surroundings and will not always be just creepy human forms. I understand that the holocaust memorial will be a geometric design. Sometimes the enormity of a situation outweighs one individual. On the other side of the river we have the covid memorial wall, and I know my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) and for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) are campaigning to make that permanent, which is a good plan—I make a plea to the Minister there.

The second point is that putting things in context, for example in museums with explanatory notes, is preferable to unthinking idolatry and the glorification of individuals. Thirdly, the public sector equality duty should be given due regard in planning decisions.

Fourthly, goodies versus baddies, London versus the red wall, and saints versus sinners is divisive and makes everything too binary. Richard III still has numerous statues everywhere, despite being a complete rotter with the princes in the tower. When his remains were found under a car park in Leicester, he received a lavish reburial, with the great and the good turning out, including Benedict Cumberbatch and people like that. That renewed Richard III's memorialisation, and I would never protest against any of that. Heritage and history are crucially contested; there is not one version of the past. We need more emphasis on critical thinking in

humanities and history, which of late seem to have been a bit disfavoured in the curriculum, in favour of numeracy and literacy.

Fifthly—I am halfway through—we need more flexibility, including a recognition that we do not have always to think of removal versus retention. There is also the option of relocation. Prague and Oslo have statue parks, so that people who like to look at such things can look at a whole load of them at once. Closer to home we have the fourth plinth, and such things are more adaptable than either “pull them down” or “stick them up”. Relocation and flexibility are other options.

My sixth point is to have fewer short-term reactive policies that are driven by the jingoistic stirring up of popular sentiment, and more cool-headed, longitudinal assessment. We need a recognition that London boroughs also need investment, and are not just places that are electorally useful for the current Government.

Point number seven is to reverse the wilful neglect of local government by Whitehall. Councils should not be forced into desperate measures. As I said, ministerial intervention on the planning issue that I flagged up would save Ealing's municipal heart and legacy from being overrun by development. Forcing local authorities to be self-financing is unrealistic, given the range of services now at their door. The biggest of those is the social care bill, which is still missing the Prime Minister's plan. We were promised that plan a long time ago, so if the Minister has any clues we would be grateful.

My penultimate point is that central Government leadership is needed on tall buildings to prohibit the over-densification of suburban locations, just as the green belt limited the overspill of cities into the countryside. Ealing, Brent, Croydon and Barnet have been the worst offenders of that “the sky's the limit” attitude to tower building in recent years. Local communities should be genuinely involved in decision making. The Colston scenes were exciting to witness, and the episode was a catalyst, but better frameworks for public inquiry should exist to achieve that end result, including listing or delisting buildings.

Finally, we should never look at statues as being a substitute for tackling the real issues of inequality. That really would be levelling up, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

9.54 pm

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) on securing the Adjournment debate. Gosh, that was wide-ranging! I think I would need an entire Front Bench of Ministers to respond fully to all the important points she made. If she will forgive me, I will use the short time left to me to concentrate on the bits that fall into my portfolio, which would be those that come under the topic of this debate, and to set out the Government's position on statues in cities and the wider context she talked about.

The hon. Lady started by saying that the debate on how best to acknowledge and commemorate our past and history is complicated. It can provoke really strong emotions and, although we might sometimes disagree with each other's positions, we always have to remember that everybody's individual views are strongly and sincerely

held and need to be seriously considered. That is because our history shapes who we are and what we value, and we are the poorer if we seek to deny that.

We believe that the right approach to statues and to other aspects of our history that are in the public realm—that are displayed publicly—however contentious, is, as the hon. Lady says, to retain and explain their presence, and present to the public their full story. Sometimes that is unpalatable, but it is important that we learn from it, as she pointed out; we cannot airbrush our past. We need to face up to it, however uncomfortable, and explain the history of those who are commemorated or marked within the contexts of the dominant norms of their time, and how those differ from the world we live in today and what we regard as acceptable. There are so many diverse opinions on the matter of statues. As she mentioned, for every statue on display that is deemed contested, there are at least two often conflicting opinions on what should be done, and there is often no consensus. The one thing I would like to try to reach today in this short debate is some kind of balance on this issue.

Let us start by putting the debate in context. There are approximately 12,000 outdoor statues and memorials in England. I agree with the hon. Lady that far too few of those are of women or of people who were significant in the LGBT struggles of our past, or of people with a range of other important aspects. However, all the statues that exist are of interest, significance and often pride to the communities in which they are erected. A significant number of them are listed in their own right or as part of the buildings in which they reside, which means that they are protected. The regulatory framework means that their removal or amendment can be complex, protracted and expensive, particularly given that in some cases planning permission has to be granted to get rid of them. Just one of those 12,000 statues has recently been removed illegally—the Colston statue in Bristol, which she mentioned.

The hon. Lady talked about how in April the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government introduced a new planning power, giving him the authority to call in for the ultimate decision a local authority intention to remove an unlisted plaque or commemoration. A lot has been said about the penalties, but to put this matter in context, let me say that this power has yet to be used. That is an important comment to make.

It is also important to remember that we do not just erect statues to mark the contributions of others at the national level; in local communities up and down the country there are commemorations to our own heroes, with many of those figures being a real source of local pride. George Stephenson, engineer and father of the railways, is commemorated in Newcastle. An important recent addition in Oldham is a statue of a local suffragette and former mill worker who was an associate of Christabel Pankhurst and who was jailed for three days for challenging MPs who opposed the campaign for votes for women. As the hon. Lady said, we would all be far better off if there was more recognition of women such as that who played such a pivotal and important role in history, and without whom she and I would probably not be here doing our jobs today.

A commemoration in a public space, often funded by public subscription, is a really positive way to acknowledge the contributions that these individuals have made to

their own communities. As we look at them, we have got to learn important things about the history of the area in which they lived and the wider context of the world in which they existed and the values of the communities that commemorated them.

However, as the hon. Lady said, the full stories of some individuals who are commemorated and their place in history are terribly complex. Some of them have been commissioned by past generations with very different perspectives and understandings of right and wrong from those we hold today. Although we may now disagree with those figures and their actions, they do play an important role in teaching us about our past. We are all products of our time, with our attitudes, beliefs and values often reflecting the age in which we live. Looking back, some of the norms of earlier centuries look bizarre—in fact, sometimes they look abhorrent—when measured against what we regard as acceptable today.

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Alan Mak.)

Caroline Dinenage: That brings us to the current debate about whether we should be removing statues, very often of men who were esteemed and well regarded in the past but, by today's standards and values, built their wealth and fame on things that we now find morally repugnant, such as the transatlantic slave trade.

Last month, I visited the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. I found it disturbing and upsetting. Probably to my shame, it taught me some uncomfortable facts about our history that I did not know. But as a confident and progressive country, we should face those difficult facts squarely, not wipe them from the history books. Historic England, the Government's adviser on the historic environment, agrees. It argues that if we remove difficult and contentious parts of our heritage, we risk harming our own understanding of our collective past.

How can we avoid repeating the errors of the past if we do not learn from them? Rather than erasing these objects, we have to seek to contextualise or reinterpret them in a way that enables the public to learn about them in their entirety, however challenging, uncomfortable and distressing that might be. The aim should be to use them to educate people about all aspects of Britain's complex past so that the Britain of the future can be better, stronger and better advised.

Much has been said and written about contested heritage in the past 18 months or so. The aim is to take politics out of the debate and allow organisations to get doing what they do best: curating our national heritage for future generations. To that end, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has established a heritage advisory board, which will oversee the development of guidelines that help decision makers in public and other organisations decide how to address the aspects of our heritage that have become controversial. The starting point is always that objects should be assumed to be retained in situ and contextualised in order that the full and comprehensive legacy of the deeds and actions of that person can be discussed, even if some of them are horribly unacceptable by today's standards.

Dr Huq: I totally agree with what the Minister is saying; I think we are at one on all this. We are talking about public space, place, purse, taste and all those things, so it is right to have these safeguards, but I wonder what she thinks of the 10-year tariff for defacing statues. A lot of women think that just looks really weird, and even the equality assessment says it will not result in one single more prison place. It just seems that that kind of thing is playing to the gallery. I wonder whether she has a view on that.

Caroline Dinenage: I am glad that the hon. Lady mentioned that. I am not aware that any of those kinds of sanctions have been handed out. That is a maximum sentence, and I am not sure that anything even approaching that has ever been dished out. When we measure it against the minimum sentence for rape, of course it seems obscene. Of course, the maximum sentence for rape is life imprisonment, so then it looks a little more understandable, but there is never any excuse for raping a woman, and of course human life and respect for each other should always take precedence over respect for statues and other man-made objects.

We have to be really careful about going down that track and making political issues out of something that is difficult. Really, what we are talking about here is memorials, and memorials do not just have historical significance. They are not just pieces of stone or marble; they are sometimes also very deeply symbolic, culturally or emotionally, sometimes to those who have died, and hold a huge importance to those who visit them. Thinking back to events around Parliament Square in 2020 and

the pictures and reports of the violence and the vandalism at some of the protests that took place then, the public are very rightly concerned about the respect for memorials in those types of contexts, so we do have to take that into consideration.

In the past year, some in the culture and heritage sector have been subject to some really disturbing social media abuse because of the work of their organisations. There can be absolutely no justification for defacing statues and for damaging memorials and symbols of British history, but most importantly, while we do not always agree on the approach some heritage organisations take in dealing with controversial aspects, I absolutely condemn those who hide behind the anonymity of social media to make threats to the hard-working curators and heritage professionals who are simply doing their job. With my other hat on as Digital Minister, I am determined to tackle that via the online safety Bill, because nobody should ever be abused or attacked online simply because of the job that they do.

I hope that I have managed to convey to the hon. Lady how committed I am to the hope that through dialogue and improved contextualisation of the stories of those commemorated, we can arrive at a consensus as to how best to address contested heritage. Rather than tearing things down, we should work at building that consensus and at building a better and fuller understanding of our complex history.

Question put and agreed to.

10.6 pm

House adjourned.

Members of 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)	Zarah Sultana
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Owen Thompson
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Con)	Chris Elmore
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Zarah Sultana
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Zarah Sultana
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP)	Neale Hanvey
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Andrew Mitchell
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Zarah Sultana
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Peter Aldous
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anum Qaisar-Javed (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jonathan Reynolds (Salford and Hyde) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Andrew Mitchell
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Zarah Sultana
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hywel Williams (Arfon) PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Westminster Hall

Monday 7 June 2021

[DAVID MUNDELL *in the Chair*]

Animal Welfare

[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 18 May 2021 on moving animals across borders, HC 79. Oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 24 November 2020 on pet smuggling, HC 926]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

4.30 pm

David Mundell (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practices in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate.

I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of Westminster Hall debates. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate. I also remind Members participating virtually that they are visible at all times to each other and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks' email address, which is westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk.

I would also like to remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall when Members are not speaking. Mr Shannon, as you are aware, you will need to move to the horseshoe to participate in the debate later.

4.31 pm

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 300535, 326261, and 574305, relating to the Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. Since these petitions were launched, the Government published their action plan on 12 May 2021, setting out their plans, aims and ambitions across the field of animal welfare. I know that in her summing up, the Minister will want to go into more detail about the plan's contents, so I will try not to steal all of her material. However, I will briefly say how much I welcome many of the commitments made in the plan, which truly reflects the fact that the UK is a nation of animal lovers and that the Government are keen to put the highest possible animal welfare standards in place, not just in terms of our domestic aims and objectives, but in terms of importing animals from overseas. The plan includes three very specific commitments, all of which relate to one of the three petitions under discussion.

I am grateful to everyone who has signed these petitions, who have demonstrated the power that they have to bring about change.

I will turn first to e-petition 300535, entitled "The UK should ban the importation of Shark Fins." The prayer of this petition states:

"Now that we have left the EU, the UK has the ability to finally stop the importation of Shark Fins. They had previously stated that 'Whilst in the EU, it is not possible to unilaterally ban the import of shark fins into the UK.'

Each year roughly 75 million sharks are killed for Shark Fin Soup where their fins are brutally cut from their bodies and thrown back in the sea to die. Despite countries in recent years making an attempt to crack down on Shark Finning no European country has yet to ban the importation of fins, meaning that loopholes still exist. Britain should become the first European country to ban the importation of Shark Fins before we lose these beautiful creatures forever."

This petition closed with 115,382 signatures, including 155 from my constituency of Carshalton and Wallington, and I am incredibly grateful to the petition's creator Robin for taking the time to speak to me last week about why he started this petition, in partnership with the charity Shark Guardian. I pay tribute to them both for their incredible efforts. As the Government outlined in their response to this petition in November 2020, it is true that shark finning is an illegal practice in UK waters, but imports and exports are helping to keep the demand—and consequently the practice—alive.

The prayer of this petition eloquently outlines the need for a ban, but I want to expand a little further on that. According to Shark Guardian, it is currently legal, under the fish and fish product allowances set by UK Border Force, to bring 20 kg of dried shark fin into the UK without declaration. Twenty kilograms of dried shark fin potentially equates to hundreds of sharks being butchered, depending on their size. Many of those fins could belong to threatened shark species listed under the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, and they could make their way into the UK illegally through this loophole. UK Border Force also requires people to declare goods worth more than £390, but 20 kg of shark fin could have a value of more than £4,000, so Shark Guardian identifies huge potential for tax evasion. It is therefore very welcome that the UK Government have committed in the action plan to ban the import and export of shark fins to and from the UK. The only clarification that I seek from the Government today is on the timeline for implementation.

I turn next to e-petition 326261, entitled "Ban the exploitative import of young puppies for sale in the UK". The prayer of the petition states:

"Plenty of dogs from UK breeders & rescues need homes. Transporting young pups long distances is often stressful, before being sold for ridiculous prices to unsuspecting dog-lovers. Government must adjust current laws, ban this unethical activity on welfare grounds & protect these poor animals ASAP.

The recent tragic case of a puppy dying just 6 days after being delivered from Russia has exposed a completely legal but immoral route to market for pups bred hundreds of miles away & sold away from their mums. Who's actually inspecting these breeders & transportation conditions? Selling imported pups like this is cruel & appears to contradict the Government's own advice to always physically 'see puppies interacting with their mothers in their place of birth' as with Lucy's Law in England."

The petition closed with 128,549 signatures, including 217 from Carshalton and Wallington.

[*Elliot Colburn*]

There has been significant interest in this petition. I am grateful to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, the Kennel Club, the Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, the all-party parliamentary dog advisory welfare group and others for briefing me prior to today's debate. All organisations have spelled out, almost in complete agreement, why action is desperately needed. Animals imported from overseas have often been subject to much lower animal welfare standards and even abuse, and the long journey can be physically and mentally draining for a puppy. It is also evident that the EU pet travel scheme is being completely abused, and the enforcement at the UK border is not good enough.

Again, since responding to this petition the UK Government have taken action in the form of the action plan, which states that they will increase the minimum age at which dogs can be brought into the UK. That has largely been welcomed. The action plan also contains a commitment to reduce the number of dogs and cats that can be moved under pet travel rules.

There are many common themes from all the organisations that have approached me with briefings prior to today's debate, and I hope that the Minister will address them in her response. They include the need to reduce from five to two or three the number of dogs that can be moved under the pet travel rules, to increase the maximum sentence, and to ensure much better enforcement at the border, including by using trained animal professionals and having trained staff available 24/7 to avoid lapses at weekends and out of hours. Additionally, any information that the Minister can provide on timelines would be very welcome indeed.

Finally, I turn to e-petition 574305, entitled "Stop the rising number of ear-cropped dogs in the UK". The prayer of the petition states:

"Leading veterinary and welfare bodies are concerned by the alarming rise in ear-cropped dogs in the UK. Ear cropping is illegal in the UK and an unnecessary, painful mutilation with no welfare benefit. The practice involves cutting off part of the ear flap, often without anaesthesia or pain relief.

The RSPCA states a 621% increase in reports of ear cropping from 2015 to 2020. We believe a rise in UK celebs sharing images of their cropped dogs on social media is helping to fuel this. While illegal to crop in the UK, it's not illegal to sell ear-cropped dogs, import them from abroad or take dogs abroad to be cropped. These loopholes act as a smokescreen for those illegally cropping in UK. We call on the Government to close these loopholes and end the trend in ear-cropped dogs for good."

This petition is still open and at the time of my writing this speech it has over 104,000 signatures, including 147 from Carshalton and Wallington. I am grateful to the petition's creators for speaking to me last week about why they feel it is important.

Similar to shark finning, the practice of cropping a dog's ear is indeed illegal in the UK, but importing and exporting is keeping the practice alive. However, as the petitioners have outlined, there is an added pressure given the increase in the number of celebrities and so-called social media influencers who have been buying ear-cropped dogs and parading them online. Although I am sure that some want to provide them with a loving home, many are buying them for their aesthetics—in other words, the way they look.

I will not waste time naming and shaming those celebrities, because they have all been well covered in press reports. However, I will join animal charities in urging them not to buy ear-cropped dogs or parade them around social media, which could lead others to buy them, too. We need to take the demand away, so I hope that when she replies the Minister will join me in condemning this celebrity trend and in urging them not to do it.

There is no need to crop a dog's ear, and many people who do so put the animal through this awful procedure without any sedation or pain relief. Again, I praise the Government for the measures in the action plan, which states that they are seeking to prohibit the importation and non-commercial movement into Great Britain of dogs that have been subject to low welfare practices such as ear cropping and tail docking, in line with domestic legislation.

Although the practice might be banned in the UK, however, UK-based companies are still offering do-it-yourself cropping kits for sale on online platforms such as Google and Amazon. What steps are the UK Government taking to tackle that?

Will the Minister also confirm that the commitment to ban imports and non-commercial movement includes a ban on the private sale of ear-cropped dogs within the UK, regardless of whether the seller caused the dog's ears to be cropped in the first place? Finally, as with the other petitions, any news on timelines would be greatly appreciated.

Overall, the Government should be commended for their action plan on animal welfare and on listening to the petitioners' concerns. I thank those who have signed each of these three petitions, who have demonstrated the power of the petitions system in the UK, as evidenced by the fact that all three petitions have secured changes in policy.

The big question coming out of today's debate must be this: when can we expect to see these measures brought before the House? In addition, while the UK is showing leadership, the lead petitioners to whom I have spoken said that we cannot act alone. Although the UK may take firm action—which I am sure the Minister will further outline in her reply—overseas animals will still be subject to these practices unless we encourage others to follow our lead. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will also touch on what we are doing to influence animal welfare standards around the world, taking advantage of our hosting of the G7 and our new trading relationships, to ensure that others can follow our example.

David Mundell (in the Chair): I do not intend to impose a time limit at this stage, provided that Members can stick to a self-disciplined time limit of four minutes.

4.43 pm

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (*Elliot Colburn*) on bringing this important debate before us.

Historically, the UK was the foremost leader when it came to animal welfare and it is the first island of nations in the world to implement legislation protecting

animal rights, but today we have witnessed this Tory Government turn their back on the opportunity to implement the very highest standards of animal welfare.

The Scottish National party has always had a steadfast commitment to initiate the steps that strengthen animal welfare legislation and will continue on this progressive path in this new parliamentary term. Indeed, the Scottish Government have undoubtedly led the way in developing policies that keep animal health and welfare at the forefront of any new legislation.

It has been especially heartening to see those decisions prompt debate and considerable movement on crucial pieces of legislation across the other nations of the UK. That includes banning the use of wild animals in circuses and an effective ban on the use of electric shock collars, paving the way for the rest of the UK to follow suit and highlighting issues that are emblematic of our position that animals under the care of our Government deserve the very highest possible protections in future legislation.

Since the pandemic, there has been an unprecedented demand for puppies, which has led to a devastating increase in the prevalence of abuse on puppy farms. The increase in price due to increased demand has only further fuelled criminality. The introduction of Lucy's law in Scotland has helped crack down somewhat on this scandalous trade, and it means that puppies and kittens in Scotland can no longer be sold by third-party sellers such as pet shops and commercial dealers, unless they have bred the animals. Instead, anyone seeking to buy or adopt a puppy under six months old must deal directly with either the breeder or the animal rehoming centre. The move has been warmly welcomed by animal charities such as the Kennel Club, which has described it as a crucial step in advancing animal welfare regulations.

I saw the positive effects of Scotland's approach on a visit to the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals rehoming centre in Lanarkshire just last week, and I place on the record the fact that the work carried out by its outstanding team is nothing short of incredible. They are, indeed, a credit to their sector and provide a lifeline to the animals that depend so much on their care. They noted that the regulations introduced in Scotland are far more effective, fairer and far more straightforward than their English counterparts, simply by not repeating the mistakes made in the parallel regulations, which we already know have been embarrassingly ineffective in tackling poor breeding practices.

That proves again that Scotland is leading the UK—not for the first time, of course, and not only in this specific area. Indeed, unlike the Government who operate from this place, the Scottish Government create animal welfare legislation based on independent scientific and ethical advice by the Scottish animal welfare commission, a body of leading animal welfare experts and vets who are responsible for helping develop evidence-led recommendations on issues relating to animal welfare and sentience.

Today, in the name of my constituents in Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, many of whom have signed the three petitions, I am further calling on the Government to prohibit the importation of shark fins, ban the exploitative import of young puppies, end the sale of electric shock training devices on pet collars, and stop the increasing number of ear-cropped dogs being imported into the UK. The Government must work to ensure that

regulations are in place to protect the welfare of all animals. Although much of the legislation has been devolved, the Scottish Government are always willing to support strengthening animal welfare legislation within the UK and achieving better standards internationally. If the UK Government need a precursor, they need look no further than to Edinburgh and the Scottish Parliament.

4.47 pm

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell, and to follow the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar). I welcome this debate on important areas of animal welfare. I declare a professional interest as a veterinary surgeon, and I also declare that I am a member of the Dogs Trust parliamentary puppy smuggling taskforce.

I strongly support the shark fin petition, and I am reassured that the Government have said they are keen to act in order to stop this cruel practice. Enlarging this theme, as we move from World Environment Day to World Ocean Day, we must as a nation speak out and urge other countries to join in the conservation of species in all habitats. I welcome the Government's approach in their action plan for animal welfare, and the Environment Minister's responses to our letters and to the inquiries held by the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs into pet smuggling and the movement of animals across borders. I pay tribute to those campaigners championing the causes in the puppy and ear-cropping petitions, including my fellow vet Marc Abraham, the British Veterinary Association, the Dogs Trust, Blues Cross, Battersea, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the FOAL Group—Focus on Animal Law—to name but a few.

In recent times, and stimulated by the pandemic, we have seen increased demand for pets, increased smuggling and importation, and a shift from the pet travel scheme to the commercial Balai directive. We have also heard increased reports in the UK of diseases such as canine brucellosis, babesiosis, leishmaniasis and echinococcus, some of which have zoonotic potential. In our EFRA Committee hearings, we have heard harrowing accounts of the transport of puppies and heavily pregnant dogs in appalling conditions. Now that we have left the EU, we have the opportunity to tighten up on legislation and border checks, in order to put an end to the miserable plight of animals being transported by unscrupulous smugglers. We urgently need to raise to six months the minimum age of entry for dogs and cats, reinstate rabies titre checks, and increase the wait time post-rabies vaccination to 12 weeks. We also need to institute pre-import screening for pathogens such as brucella canis and to reinstitute mandatory tick and tapeworm treatment before entry. This will protect not only travelling animals but the UK pet population, and it will also militate against the risk of some diseases being transmitted to people.

In addition, the number of pets per person, currently set at five, is too high and should be reduced to two. In fact, it would be good if it was capped per vehicle, as we have heard reports of vehicles picking up foot passengers in order to increase the number of animals they can legally transport. The rules on transporting pregnant

[Dr Neil Hudson]

dogs and cats need to be tightened. Currently, this is not allowed in the last 10% of the pregnancy, but that is very difficult to adjudicate on, so the period should be increased to, say, after 50% of the pregnancy. We must not forget about cats and kittens in this debate. The scale of their smuggling is harder to ascertain, but we must be cognisant that this is not just a canine problem.

Ear cropping is a cruel, horrific and unnecessary practice that is rightly illegal in the UK, but sadly there are increased reports of cropped dogs, with six in 10 small animal vets saying they have seen cropped dogs in the past year, begging the question of not only whether there are increased imports but also the horrific concept of whether cropping is being done illicitly here in the UK. Celebrities and people in public life have a role to play here by not endorsing or promoting the ownership of cropped dogs. We also need to be careful in culture and media. One of my favourite films is Disney Pixar's "Up", a touching and funny film that coined the inspired phrase "cone of shame" to describe a veterinary buster collar. However, take a closer look at one of the Dobermans in the cartoon film and it looks like its ears have been cropped and splintered. These subtle images normalise something in our psyches that we should be calling out as unacceptable. Again, we should not forget the cat here. We should ban the import of dogs with cropped ears but also the import of cats that have been de-clawed, another banned practice here in the UK.

Animal welfare unites us in humanity in our duty of care to animals, the fully sentient beings in our care. I welcome the Government's direction of travel in this area, and I am sure that we can work with the Government, across parties, to do our bit to help sharks and dogs—and not forgetting the cats.

4.52 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) on securing this important debate. We have had a cross-party discussion on the shame attached to various behaviours so grotesque that it is truly challenging to admit that they are tolerated in any culture or community, much less elements of the communities that we live in and represent. I thank the members of my constituency who contacted me independently and those who signed these important petitions.

I turn first to the toe-curling barbarism of shark-finning and the unfolding catastrophe it presents. A once rare and infrequently consumed dish for the Chinese aristocracy, it is now a macabre edible trinket of no nutritional value—I understand it must be comprehensively seasoned before it even has a taste—the global demand for which, principally from the burgeoning Chinese middle class, has made it a totem for conspicuous consumption and an ultimate status symbol. The resulting demand is literally insatiable; there will never be enough sharks to sate the demand, currently running at 73 million sharks annually.

The strongest action must be taken if we are to reverse the growth in popularity of this most costly of dishes—costly in every sense, not only in that it is \$100 for a bowl of broth—making it the guilty pleasure that it is and ensuring that, over time, it is consigned to history.

We should do so as soon as possible. The UK Government have said that they will bring in legislation to ban the import and export of detached shark fins. Will the Minister clarify whether that is only shark fins that are intact and dried, or whether it is also shark fin products? If it is not, we risk supplanting one problem with another just as grievous. This being an issue of customs and enforcement at the UK border, it is of course reserved for the time being to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the UK Government, but to be clear, the SNP Government in Scotland will support any prohibition on the import of detached shark fins and shark fin products, to protect this majestic animal, an apex predator, from the unimaginable suffering of finning.

Let me turn to puppy smuggling. I and my colleagues on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee have heard the most harrowing evidence of puppy smuggling into the UK. Particularly horrifying was the evidence about pregnant bitches being seized and found to be pregnant without having had the opportunity to heal from their last caesarean section. This was compounded by evidence that the gangs will grudgingly concede their pups at the border when seized, but will be very unhappy indeed to lose a breeding bitch. This indicates the terrible ordeal for pups and their mothers who travel huge distances in poor conditions and the long-term health problems that will leave many a heartbroken family with a poorly bred pup that will never reach adulthood.

The SNP Government in Scotland have pledged to modernise and update the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and will continue to adopt the highest possible animal welfare standards to protect their wellbeing. The Scottish Government will adopt new licensing requirements for breeding puppies and, importantly, also for kittens and infant rabbits, something that I do not believe at the moment, although the Minister might clarify this, DEFRA is planning to do, and we will have the introduction of Lucy's law, which will end the third party selling of dogs and cats under the age of six months in Scotland.

On ear cropping, many of us in this room are dog owners and dog lovers and the notion of mutilating a puppy to reshape its ears into a more aggressive posture is beyond my ken, and I am sure beyond that of the vast majority of the public. However, it is not currently prohibited to possess a dog with cropped ears. As suggested by the Scottish SPCA, animals that have undergone that mutilation are being seen in greater numbers. These animals might have been cropped illegally in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK, or might have been imported, and we need to make sure that we work cross-party and cross-nation in the UK to adopt the best possible outcome for our animals.

4.56 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a pleasure to be back in Westminster Hall. This is the first time I have made a contribution in Westminster Hall since the start of the lockdown, and it is even better that it is under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I am grateful to see you, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan).

We have three petitions brought together for this afternoon's debate, and I am encouraged that in my constituency of Belfast East, 464 individuals have signed them. I want to focus my remarks during my four minutes

on puppy welfare. Progress on Lucy's law has been encouraging, but, as has been mentioned and no doubt will be repeated throughout the debate, there are difficulties with the application of the law, primarily in frustrating the importation of illegally farmed puppies from outside the United Kingdom. England led the way last year, and the introduction in Scotland shortly followed. Wales will introduce legislation in September. In Northern Ireland, Marc Abraham, who was mentioned, has been keenly involved in the campaigning to introduce Lucy's law in Northern Ireland. My party colleague from East Belfast, Robin Newton MLA, is advancing that legislation—not a moment too soon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) noted that his wife is a volunteer at the Assisi Animal Sanctuary in his constituency. It is a wonderful charity, and six years ago, just prior to my election to this place, I launched our party's animal welfare policy document in its facility in Newtownards. We had ambitious plans—we still do—to increase sentencing for animal welfare. Animal cruelty is a challenge, but there is a challenge here for the Minister. So much of this debate is about what is happening in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England as though they are separate entities. There is a much greater need for collaboration across the four nations, and I do not think the Minister will balk at that notion. There just needs to be a greater focus on it.

One issue that comes up time and again is the lack of a register of those banned from holding animals. Sentencing is one thing, and we want to see an increase in penalties, but there is no register where people can read across and check whether somebody has been banned from holding animals, so we need that register to preclude them from looking after animals again.

I remember, shortly after my election in 2015, working with the then Member for Dumfries and Galloway, Richard Arkless, on puppy smuggling—my constituency of Belfast East straddles Belfast lough, and we all know that there is a good ferry connection from there over to Scotland—and here we are six years later, still talking about the same issue. I see that the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) will be talking on this issue later as the SNP spokesperson. I think that there is an onus on us from Northern Ireland and Scotland to collaborate in a much greater and impactful fashion.

Just six years ago, 100,000 puppies were being brought into this country from illegal farms; 40% of those were coming from the Republic of Ireland and 30% were coming from illegal farms in Romania, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania. Those numbers have greatly increased in the intervening period—they have increased dramatically.

I think of a constituency worker in my own team in Belfast East who bought a wonderful cocker spaniel called Walter just a year ago. At £450, he thought that it was a bargain, but Walter, after £1,200-worth of vet's bills, had to be put down after six months because of total organ failure. All of us who bring an animal into our home know how quickly it becomes a loved one and a huge part of the family. Whenever we are in a situation like that, it pulls at our hearts. I approach this issue, as we all do, as an animal lover. I think that the challenge is about not just incorporating and strengthening the law that is already there, but increasing collaboration

across the four parts of this United Kingdom, so that we do not see repeat after repeat of Walter, of Mr Chai and of Lucy herself.

5.1 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell, and to follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who makes a very good point about the diseased animals that people are likely to buy and the great cost and heartache to people when they have to have them put down. It is essential that we do more about this. I am also happy to follow the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), who is a great member of the EFRA Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson), who of course brings his veterinary experience to our Select Committee.

I very much support the petitions that have come through. On shark finning, let me say to my hon. Friend the Minister in all seriousness that I think that we have to take that issue up with the European Union. I will not name the particular countries that are interested in shark finning. They are well south of Europe, and I do not need to name them. That is where we need to act to stop that happening. Of course, the trouble with shark fins is that they are very valuable, but the practice must be stopped.

As for puppies, I very much endorse what every Member has said. I will explain what I am going to concentrate on. In the Committee, we have taken oral evidence on pet smuggling from the veterinary director of Dogs Trust, from Dr Jennifer Maher of the University of South Wales and from Daniella Dos Santos, senior vice-president of the British Veterinary Association, as well as from the RSPCA and others; and it is key that we act on this. I congratulate the Government and the Minister on putting together some very good legislation, but I think that the biggest issue of all is enforcing that legislation. I also think that Border Force needs to have many more staff and many more trained staff so that as puppies come through, they can work out whether they are 15 weeks old or not. All these things have to be done.

Those staff have to be there late at night, early in the morning and at weekends—perhaps not every weekend and every night, but they need to come and go so that those who are smuggling puppies through illegally will be caught. We are talking now probably about a sum of between £2,000 and £3,000 per puppy. It does not take too much arithmetic to work out that if someone smuggles quite a number of puppies through, it is very lucrative. Of course, up until now, the sentencing has been very light. We are now welcoming longer sentencing of up to five years, but we have to ensure that that happens. Puppy smuggling does not always fall within the animal welfare legislation, either. It is therefore absolutely key that we get on with this and ensure that we enforce it properly.

I am going to say something that perhaps is slightly more controversial: we in this country probably need about 800,000 puppies a year. I think that there are in this country about 10 million dogs and they have an average life expectancy of about 12 years, so again, if we do the arithmetic, we probably need between 700,000

[Neil Parish]

and 800,000 puppies. We do not breed that number, and that is a problem. I do not want to go into vast puppy farming, but somehow or other, the Government need to encourage substantial breeding of dogs in a humane way. That is not easy, because we do not want to overbreed from any bitches—lots of things have to be done carefully—but I fear that if we do not do something about the number of puppies that are needed, the sheer price of them will mean that the temptation to smuggle remains. I therefore say to the Minister in all seriousness that I would very much consider this.

I am not going to raise all the points that every other Member has made about the action plan and the minimum of 15 weeks. I believe we should reduce the number of puppies that can come in legitimately to two: not many people go out and buy five puppies for their own use, so therefore those puppies are coming back legitimately through a system that is being abused. There are lots of things we can do, including about the cropping of tails and ears, which is absolutely abhorrent and something we should do our best to stamp out. I think we are agreed on this across all parties: one thing I enjoy about chairing the Select Committee is that we can bring all parties together. I am sure the Minister would congratulate all parties on working on this, so it is not a party political issue.

I will finish where I started: we can have the best rules in the world, but if we do not enforce them, they will not work. We have rules about microchipping and all of these things, but very often when these puppies that are found are taken to a vet, most of the information on those microchips is fictitious: they are not kept up to date. When people genuinely sell dogs, their microchips should be kept up to date, and then we will start to pick up on those that are illegally traded. These gangs are very clever—there is big money to be made—and we must not underestimate them. Let us all work together to try to stamp this out, but that will require Government to work across all Departments, not just DEFRA. I am sure that the Minister would agree with me about that. Thank you very much, Mr Mundell.

David Mundell (in the Chair): Thank you, Mr Parish. Let us all work together to stick to the four-minute limit on speeches.

5.7 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): This is one of those glorious occasions, Mr Mundell, on which you have caught me off guard. I had not realised that there had been a number of withdrawals from the debate, so obviously that is a bonus.

This is one of those wonderful occasions on which the House can agree on something, because all Members of Parliament are against cruelty to animals. That is not rocket science, but, of course, some of us have been saying these things in Parliament a little longer than others. For me, it is an enormous joy that so many Members of Parliament have prioritised this as the top of their agenda, for all sorts of reasons. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) has introduced the debate so effectively that there is precious little left to say. I very much support what he said, although I will say that sharks are not at the top of

my list of favourite animals. We do know that there was a film about sharks that did a great deal of damage; I have kept sharks in tropical fish tanks, but they are not quite like the ones that we see in that film.

Now that we have left the European Union, I hope that we will be able to drag some other countries up to our already high standards, and that we will continue to improve standards of animal welfare in this country. As such, I am delighted to say to my hon. Friend the Minister—who is yet again replying to such a debate—that I am very pleased with the progress that is being made on animal welfare. I was delighted that my ten-minute rule Bill on banning farrowing crates was recognised in the Government's action plan. I again urge the Government to ban those cruel and unnecessary cages for sows. It might upset some of the farming community, but there is no reason to use them.

We banned shark finning 20 years ago, yet shark fins are still being traded today. As a country with strong marine conservation, we must ban the import and export of shark fins, as other colleagues have said, and press for stronger action against unsustainable fishing practices. Tomorrow is World Oceans Day—I do not know whether we have a badge to wear to celebrate it—so it is apt that we are bringing to the House's attention the plight of sharks and are pushing for harsher financial punishments to act as a deterrent to the mutilation of those wonderful creatures, which are perhaps scary if one goes towards them but are fine if left alone.

We heard in the opening speech about a puppy that was just four months old and died after being transported from the Soviet Union to the United Kingdom, but that is only one example of the many puppies imported for sale. All puppies are cute; we love puppies. However, as we tell our children and grandchildren—I do not have any grandchildren yet—they grow up and develop different personalities. There is an enormous responsibility in owning a dog; it is not just that they are cute while they are a puppy. There should be much more careful thought about dog ownership generally. In the 18 months in which the pandemic has been with us, lots of people found great comfort in owning an animal. I understand all that, but I have talked to many animal welfare groups, and the number of dogs that have been returned to them is rather heartbreaking.

That puppy suffered harsh, cruel conditions before dying. Many importers exploit a loophole in Lucy's law by legally bringing in five puppies at a time to the United Kingdom and selling them directly to the buyer for a larger profit. The number of dogs that can legally be brought into the country should be reduced to two per vehicle to stop criminals importing on a mass scale as they are currently doing. I would very much like our Government to increase the minimum import age for dogs to six months, and restrict the ability of unscrupulous traders to import heavily pregnant dogs. That is absolutely ridiculous. Although we are talking about dogs today, we must never forget about the very young farm animals that also endure long journeys for export and similarly need conditions to be improved. I feel very, very strongly about the live export of animals.

I will not go into the details of ear cropping, which other colleagues have mentioned, but it is preventable. It is painful, and is often performed without any sort of pain relief—how would we like our ears to be cropped? Despite it being illegal, the Royal Society for the Prevention

of Cruelty to Animals stated that there was a 621% increase in reports of ear cropping from 2015 to today. It is, however, not illegal to sell ear-cropped dogs, import them from abroad or take dogs abroad to be cropped. As a patron of the wonderful Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, I encourage the Government, whom I support, to introduce further steps to ensure that the transport of dogs with cropped ears for sale in the United Kingdom cannot take place, and address that loophole.

At the border, there should be more thorough visual checks of dogs and importation methods. We must, however, be careful not to affect the importation of rescue dogs—we have heard wonderful stories about rescue dogs—or any dogs bred by responsible breeders who follow high animal welfare standards.

I welcome the Government's intention to introduce three new Bills to continue to improve animal welfare—the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, the Kept Animals Bill and the Animals Abroad Bill—and I hope the House will come together, support them and get them quickly on to the statute book. A timeline for the urgent delivery of the Government's action plan on animal welfare is much needed. I urge people to buy pets from trusted sellers and to follow the Animal Welfare Foundation and RSPCA puppy contract to ensure that dogs are in good health when they are purchased.

5.15 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to participate in this debate. In the past, others and I have spoken many times about the unscrupulous elements who exploitatively import puppies in horrific conditions, so today I will focus on the ear cropping of dogs and the need to ban the importation of shark fins.

As we have heard, ear cropping in dogs is vile, mutilating dogs' ears for so-called aesthetic reasons. It is illegal in the UK and the EU, but it continues to be a challenge. Dogs that have their ears cropped undergo an incredibly painful procedure, typically with no pain relief, and are vulnerable to infection as a result. The practice has the potential to influence a dog's behaviour, welfare and quality of life. As dogs use their ears to communicate, ear cropping can impact a dog's relationship with other dogs and with people.

The RSPCA has reported a 621% increase in the number of cases between 2015 and 2019. That is truly shocking. Loopholes in current legislation mean that it is legal to sell ear-cropped dogs and to import dogs with cropped ears from abroad. These loopholes act as a smokescreen for those who illegally crop dogs' ears inside the UK. If the ban on ear cropping in the UK is to truly safeguard dogs, as is the intention, then banning the importation of dogs with cropped ears into the UK is vital. That would allow much more robust enforcement action to be taken against those cropping dogs' ears in the UK.

In addition, the law should make it clear that arranging to take a dog abroad for the purposes of cropping is an offence. The Scottish Government are looking seriously at that. Work on that would be carried out most effectively with a co-ordinated set of actions across the UK, so I am sure that the Minister will seek to liaise with the Scottish Government on that important issue.

The petition on the importation of shark fins is also very important. The shark population is declining rapidly on a global scale, because humans have now replaced sharks as the ocean's top predator. The shark population has been severely impacted by the horrific practice of shark finning, which is the process of slicing off a shark's fin and discarding the rest of the still-living animal into the ocean where, unable to swim, it sinks to the bottom and dies a slow and painful death.

Shark fins are considered a real prize for some fishermen because they have a high monetary and cultural value. Conservation, advocacy and education have cut China's consumption of shark fins by 80% since 2011. Sadly, that has been offset by a rise in the consumption of this fish in places such as Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

In order to protect the shark as a species, given the terrible cruelty the practice inflicts on the sharks and the vital role sharks play in our ocean ecosystem health, I urge the Minister to do all she can to guide progress on banning the importation of shark fins, following the Government's announcement on the global shark-fin trade last month. It is important that action proceeds with all due haste, sending a clear signal that we will have no truck with such a cruel and shocking practice. I conclude my remarks, Mr Mundell, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

David Mundell (in the Chair): Thank you, Ms Gibson, particularly for sticking to the time limit. I hope James Daly, whom I will call next, will follow your example.

5.19 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Mr Mundell. I endorse the things that all colleagues have spoken about.

I will concentrate my remarks on e-petition 574305 regarding ear cropping of dogs in the UK, which is an abhorrent practice. In recognition that there is no medical justification for ear cropping, the procedure has been banned in the UK for over 100 years and is currently covered by section 5 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 as an illegal mutilation. I am grateful to Pennine Vets in my constituency for briefing me on this important issue.

The current position in the UK is that although it is illegal to conduct such mutilation, it is not illegal to import a dog with cropped ears, which has resulted in several issues. The first is that owners and breeders can send their puppies abroad to be cropped and then returned to the UK, only to claim that the dog is a legal import. This quite frequently involves transporting a puppy that is too young for travel, but it also means that if the cropping is done in another country where cropping is illegal, the enforcement agencies in that country are not able to bring any prosecutions, as the evidence—the cropped puppy—has left their jurisdiction.

The second issue is that pro croppers have relied on the ability to import cropped dogs in order to hide a very dark back-street practice, whereby breeders or owners undertake illegal do-it-yourself cropping, frequently with no medical knowledge or training, and with rudimentary equipment, no anaesthetic and no post-operative pain relief for the dogs. As the ability to import cropped dogs also extends to rescue dogs, it is imperative that genuine rescue dogs are protected and are not demonised due to the abuse they have suffered.

[James Daly]

The pain and suffering caused to the dogs does not cease post procedure. One of the breeds frequently cropped is the Doberman, which is a large and noble breed. For Doberman puppies, ear cropping can mean not only the severance of a significant part of their ear flap, but months of splinting and/or taping in order to encourage the remaining ear to stand erect. This is not a guaranteed result; it can and does fail, leaving the dog either having to go through further surgery to try to obtain the original desired look, or with one ear erect and one ear flapping. Wound infections are not uncommon. The practice is utterly abhorrent, and I fully support the Government's move to include ear cropping in the action plan for animal welfare.

I have to finish by echoing something that my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) said—not forgetting the cat. On numerous occasions, I have stood with my hon. Friend the Minister and talked about Gizmo's law, which is not included—I stand to be corrected—in the plan for animal welfare. It is an animal welfare issue that is incredibly serious and very important to people in my constituency, and I know that other colleagues, including the shadow Minister, have had meetings with Helena Abrahams—a force of nature—to try to put this important law into statute. I am grateful that the Government adopted Tuk's law, which was part of a private Member's Bill that I introduced, and I hope that Gizmo's law will follow very shortly.

5.22 pm

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): Diolch, Mr Mundell. I am grateful to be able to follow the hon. Member for Bury North (James Daly), and I echo his comments regarding Gizmo's law being brought in as soon as possible. I am also grateful for being called to speak in this debate on a topic that is close to heart for so many of us, and about which I have spoken at length in this place. The welfare of animals big and small has undeniably taken a hit as a consequence of the pandemic, but it is our duty and moral obligation to protect animals from harm. Like many others, I have fears that the Government's action plan for animal welfare does not stretch far enough.

Residents across my Pontypridd constituency topped the signature count for the petition focused on the worrying rise in the ear cropping of dogs, so that is where I will focus my comments. Let us be clear: ear cropping is a barbaric and illegal practice that is completely unnecessary and which brings no welfare benefit to dogs. There are some fantastic charities out there that are leading the way on tackling this issue—none more so than Hope Rescue, which is a dog rescue charity based in the constituency of my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore). Hope Rescue does genuinely brilliant work and is a proud former partner of the “flop not crop” campaign, which is a collaboration led by the Focus on Animal Law Group and the British Veterinary Association.

The strength of feeling on ear cropping is particularly clear in south Wales, and Hope Rescue is currently caring for eight micro-bully puppies seized from a breeder. Of the eight, six have had their ears cropped. It is all very well to outlaw such cruel practices, but it is clear that in the case of ear cropping, the law is doing nothing

to protect dogs that are at risk. As others have mentioned, although it is illegal to crop in the UK, it is not illegal to sell cropped dogs, import them from abroad, or take dogs abroad to be cropped. Such loopholes act as a smokescreen for illegal cropping in the UK. Sadly, the coronavirus pandemic, and the overall increase in demand for dogs and puppies, has seen an increase in demand for dogs with cropped ears. It is utterly shocking that the RSPCA has reported a 621% increase in reports of dogs with cropped ears over the past five years, and this is clearly something that charities on the ground are having to cope with too. In the past few weeks alone, Hope Rescue has reported a number of breeders across south Wales to both the police and relevant local authorities, but ultimately the severe delays in the court system are having a major impact. Sadly, the ability to create meaningful change is very limited.

It is absolutely vital that when we consider issues of animal welfare, including those covered by the petitions that we are debating today, we also consider the knock-on effects and long-term problems that animals may face in years to come. Puppies that have been subjected to ear-cropping have often been subjected to poor breeding techniques that consequently impact their overall health and welfare too.

Put simply, in its current form the Government's action plan for animal welfare does not go far enough to protect animals, both now and in the years to come. If we are truly to get a grip on tackling the abuse of animals, part of the conversation is to improve law enforcement practices. Although I welcome the recent introduction of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill, tougher prison sentences for animal cruelty offences will do little to change the situation on the ground and are unlikely to lead to meaningful and much-needed change for animals that are suffering today.

I urge the Minister to take forward my concerns and those of colleagues across the political divide in her conversations with colleagues in the Home Office. The Government have the opportunity to improve practices, but they are dragging their heels when it comes to ear cropping. I truly hope that today's debate will make it clear to the Minister that urgent action is required, and required now.

David Mundell (in the Chair): I now call Jim Shannon to speak. Mr Shannon, if you stick to four minutes, then the Minister and the opposition spokespersons will have plenty of time to contribute.

5.25 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I certainly will do that, Mr Mundell; thank you for that clarification.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) and everyone else who has spoken. I thank the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for presenting the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who has just left the Chamber, referred to the Assisi Animal Sanctuary, where my wife has been a dedicated volunteer for many years; indeed, many of the animals in our own home are animals that have been rescued. They now rule the roost.

My comments today will largely focus on the puppy issue. The facts are clear—there has been an absolutely massive increase in demand for puppies during the

pandemic. People who are spending more time at home have realised that a wee dog may be something that can complete their family; that is lovely and it should be the case. However, my wife has highlighted to me that often after peaks of demand such as this one there will be a devastating peak of abandoned dogs, when owners realise the huge responsibility that comes with a cute little puppy, as the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) has said.

Dogs are a lot of work. In my opinion, as someone who has had dogs all his life, they are worth every second. The fact is that dogs will always love their owner and will always wag their tail. The springer spaniel that we have—Autumn—probably came from a home where it was abused. It was certainly nervous and unsure. Now, it is confident; it is now my hunting dog and also my guard dog.

I first realised the scale of the problem when one of my staff members told me that she had been approached during lockdown while she was out on a walk with a two-year-old Dachshund by a man who offered to buy her dog. She laughed it off by saying that she would rather sell her husband before she would sell her dog—there is a thought for us. My goodness me, that was not a nice thing to say and it was not my wife who said it. Perhaps my wife did not hear—there we are.

Here is the story. My staff member was met with a stern expression and the man saying, “I will give you £1,000. I can’t source Dachshunds anywhere.” She had paid £550 for the dog to a local lady who had invited her into her home. When she saw the dog’s mum and dad, and the papers, she was happy that all was well; that is the way it should be done. This type of dog is now listed as costing over £2,000, so it is little wonder that she was approached like that. We are now seeing people who are capitalising on people’s isolation and loneliness, and when there is a demand the unscrupulous will do whatever it takes to try and meet it.

Therefore, despite Lucy’s law, the unscrupulous are exploiting the loopholes in order to exploit animals and make a quick buck. The problem is that these animals are not checked against rigorous standards and the results can be dire. There can be health risks for both pups and unsuspecting new owners; families in the UK could get infectious diseases. We must be aware of them: parvovirus; e-coli; brucellosis; parasitic infestations of ticks; tapeworms; rabies; and other problems that are endemic. Those are diseases that we cannot ignore. These are serious issues. Indeed, I read an article recently that outlined an increasing fear of diseases that cross the human-animal divide. In some cases, those diseases have an impact upon human beings as well.

At present, puppies must be at least 15 weeks old to enter the UK legally. It is virtually impossible to establish the age of a 15-week-old puppy accurately by its teeth or appearance alone. Documents, including certification and animal passports, are commonly forged and microchip numbers can be falsified, thus compromising both traceability and accountability.

I will finish with this point. The suggestion has been made that the import age must be raised to six months. I understand that some people may be less inclined to get a dog that is older and therefore harder to train. At the same time, I have had many older dogs over the years, so I can testify that a gentle hand and love can teach any

old dog the basics. Six months may affect the cuteness factor of a dog that is being bought, but it certainly will not affect its training.

In conclusion, I will ask the Minister a question. The Republic of Ireland is seen as a place where puppy farming can happen, and dogs can be trafficked from the Republic into the UK, and vice versa. What discussions has the Minister had with Ministers in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that laws are used right across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland so that that does not happen? Loopholes exist. We must work to close them as soon as possible and to prevent the abuse of this system, which translates into the abuse of animals and can pose a danger to families throughout this UK. I think that was just about four minutes.

David Mundell (in the Chair): Excellent; thank you very much, Mr Shannon. I will now call Dr Lisa Cameron, followed by Luke Pollard and the Minister. If they could each stick to speaking for about nine minutes, that will allow Mr Colburn some moments to conclude the debate.

5.30 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)[V]: It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in such an important Petitions Committee debate, Mr Mundell. I thank all those who have spoken, the people of the United Kingdom who signed petitions of the utmost importance on dog and shark welfare, and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for his dedicated work on animal welfare issues and for leading the debate. I also thank the numerous animal welfare charities, organisations and experts who have been in touch, including the Kennel Club, Dogs Trust, RSPCA, SSPCA, Blue Cross, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, CARIAD, Marc Abraham and the League Against Cruel Sports, to name just a few.

I must declare an interest as the owner of Rossi the rescue French bulldog, who came fourth in the Westminster dog of the year competition a few years ago. We are very proud of Rossi. I am chair of the all-party parliamentary dog advisory welfare group and we have been championing Lucy’s law, cross party, for so long, as Members know. It has had such success across the United Kingdom. We are proud of that, but this debate shows that there is much more work to be done and that we can work together, across parties, to ensure that that happens.

The contributions have been absolutely excellent. I highlight my hon. Friends the Members for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar), for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and for Angus (Dave Doogan), who proudly raised the Scottish Government’s work on animal welfare and the work that will be taken forward by the Scottish Parliament over the next five years. I was also particularly delighted to hear about the experiences of the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson), who is himself a veterinary surgeon, and the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who spoke passionately about puppy welfare.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) speaks in so many of these debates, and his wife works on the frontline of puppy welfare, so he spoke with great family expertise. The hon. Member for Tiverton

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

and Honiton (Neil Parish) works endlessly on animal welfare issues on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and always attends these debates. He is dedicated to the issue of animal welfare. I could not believe my ears when I heard the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) say he was a keen shark keeper. I was glad that he clarified that he meant little tropical tank sharks. He is assiduous in speaking on animal welfare across the House and has achieved so much in raising and taking forward these matters. The hon. Members for Bury North (James Daly) and for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) gave detailed rationales against cropping dogs' ears and on the need for Government action, particularly in relation to the petition on that aspect of animal welfare legislation.

In line with others who have spoken, I press the Government on their commitment to increase the minimum age at which dogs can be moved non-commercially and imported commercially. I place on the record my support for the recommendation of the Scottish animal welfare commission and the more than 120,000 members of the public across the UK who signed the petition calling for the Government to increase from 15 weeks to six months the age at which puppies can be imported to the UK. Under present restrictions, it is incredibly difficult to identify by appearance alone whether a puppy is 15 weeks old, and therefore almost impossible to effectively enforce current legislation, as attested by the fact that documentation such as pet passports can be easily forged or falsified. Much more must be done.

There is growing scientific evidence that a single rabies vaccination at 12 weeks is largely ineffective for puppies, which means that the pups imported from countries where rabies is endemic pose a significant public health risk of rabies transmission among humans and dogs in the UK. As we have heard, there is increasing evidence, collected by the Dogs Trust, that suggests that puppies are bred in absolutely horrific conditions and endure journey times of often over 20 hours with little food or water in order to be sold in the UK. The mental and physical health risks associated with travel and unscrupulous low-welfare breeding have led not only to tragic deaths in transit but to the potential transmission of infectious diseases, some of which are zoonotic, including parvovirus, *E. coli*, brucellosis and parasitic infestations of ticks and tapeworms. Those are extremely serious medical conditions.

Lucy's law, on which many of us worked hard on a cross-party basis during the previous parliamentary Session, has gone some way to improve the welfare of pups and their mums, but the loophole remains and more must be done. The loophole continues to allow breeders to sell puppies that have not been born in licensed and inspected breeding premises. That flies in the face of the Government's advice that puppies should always be seen interacting with their mum in the place they were born. By introducing a ban on the importation of puppies younger than six months, the Government would not only protect young puppies from arduous travel and curb the spread of potentially fatal diseases; it would also be a far more robust system. A puppy's age can now be verified by visual appearance due to their adult teeth being visible, and puppies would be travelling after a much more effective full course of two rabies vaccinations.

I would also like to press the Government on their commitment in the action plan to prohibit the importation into the UK of dogs that have been subject to low-welfare practices such as ear cropping and tail docking—*[Inaudible.]*

David Mundell (in the Chair): We are slightly struggling to hear you, Dr Cameron. Could you repeat the previous sentence?

Dr Cameron: Thank you for pointing that out, Mr Mundell.

I want to press the Government on the commitment made in the action plan to prohibit the importation into the UK of dogs that have been subject to low-welfare practices, including ear cropping and tail docking. Battersea Dogs and Cats Home has documented a 200% increase in the number of dogs with cropped ears coming through its gates since 2016. That is absolutely startling. The RSPCA reports a 621% increase in instances of the cropping of dogs' ears in the past six years.

This ear-cropping phenomenon is often carried out in a crude and amateurish manner with no pain relief, causing immense amounts of pain and trauma to young puppies at a crucial stage in their development and socialisation. Until recently, DIY cropping packages, including scalpels, blades and scissors, could be purchased online for £30. Disturbingly, the phenomenon seems to be fuelled by a growing number of celebrities posing on social media with cropped-ear pets. This really must be addressed.

I echo hon. Members' calls for the Government to act on the importing of shark fins. Other hon. Members have covered the issue at length, and once again there appears to be broad cross-party agreement. It is not only the public who wish for it to be addressed; animal welfare organisations are also in agreement. The Government must now act.

I thank everyone who has contributed to this excellent debate and my constituents across East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow who signed the petitions in their droves. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments and to working on a cross-party basis to take these issues forward.

5.39 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank all hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. This has been a good debate, and I thank in particular the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn), who stole much of everyone else's speeches by being so comprehensive in his introduction. He was very good at pulling out the reasons why the petitioners brought forward these petitions, and the injustices that compelled them to petition Parliament to get a debate. I thank him for that. I also thank the petitioners and all those who signed the petitions—they have made a really big difference—including the nearly 1,500 people from Plymouth.

It feels like we have been here before. In fact, in this room we held an evidence session during the passage of the Ivory Act 2018, which sought to ban the sale of elephant ivory. Since the Act passed on to the statute book, not a single one of its provisions has been enforced by the Government. We must be careful about Governments, or political parties, using animal welfare as a reason to put stuff into legislation but then not enacting it. I fear

there is a risk that in our hurry to pat ourselves on the back and cite our cross-party passion for animal welfare, we let the Government off the hook in what comes afterwards.

That is why some of the contributions from hon. Members have been so powerful. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), whom I want to preserve for many decades to come as he articulates it so very well—I do not want anything to happen to him and I hope he fares well in the boundary changes—talked powerfully about the need for proper enforcement. If we are to make the case for animal welfare law, we must also make the case for it to be properly enforced. The National Wildlife Crime Unit is a great example of something that is absolutely essential and completely underfunded.

The animal welfare action plan is a step forward and contains welcome words, lots of which are borrowed from the animal welfare manifesto that my party stood on at the last election. That is good, because frankly I want to see the change more than I want to see a party rosette attached to it, but we need to ensure that those words are properly enforced as well.

Hon. Members made a number of good contributions in relation to shark finning. The figures are utterly staggering. The hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) would need a much bigger tank if he were to rescue the 100 million or so sharks that are killed each year. Although this debate has focused on shark fins, we should be aware that it is not shark fin soup alone that is responsible for the decimation of shark populations. Greenpeace estimates a 50% decline in sharks in the last 30 years. Shark meat, illegal fishing practices and criminal fishing activities also contribute to that decimation.

The hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) asked if we should ban all shark fin products. It is important that we look at that, because the wording of the action plan might be good on shark fins but not necessarily on shark fin products. We must not drive huge numbers of dead sharks through that loophole; we need to make sure that this works. Similarly, the Ivory Act 2018 bans only elephant ivory, so even if it were enforced, rhino ivory is not included. When we take the time to legislate, let us ensure that we do so in a comprehensive way.

The Shark Trust, a fantastic organisation that is based in Plymouth and operates globally, says that

“it’s unlikely that you’ll encounter responsibly sourced shark fin soup and so shark fin should be avoided.”

That is the message that we need to send. We are going into a new era where China will be more dominant, so the practices of the Chinese Government and the state-sponsored practices of illegal fishing activities around the world are more than just welfare matters. It is a matter of geopolitics.

We must be careful about how we have this debate and how we encourage others to come with us. When we talk about the illegal trade in shark fins we must ensure that we also talk about the illegal trade in people that so often accompanies it. We are talking about not just the massacre of 100 million sharks every year, but, in many cases, illegal slavery, oppressive conditions and overfishing. That is why there needs to be a comprehensive strategy on shark fins, not just a tactic to deal with pressure from well-meaning and vociferous lobbying by constituents. The strategy needs to be broader.

We have heard enormously passionate and heartfelt speeches about the ear cropping of dogs. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) spoke passionately about its effects, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), who is a real animal welfare champion. When we talk about this subject, let us remember what happens to a single dog when its ears are cropped. Let us remember the risk to the animal of infection, the person who carries out the practice regularly, the owner who allows it to happen, the person who turns a blind eye to the transit of that animal, and the person who purchases the animal, who also turns a blind eye.

As has been said about the influencers who do this, let us also call out people who put an image of a cropped dog on their Instagram or TikTok to get likes, shares and followers, and who ignore the pain that comes with that dog. Let us properly call out the influencers and also make sure that animal welfare is properly included in the action being taken on online harms by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The Minister knows that I feel strongly about this, and I encourage her to speak regularly to her DCMS colleagues about how the online world is driving poor behaviour in relation to animals. That needs to be addressed and it is also the responsibility of social media companies.

We have a leaky law on dog ear cropping and it is poorly enforced. Many Members, including the hon. Member for Southend West, have referred to the 621% increase in reports of ear cropping since 2015. Although that figure is shocking, it should shock only those who have not been paying attention to what has been a growing trend over many years. That is why we need proper action and a law that is not only tighter but properly enforced. There is a real boom in dog ear cropping—a disgusting criminal activity—so the cross-party message needs to be really powerful. I am certain that the Minister will echo that when she gets to her feet.

On the campaign to ban puppy imports, it feels as though its time really has come. During lockdown, thousands of people felt that something was missing from their homes—it was a pet-sized hole and more and more animals have been bought. I liked it when the Select Committee Chair asked whether the market is sustainable. It is not sustainable, but the animal welfare plan does not address that. I would be grateful if the Minister would not skip over that in her response.

We need to recognise that there are things that need to be improved in the action plan. When the legislation comes forward, I hope that some of the suggestions mentioned in this debate will be taken up. I have a lot of time for the Minister, but, speaking frankly, I fear that the Government as a whole have dragged their feet on some of these issues for too long. In addition, that is fuelling a dog abandonment catastrophe, because lack of action now is fuelling an increase in the number of animals with behavioural issues and real problems. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke passionately about dog abandonment issues, which should have had a much more prominent position in the debate.

I thank Marc Abraham and others, and *The Mirror* campaign, for talking about puppy smuggling. There has been a fantastic focus on this issue and now we need proper action. That should include making sure that there are no imports of puppies younger than six months.

[Luke Pollard]

Finally, we have a real opportunity to have cross-party consensus on bold action. I wish the Minister the very best of luck in strengthening the legislation that her Department is currently preparing. The hon. Member for Bury North (James Daly) made a very good plea for the inclusion of Gizmo's law, and I echo that. It is in these coming weeks, before the Minister publishes Bills for First Reading, that we have a chance to ensure that the proposed legislation is good not just in terms of soundbites but in terms of action. I wish the Minister the very best of luck with that, because plenty of MPs will hold her accountable if we see good soundbites but no action.

David Mundell (in the Chair): I call Minister Victoria Prentis. Could you leave a couple of minutes at the end so that Mr Colburn can respond to the debate?

5.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): Thank you, Mr Mundell. I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for securing the debate, in which I know he was ably assisted by his dogs Willow and Lola, and probably by his rabbits Benji and Bella as well. He is a strong champion of animal welfare, and I know that he speaks on behalf of many of his constituents when he raises these issues in Parliament.

I also thank all other hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, including very distinguished Members—several of them from the EFRA Committee—who have worked hard in this area, and many others who have spoken repeatedly in our animal welfare debates. What they say is listened to, and I hope that I will be able to reassure Members present that some of the points they have raised will be imminently brought forward into legislation, and that we have a plan for the rest as well. It is not possible to do everything at once. Given the number of actions mentioned in the past hour and a half, Members will realise that there is a great deal to do. I also thank the public, who engaged with the petitions, and indeed the organisations that worked so very hard to provide all of us with the evidence that we need to make proper legislation.

Animal welfare is one of the very highest priorities for this Government. We know that animals make a valuable contribution to all of our lives and to the planet that we share with them. This is why we recently published an action plan for animal welfare, and it is why we have started the process of legislation to bring many of the issues we have discussed today into effect. I do want to manage expectations, though, because not all of the answers are legislative: the public need to be involved. Where we see infringements of animal welfare that are already contrary to the law, it is important that these are called out, as was suggested by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). I totally agree that enforcement is critically important, and it is often the case that we need to work across Government Departments to make sure that these laws actually take effect—I was going to say “bite”, but stopped myself. The pet theft taskforce, launched just under a month ago and due to report later

this year, is an example of this. It is also important that we work together, both cross-party and as four nations, to make sure that we put into action what we have talked about today.

As many Members have said, we also have an important role as a global leader on the animal welfare front. That leads me to the issue of detaching shark fins, on which we really want to be seen to demonstrate global leadership. As a Government, we are strongly opposed to shark finning: we banned finning nearly 20 years ago and, since 2009, we have enforced a “fins naturally attached” policy that applies to UK vessels. We launched a call for evidence, which closed earlier this year; the evidence we got through that has helped us to draft legislation that will seek to ban all fins that are not naturally attached to the carcass from being imported to and exported from the UK, with extremely limited scientific exceptions. This will get rid of the high personal allowance mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington in his opening speech. I am not able to give an exact date for the introduction of that Bill, but I reassure hon. Members that we are moving at pace to make sure we get this legislation absolutely right.

On puppy smuggling, we will very, very shortly show how we will fulfil our manifesto commitment: I urge hon. Members to watch for news in this area very closely, very shortly. When the new legislation is introduced, it will reduce the number of dogs, cats and ferrets that can be moved under the pet travel rules, in order to prevent unscrupulous traders from exploiting those rules—it is not in the Register of Members' Financial Interests that we have a ferret at home, as well as a cat, but perhaps it should be and I should declare that interest. As we all know, there have been loopholes in the rules, and we do not want to encourage the importation of animals that are heavily pregnant because we make a rule reducing the age limit on puppies. It is really important that we draft this new legislation very carefully, in conjunction with those who work on the ground, so that we can make laws that are enforceable. As many hon. Members have mentioned, pets imported illegally are often in poor health, having been brought up under poor welfare conditions and subject to horrific abuses. There are many reasons for making sure that we get this absolutely right.

We will also bring forward regulations, probably via secondary legislation, to introduce new restrictions on both commercial and non-commercial imports on welfare grounds. Such rules could include a new minimum age for puppy imports and restrictions on the import of heavily pregnant bitches. It is important that we are able to introduce these regulations in a very specific way that enables us to close loopholes. On the point about the Republic of Ireland, we work very closely with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and we will continue to work with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the Republic to put a stop to that abhorrent trade.

Regarding dogs subject to mutilations, my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised the particular issue of DIY cropping kits. I remind him, everybody in the room and the general public that cropping is illegal in this country and is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Later this month, the sentences available under the Act become much longer, as hon. Members know. Dogs with cropped ears

should not be available domestically, except for those that have already, sadly, been cropped. will introduce powers to enable us to bring in new restrictions on welfare grounds in future. We will need to work very closely on closing the loopholes, but all of us and the public have a role to play in calling out bad practice where it is seen.

It is not only sharks and puppies that the Government intend to protect. We have really ambitious plans across the animal welfare spectrum. The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 became law, as I have mentioned, which means that from the end of this month the prison sentence available for animal cruelty will move from six months to five years, which is something that many people in this room should be proud of. We introduced the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, which will recognise and enshrine animal sentience in law and make sure that Ministers take animal welfare into account when making policy generally.

I must mention farm animal welfare, as so many animals are affected by the laws and regulations in this space. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) will be pleased to know that we will introduce measures to end the export of live animals for fattening and slaughter, and we will update the law on livestock worrying. It is important that hon. Members continue to watch this space on keeping primates and how that is regulated in future as well.

On Gizmo's law, I can never look at my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) without calling him Gizmo, as he mentions it frequently to me. It is awful to lose a cat to a road traffic accident; I have done so myself. We have a manifesto commitment to introduce the compulsory microchipping of cats, as he knows. We have consulted on that fully and will respond later this year. If legislation is not imminent, I undertake to continue to engage with him on this important area.

In summary, there is a great deal to do, but I want to reassure Members about the Government's commitment to protecting and enhancing the welfare of all animals.

5.57 pm

Elliot Colburn [V]: I thank the Minister for her response. I was indeed assisted by my dogs and bunnies in preparing for today's debate. I also thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their passionate contributions. Time prevents me from going into everyone's contributions, but the debate has demonstrated the level of interest and strength of feeling across the House on animal welfare and how keen Members are to see us take important action. I apologise if as several Members mentioned, I have eaten into the content of what that they wanted to raise during the debate.

I also thank the petitioners and those who signed all three of the petitions. It demonstrates that the petitions system in the UK truly can bring about change, so I encourage them to keep signing petitions and engaging with the petitions system because it is clearly a powerful tool, and I am proud to sit as a member of the Petitions Committee.

We all look forward to seeing the measures get on to the statute book soon. As the Minister requested, I will watch this space very closely indeed, and I hope that we can all sit together in the Commons soon to debate the issue again and to bring these measures into law.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions 300535, 326261, and 574305, relating to the Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare.

5.59 pm

Sitting suspended.

Protection of Retail Workers

[JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

6.15 pm

James Gray (in the Chair): Before I call the Member in charge of the debate to propose the motion, I point out to Members both physically here in Westminster Hall and virtually that we have a total of 15 Back-Benchers. Allowing 43 minutes for those speeches, that gives us less than three minutes per head for Back Benchers. I do not intend to impose a formal time limit, because I think that substitutes quality for quantity, but we should all limit ourselves to a maximum of two—perhaps three—minutes for Back-Bench speeches.

Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 328621, relating to the protection of retail workers.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray.

I thank the petition creator and all those who signed it, giving us the opportunity to debate this hugely important issue. As of last Friday, 104,354 signatures were on the petition, so I think it is fair to say that this something that a lot of people up and down the country care greatly about. Having worked in retail, it is one that I, too, care deeply about. Over the past year, while most of us have retreated to the safety and comfort of our own homes, many of our retail workers rolled up their sleeves and got on with it, making sure that our shops remained stocked so that we could all access the essentials we needed as we bunkered down to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

We have asked a lot of our retail workers over the past year: not only have we asked them to brave the pandemic, potentially putting themselves at risk from the virus, but we have asked them to implement the measures that were designed to keep us all safe, such as mask wearing and social distancing. As a result, violence and abuse directed towards retail workers has gone through the roof.

Recently, I met some amazing, passionate ladies who work in retail: Jo who works for the Co-op in Northumberland, Kate who works for Primark in Worcester and Jane who works at Tesco in north Wales. Each told me that since the pandemic began, the number of incidents of abuse had increased noticeably. They told me about the fear and the risks faced by ordinary men and women who go to work in shops in all our communities across the country, echoing the issues I have heard from my own constituents.

I heard from responsible retail businesses as well, such as Morrisons, the Co-op, Asda, Sainsbury's and many others. They are investing millions of pounds trying to protect their staff and are desperate for more to be done. A recent survey by the British Retail Consortium has shown that a staggering 455 incidents of abuse and violence are now directed towards retail workers, not each month or each week, but every day—yes, 455 incidents every day. Men and women go to work—some of them young people or even students in their first job, some of them mothers, trying to manage a job around family life, some of them semi-retired, in the later years of their life, but all trying to earn a living—and are subjected to disgusting abuse as a result.

Another survey, by USDAW, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, found that the top triggers for abusive incidents were enforcing social distancing at 24%, queuing to get into stores at 17%, and wearing face masks at 15%. Nobody likes having to queue to get into a shop or to wear masks, but that is absolutely no reason to be abusive, threatening or violent to someone who is just doing their job. There is never a reason to do any of those things to someone who is trying to earn a living. When I was talking to USDAW members, they told me shocking stories about how people have weaponised covid during the pandemic, spitting at them and threatening to infect them with the virus.

The issue, however, was not created by the pandemic; it pre-dates it. I have heard the terrible stories of people being on the receiving end of vile abuse for having the temerity to do their duty of checking ID when selling drinks, or being assaulted when they step up and try to stop a shoplifter. The problem is rife. In the words of one retail worker—an ordinary person working in an ordinary store on the streets of a constituency like mine or yours:

“I have been dragged out of the store and battered by a group of five men, punched and kicked by a gang of teenagers, followed home after late night shifts, had a knife pulled on me three times, had to wrestle needles out of drug addicts' hands to prevent harm to colleagues, and that doesn't include the verbal abuse I receive on a daily basis.”

We need to send a clear message to the people that this is unacceptable. Retail staff must be able to do their jobs without the fear that they will be on the receiving end of abuse or worse at any time throughout their shift. That is why I wholeheartedly support the demands in the petition. We need a punishment for these crimes that shows that we stand by our retail staff and that acts as a proper deterrent. Often, instances are sparked by retail staff doing the duties that we in Parliament have asked them to do. If we are going to put the burden of statutory responsibilities on them, we need to give them statutory protections too.

As well as protecting retail workers, we need to ensure our shops are safe for everyone. They are the hearts of our communities. Not everybody has friends and family they can talk to nearby. They might not go to the pub, but they will go to shops, and sometimes the interaction with the person at the checkout is the chat they need to prevent isolation. We cannot have our shops—the hearts of our communities—turning into something like the wild west where anything goes. We need to make them safe for everyone.

I know that putting in greater protections for retail workers does not require a feat of legislative gymnastics. Looking just north of the border, the Scottish Parliament recently passed a Bill, now an Act, put forward by Daniel Johnson MSP. It is decisive and sends a clear message that these actions will not be tolerated, but it now means that retail staff are better protected in Dumfries than they are 30 miles south in Carlisle. I would like to see similar action taken in England so that retail workers in my patch are just as safe doing their jobs as their counterparts in Edinburgh or Glasgow.

When I read the Government's response to the petition, I was glad to see that they said:

“Everyone should feel safe at work”.

That is a sentiment that we can all agree on, but I was disheartened to see that they were not persuaded that a specific measure is needed to protect the retail workforce,

particularly when prosecutions are so low and the role played by retail workers in upholding the law and their statutory duties was considered an aggravating factor in only three in 100 cases.

The Government are correct that there is a wide range of offences to hold offenders to account, but if those offences were a sufficient deterrent, incidents would not continue to rise. We need to look again and do something stronger. However, we still have the chance to make things better. I hope the Government will work with me and Members from all corners of this House to support the provisions in this petition and look again. Let us send a message that this Government have retail workers' backs.

6.22 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: What a pleasure it is serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray, even though it is remotely. I have been a member of the Co-operative party and a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for all my long parliamentary career, and I have a particular affinity for the small co-operative shops—real grassroots community facilities—that are essential to local communities. Of course, the Co-op is not the only small business working in local communities; there are many more. We must seek to protect all workers in all those shops.

Yes, we would like legislation; yes, we want this petition to be successful; yes, we want to give as much protection to workers in England and other parts of the United Kingdom as those in Scotland have. But we need to go further than that. The small shop is absolutely central to our communities—it is the life of the community. Workers in small shops that stay open late at night, are there when people need them and are very close to home so that people do not need a car to get large amounts of goods in order to be a customer—vital neighbourhood facilities—should be protected as well as workers in the large stores. Some large stores are well managed and have security that is very good indeed. Others are less efficient at keeping a well-managed shop and protecting the workers who work there. I want a change in the law to protect workers, but that is not all. These are designated key workers, who have been key in the first wave of fighting against covid and all the problems of this past miserable year, so I want them to be protected; I want them to be looked after, whether in a big store or a small store. I do not go to as many shops as many people, because I am a married man, and all the research data shows that if a woman takes a man to a shop with her, her bill when they get to the checkout is 20% higher than if she goes on her own. That might be a bit of a sexist comment, but it is my personal experience.

I want to change the culture. This is not about every consumer, but about a small minority of people who do not like obeying the laws that we pass in this Parliament. They do not like the fact that there are age restrictions on buying alcohol, restrictions on buying tobacco, or the special restrictions on buying too many items of one good that were introduced during the covid epidemic. Most customers are good, well-behaved, excellent people, going about their business, buying things and being nice—the sermon in my church on Sunday was about, “Let’s get back to being nice to one another.” We need a cultural change, speaking up when we witness verbal abuse or any abuse in our local shops or supermarkets.

Let us work together to change culture: let us make sure that we drive out the antisocial behaviour, whether verbal or physical abuse, that is becoming far too common.

As I have walked through my lovely constituency of Huddersfield, I have talked to many workers who have not only been in fear during working hours, but fear being followed home and having stones thrown through their windows. This is a real problem for many workers, and I came into Parliament to protect workers and workers’ rights. We need better laws and better police regulation and response, but we also need a changed culture.

6.27 pm

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Mr Gray, as ever, it is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair. I shall do my best to follow your instruction, although I cannot guarantee any greater degree of quality if I get rid of quantity. Following the recollection by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) of the sermon he heard at the weekend, I agree wholeheartedly that we should all be nice to one another, but I also hope that men and women alike will go and spend what they can at our shops as we emerge from the covid pandemic. The Co-op being a theme of today’s debate, there are two pioneers here today—if I can use that phrase, borrowed from the Rochdale pioneers of the co-operative movement. Those are my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers), who gave a fine exposition of the issues in his opening speech, and the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who is further down the call list and has done a great deal of work in this area.

If I have any time left after those opening remarks, I will be very brief. Last Wednesday, I was fortunate to visit the newly opened Co-op store in my constituency, on Church Lane in Marple. They are doing a great job there, regenerating that part of the town and improving that end of Market street. I was able to hear at first hand from Nick, Julie and Melissa about their experiences, particularly during the pandemic—which have been ably explained by others—but also more generally. As an example, workers at the Sainsbury’s in my constituency now wear a body cam as they limit the queues going in. What a sign of the times! Many of us have been able to exist in a degree of comfort and convenience during the pandemic, but those on the frontline—on the shop floor—have had to bear witness and have been assaulted in all manner of ways. It is simply intolerable.

I am not one to recommend a change in the law lightly. The first step, as has been shown by some police and crime commissioners, is to enforce the existing law properly, particularly against prolific offenders. I think that an example in Sussex showed recently that a targeted approach, whereby the police are able to take this matter as seriously as they should, yielded strong results and gave shop workers the confidence that their daily experience is being taken seriously. However, if that is not enough, then a change in the law is necessary and I would support assaults on retail workers becoming an aggravated offence.

However, as I have said, and as I am sure the Minister will ably seek to reassure us in his summing-up at the end of this debate, the existing law must be enforced. Mr Gray, doing my best to follow your instruction, I

[Mr William Wragg]

hope that if the existing law cannot be enforced, the law can be changed and we must give all retail workers the absolute assurance that we take their difficulties seriously, and will make that change if necessary.

James Gray (in the Chair): An admirable three minutes—very good.

6.31 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray.

I thank the Member in charge, the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers), for agreeing to lead the debate for the Petitions Committee. In doing so, I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who has worked on this issue since he joined the House in 2017. I was proud to support his ten-minute rule Bill—I think that was well over a year ago—highlighting the realities of working in the retail sector and the abuses that too many people who work in the sector face.

I will place something on the record as a former worker in the retail sector. For those who do not know, I was a trainee butcher in Tesco; you would not believe the number of times I have said that, Mr Gray. That was my first proper job and I received abuse from members of the public; it was nothing unusual to have meat quite literally thrown at us in shops. It was really very common for customers to think it perfectly normal to shout at staff on a regular basis and to think nothing of making threats of physical and verbal abuse.

I also stand here proudly as an USDAW-supported Member of Parliament; I have been for many years and it is in my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. USDAW does Freedom From Fear work every year. Its last survey was in 2020. Of the respondents, nine in 10 shop workers confirmed that they had been verbally abused; 60% said that they had reported threats of abuse; and 9% had been physically assaulted. Those figures are stark and deeply concerning, showing that when someone goes to work they live with the fear of either being threatened or actually physically assaulted.

I pay tribute to USDAW for the work that it has done over decades to try and improve this situation. When I was working in retail some 20 years ago, this work was going on then. Actually, it has gone on too long—this abuse is simply unacceptable. I agree, as I do occasionally, with the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), that if the law cannot be enforced, I hope that the Minister will tell us today that there can be a meaningful change in the law to protect retail workers, in the same way that we protect other frontline workers in the NHS, the police, the ambulance service and the fire service. Retail workers really are frontline workers who deserve our support.

In closing, I will briefly pay tribute to another organisation. There has been much talk of the Co-op in everyone's speeches so far; I think that is a theme that shows the positive work that the Co-op does to engage with Members of Parliament. I have many Co-ops across my constituency; I think I have met staff from all of them. The truly concerning thing is that they all say the same thing: abuse is commonplace; it is something that they have come to accept; and it is something

which they almost tolerate as part of the job. Covid has only increased that abuse, because a lot of people see shop workers as fair game. I hope that the Minister, in his closing remarks, will set out how the Ministry of Justice will deal with this abuse, because it has to stop. Enough really is enough.

James Gray (in the Chair): The next speaker represents a town where my grandfather was a butcher for 60 years.

6.34 pm

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray, and I hope that connection with Coatbridge will buy me an extra 30 seconds in this debate.

James Gray (in the Chair): Not a chance.

Steven Bonnar: I commend the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for leading this debate today.

Throughout the coronavirus crisis, key workers across the retail sector have played an invaluable role in our communities, ensuring that we can maintain our basic right to access food. Without their incredible contribution, it is undoubtedly clear that we would have failed to get through this unprecedented global crisis in the manner we have. However, despite their heroic efforts, it is incredibly disappointing that the coronavirus crisis has resulted in a significant increase in abuse, threats and violence towards our retail workers. It is high time that we tackled such abuse and provided retail workers with the proper protections and respect that they deserve, especially given the current climate.

Weekly data released by the representative body of the UK's retail sector, USDAW, show that abusive incidents towards shop workers have doubled since the outbreak of covid-19. Respondents to its survey reported being spat at, coughed at and sneezed at when asking customers to practise social distancing—I am sure every Member will agree that that really is abhorrent. When averaged across all 3 million workers across the retail sector, it amounts to a staggering 3,500 assaults every single day. Although not all shop workers suffer to this extent, some experience much worse, with one in six reporting being abused on every single shift. These are not mere statistics; this issue affects our parents, our partners, our brothers and sisters, and our children, who are needlessly suffering just for carrying out their job.

Many incidents arise as staff carry out their legal duties, including age verification and, more recently, the implementation of covid safety measures. We must all recognise that outwith our NHS, the biggest body of work throughout this pandemic has been undertaken by these undervalued and underpaid workers, who have been tasked with implementing, and ultimately enforcing, many of the guidelines that affect our daily lives. Despite retailers and businesses spending enormous sums on crime prevention, the situation is getting worse. Retail workers are employed in one of the sectors most vulnerable to violence, yet they are still being neglected and ignored. Of course, we are seeking to put that right.

In Scotland, we have said that enough is enough. As ever, we are leading the way in the protection of shop workers by passing the Protection of Workers (Retail

and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021. Scotland has sent a clear message that the rise in violence and abuse towards workers in the sector must end, and the rest of the UK must now follow suit. Despite clear evidence showing the escalation of violence and abuse against retail workers, time and again the Government have chosen not to act. This place must now stop dragging its feet and take the necessary action to protect retail colleagues from harm, and I urge the UK Government to follow the lead of the Scottish Government and enact legislation to protect our retail workers, who have been at the very heart of fighting for us all throughout the whole of this pandemic.

6.37 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to take part in this debate with you in the Chair, Mr Gray. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and note that I am a proud member of USDAW, which does so much great campaign work on this issue.

The pandemic has shown once and for all how vital retail workers are. They have been largely unsung heroes on the frontline of the pandemic—dealing with the public, keeping us supplied and keeping our society going, yet they are regularly abused and assaulted. We have heard some of the shocking statistics from hon. Members, and things have got worse over the last year. In Co-op stores alone in the first quarter of 2021, there have been almost 400 incidents where weapons have been used against shop workers, and more than half of those have been sharp implements such as a syringe, knife or bottle. That is just in the first quarter of 2021.

As today's report from the Home Affairs Committee says, many incidents go unreported. Some of the people who are reluctant to report incidents said in their evidence to the Committee that it is part of the job, but it should not be part of the job. When I discussed this issue with local shop workers in Didsbury in my constituency, it was clear that this was a really big problem. Despite what the *Daily Mail* might think, Didsbury is an enviably nice, welcoming, cosmopolitan and mainly middle-class area—and a no-go zone for no one—but we have had issues in recent years with gangs of young people shoplifting. The fear is that when they are challenged, they then become aggressive and abusive, or worse.

A couple of years ago, I wrote to the regional managers of the bigger stores in the area, asking for their support for better security and engagement with the local traders association. Most of them were positive and responsive, but not all, and it should not be down to the attitudes of individual employers or owners for retail workers to be properly protected. The Government need to introduce a framework of protection for workers, which means ensuring that people understand that there are consequences for abusing or assaulting retail workers. As the petition asks for, we need the creation of a specific new criminal offence of assaulting, threatening or abusing retail workers. That is supported across the country by staff, by unions and by shop owners, from small businesses to retail giants. We have heard that, in Scotland, legislation to protect shop workers from violence will come into force on 24 August. I congratulate everyone who has made that happen, but if it is good enough for Scotland, why not for the rest of the UK? We have an opportunity. We do not need to wait for a full Bill to pass through

Parliament. If we can support new clause 45 as tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, we have an opportunity to make a real difference for retail workers, so let us take that opportunity. Let us help the people who should not be scared just by going to work. "Freedom From Fear", the USDAW campaign slogan, should not be just a campaign slogan. It should be reality for the people who serve us.

6.40 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) on introducing this really important debate.

As the first woman to speak in the debate, I would like to take issue with the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) when he was making his points earlier. I have to tell him that my husband is actually a much better grocery shopper than I am and much better at seeking out the bargains. Where I agree with the hon. Gentleman is that what is really needed is a change of culture and a change in attitude towards shop workers.

Like the hon. Member for Ogmire (Chris Elmore), I draw on my own experience. Twenty years ago, I was working in a bookshop and I had those experiences of facing customers every day. I also know that the experience in the last year for people working in supermarkets in particular has been really difficult. I know that because both my brother and my brother-in-law are supermarket workers. They have been on the shop floor every day during the pandemic and they have had, along with their colleagues, a really hard time. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to everyone who has kept our grocery sector going at this time.

In common with many other hon. Members, I have been speaking recently to a constituent whose daughter has not been able to work because she is suffering post-traumatic stress disorder after a knife was pulled on her during a shift she was working in a shop not far away. The impact that that kind of behaviour has on young people, on women and on vulnerable people is really serious, and that is why I support calls for the Government to introduce a specific law.

It is really important to recognise that we are asking shop workers to enforce the law themselves; they are enforcing the law on age-restricted products such as alcohol, games, DVDs—all sorts of things. We need to recognise that, during the pandemic, they have been called on to enforce all the extra regulations and the social distancing and they have played a really important part in managing shortages. That, of course, has created a great many difficult situations for them. They have put themselves at risk, in harm's way, to protect the public from the impact of the pandemic, and I think it is high time that we recognised the role that retail workers play in keeping us all safe.

I also want to mention the really important role—again, we have noticed this more and more during the pandemic, but we knew about it already—that retail workers play in maintaining our communities. The biggest issue that so many of us have been dealing with in our constituencies over the last 18 months has been loneliness and isolation, and our retail workers have been the ones to really make a difference in that. Whether we are talking about the

[Sarah Olney]

lady on the cash register or checkout, or the person bringing groceries to someone's front door, it is that human connection that has made all the difference to many of our constituents. That is why I think it is high time that we recognised the important role that retail workers play in every community in the land and that to pass this law, or to make the amendment to the Bill that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) mentioned, would be a real step forward. What is absolutely critical is to demonstrate to the public how much we value our retail workers. That will be critical in changing the culture, as the Member for Huddersfield mentioned, and that to me is the most important thing.

6.43 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab) [V]: It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for introducing the debate on this petition.

I pay tribute to all the retail workers in Liverpool, West Derby for everything that they have done for our community, especially during the pandemic. There are many examples of how, during the height of lockdown, retail workers went over and above the call of duty to ensure that there was a service to the local community. Despite the shortages of personal protective equipment across the sector and the fear of the unknown consequences of covid-19, retail workers were at the coalface, ensuring that services stayed open, and played a vital role in pulling the country through this period.

I often hear the words "retail work" and "low skilled" in the same sentence. That term must be consigned to the dustbin of history. It devalues the workers in roles that are vital to our communities; the people in those roles should be acknowledged as such. The term also plays into a perception of a lesser worth, which may lead some to try to justify the behaviours that people have been speaking about. Some 164 people in my constituency signed USDAW's petition to protect retail workers from abuse, threats and violence, and many also wrote to me directly.

Even before the pandemic, threatening behaviour towards retail workers was increasing; USDAW's annual survey showed an increase of a third in workers threatened during the course of their duties between 2015 and 2019. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the situation has got even worse, with USDAW's 2020 survey finding that 88% of workers experienced verbal abuse, 61% were threatened by a customer and 9% were assaulted. Those experiences can be especially traumatic as retail staff usually have to work every day in the same situation in which they were attacked. Staff have reported anxiety and panic attacks on returning to the workplace after an assault and the constant worry that they will be attacked again, leading some to leave the profession entirely, losing their livelihood as a result.

The signatories to the petition and USDAW demand specific legislation to tackle this. Action from the Government cannot wait when there are an estimated 455 violent or abusive incidents in retail workplaces every single day of the year. Will the Government listen to my constituents; will the Minister work with the trade unions and others to bring about this legislation; and will the Minister commit to taking the words "low skilled" out of any future literature?

6.46 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): As a former retail worker myself, I very much wanted to participate in the debate, because I know first-hand how important it is that those working in retail feel safe and protected while doing their jobs. The vast majority of those whom retail workers come into contact with are polite and reasonable, but it only takes one incident of abuse or violence to leave a worker in the retail industry feeling distressed, afraid, shaken and threatened as they go about their job.

The petition calls on the UK Government to protect workers from abuse, threats and violence. Of course, the Minister will be aware that the Scottish Parliament has already passed the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021, which will come into force very soon. It creates an offence of assaulting, threatening or abusing retail workers and will provide statutory aggravation of that offence where the retail worker is enforcing a statutory age restriction. As someone who spent almost a decade working in betting shops, I absolutely appreciate the value of that protection, and I know that other workers delivering age-restricted services will too. Scotland is leading the way, and I urge the Minister to study that legislation closely, as it gives greater protection under the law to retail workers in this field. The British Retail Consortium and more than 65 chief executives have called on the UK Government to follow Scotland's lead.

In addition, the Scottish Government have launched a new awareness-raising campaign, delivered by Crimestoppers, Fearless and the Scottish Grocers' Federation, highlighting the impact of abuse, threats and violence on retail staff. We know that threats toward and abuse of retail workers have increased as a result of covid safety measures. Retail workers are on the frontline, trying to ensure that customers comply with covid safety measures on their premises; requesting ID when age-restricted products are sought by customers; and having to confront those who seek to shoplift. They have demanding jobs and too often do not get the credit or, indeed, the pay that they should.

I hope the Minister will seriously reflect on what he has heard in the debate and will support specific legal protection for our retail workers, who have served us so well during the difficult period of the pandemic, as they have always done. They deserve our support and our thanks. It is time for the Government to catch up with the Scottish Government and do more to support our retail workers.

6.49 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) on the excellent way in which he introduced the debate, and I particularly thank the 104,354 people who signed the petition, thereby triggering the debate. The violence and abuse our shop workers face is a source of national shame, and it is well beyond time that we acted.

According to the Association of Convenience Stores, there have been 40,000 violent incidents in the past year, with one in five resulting in injury. On top of that, there are a staggering 1.2 million incidents of abuse, and

nearly nine out of every 10 shop workers have been affected. They are key workers, doing their job, keeping us fed and watered, and that is what they have to face daily.

This is such a significant issue, and it calls us to act. As parliamentarians, we have a special responsibility to do so. When do many of those flashpoints happen? When shop workers enforce age or similar restrictions—alcohol, cigarettes, acids, knives: 50 different categories of things that we have asked them to restrict. Those are important restrictions, and in that moment the staff act as, yes, employees of their retailers, but also as public servants. We put them at risk while they do so: we ought to have their backs.

What could we do? I hope that the Minister has had the chance to read the excellent “Breaking the Cycle” report carried out by Dr Emmeline Taylor in conjunction with the Co-op Group, which is doing outstanding work on behalf of its staff in this area. I am proud to have provided an introduction to that report, but I assure colleagues that it gets better after that bit, so keep reading on. The report provides tangible ways in which to tackle the epidemic, with particular regard to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, from the better use of civil tools to improvement in the ways in which probation and prison services respond to offenders.

I will finish by focusing on one suggestion, which is to replicate the excellent Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021, introduced by our colleague Daniel Johnson. That Act created a new offence in Scotland regarding violence and abuse targeted at shop workers, with an enhanced aggravating factor when age restrictions are involved. I have introduced a private Member’s Bill in each of the two previous Sessions along the same lines, with the support of excellent trade unions such as USDAW, of which I am a member.

Like no other campaign, this has united companies and their unions, management and their staff, big retailers and the independents—they all think that that is the right thing to do and they all want to act now. My good friend, Sir David Hanson, pressed for similar during proceedings on the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, the Government asked for time for the case to be proven through the call for evidence. That evidence was overwhelming. Since then, things have worsened, and have been turbo-charged by the pandemic. I hope that when the Minister sums up, he will announce that the Government are ready to bring forward their own amendment, or to accept the amendment mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) to move the issue forward. The time is now, we have proven the case and we can wait no longer. It is time to act.

6.52 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I, too, declare an interest, as a proud member of both USDAW and the Co-op party.

I am an ardent supporter of USDAW’s Freedom From Fear campaign, as 2020 was a year like no other. As the pandemic took hold, we realised what services and occupations we relied on most. Our shop workers were and still are vital frontline key workers. For too long, they have been undervalued. The pandemic

exacerbated that. We have to acknowledge the contribution that those workers make, and ensuring their safety and protecting them from violence and abuse is a good place to start.

Nothing would please me more than to be able to share with hon. Members a decline in the incidence of abuse but, unfortunately, I cannot. Our shop workers put themselves at risk of covid so that we can have our essential supplies, but abuse of staff have worsened. Each year, USDAW conducts a survey of the violence and abuse experienced by members and those working on the frontline of the retail sector. The 2020 survey found that 88% experienced verbal abuse, 61% were threatened by a customer and 9% were assaulted, and that abuse, threats and violence doubled in the first few months of the pandemic.

I will share some of the shocking first-hand experiences of shop workers:

“I’ve had customers say they’ve got covid-19 and then cough in my face because they were asked to stand behind a marked line”;

“Customers grabbing my arm to verbally abuse me”;

“Pushed, shoved, coughed at and not given any social distancing”;

and

“I was filmed in work and threatened to be posted all over Facebook. Sworn at for refusing a return with no proof of purchase.”

I am sure we can all agree that such accounts are beyond appalling and that nobody should be exposed to that level of abuse. We would not tolerate that abuse of any other frontline occupation. It is time that shop workers were afforded the same consideration as other professions.

The abuse and violence stands at an unacceptably high level. It is essential that we take action to reduce incidence of abuse. Like others, I will continue to support USDAW’s Freedom From Fear campaign and the calls for legislation to help shopworkers against these acts of abuse, threatening and assault. I urge the Minister to listen the many contributions of hon. Members, to the 104,000 people who signed the petition and to the shopworkers who were subject to this vile treatment. Our shopworkers’ safety is paramount. We do not need empty words; we need change and we need it now.

James Gray (in the Chair): We come now to Mike Amesbury, but he has not been here for the debate, so theoretically we should not call him. On this occasion, as we have some time in hand and he probably has perfectly good reasons for not being here, we will call him towards the end of the debate. That brings us to Liz Twist.

6.55 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is an honour to serve with you in the chair, Mr Gray. I am particularly keen to take part in this debate because my constituency of Blaydon has a huge proportion of retail workers, what with the Metrocentre at one end and lots of small district centres, so I know that retail workers are crucially important to our local economy and deserve to be treated properly.

At the beginning of the year, I was appalled to hear that one of my staff had witnessed a shop worker in a local store—an Iceland store, I believe—being spat on when trying to enforce mask wearing in the shop. I

[Liz Twist]

raised this issue in business questions and was told by the Leader of the House that of course it was awful, but that there were already many ways to prosecute, which is important.

This is another example that was reported to me from my constituency:

“A colleague asked a customer for ID as they were attempting to buy an age restricted product. The customer began verbally abusing the colleague, calling her a fat slag.”

Retail workers have been at the frontline of this pandemic and they need to be protected and valued. This petition calls for specific legislation to protect retail workers and has attracted over 100,000 signatures, including many from Blaydon. It is clear that something has to be done, as the current situation is simply not acceptable.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) for raising the issue through private Member's Bills. As he mentioned, in 2018 the former Member for Delyn, Sir David Hanson, also attempted to raise the issue. I credit them with building this campaign from that time. We now have an opportunity to make assault on retail workers a crime in its own right through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. Sadly, it seems the Government remain unpersuaded by this, but the Bill is an opportunity to address the issue.

I will not go into the details of the USDAW survey, as many hon. Members have already referred to them, but it provides a shocking picture. Shop workers just from Tyne and Wear provide the following testimony:

“Punched by customer under the influence.”

“Threats from men to ‘kick my head in’, spat at twice.”

“Most customers are polite and keep their distance, however I have had verbal abuse shouted at me.”

We need stronger protection for these staff. Too few cases are prosecuted, and we really need to do something about that.

As I understand it, the Government say that there are already means of prosecuting people. Let us look at what happened with the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018. From a starting point that not many would be prosecuted, we find that 50 assaults on emergency workers have been prosecuted. If the offence is there, it will be pursued. I urge the Government to consider their position.

6.59 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Thank you for calling me in this important debate, Mr Gray. It is always a pleasure and a privilege to serve under your chairmanship. I thank the Petitions Committee and the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for the way in which he initiated the debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) for all the excellent work he has done, over a number of years, in promoting the Freedom From Fear campaign. I also want to give a shout-out to USDAW, the GMB and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, who have been very much involved in speaking up for their members who face assaults and in the campaign to end abuse and violence towards retail staff.

Whether it is clapping for NHS staff or thanking our key workers, such gestures are worthless if not substantiated with meaningful change by this House. I look to the

Minister here. Time and again the Government sympathise with but ignore workers facing cuts to their pay and terms and conditions. I am thinking of businesses, many that have received substantial sums in taxpayer-funded support, using fire and rehire tactics as a form of industrial blackmail. Unless the Government act, they are failing our retail workers because, sadly, workplace abuse and violence have been normalised and are now accepted as part of the job.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ogmere (Chris Elmore), for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and others have referred to the USDAW survey, so I will not repeat that, but the British Retail Consortium revealed that there were 455 incidents of abuse and violence every day in the year to March 2020. Indeed, covid has not improved the situation, with the enforcement of Government covid regulations being a major trigger alongside the more traditional confrontation points, such as challenging customers over ID for age-restricted products like alcohol, or encountering shoplifters. Clearly, the Government have placed additional responsibilities on retail workers. Failing to ID customers for age-restricted products can lead to a criminal conviction for a retail worker, a fine, or even being sacked.

Clearly, challenging people can lead to threats of violence. Where the Government place extra demands on retail workers, it is surely reasonable for those workers to expect that when they are placed in harm's way they are provided with greater protection under the law.

I want to refer to a survey by the Home Affairs Committee, in which 42% of respondents said,

“More or improved security measures in/around the premises” would help

“prevent future incidents...from occurring”.

I hope the Minister has noted that. People working in convenience stores are particularly vulnerable, potentially being a lone worker or working in a small team of young staff. The Association of Convenience Stores estimated that there were 50,000 incidents of violence in the sector, a quarter of which resulted in injury.

I want to make some promises to our key workers and our frontline shopworkers: people such as Loraine Fox from the GMB who works at the Peterlee Asda in my constituency and Alan Kell and his colleagues in USDAW. I want to do more than clap on the doorstep for key workers. I will not say thank you and then vote against protecting workers in Parliament. I say to the Minister: you have a choice. Will the Government introduce legislation to protect retail workers, or will they ignore the epidemic of abuse and violence in our retail sector? Will the Minister sit on his hands and leave shopworkers unprotected in the workplace?

7.4 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I thank the 104,000 who signed the petition and my good colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who has been such a vocal champion for this cause.

This debate comes nearly a year and a half after I led a Westminster Hall debate on the very same vital subject over a year ago. Thanks to the engagement team from

USDAW, the Co-op, and the British Retail Consortium, we received powerful, often very distressing, stories from retail workers across the country of their experiences of abuse in the workplace. As has been documented in the debate today, the challenges facing retail workers since the previous debate, especially in the early days of the first lockdown, have been extraordinary. It is no surprise to hear that enforcing public health measures such as social distancing and face coverings, and dealing with stock issues, have been big triggers for abuse over the past year. More than ever, we have relied on our shop workers to enforce important laws—not just those relating to alcohol, knives and other potentially dangerous goods, but those relating to social distancing, mask wearing and ensuring that household items are not hoarded.

Shop workers in Cheshire told USDAW that they have had cans thrown at their heads, and have been spat on and kicked by customers. Refusing to sell alcohol to a customer resulted in verbal abuse. Such incidents clearly deserve prosecution, but very few get to that point. That is why we need specific protections. If it is good enough for Scotland—a law was introduced on 24 August—it is certainly good enough for the people of Runcorn and our nation. I look forward to the Government doing the right thing and legislating now.

7.5 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see a fellow Glaswegian in the Chair, Mr Gray—our city is the centre of the universe, as you are aware. I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for presenting this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I pay tribute to my colleagues for their fine speeches. This has been an excellent debate, and I commend my hon. Friends the Members for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar) and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for their excellent contributions.

I should declare—other hon. Members have mentioned their careers—that my first job when I was at school was working for the then supermarket chain Presto. I was still at school, but I worked for Presto two evenings a week, and I was assigned to the paperware department. For those watching these proceedings who do not know what the paperware department is, it is the toilet rolls. My responsibility was to stack the shelves of toilet rolls where I lived—obviously, I moved up in my career to soup tins and the rest. But some of the issues then apply now.

We should start from the basic principle that no one should have to experience violence and abuse while doing their job. The Scottish National party supports the effective legal protection of retail workers and is urging the UK Government to take action on this issue and strengthen other workers' rights. As many hon. Members have said, retail workers carry out an important role in serving the needs of our communities, and it is only right that they receive effective legal protection. As many colleagues have said, that is going to exist very shortly in Scotland.

The Scottish Government not only supported the Bill that gives greater protections in law to retail workers, but are assisting with a new awareness-raising campaign to highlight the impact of the abuse, threats and violence

on retail staff. The campaign is being delivered by Crimestoppers, Fearless and the Scottish Grocers' Federation and is backed by £50,000 of Scottish Government funding.

The British Retail Consortium and more than 65 chief executive officers wrote to the Prime Minister in February calling for legislation to make assaulting shop workers a separate offence in England and Wales. I really am staggered to see that the Government's first response to the petition on 15 September 2020 was to say that that they were not persuaded that a specific offence was needed as a wide range of offences already exist covering assaults against any worker, including shop workers. I hope the Minister will perhaps give us an indication of why that is the case, because it is certainly not what is being said by many Members in this debate.

Verbal abuse and violence against all staff has been increasing for some time. A British Retail Consortium survey finds that that has accelerated as a result of covid safety measures and is now up to 455 incidents a day. Major triggers for these incidents, as we have heard from many colleagues in this debate, include challenging customers for identification and encountering shoplifters. The Scottish Grocers' Federation crime survey last year indicated an increase in verbal or physical abuse in 2020 in the retail sector. Such appalling behaviour is completely unacceptable. Like everyone else, shop workers are fully entitled to work free from the threat of violence or abuse.

I have read the USDAW briefing and I think that some of the evidence presented to us by the trade union should be read out. I will read out extracts from the presentation given to us about what has happened in Scotland; I think that will show why the legislation was needed in Scotland and why it is needed in the rest of the United Kingdom.

A worker in central Scotland said:

"I challenged a customer under Think 25. He threw his shopping at me and tried to grab me."

Another worker was punched in the back by a customer when they were filling shelves,

"just to ask me if I am busy".

There is verbal abuse. An USDAW member in Glasgow said:

"A customer swore at me and hit me with a sandwich. The abuse I receive varies from comments"—

I will not say some of the words used, but again it is verbal abuse. There is finger-pointing in the face and being poked at with a finger. Another worker said:

"Customers tried to punch me on the body."

USDAW members in the highlands and islands who asked people politely to keep a two-metre distance were met with verbal abuse and told to get on with their work. People have thrown money at retail workers. There is verbal abuse, mainly from people influenced by drugs and alcohol.

USDAW members in Lothian say:

"People get stroppy about wearing face coverings. Customers have called me an idiot for asking for identification."

There has been sexual assault of workers in the retail sector. USDAW members in mid-Scotland and Fife say:

"Customers take their frustration out on staff, being verbally abusive for no reason and treating us like dirt. Threats, coughing in my face and rants at having to wait in a queue."

[Chris Stephens]

USDAW members in the north-east of Scotland talk about

“Shoplifters angry at being challenged. An attempted armed robbery. Verbal abuse from shoplifters, verbal abuse from intoxicated customers and verbal abuse from people who have been asked for ID.”

USDAW members in the south of Scotland talk about

“Covid-related abuse about social distancing and queues at checkouts...Get verbal abuse asking for ID, customers being nasty, shouting in front of the rest of the queue and shouting abuse when we carry out Challenge 25.”

Finally, this is from USDAW members in the west of Scotland:

“Drunk people unable to accept service refusal, usually verbal, being spat at and threats. When we are politely explaining our refund policy, some people get very abusive when they find out they cannot exchange without a receipt.”

If people think that this law should only be law in Scotland and that what I have just read out—testimonies from USDAW workers in Scotland—does not apply in the rest of the United Kingdom, then I have magic beans to sell them, because it is quite clear that this legislation should be introduced across the United Kingdom. I hope that the Government will do that.

However, there is a thread here that is of concern to me—the UK Government’s failure to deliver. As the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), I think, quite rightly asked, where are the protections for workers since covid and as a result of covid? Where is the Employment Bill that was in the last two Queen’s Speeches as a result of the Taylor review, which should deal with exploitative contracts and short-term shift changes—both features of the retail sector? Where is the Bill to ban fire and rehire, as proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands)—which, again, is a feature in the retail sector? It is not there. I have a real concern, as the hon. Member for Easington rightly pointed out, that this Government give platitudes with one hand but do not deliver protections and legislation with the other.

If we are to build a fairer society, it needs to enhance and protect the workers’ rights that were hard-fought for. Frankly, if the UK Government will not provide those employment rights, they should devolve the responsibility to the Scottish Parliament—the Scottish Parliament will ensure that it does provide them.

7.14 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): It is a pleasure, Mr Gray, to serve under your chairship.

I thank the hon. Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for introducing this timely debate on the protection of retail workers from abuse, threats and violence—an issue he has experience of, having worked in retail. I also place on the record my thanks to the Petitions Committee, and I give a massive thanks to the thousands of signatories and those who have championed this petition. I also pay tribute to USDAW, the co-operative movement and the GMB, who have all worked tirelessly to ensure that this issue is rightly given the time that it deserves to be debated in.

We have heard strong and passionate contributions from right across the political divide, showing the need to drive forward this issue. I pay particular tribute to my

hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who has worked tirelessly on this issue, including on the recent introduction of his own 10-minute rule Bill.

There is a growing epidemic in the heart of our communities of abuse and violence against key workers, who are the backbone of this country. In this difficult year, they have shown the significant value that they add to our communities and our lives up and down the country. This is a crisis. Like so many other crises we must confront, we have a solution to tackle and deter unacceptable behaviour and violence, and deliver justice for victims. If anyone is in any doubt about the scale of the problem across the country in 2021, we have heard some of it today: 88% of retail workers experienced verbal abuse last year, up from 77% the year before. Some 10% were assaulted—that is 300,000 out of a 3 million-strong retail workforce. There were 455 incidents of violence and abuse each day, yet only 6% of those incidents resulted in prosecution. That is shocking.

Covid pressures and restrictions have certainly driven that increase, but that is by no means a justifiable excuse. This crisis and grave miscarriage of justice has long existed and cannot be ignored. Retail staff are key workers: they are our sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, friends and neighbours. They are those who have kept our country fed throughout this pandemic. They may be the only smile or conversation our grandparent may have that day. They may be the person who returned a lost wallet, who comforts a child when they are separated. They are retail workers, but they are so much more. They are counsellors, friends and heroes.

Let us be clear that any and all forms of abuse, threats and violence, whether physical, verbal or mental, are unacceptable. No one should have to face harm at the hands of a stranger at work. No one should be treated with disrespect, spat at, bitten, grabbed, sexually harassed or discriminated against, and no one should have to mentally prepare themselves before a shift. No one should be forced to take self-defence classes because the law fails them. No one should have to take time off because of trauma or injury. Retail workers should not have to wear body cameras to carry out their work, yet so many are so fearful, traumatised and badly neglected by the authorities and the law that they feel there is no alternative.

For many retail workers across the country, that is their daily experience and their battle. They already face insecure and precarious working conditions: they are paid disproportionately lower wages; they have fire and rehire tactics used against them; and a third are under the age of 25 and particularly vulnerable. Let us look at a few examples. Take Ian Robson from Gateshead: he was dragged and punched repeatedly with a knuckle duster after asking a customer to wear a face mask. A shop worker in Northamptonshire had part of her ear bitten off. Others often have needles pulled out at them in store. Another in west Yorkshire was spat at in the face, thumped in the chest and head butted. When she was visibly pregnant, she was repeatedly knocked by a customer with a trolley and chased down the aisle. That is not normal. The situation is untenable.

Retail workers should be free from worry, fear and anxiety. It is so easy to get lost in the statistics, but many people across the country, including from my own constituency, have contacted me demanding change.

That is why we are here today. We know that that feeling is shared across the country. Worse still, too many victims feel that the system does not work to protect them. Who can blame them, when so few cases lead to prosecution and a quarter of cases go unreported altogether? This must be tackled with sustained and meaningful action.

It is a damning failure of this UK Government not to listen to the voices from the frontline, not recognise the exponential rise in abuse of retail staff, and not protect our heroes. Labour has long campaigned for, and brought forward, credible, achievable and non-partisan legislative proposals to improve conditions for millions. All were hindered by consecutive Conservative Governments, including this one, whose own consultation—not a year old—said that

“it does not consider that the case is yet made out for a change in the law.”

The first question the Minister must answer today is: if the Government truly believe that there is a serious issue, why continue to delay necessary action to protect workers? I am sure we will hear plenty of warm words from the Minister, but they will all be hollow platitudes until his Government bring forward the necessary legislation, and work together to make progress on this issue by passing our amendment tabled to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

The Government consultation last year reads like a devastating charge sheet of failings. These included a lack of response by police to threats, inadequacies within the criminal justice system, concern over ineffective powers to deal with abuse in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and the recognition that victims themselves have a lack of awareness of their rights under the victims' code—a consequence of the Justice Secretary, his predecessor, and his predecessor's predecessor breaking promises to reinforce victims' rights and bring forward a Bill.

Those points in the consultation were all accepted and recognised by this Government, yet they have failed to act. All this evidence points to the clear need for tighter legislation along the lines of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Will the Minister work with us now, as his predecessors did then? Will he explain what steps the Government are taking to ensure the safety of retail workers, why they believe there is no case for a change in the law, and how they will deal with the appallingly low prosecution rate?

Time and again, we have heard warm words and grand gestures, but seen little action. Through our amendment, we have put the option for progress on the table: a stand-alone offence and a 12-month prison sentence for abuse, threats and violence against retail workers is here and ready to go. We will do what is necessary; we have cross-party support. The Government must stop aiding and abetting offenders, and improve this law to protect our retail workers—our key workers, who have worked hard during this pandemic—and they must ensure that this system delivers justice.

7.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): As always, Mr Gray, it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I join others in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) for the

aplomb and elegance with which he introduced this afternoon's debate. I add a tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) who, as many other Members have said, has been campaigning on this issue for a very long time. The strength of feeling on this topic is palpable and, of course, is evidenced by the 104,000 people who signed the petition.

To add my own CV reference to those of others, my very first salaried job when I was aged about 16 or 17 was working in a branch of Sainsbury's in south London—very close to my now constituency—so I have had that experience of working in retail myself. Thankfully, I never got assaulted, although I was frequently ridiculed by customers on the rare occasions I was allowed to operate the till instead of stacking shelves, due to my complete inability to recognise various rudimentary forms of fruit and vegetable. This was in the days before barcodes, and I was completely unable to recognise most of the fruit and vegetables that people were buying. That caused a lot of merriment and, on occasion, ridicule—all of which was entirely deserved, I should add.

Many Members have paid deserved and justified tribute to retail operatives and retail workers for the work that they have been doing, particularly during the pandemic. They serve the public and our communities, as many Members have eloquently and powerfully set out. Of course, violence against such workers has a significant impact on individuals. It can leave them with physical effects, but it also has a significant bearing on their overall emotional and mental stability. No worker should suffer abuse or violence in providing service to members of the public—that is completely unacceptable. For more than a year, the pandemic has resulted in some shop workers feeling more vulnerable and susceptible to even worse behaviour and treatment than they might have experienced before, so we completely understand the motivations and concerns that have brought so many Members to this Westminster Hall debate, and we understand what motivated 104,000 people to sign the petition.

It is worth laying out the law as it currently stands, because some speeches might have suggested that there are no provisions in place to protect emergency workers from these kinds of terrible assaults, but that is of course not the case. A number of existing criminal offences cover many of the terrible attacks of the kind that we have heard described, which inflict harm on people both physically and psychologically. The entry level offence is common assault, which carries a maximum sentence of six months' imprisonment, but a lot of offences go beyond that. Many of the examples of offences that we have heard described would, in fact, not be charged as common assault; they would be charged as much more serious offences. The hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) described several incidents, but two in particular stuck in my mind. She mentioned a terrible example—I think it was in the north-east—of someone being dragged, punched with knuckle-dusters and kicked, and another terrible case where somebody's ear was bitten. That would not be charged as common assault, because it is much more serious than common assault.

That would apply in Scotland as well. The law in Scotland applies to the common assault-type offences. Much more serious offences, such as those I have just mentioned, would be charged as something different. For example, actual bodily harm, or section 20 grievous

[Chris Philp]

bodily harm, carries a maximum sentence not of six months or 12 months, as is the case with the new law in Scotland, but of five years. More serious offences—for example grievous bodily harm with intent to commit—carry a maximum sentence not of a year, as per the new law in Scotland, but of 10 years.

Anna McMorris: What the Minister fails to recognise is that the current law is not fit for purpose. Only 6% of incidents result in prosecution. There is a real failure in the system, and that is recognised by his own consultation.

Chris Philp: I agree that there is an issue with the number of prosecutions. I will come to that in just a few moments' time. I will address that point—I am not trying to duck it, because I am coming to it next.

Points have been made about knives and people producing a bladed article in a shop. Again, if somebody makes a threat with a knife, it is not charged as common assault and it would not be charged under the new offence in Scotland. It would be charged as making a threat with a bladed article, which carries a four-year maximum sentence and, for adults, a six-month minimum sentence. All of these offences exist, and many of them carry higher sentences than the new Scottish law, and higher sentences than common assault.

That does not, however, answer the question that many Members have raised. They have made the point that attacks on retail workers are different, because the retail worker is providing a service to the public. In some cases, the retail worker is effectively enforcing the law on our behalf—for example, by asking questions about whether somebody is over the age of 18 when buying cigarettes, alcohol and similar. Many Members have made the point that retail workers are different and that for that reason the offence should be taken more seriously. Members are right to say that.

In responding to that reasonable and legitimate question, I point colleagues to the Sentencing Council guidelines for common assault, which, as it happens, were refreshed and updated just last week—I think the updated version came out on Thursday of last week. The section on common assault also covers racially and religiously aggravated assault and the common assault of an emergency worker. One of the listed aggravating factors for common assault, which would lead to a sentence going up relative to what would otherwise be the case, is an

“Offence committed against those working in the public sector—” quite rightly—

“or providing a service to the public or against a person coming to the assistance of an emergency worker.”

The Sentencing Council guidelines, refreshed just last week, expressly recognise that those people providing a service to the public, including retail workers, are doing a different kind of job, and that somebody who assaults them deserves a higher sentence. That is what “aggravating factor” means.

That applies not only to the common assault offence; it is also to be found in the list of aggravating factors for actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm and so on. That list of aggravating factors is not long; it is about 15 bullet points. Those concerns are recognised, as is deliberately spitting or coughing. Some Members mentioned

that, during the pandemic, people have spat at or coughed on retail workers in a deliberate attempt to give them covid, to threaten to give them covid or to give them the impression that they might be at risk of covid. “Deliberate spitting or coughing” is the very first non-statutory aggravating factor on the list, so again, that is accounted for.

It is worth saying that these aggravating factors do not apply only to retail workers but to any public sector worker, quite rightly, and to other people providing a public service, including transport workers. The debate has focused on retail workers, who are special and deserve protection and who suffer terrible abuse, as everyone has said, but we should not forget people who work on buses, trains or the London underground, or postmen, teachers or social workers. I would not like to say that they should be overlooked if they are assaulted as they go about their work. They are just as important as retail workers. The Sentencing Council aggravating factor sets out that people who assault retail workers, teachers, postmen and people working on trains and so on will get a heavier sentence.

Liz Twist: The Minister refers to the sentencing guidelines, but they are only of any impact if we actually get the prosecution. That is the issue that we are all trying to raise.

Chris Philp: I will now come to that critical point, which the shadow Minister also raised. I hope I have demonstrated in my foregoing remarks that, first, the criminal offences to prosecute assaults on emergency workers are already on the statute book, and secondly, that where prosecutions are secured, a longer sentence will already be given owing to the aggravating factors I have just read out. Creating a new offence does not answer the question, because the offence exists already. The aggravating factor exists already. The issue is prosecutions, as the shadow Minister and the hon. Lady have raised.

I have some data. I am not sure whether it came from the USDAW survey or another source. I got it through the Home Affairs Committee's survey. I am not sure whether that is the same one or a different one.

Carolyn Harris: It's a different one.

Chris Philp: Thank you. The Committee surveyed 8,742 people, whom I believe were retail workers, asking if they had been assaulted, and many had been. They were asked whether they had reported the offence, and 87%—not quite 100%—of respondents reported it to the employer. The Committee then asked whether they had reported the offence to the police, and only 53%—half of those retail workers who suffered an assault—had done so. In 12% of cases there was an investigation and arrest. That 12% figure is clearly too low, as the shadow Minister and the hon. Member for Blaydon pointed out. Putting a new criminal offence on the statute book does not fill the gap. It is about investigation and prosecution, and that has to start with reporting.

Grahame Morris: I raised the Home Affairs Committee report in my brief contribution. I still think that we need to have a specific offence to deter people—my people in Peterlee should not be any less well protected than the people in Peterhead, which is what is happening at the moment. The Committee suggested improved security. Body cameras have been mentioned, and they should be a factor, to give staff confidence, should they

challenge someone, that they have a witness to take forward a prosecution, if necessary. Does the Minister agree?

Chris Philp: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is vital that more people report such offences and that we support the retail community to take steps to detect such terrible crimes that are being committed. The national retail crime steering group—of which the Policing Minister is a co-chair or leading member—is doing exactly that kind of work. The Home Office has also invested £40,000 in the ShopKind campaign, which aims to move in the direction mentioned by the hon. Member for Easington.

On the reasons why people do not report incidents—and why only half of victims report them to the police—there is some data in the Home Affairs Committee survey. By the way, I commend the Select Committee for putting that together. It found 3,444 people who did not report their incidents. That is a lot of people. Of the reasons given—people clearly gave more than one—the top one, cited by 35% of those victims who did not report, was:

“I did not believe the employer would do anything about it”.

That is terrible. The first thing we need to do is to say to employers, “If your employee is assaulted in any way, it is your duty as an employer to make sure that it gets reported to the police.”

Secondly, 32% said:

“I believed it was just part of the job”.

Clearly, it is not. That is obviously a terrible perception, so we need to send out a clear message that assault of anyone is unacceptable. Others said:

“I considered the incident too minor to report”,

so we need to make sure that such assaults are criminal offences and that they are aggravated when the victim is providing a service to the public. Another reason, given by 28% of respondents, was:

“I did not believe the police would do anything about it”.

The Policing Minister is working on that. Of course, every time one of those incidents gets reported, the police should take action.

Chris Stephens: I do not usually make much of a case for employers, but the British Retail Consortium and 65 CEOs in the United Kingdom are asking the UK Government for a specific law for retail workers. Why does the Minister believe that to be the case?

Chris Philp: As I laid out in the first half of my comments, the laws exist already. The law criminalises every example of the behaviour—terrible behaviour—that Members have laid out this afternoon. They are criminal offences already, each and every single one. Most of them, including the two examples given by the shadow Minister, would not be prosecuted under the new Scottish law; they would be prosecuted as more serious assaults. The criminal offences exist and they are, in the Sentencing Council guidelines, already aggravated where the victim is a retail worker or, indeed, a transport worker. In any case, if we passed a measure focusing only on retail workers, it would obviously neglect train and bus drivers and everyone else. However, they are already covered by those aggravating factors.

What is clearly needed is not to criminalise the behaviour; it is criminal already. It is not to elevate the penalty given to those people who are convicted; it is elevated already.

What we need to do is to get more convictions, and that starts with reporting. That is the work that the national retail crime steering group is doing. I have participated in this debate from the Ministry of Justice point of view, while the steering group and policing sit with my hon. Friend the Policing Minister, so I will take away a clear message for him and the national retail crime steering group: these terrible offences, which have an enormous impact on retail workers, need to have a significantly elevated focus, in terms of getting more reporting, as we have just talked about, and making sure the police follow them up in every case. The Government obviously agree that these are serious offences and that they need to be investigated and prosecuted. I can give a firm undertaking to hon. Members that I will take that message back to the Policing Minister.

Liz Twist: Will the Minister give way?

Chris Philp: I was about to conclude, but it would be ungallant not to give way to the hon. Lady.

Liz Twist: I thank the Minister for his gallantry. When he talks about reporting, it sounds as if he is asking the shop workers to put right the problem that they are facing. To me, that is definitely not acceptable. We need to look at ways of supporting them, which is why we are all asking the Minister to look again at this issue.

Chris Philp: The police can only respond to and investigate crimes that are reported, so any investigation starts with the report by the victim or, in this case, the employer. We heard evidence in the survey report that many victims do not report the crime because they think that their employer will not support them. Clearly, we need to ensure we are actively encouraging reporting and that it is then actively followed up and investigated.

That is the message I will take away from this debate and give clearly to the Policing Minister. I undertake that I will ensure that that message is heard by him and by the steering group, so that steps can be taken to make sure that more of these offences are reported and prosecuted. That is how we can ensure that justice is done and victims protected.

7.41 pm

Matt Vickers [V]: I thank the Minister for his response and the Government for continuing to actively consider how we best tackle this growing and abhorrent problem. I thank hon. Members for their contributions and for sharing the many harrowing experiences of their constituents. I particularly thank the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) for his campaigning.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) made an important call to be more kind. Let us make it our mission as parliamentarians to go out and make the world a kinder place, by pushing this issue up the agenda in every way possible. Let us ensure that the retail workers in our communities get the respect they so rightfully deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 328621, relating to the protection of retail workers.

7.42 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 7 June 2021

CABINET OFFICE

Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee: Eighth Meeting

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): My noble Friend, Minister of State, Cabinet Office (right hon. Lord Frost CMG), has today made the following written statement:

The next meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee will take place in London on 9 June 2021, with delegations attending in person and by video conference.

The meeting will be co-chaired by the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, right hon. Lord Frost CMG, and Vice President of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič.

The agenda will include five items:

Welcome and opening remarks from the co-chairs

Formal adoption of the agenda

Stocktake of Specialised Committee activity 24 February - 9 June 2021

Withdrawal Agreement Annual Report

Update on withdrawal agreement implementation

Citizens' Rights

Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol

AOB

Concluding remarks

The UK delegation will include:

Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, right hon. Lord Frost CMG;

Paymaster General, right hon. Penny Mordaunt MP.

Representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive have been invited to form part of the UK delegation.

[HCWS68]

Trade and Cooperation Agreement Partnership Council: First Meeting

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): My noble Friend, Minister of State, Cabinet Office (right hon. Lord Frost CMG), has today made the following written statement:

The first meeting of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement Partnership Council will take place on 9 June 2021, in person and by video conference, hosted by the UK.

The meeting will be co-chaired by the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, right hon. Lord Frost CMG, and Vice President of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič.

The agenda will include nine items:

Introduction

Welcome, opening remarks from the co-chairs

Formal adoption of the agenda

Sanitary and phytosanitary measures and customs and trade facilitation

Fisheries

Law enforcement

Long-term visa fees

Participation in union programmes

Update on institutional framework

Tentative timetable of meetings of Committees under the TCA

Parliamentary Partnership Assembly

Civil Society Forum

AOB

Concluding remarks

The UK delegation will include:

Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, right hon. Lord Frost CMG;

Paymaster General, right hon. Penny Mordaunt MP;

Ministers from the devolved administrations.

[HCWS67]

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Downstream Oil Resilience Bill: Draft Publication

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): I will this morning lay before Parliament a draft Downstream Oil Resilience Bill which introduces measures that will enable Government to support industry in ensuring the resilience of the fuel supply sector, prevent supply disruptions and maintain the security of fuel supply to consumers.

The sector is currently efficient, flexible and effective in ensuring the continuity of fuel supply and we do not currently expect any disruption to this. We need to ensure that we protect the continuity of fuel supply and that we are prepared and resilient to disruptions when they do occur. The measures set out in the draft Bill will help ensure that critical services and consumers will continue to receive the fuel on which they rely and will reduce the risk of disruption to economic activities from the loss of fuel supplies.

This draft Bill follows a public consultation in 2017, where Government explored options to address sector resilience and concluded that due to high levels of global competition, the sector has gone through a process of restructuring to remain internationally competitive which has reduced its spare capacity. This means that there is an increased risk of market disruption in the downstream oil sector, given the lower capacity to react to sudden supply and demand shocks.

The fuel supply system faces a number of inherent risks, including accidents, severe weather, malicious threats, industrial action, and financial failure. The Government work with fuel suppliers to mitigate such risks and, while individual companies have a good record of managing their own risks, they do not see a commercial return in managing low probability, higher impact risks.

The publication also marks the first step towards the commitment made in the Energy White Paper 'Powering our Net Zero Future' to take powers to ensure we maintain a secure and resilient supply of fossil fuels during the transition to net zero emissions. As set out in the Energy White paper and in line with the recommendation from the independent Climate Change Committee, we will decarbonise our energy system, boosting the production of clean energy. The sixth carbon budget will ensure Britain remains on track to end its contribution to climate change. Ensuring a reliable and secure fuel supply to essential services in coming

years will be critical and therefore primary legislation is required to build adequate resilience across the whole supply system.

The Integrated Review 2021 sets out our goals to build a more robust position on national security and resilience in order to reduce the impact of shocks and long-term challenges on the life and livelihoods of UK citizens. The Bill is aligned with the Integrated Review's objectives and outlines solutions to address the current and future risks to the downstream oil sector because we need to ensure that there is a supply of secure, affordable and clean energy which is essential to the UK's national interests.

The Bill will help the Government identify risks of disruption to the UK fuel supply market in advance and ensure that Government and industry together can implement effective and proportionate contingency plans as early as possible. This includes mandating the provision of information to Government to allow better risk assessment and the design of appropriate mitigating measures, and direction powers that will allow the Government to intervene where supply resilience is compromised, or there is a significant risk that it will be, and the industry has not taken any action. The Bill also introduces new powers that allow the Government to ensure that anyone taking control of critical infrastructure in this sector has appropriate financial and operational measures in place, and a new spending power to allow Government to provide financial assistance to support sector resilience and ensure continuity of supply, where such support is deemed necessary and value for money.

The Bill will apply to all operators and infrastructure in the downstream oil sector with a supply handling capacity above the thresholds which are outlined in the Bill. My Department will continue to work with industry to refine the proposed measures, so that the disruption to market functioning is minimal.

The Bill will also ensure that there is a reliable energy supply and increased resilience which means that the downstream oil sector is able to protect against, react to and recover from any disruption.

The draft Bill will be published with accompanying explanatory notes and an assessment of the potential impacts. The draft Bill will undergo pre-legislative scrutiny by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee to ensure that it is robust and workable.

[HCWS64]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Regulation of BetIndex Ltd: Update on Review

The Minister for Media and Data (Mr John Whittingdale): Further to the statement of 20 April outlining plans for an independent expert review of the regulation of the Football Index gambling product, we are today announcing the full terms of reference for the review and further details.

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) has appointed Malcolm Sheehan QC

to lead the review. He will provide an independent expert account of the actions taken by the Gambling Commission and other relevant regulatory bodies, and consider the lessons to be learnt for the future. He will have access to all the necessary information held by Government and regulatory bodies to conduct the review.

As outlined in the terms of reference which we have also released in full on www.gov.uk, the review will cover the period from the granting of BetIndex's gambling licence in September 2015 to the Gambling Commission's suspension of that licence on 11 March this year. It will principally report on the actions of the Gambling Commission in assessing, licensing, and monitoring the operator, responding to concerns and delivering its objectives. The review will also consider how the Financial Conduct Authority responded to questions from the Gambling Commission and how it considered whether the product amounted to a regulated activity under the Financial Services and Markets Act.

It is important that former customers continue to have a voice. The Administrators should have already contacted every former customer so they can submit a claim if they think they are owed money or compensation from the company. Customers will be kept informed through the administration process, including on any opportunities they may have to vote on next steps. The Gambling Commission will also continue to consider information it receives from individuals about the actions of Football Index where it pertains to its ongoing regulatory investigation into BetIndex's licence. While the Call for Evidence closed on 31 March, former customers can also continue to provide information to DCMS about the Football Index case to inform the Gambling Act review. Hundreds of individuals have already done so, and where relevant to the Terms of Reference for the independent review we will pass those to Malcolm Sheehan QC.

This independent review is expected to provide a report for publication in the summer, and will include recommendations as needed across the full range of questions set out in the terms of reference. Its findings will form part of the evidence informing the Government's ongoing review of the Gambling Act 2005, which was announced in December 2020. This independent review is entirely separate from the Gambling Commission's ongoing regulatory investigation and the administration proceedings, and will be done in such a way as to avoid prejudicing either of those processes. A copy of the terms of reference will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS63]

EDUCATION

Education Recovery

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): The pandemic and its associated restrictions and disruptions have had a substantial impact on children and young people's learning, evidenced in recent research from the Education Policy Institute.

Last week I announced the details of the next step in our efforts to make sure children and young people catch up, as part of our ongoing education recovery plans.

A further £1.4 billion will be made available to support education recovery for children aged two to 19 in schools, colleges and early years settings, focusing on two areas where the evidence is clear that our investment will have significant impact: high-quality tutoring and great teaching.

This further instalment is the third major recovery intervention in the past year, building on the £1.7bn already announced, bringing total investment announced for education recovery over the past year to over £3 billion. This forms part of the wider response to help pupils make up their learning over the course of this Parliament.

New measures include:

£1 billion for tutoring

To support those most impacted by the pandemic, particularly disadvantaged students, we will radically expand tutoring to provide up to 100 million hours of tuition for five to 19-year-olds by 2024. This will expand high-quality tutoring in every part of country so that small group tuition is available to those children who need help catching up—not just the most affluent.

In schools, we will provide up to 6 million tutoring courses for five to 16-year-olds by 2024. Children in receipt of tutoring will receive up to 15 sessions of small group or individual tuition to support them to catch up in subjects such as maths or science, delivered by a trained professional or member of school staff outside of their normal lessons. One course of high-quality tutoring has been proven to boost attainment by three to five months, so tutoring will be vital for young people in recovering the teaching hours lost in the last year. For 16 to 19-year-olds, we will extend the 16-to-19 tuition fund for a further two years. Over the coming three academic years, funding will be provided to support the equivalent of 2 million 15-hour courses to accelerate the progression of lower attaining students. Collectively 16-to-19 students will receive up to 32 million hours of small group tuition over the three years.

£400 million for teaching

£253 million new funding to provide 500,000 teacher training opportunities for teachers to access world-leading training appropriate for whatever point they are at in their career, from new teachers to headteachers through extending the roll-out of the early career framework and middle and late career national professional qualification.

£153 million new funding to provide training for early years staff to support the very youngest children's learning and development. This will involve rolling out new training programmes so that early years staff are supported to help young children with their speech and language skills as well as their physical and emotional development. We will also provide additional support and expert advice for nurseries and other settings implementing our early years reforms, which will reduce teachers' workloads so they can spend more time supporting children's development.

To ensure that those with the least time left do not miss out, providers of 16-to-19 education will have the option of offering students in year 13, or equivalent, the opportunity to repeat up to one more year if they have been particularly severely affected by the pandemic.

The Government have committed to an ambitious, long-term education recovery plan and the next stage will include a review of time spent in school and college and the impact this could have on helping children and

young people to catch up. The findings of the review will be set later in the year to inform the spending review.

[HCWS70]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Compliance Improvement Review: Independent Verification

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): In 2019, my predecessor notified Parliament of compliance risks that MI5 had identified and reported to the Home Office and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner. These risks were identified within certain technology environments used to store and analyse data, including material obtained under the Investigatory Powers Act. The compliance risks related to the particular safeguards set out in the Investigatory Powers Act that relate to the processing of material that has been obtained under a warrant—section 53 of the Act and the corresponding provisions.

As part of the response to this, Sir Martin Donnelly, a former Permanent Secretary, conducted an independent review to consider how these risks arose and what could be done to reduce the likelihood of a similar situation arising again in the future. In June 2019, the Compliance Improvement Review's summary and recommendations were published on gov.uk and work began immediately to address these recommendations. One of these recommendations was

"the satisfactory delivery of this change programme should be independently verified by the end of June 2020."

On 6 July 2020, I made a written ministerial statement to notify Parliament that due to the adverse impacts of covid-19 the independent verification of the implementation of the recommendations would be delayed until the start of 2021. Despite the ongoing impact of covid-19, the independent verification has now taken place.

The independent verification process was led by Mary Calam, a former director-general in the Home Office. She considered whether the work undertaken since the summer of 2019 had addressed the concerns raised in Sir Martin Donnelly's report and delivered the outcomes he had intended. Mary had access to all relevant documentation and personnel, and conducted interviews with senior members of the relevant organisations as well as with focus groups of staff. I would like to place on record my thanks to Mary and the review team, who have produced a comprehensive report in a difficult working environment due to covid-19.

I was provided with a copy of the verification report earlier this year and have since had the opportunity to discuss it with Mary. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner and the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament have both received copies of the full report.

The verification report concludes that significant and measurable progress has been made and that the new operating model is an excellent start to ensure any future compliance risks are identified and addressed early. The report finds that

“MI5 have used the Compliance Improvement Review to make fundamental changes across the whole organisation” and that

“there is new governance to oversee compliance and security risks and resourcing for compliance work has been significantly increased.” The report further notes that

“the broader changes that MI5 has made to strengthen its legal compliance risk management processes, instil a culture of individual accountability for legal compliance risk and ensure that compliance is built in to new products should give Ministers greater confidence that new risks will be identified early and addressed promptly.”

The report does acknowledge that, in places, work remains to be done and that maintaining high levels of compliance is—by definition—an ongoing effort. MI5 have already put in place a successor programme to take forward further work and the director-general of MI5 and I are fully committed to ensuring this work remains a priority. I will continue to monitor progress through the quarterly MI5 Ministerial Assurance Group which I chair.

I am very grateful to the director-general of MI5 and his staff, as well as my own officials, for the immense progress that has been made since Sir Martin Donnelly completed his compliance improvement review in June 2019.

A copy of the verification summary document will be made available on www.gov.uk and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS69]

TRANSPORT

Local Transport Update

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

The Government and Mayor of London have agreed a third extraordinary Transport for London funding deal of £1.08 billion for the period up until 11 December 2021. The deal will replace the agreement signed in October 2020, which, following extensions agreed in March 2021 and in May 2021, expired on 28 May 2021.

The funding settlement is further proof of our commitment to supporting the capital and the transport network on which it depends, whilst ensuring that our support is fair to the national taxpayer. The Government will continue to review passenger demand in line with the Prime Minister’s roadmap and will continue to support the fare revenues lost as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

The funding settlement sets out further measures to sustainably support London’s transport network. Within the next deal period, the Mayor has agreed to; deliver £300 million of savings or new income sources in 2021-2022; deliver £0.5-£1 billion of new or increased income sources each year by 2023; prepare a revised medium-term capital investment programme; carry out a review of TfL’s pension scheme; set aside at least £100 million to continue the delivery of active travel programmes; and review options for long term funding reform in partnership with the Government. To help TfL achieve financial sustainability, the Mayor has agreed to prepare a plan to accelerate TfL’s existing modernisation programme of £730 million by April 2023.

The Mayor has agreed to work collaboratively with DfT on a joint programme for implementing higher levels of automatic train operation on the London

Underground, as is the case on many metro systems worldwide. Over the course of this funding period, the Mayor and TfL will make progress towards the conversion of at least one London underground line to full automation but with an on-board attendant. This technology has the potential to offer a more punctual, reliable, customer-responsive and safer service that is less susceptible to human error. TfL will also lead market engagement into technology for protecting passengers at station platforms.

London’s underground is the world’s oldest underground railway and the Government are committed to supporting the capital’s transport network, ensuring that it meets the needs of Londoners as we recover from the pandemic and that it is modernised for the 21st century.

TfL and the London Boroughs are responsible for local road maintenance, including bridge repairs. London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is responsible for the safety and maintenance of Hammersmith Bridge. However, given the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, during the period of this agreement, we expect to draw up a memorandum of understanding between HMG, TfL and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham to fund the reopening of Hammersmith Bridge—initially to pedestrians, cyclists and river traffic and, depending on cost, to motorists. Funding will be conditional on the following:

All parties must scrutinise and agree the cost of the project.

Each party agrees to pay a share of the cost. Repair costs are to be led by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and TfL; HMG will not directly contribute more than 1/3 of the costs.

That the independent Board responsible for the case for continued safe operation, reporting to London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, will conduct a new assessment for controlled and limited reopening of Hammersmith Bridge to pedestrians, cyclists and river traffic once further investigations and report validations are completed at the end of June. London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham shares the assessment with the Government and TfL.

The Government have repeatedly shown that they are committed to supporting the running of essential services across the capital while we recover from this pandemic, while ensuring fairness and value for money for the taxpayer. The Government continue to work with TfL and the Mayor so TfL can be financially sustainable as soon as possible.

This deal takes Government support to TfL since March 2020 to over £4 billion, while continuing to spend money on vital infrastructure projects to level up the national transport network outside of London.

[HCWS65]

Motoring Services Agencies Business Plans 2021-22

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) has made the following ministerial statement.

I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2021-22 business plans for the Department for Transport’s Motoring Agencies—the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) and the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA).

The business plans set out:

The key business priorities that each agency will deliver and any significant changes they plan to make to their services, and;
the key performance indicators, by which their performance will be assessed.

These plans allow service users and members of the public to understand the agencies' plans for delivering their key services, progressing their transformation programmes, and managing their finances.

The business plans will be available electronically on www.gov.uk and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2021-06-07/HCWS66/> .

[HCWS66]

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 7 June 2021

CABINET OFFICE

Covid-19: Government Contracts

The following is an extract from Oral Questions on Thursday 27 May 2021.

Michael Gove: I remember Front Benchers from the Labour party pressing us at an earlier stage in the pandemic, quite rightly, to move even faster to secure that PPE. But, of course, even as we were moving more quickly to secure it, there was a seven-step process supervised by civil servants in order to make sure that procurement was handled appropriately. If the hon. Lady has any specific cases where she feels that the process was faulty, I look forward to hearing from her about them, but so far there have been no specific charges from her. More broadly, I welcome emphasis on greater transparency overall.

[Official Report, 27 May 2021, Vol. 696, c. 525.]

Letter from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson)

The correct response should have been:

Michael Gove: I remember Front Benchers from the Labour party pressing us at an earlier stage in the pandemic, quite rightly, to move even faster to secure that PPE. But, of course, even as we were moving more quickly to secure it, there was **an eight-step** process supervised by civil servants in order to make sure that procurement was handled appropriately. If the hon. Lady has any specific cases where she feels that the process was faulty, I look forward to hearing from her about them, but so far there have been no specific charges from her. More broadly, I welcome emphasis on greater transparency overall.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19: Government Handling and Preparedness

The following is an extract from the urgent question on 27 May 2021.

Matt Hancock: What I would say to the people of Bolton is that they have again risen to this challenge. The number of vaccinations happening in Bolton right now is phenomenal—tens of thousands every single day. *[Official Report, 27 May 2021, Vol. 696, c. 538.]*

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi).

The correct response should have been:

Matt Hancock: What I would say to the people of Bolton is that they have again risen to this challenge. The number of vaccinations happening in Bolton right now is phenomenal—tens of thousands every single **week**.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Oral Health and Dentistry: England

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on oral health and dentistry: England on 25 May 2021.

Jo Churchill: I am pleased to say that approximately 95% of practices exceeded the threshold for full remuneration set in the last quarter of last year, so up to March. The average performance in February was 59%.

[Official Report, 25 May 2021, Vol. 696, c. 73WH.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill).

An error has been identified in my response to the debate.

The correct response should have been:

Jo Churchill: I am pleased to say that approximately **88%** of practices **in England** exceeded the threshold for full remuneration set in the last quarter of last year, so up to March. The average performance in February was 59% **of units of dental activity**.

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**not later than
Monday 14 June 2021**

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