

**Monday  
12 July 2021**

**Volume 699  
No. 32**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Monday 12 July 2021**

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# HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. BORIS JOHNSON, MP, DECEMBER 2019)

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 17 DECEMBER 2019]

SEVENTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 699

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2021-2022

### House of Commons

*Monday 12 July 2021*

*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

**Mr Speaker:** Before we come to Question 1, I wish to inform the House that there is an error on the call list. Cat Smith's Question 14 is listed as asking about the dismantling of county lines drug gangs. In fact, her tabled question was about steps taken to ensure that Border Force staff are trained on exemptions from requirements for covid-19 testing. I understand that Ministers have been informed and that the correct question will be answered when we reach that point.

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Hate Crime Legislation: Law Commission Review

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): If she will make it her policy to implement the recommendations of the Law Commission's review of hate crime legislation. [902505]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):** All forms of hate crime are completely unacceptable and the UK has a robust legislative framework to respond to it. We are absolutely clear that the cowards who commit these hateful acts should feel the full force of the law. We will of course work with the Law Commission on its review of hate crime legislation.

**Christine Jardine:** I welcome the Secretary of State's comments about the complete unacceptability of hate crimes. The dictionary defines misogyny as "dislike or contempt for", or indeed, "prejudice against" women. Every year, tens of thousands of women in this country face emotional and physical violence, often prompted by exactly that sort of prejudice. Making racially and religiously motivated crimes aggravated offences has helped the police to tackle them, but the law does not provide the same protections against gender-based hate crimes, so does the Home Secretary agree that, if the Law Commission recommends improvements in those areas, they should be a matter of priority?

**Priti Patel:** First, let me acknowledge the points that the hon. Lady has made. She is absolutely right about hate crimes, misogyny and crimes against women in particular, and some of the most appalling and corrosive attitudes against women that we have seen across our society for too long. On the Law Commission report, we are waiting for its findings. I can give her and the House every assurance that we will work with the Law Commission. Alongside that important point, we will be publishing very soon—in the next few weeks, in fact—our strategy on violence against women and girls. I want to go on the record to emphasise that any form of violence, oppression, sexism or hatred against women and girls is thoroughly unacceptable and this Government are absolutely adamant in dealing with it.

#### Fire and Rescue Service: Negotiations on Pay and Conditions

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): If she will make it her policy to maintain collective bargaining in fire and rescue service negotiations on pay and conditions. [902506]

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):**

Fire and rescue professionals work tirelessly to protect their communities. Currently, the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services is responsible for negotiating the pay and conditions of fire and rescue authority employees, and central Government have no direct role in this process. The Home Office will be launching a consultative White Paper on fire reform later this year.

**Ian Lavery [V]:** This Government should salute the courageous men and women of the fire and rescue service, who are the envy of the world, not constantly attack them. It is universally recognised that trade union membership and collective bargaining rights for workers are among the most effective ways to reduce inequality. “Brexit will not be used to reduce labour standards” was the constant cry from Government Ministers. Prove it, Home Secretary. Commitment after commitment has been given to protect and promote collective bargaining. Deliver it, Home Secretary. Stand by your word and confirm that the collective bargaining rights of firefighters within their chosen trade union will not be diminished in any way.

**Kit Malthouse:** The hon. Gentleman has a long association with the trade union movement, which I know he has found rewarding in every sense of the word. As I said, we are not, as a Government, involved in pay bargaining for the fire service. There is a national joint council, where the Fire Brigades Union is represented 50:50 with employers. As I am sure he will know, the FBU has accepted a pay offer for the coming year that will be payable from the 1st of this month. There will be a White Paper looking at reform in the future and we will see what comes out of that consultative process.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not think it is on good terms for the Minister to be sneaky in the way that he approached the answer. The underhand in there was a bit leading and I hope that we have a better relationship on all sides of this House.

**Kit Malthouse:** I apologise, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you for that.

**Crime and Violence: Young People**

**Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to prevent young people from becoming involved in crime and violence. [902507]

**Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to help stop young people from becoming involved in crime and violence. [902520]

**Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to help stop young people from becoming involved in crime and violence. [902521]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):** From 2019 to 2022, this Government will have provided more than £242 million across the 18 areas that account for the majority of knife crime and other serious violence incidents. This money is funding violence reduction units, which will

draw together all key partners to address the root causes of violence as well as targeted police action to deter and disrupt knife crime. The House has recently approved the serious violence duty in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, and we are investing more than £200 million over the next decade in the youth endowment fund to help interventions to divert young people away from serious violence.

**Darren Henry [V]:** In Nottinghamshire, our violence reduction unit has played a key role in strategic planning and supporting practical local work to protect our young people from harm. Can the Minister provide any reassurance that VRUs will continue to form part of our local response to serious youth violence, supported by Home Office funding?

**Victoria Atkins:** This Government take extremely seriously the harm that serious violence causes all people across society, but particularly young people who are dragged into gangs by gang leaders. That is why, through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, we have introduced, as I said, the serious violence duty. We are also increasing sentences for the most violent offenders. VRUs remain a key part of our work to tackle serious violence, as demonstrated by our £2.6 million invested in Nottingham alone.

**Simon Baynes [V]:** Youth clubs and groups teach young people valuable skills and help to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. Will the Minister join me in praising the neighbourhood policing teams in Clwyd South, who work in partnership with youth services and local councils, including in the Ceiriog valley, where together they are involving more young people in the local rugby club and hiring a mobile BMX course?

**Victoria Atkins:** I am very pleased to join my hon. Friend in praising his local police, and also the local charities and other services that are working together to help young people to escape a life of crime. Sport can have many benefits. With our £200 million youth endowment fund, over the next 10 years, we will see the benefits of sport programmes, but also of other types of intervention to help to remove young people from the clutches of gang leaders. I am delighted also that my hon. Friend's police force has received almost 100 new police officers as part of this Government's commitment to tackling violent crime and making our streets safer with 20,000 new officers.

**Paul Howell [V]:** Does the Minister agree that one way to stop young people from becoming involved in crime is to give them more opportunity to be active? Would she support the efforts of people such as Sean Ivey, who, despite suffering personal attacks, including having his home, car and caravan torched, is now leading efforts to support his community in attacking antisocial behaviour? Will she look at how we can support his efforts through targeted funding for distressed communities, and can I encourage her to come to Wingate in Sedgefield to see for herself the efforts being made?

**Victoria Atkins:** I join my hon. Friend in commending and thanking Mr Ivey for all his efforts in his constituency to support others in Sedgefield and to tackle antisocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour, particularly of the sort

that my hon. Friend has described, is absolutely unacceptable. Next week, we have a week of awareness raising on the perils of antisocial behaviour and the tools available to our councils, the police and, indeed, to us as Members of Parliament to tackle antisocial behaviour in our communities. As a Government, we have committed an additional £7.3 million in funding, and almost 90 new officers have been recruited to help to keep County Durham's streets safe. I am very pleased to receive my hon. Friend's invitation, and I will of course accept.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): I had the pleasure of visiting Calderdale's early action team on Friday, where West Yorkshire police and partner agencies are delivering some exemplary work, keeping children and young people safe from crime and exploitation. However, for all the positive work they do, chronic backlogs in the criminal justice system mean that it is taking anywhere up to 18 months for cases to be heard, delaying restorative justice for often young victims. Only with a swift and effective criminal justice system will these agencies be able to do their best work in protecting young people from criminality, so what is the Government's plan to deliver a dynamic and effective youth justice system that is fit for purpose?

**Victoria Atkins:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and I know her own commitment in this area. The Government are taking a whole system approach to how we tackle serious violence. The journey of a young person who is involved in serious violence may start in seemingly tiny steps. It may be the offer of a new pair of trainers or the offer of a meal. That is how gang leaders ensnare young people into their gangs to go around the country selling drugs and so on. As part of the Government's work, we are investing not only in very tough enforcement action, but in early intervention programmes. The youth endowment fund has just launched its toolkit, which will help local commissioners to discover which programmes work and have the best impact on early intervention. I commend that to the hon. Lady. I very much look forward to working with her and her local police force in helping to prevent serious violence among young people.

#### Knife Crime: Summer 2021

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help prevent knife crime during summer 2021. [902508]

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help prevent knife crime during summer 2021. [902511]

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help prevent knife crime during summer 2021. [902514]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):** This year, we are investing more than £130 million to tackle serious violence at local level. That includes funding violence reduction units, which draw in all key partners, including the police, local authorities and the community, to address the root causes of violence, as well as targeted police action to deter and disrupt knife crime. It also includes

up to £23 million for new early intervention programmes that will help stop young people being drawn into violence in the first place.

**Helen Hayes:** Yesterday, I spoke to Cindy, whom I met three years ago as we both worked to support her friend whose son had been murdered with a knife. She phoned to tell me that a 16-year-old son of another friend had also been stabbed and killed this weekend. She told me:

"I haven't called his mum yet, I don't know how I will bear hearing her screams in my ears."

Knife crime has risen in every police command area across the country in the last decade, doubling since 2013. Lives are being lost, families devastated and communities traumatised every single week, yet the Government have disbanded the serious violence taskforce. Why are they so complacent about the loss of young lives?

**Victoria Atkins:** May I try to correct the hon. Lady? First, clearly everyone in the House has heard the account she has given of her constituent and the families affected in her constituency by knife crime. We understand and we express very seriously our commiserations to the families involved. However, the hon. Lady has perhaps missed the news about the violence reduction units, which we are funding, particularly in London, to help the police work together with other agencies, local authorities, local groups and so on to try to tackle serious violence both with enforcement and, importantly, with local intervention projects. Again, I very much welcome the opportunity at some point of sitting her down to talk about the youth endowment fund, for example, and to explain how that will help young people in her local communities. This Government are not complacent about serious violence or the deaths she has described. We are working very hard with the police and with local communities to ensure that these terrible crimes stop.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** The Government have stated that they are committed to a public health approach to tackling violence affecting young people and the Minister has just mentioned the violence reduction units, yet our 18 violence reduction units only receive short-term funding settlements. The work these units do is extremely important in tackling the root causes of violence, but they cannot formulate long-term strategies without long-term funding, so what is the Home Secretary doing to ensure that the comprehensive spending review delivers on that?

**Victoria Atkins:** As the hon. Lady knows, because we have discussed this many times in the past, violence reduction units are a key part of our work to tackle serious violence. We are constrained within the current spending review, with the wider problems of the pandemic and the impact that has had on Government spending, but she will know that the Government have invested record amounts in these units to get them working across the country in the 18 areas most hit by serious violence. However, we are going further than that, because through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, we are imposing a serious violence duty on every single local area across the country, so that every single area is taking the public health approach that she so commends, and rightly so.

**Ellie Reeves:** Michael Jonas, Ayodeji Habeeb Azeez, Jay Hughes, Levi Ernest-Morrison and Tashawn Watt are all young children and young people who have been



stabbed to death in my constituency over the past few years. Words cannot do justice to the grief and anguish this has caused their families and the wider community. The Government say they are committed to a public health approach to youth violence, but youth centres, schools, health services and children's centres have all had their budgets decimated over the past 10 years. My constituents cannot wait any longer. When will the Government reverse these cuts and take urgent action before more lives are lost?

**Victoria Atkins:** The hon. Lady rightly raises the names of those who have been murdered in her constituency, and of course our thoughts go to the families and friends affected by that. Of course, serious violence does not just affect the individual family; it affects the whole community. That is why we are taking this whole-system approach: very tough law enforcement, but critically, also trying to intervene at an early stage to help young people to avoid gangs, which will have an impact on the streets more widely. That is why the serious violence duty is so very important. I really hope that, on the next occasion the Labour party has to vote in support of the serious violence duty, it takes the opportunity to do so. Working together with schools, hospitals, other healthcare agencies, the police and local authorities is how we are going to help ensure that the sorts of incidents she describes do not happen again.

**Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab):** As we have been watching the incredible achievements of the England football team, the epidemic of violence on our streets has been growing, with younger and younger boys losing their lives in horrific murders, including a 16-year-old we are mourning in my constituency. Many of our football heroes had tough upbringings and have spoken out about the importance of role models and mentors—adults in their lives who helped them unlock their talent. I want all our young people to be able to unlock their talent, including that small group of vulnerable people at risk of being gripped by crime, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) says, many of those adults—in youth work, in education, in social care, in the health service—have disappeared following a decade of extreme cuts. Our summer holidays should be flooded with youth work, mentorship programmes, sports clubs and mental health support, as well, of course, as good neighbourhood policing. The scale of the problem deserves an appropriate response, so will the Government today recognise the potential of our whole nation and commit to helping every vulnerable child this summer?

**Victoria Atkins:** May I join the hon. Lady in acknowledging the sportsmanship, the talents, the dignity and the joy that the English football team have brought so many people over the tournament? They have been the very best of us; and they have been the very best of us while facing some horrific abuse—absolutely horrific racist abuse—during the tournament, and that is not acceptable.

The hon. Lady is quite right to raise the question of role models. I know from my own son's adoration of many of the England footballers just what powerful role models many of those footballers are to younger people. Sadly, of course, we cannot incorporate a Sterling or a Harry Kane into every youth project, but what we can do is build the structures around them. That is

precisely what we are doing, with increased investment both through the Department for Education funding over the summer and through our own work in funds such as the trusted relationships fund, which is helping young people to build positive relationships with positive role models. I join the hon. Lady's *cri de coeur* that we should pay full credit and respect to our footballers. They themselves tell the tale that if you have the belief and you have the talent, my goodness you can make it.

### County Lines Drugs Gangs

**Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to help dismantle county lines drugs gangs. [902509]

**Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps she is taking to (a) tackle county lines drug trafficking and (b) safeguard children from county lines exploitation. [902510]

**Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to help dismantle county lines drugs gangs. [902518]

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):** Since 2019, we have invested over £65 million to tackle county lines and drug supply, including £40 million committed this year. Through our county lines programme, we have become smarter in our activity against these ruthless gangs, resulting in more than 1,000 lines being closed, more than 5,800 arrests and more than 1,500 vulnerable adults and children safeguarded.

**Antony Higginbotham [V]:** Drug dealing is a despicable crime that preys on the vulnerable, damages communities and causes misery to so many. Locally, the Burnley and Padiham neighbourhood policing team has set up a taskforce to tackle this issue. Will the Minister confirm that local police forces will continue to have the resources and support they need really to tackle this issue and rid our communities of it? Will he meet me and our police and crime commissioner, Andrew Snowden, to see what more we can do?

**Kit Malthouse:** I am always happy to meet police and crime commissioners and their Members of Parliament to talk about fighting crime, and I am very pleased that my hon. Friend is so embedded in the collective mission to reduce crime in his constituency. He is quite right that we are having enormous success with county lines, and that is off the back of significant Government investment. I am hopeful that police and crime commissioners can see the wider benefits of that programme in suppression of violence in their areas and will supplement the work that we are doing, but he should be assured that we will be making a very strong case in the spending round for continued investment. The one thing I have learned about the Treasury over the past few years is that it likes investing in success, and we are certainly having that with county lines.

**Florence Eshalomi:** I thank the Minister for his reply. He mentioned that the Home Office and officials are getting smarter, but so are gang members. They are getting so smart that even during lockdown they had the sheer audacity to use our young people to carry drugs up and down the country dressed as key workers. They are always one step ahead. They will continue to exploit

our children until we have a clear definition on child criminal exploitation. It is estimated that over 4,000 teenagers in London alone are being criminally exploited. What additional steps will the Minister be taking to ensure the Government put their full weight behind addressing this real and serious issue?

**Kit Malthouse:** The hon. Lady rightly highlights one of the truly despicable aspects of county lines, which is the horrible exploitation and often victimisation of young people who are driven into the awful activity. She might be interested to know that we are very focused not necessarily on them but on those who control and victimise them. Much of the activity taking place in the three big forces we are funding—Liverpool, London and in the west midlands—is in targeting those line controllers who drive that exploitation. Interestingly, more and more of them are now not just being prosecuted for drugs importation or distribution, but for modern slavery or under child grooming legislation. That means that when they are convicted, they are put behind bars in the sex offenders wing, which is something not even they see as desirable. It is proving to be a very strong deterrent.

One of the key aspects of our work is gripping the transport network, in particular rail. We are finding that where we shut down their ability to use rail and they divert to roads, their likelihood of using young people, who cannot drive and are more likely to be arrested, is dropping. All our effort is being focused not just on restricting the supply of county lines across the country, but on rescuing and preventing young people from getting involved.

**Jack Brereton:** There have been a number of illegal cannabis farms busted recently by Staffordshire police. Many are in derelict and abandoned buildings, including the empty former Woolworths building in Longton, which was raided for the second time in under two years recently, finding 1,500 marijuana plants. Will my hon. Friend look at what more can be done to tackle the use of empty and derelict buildings by organised gangs to cultivate drugs?

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend is known for his innovative approach to policy and he certainly raises something that merits further investigation. He is quite right that we have seen a growth in the number of cannabis farms across the country in all sorts of buildings. Notwithstanding the drugs they produce, there is very often disgusting oppression and victimisation taking place inside—people who are trafficked across the world to tend the plants—and we need to do something about that as well. He might be interested to know, however, that in their off-hours when police helicopters are not dealing with other crimes, one thing they do is circle around using thermal imaging cameras to find houses that are strangely heated to full blast in the middle of summer, indicating that there may be something afoot. That has been a very rewarding way of investigating those farms. I will look at his idea and pursue it further.

#### **Covid-19 Testing: Border Force**

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What steps she has taken to help ensure that Border Force staff are trained on exemptions from requirements for covid-19 testing. [902519]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster):** Comprehensive guidance and training plans have been developed and are continually reviewed to ensure that all Border Force and frontline officers are trained in new policy, process and system changes relating to covid-19 border health measures, including those set by the devolved Administrations. That comprehensive guidance includes training and shift briefings.

**Cat Smith [V]:** RDI Trucking based in Preesall in my constituency provides international logistics for Formula 1 and other racing industries. Under coronavirus legislation, they are international transport workers. Therefore, as essential workers the legislation applies slightly differently to them, providing an exemption from the requirement for a negative test prior to cross-border travel. However, they have been having some issues in applying that. Will the Minister take the time to meet me and my constituent Baz Scott to discuss some of the issues he is facing in his industry?

**Kevin Foster:** I am certainly happy to look into that if the hon. Member provides the detail. She will appreciate that Border Force's first priority is to maintain our defences against covid-19. However, as part of our work, we are looking to move exemption decisions away from the border and to have more automatic checking. That is in everyone's interests, including those passengers who need to comply with the regulations and would otherwise be stood behind those trying to prove exemptions at the primary control point.

#### **People Smuggling**

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle people smuggling. [902523]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp):** People smuggling is a despicable crime, often leading to tragic deaths such as the 39 we saw in Purfleet. The Government are determined to crack down on organised immigration crime, which is why last week we introduced a new Nationality and Borders Bill, which will receive its Second Reading next week. It is also why in 2020 the National Crime Agency and immigration enforcement were involved in 750 arrests in relation to organised immigration crime.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Following the ridiculous decision by the Crown Prosecution Service not to prosecute illegal migrants on the grounds that they have “no choice in how they travel”,

as if they do not voluntarily pay a people smuggler €10,000 or voluntarily get in a dinghy, or the even more absurd reason that we can rely on “administrative removal channels” when corrupt human rights lawyers string such claims out for years and nobody is ever deported, where does that leave the absolutely good Bill of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary? She wants to arrest these people in the channel. Does this decision make it even more urgent that we bring in safe havens for these people in a third country?

**Chris Philp:** My right hon. Friend is quite right to point out that countries such as France and Germany are obviously safe and that someone genuinely in need

of protection or asylum can claim asylum quite properly and easily in such countries rather than attempting dangerous and unnecessary crossings over the English channel. Notwithstanding the CPS's recent announcement, we can, do and will prosecute people who organise and pilot dangerous boat crossings across the English channel for gain or with the intention of avoiding immigration controls. The Bill, which will receive its Second Reading next week, critically contains provisions that will close some of the loopholes that may have led to the CPS's recent decision and will make it clear that any attempt to arrive in the United Kingdom from a safe place, such as France, will be rightly treated as a criminal offence.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: Each year, about 5,000 or so family members benefit from refugee family reunion rights, 90% of whom are women and children. Depriving refugees of family reunion rights would drive many of those women and children straight into the arms of despicable people smugglers through desperation to be reunited with their loved ones. Why on earth will the Government provide exactly that massive bonus to people smugglers through their nasty anti-refugee Bill?

**Chris Philp**: The hon. Gentleman is misinformed and misguided on this point. There is no plan to weaken or undermine the refugee family reunion provisions that have been used by 29,000 people in the last six years. In addition, in the last five or six years we have been operating Europe's largest resettlement programme, which has seen an additional 25,000 people come to the UK directly from places from danger. Because we have these effective and well-used safe and legal routes, it is reasonable—indeed, it is our responsibility—to clamp down on the people smugglers who are exploiting migrants and charging them money to make an unnecessary and dangerous journey, often across the English channel from France, which is patently a safe country. No one needs to leave France to claim asylum. It could be quite easily and properly claimed in France.

### Violence Against Women and Girls

**Dr Jamie Wallis** (Bridgend) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle violence against women and girls. [902513]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel)**: Violence against women and girls is thoroughly unacceptable—the House heard my comments earlier on—and there is no place in our society for such acts. My hon. Friend will be well aware, as I have said, that we are publishing in the next few weeks our strategy on violence against women and girls.

**Dr Wallis** [V]: I was recently left horrified by a sexual assault that occurred just outside my constituency office. Tackling violence against women and girls begins to address the issue of female safety, but many women still do not feel safe simply walking home, so how will my right hon. Friend begin to rebuild confidence for women and girls to feel safe while walking the streets?

**Priti Patel**: First, I am appalled and very sorry to hear of the offence—the sexual assault—that took place outside my hon. Friend's constituency office. There is a

range of work taking place across Government right now, but importantly, he addresses the point about the lack of protection and the way women do not feel that it is safe to walk our streets. Many women around the country have sensed that and we have heard that as well in the call for evidence; we had over 180,000 people respond to our call for evidence on the VAWG strategy. He will see in the next few weeks the details of our approach because we will announce it, rightly, through the appropriate measures and means. But this is not just about policing; it is about the criminal justice system, public attitudes and how women are treated and how women are respected, and there is a lot of work that we will need to do together on this.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Shockingly, I could not agree with the Home Secretary more. I am not sure that I will say that many times in my life, but she is absolutely right that the respect of women when they come forward is very, very important. The heartbreaking cases of Bibaa Henry, Nicole Smallman and Sarah Everard have raised serious questions about police handling of reported violence against women and girls. There is currently an ongoing investigation into claims that Kent police failed to look at the incident of indecent exposure linked to Sarah Everard's killer in 2015. There is also a probe into the Metropolitan police's alleged failure to investigate allegations of indecent exposure in February this year. I am afraid to say that there will be a similar pattern all over the country. Can the Home Secretary tell me exactly what the Government are doing to ensure that allegations such as indecent exposure are taken seriously by police forces and that cases involving police officers as perpetrators are not ignored in the future, as they have been in the past?

**Priti Patel**: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. First and foremost, there should be no aspect of anybody ignoring these cases whatsoever, particularly from a policing perspective. She has rightly highlighted, I am afraid, some incredibly tragic and harrowing cases. Those of us who have sat down with family members of those who have been involved in these cases know that they are absolutely awful at every single level, so it is right that there are various investigations. There are independent investigations taking place into the cases that the hon. Lady has raised directly, and rightly so, by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, but there is no place for anybody to hide and that applies equally to the police. While we always want the full force of the law to be applied to perpetrators of violence and the most abhorrent crimes, any police involvement must also be uncovered, and that means that the police must be held to account—commissioners, chief constables, those at the highest level of policing—and I can give her every assurance that we as a Government are making sure that happens.

### Child Sexual Abuse

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle child sexual abuse. [902515]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins)**: The UK Government are committed to eradicating all forms of child sexual abuse and continuing to be a global leader in tackling these crimes. The Government's tackling child sexual



abuse strategy sets out our ambition to drive action across Government, law enforcement and society as a whole to combat this heinous crime in all its forms.

**Mrs Miller:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. She knows that the National Crime Agency is receiving more than 20,000 child abuse referrals a year from organisations such as Facebook and Instagram. If the services are end-to-end encrypted, those referrals may not be possible in future, so how are the Government addressing this really important problem to ensure that those who abuse children online continue to be brought to justice?

**Victoria Atkins:** The implementation of end-to-end encryption in a way that intentionally blinds tech companies to content on their platforms will have a disastrous impact on public safety, and we remain seriously concerned with Facebook's end-to-end encryption proposals. The safety and security of the public is at the heart of this issue, and Facebook must continue to work with us to embed the safety of the public in its system designs. Companies have a responsibility to prevent the proliferation of child sexual abuse imagery and to protect children from predators on their platforms.

#### Scam Callers

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle scam callers. [902516]

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):** The Government will not tolerate criminals lining their pockets while causing serious financial and emotional harm to victims. We are working closely with the industry, regulators, law enforcement and consumer groups to crack down on scam callers. Additionally, since its launch last year, the National Cyber Security Centre has shut down over 50,000 scams and taken down almost 100,000 websites.

**Neil Parish:** Since the onset of the pandemic, many of my constituents have been contacting me to report an influx of fraudulent or scam telephone calls. The fraudsters behind these malicious enterprises often target elderly or vulnerable individuals, posing as Government agencies, telecom companies, banks or pension providers. Sadly, too many of these cases result in the scammers convincing, or indeed coercing, individuals to part with their hard-earned savings. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must clamp down on this dreadful criminal activity and ensure that there is somewhere that victims can go to immediately to get help?

**Kit Malthouse:** As our lives have moved increasingly online, so has crime, as my hon. Friend rightly says. Can there be any Member in the Chamber who has not received a dodgy email or text or even a recorded message on their telephone, which is becoming increasingly frequent? It is typical of my hon. Friend to point out the particular vulnerability of elderly people, who are often coming to grips with technology—many have had to do so over the past year or so for the first time in their lives—and being taken advantage of. He is right to say that we need to do all we can to help them, and through the economic crime victim care unit we are doing exactly that. We are working with the banking sector to ensure that victims are not left out of pocket through no fault

of their own. Critically, we can all help the fight by reporting these emails and text messages, and I want to take a moment to say that anyone who gets a suspicious email should please forward it to the email address [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk) and anyone who receives a similarly suspicious text should please forward it to 7726. The police and other services will be collating the texts and emails, and when they come from the same source, as they do on many occasions, they will act swiftly to shut it down.

#### EU Settlement Scheme: Application Deadline

**Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): What estimate she has made of the number of people who are eligible for the EU settlement scheme but missed the application deadline of 30 June 2021. [902517]

**Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): What estimate she has made of the number of people who are eligible for the EU settlement scheme but missed the application deadline of 30 June 2021. [902526]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):** As of 30 June, the EU settlement scheme had received more than 6 million applications and issued more than 5.1 million grants of status. As we have discussed before, the scheme has been a success and we have secured the status of 5.1 million individuals.

**Fleur Anderson** [V]: I am disappointed not to hear the exact number. In Wandsworth, there are an estimated 41,000 EU citizens, but the gap in applications to the EU settlement scheme is not known. Can the Home Secretary say which resources she is making available to process the 500,000 or so applications that are currently in the system but have not yet been determined, and how long she would envisage allowing late applications to the scheme?

**Priti Patel:** As I have said, the scheme has been a phenomenal success. There are many naysayers across the country and in this House who refused to believe that even 3 million people would be registered with the scheme. First and foremost, there is an abundance of support available for applicants, including from the 72 organisations to which the Home Office has granted £22 million of support for vulnerable groups and individuals to apply to the scheme. On top of that, we have invested £8 million in communications, and that involves working with local authorities such as the hon. Lady's to ensure that no one is missed and that all the support is in the place for them.

**Kate Osborne** [V]: Recent research from the Children's Society showed that less than 40% of looked-after children and care leavers had made applications to the EU settlement scheme, with 156 local authorities positively identifying more than 2,000 looked-after children and care leavers who had yet to apply. May I ask the Secretary of State to tell the House what steps the Home Office has taken to ensure that children in care who are eligible to apply have applied?

**Priti Patel:** First, let me re-emphasise a point that Ministers and I have made in this House on repeated occasions. It is absolutely right that we do everything

possible to give children in care the support, more often than not via their local authorities, to ensure that they apply for the scheme. We have been doing exactly that, working with councils, social services and local authorities across the country. If the hon. Lady has any particular cases she would like to draw to our attention, we would be very happy to pick them up.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): As the Home Secretary is aware, acquiring settled status has an impact on a person's right to work and to access accommodation and other services. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that employers and landlords are complying with the right to work and rent guidance, and are not discriminating against EU citizens? Will she also tell me what protections are in place for people to submit late applications to the EU settlement scheme, so that they are not left in limbo, unable to work or at risk of homelessness while they await the outcome of their application?

**Priti Patel:** First, the Home Office has been very clear in the support it will provide to people and late applications. The hon. Gentleman has rightly made an important point about the right to work and the role for employers. Let me give him the assurance that we have been working with employers' organisations and groups; this is exactly the vehicle through which, even throughout the pandemic, we have been working to communicate the need for employers to work with us to secure the settled status of many, many individuals. Finally, may I pay tribute to many of the employers who have been working with us on this scheme to guarantee that settled status for individuals?

### Topical Questions

[902565] **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):** I know that the whole House will join me in condemning the sickening racist abuse directed last night at our heroic England football team on social media. These young men represented our nation with pride and dignity, and we are proud of them and the fortitude they showed the country last night. Racist abuse is utterly unacceptable and illegal, whether or not it takes place in front of people—online or offline. Individuals who commit racist offences should rightly face the full force of the law.

Social media companies in particular have a clear responsibility for the content they host on their platforms, and they can no longer ignore some of the appalling, vile, racist, violent and hateful content that appears on their platforms. We have been clear that if they do not stamp this out, we will take actions against them in the Online Safety Bill. It will take a determined effort and action by everyone across society, and all institutions, to end the corrosive culture of racism.

On that point, the thuggish and violent behaviour we saw last night was utterly disgusting and there is no place in our society for it; these people have no right to be called fans, and they will face serious consequences for their actions. To conclude, let me say that our nation is immensely proud of our three lions, and they showed true grit and determination in their actions last night and their endeavours on the pitch.

**Scott Benton:** I welcome the measures set out in the Nationality and Borders Bill, and the Home Secretary's ongoing commitment to finally getting a grip of our borders and stemming the flow of illegal immigrants across the channel. Will she confirm that the Bill will include measures for the removal of migrants to offshore centres where they can be housed while their claims and appeals are being processed?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we have heard in the House this afternoon from many right hon. and hon. Members the absolute challenge this country faces on illegal migration and illegal entry to the UK. The asylum system is broken and it is being exploited by illegal migration issues and the criminal gangs that are exploiting vulnerable individuals. As he will know, the new Bill, which will be discussed on Second Reading next week, covers many aspects and it is right that the Government explore all options to fix our broken asylum system.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the England team on its fantastic achievements at the European championships. Those players, led by the inspirational Gareth Southgate, have shown incredible skill and determination on and off the pitch, taking a stand on child poverty, free school meals and so much else. They took the knee to stand against racism—a brave stance that led to their being booed by some. That booing was unacceptable and should have been condemned by all. Sadly, overnight Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka have been subject to the most appalling racist abuse. The Home Secretary spoke a moment ago about potential action in the future; have not the social media companies had long enough to get this right? What immediate action will she take to deal with this issue?

**Priti Patel:** Everyone in the House will absolutely join in not only celebrating our incredible football team and the resilience of all our players but fundamentally calling out the appalling acts and actions that we saw last night. It is absolutely appalling that we have seen this terrible racist abuse. In fairness to the right hon. Gentleman, he is absolutely right that the social media companies have had far too long, whether it is on racism, hatred, violence or antisemitism—the list goes on and on and quite frankly it is utterly unacceptable. I have pointed rightly to the online harms Bill, because we do need to legislate. The message needs to go out from this House, very strongly, to all the social media companies that they need to take responsibility. This is content that they host on their platforms. We will legislate against them, and that is on top of the fact that we are absolutely on top of them right now. We are pursuing them, as we do in every single case, but they need to wake up and take action themselves.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** But we have had to wait years for the online harms Bill. There has to be a greater urgency to do more now. The awful abuse continues to happen, and it is not contained to football but happens right across society. We still have so far to go. Our footballers have used their platform to help to give voice to the millions of people in this country who are desperate for change, but change is not happening fast enough. The Government and Parliament have to respond.



Absolutely all necessary resources must be allocated to tracking down the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. Will the Home Secretary confirm that the online harms Bill will be brought forward immediately and will contain the toughest of sanctions against social media companies for hosting vile material? It must also include criminal sanctions for senior social media executives.

**Priti Patel:** The online harms Bill, on which the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is also leading, will be brought forward and the Government have been very clear about that. There should be no room whatsoever for either complacency, equivocation or absence when it comes to social media companies taking responsibility. This House has been unequivocal in our determination to drive change directly with these organisations.

The right hon. Gentleman is right: we need the toughest possible sanctions. Social media companies are only one component part of the change that we need to see; we also need the criminal justice system to go after the individuals who perpetrate some of these online harms and the hateful content that is put on these platforms. Of course, there is never any room whatsoever for complacency on this issue, which is why the legislation will be absolutely pivotal in terms of not only bringing forward the societal change that is required but holding the executives and these very significant companies to account.

[902566] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): Last night's Euro final showed one united England team—young men of many backgrounds with the single aim of securing victory for their country. In sharing my and the entire House's utter disgust at the racist abuse that was targeted at some of those incredibly talented and dedicated young players, will my right hon. Friend confirm that she has already spoken to the police, and that they will ensure they will do everything that is already in their power to identify and charge the perpetrators of this vile behaviour by people who sicken every decent person in this country?

**Priti Patel:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for the important points that he has aired this afternoon. He is absolutely right: both the Minister for Crime and Policing and I have been on a call this morning with police leads for football issues and the policing of football. As we have all said very clearly, there is absolutely no place for racism or violence whatsoever. Quite frankly, there is clear guidance and legislation: there are laws in place that we absolutely should apply and follow—that applies to the police as well—to go after the perpetrators and the individuals. My hon. Friend will of course be well aware of the Public Order Act 1986, but there is also the Football (Offences) Act 1991 and football banning orders, all of which play an important part in terms of the actions that everyone should be taking.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

[902569] **Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Jadon Sancho, Marcus Rashford and Bukayo Saka are incredible players and part of an incredible team that has made us all proud to be English, but, while they are the best of us, they have endured vile racism from the worst of us. On their Instagram profiles

right now, there is still vile racist abuse, which has been up there for 15 or 16 hours or more, visible to everyone, including to children and young people who are there to support their heroes. I have spoken to Instagram this afternoon to urge it to take much stronger action. Has the Home Secretary done so, and, if not, will she do so and now speak to the social media companies to urge them to take this action? Will she also take the opportunity to condemn those who stood up in our stadiums and booed our brave players for taking a stand against racism and call on them to show solidarity instead?

**Priti Patel:** First and foremost, as I have said already, there are no words to describe the appalling acts that have taken place. *[Interruption.]* Would the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) like to intervene? If she would be prepared to listen, she will hear that everything related to racism and hatred both across society and involving any individual is completely unacceptable. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) is right to point to Instagram, but all social media platforms, not just Instagram, are culpable. They are all responsible and it is right that we all take action against them.

As I have already said, we in the Home Office are absolutely on top of those organisations. Of course, legislation is the way that we will go forward on this, but such acts are simply unacceptable. This matter will take determined effort by everyone. There is no place for booing. Individuals have a right to express themselves in whichever way—we live in a free country, and thank God we do—when it comes to tackling hatred, violence and racism. The fact of the matter right now is that what we saw overnight was completely unacceptable. It is right, both from a policing perspective and when it comes to social media companies, that there is no place to hide and that action is taken.

[902568] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for fulfilling her pledge on the Floor of the House to meet Aid to the Church in Need and myself tomorrow to discuss the case of Maira Shahbaz, a 14-year-old Christian girl who was abducted, kidnapped, and forced into hiding. I do not want the Home Secretary to comment on that case, but does this not make it even more important that we deal with illegal migration? If we do not do so, we cannot deal better with genuine asylum seekers. Indeed, for every illegal we deport, we should accept a genuine asylum seeker.

**Priti Patel:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right and I look forward to the discussion that we will have tomorrow. This is a very harrowing case and I have been following the details of it for some time. Although we will discuss the matter tomorrow, my right hon. Friend is speaking to the fact that our asylum system is completely broken. We are seeing too many abuses of the system and vulnerable people being preyed on, and that scuppers our ability to assist those who are fleeing persecution and having the most appalling and abhorrent acts forced on them or taken against them. That is why the Nationality and Borders Bill is so important. I urge all colleagues in the House to work with us and support the Bill as it comes to Second Reading next week.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: What we have just heard is errant nonsense. If a Uyghur fleeing torture, a Syrian

fleeing war crimes, or a Christian convert escaping death threats, arrives in the UK seeking protection but without a visa, under the Home Secretary's outrageous anti-refugee Bill, that would make them guilty of an offence punishable by up to four years in prison. How on earth can she defend criminalising torture victims—victims of war crimes, persecuted Christian converts and other refugees—for seeking our protection?

**Priti Patel:** With respect to the hon. Gentleman's question, I am afraid that he has not read the Bill, or the new plan for immigration, or followed the debate and the discussion. I have been absolutely clear that we will support those individuals who, as he says, are fleeing persecution and torture. It is our objective as a Government to support those individuals, but not those who come to our country by paying money to illegal people traffickers and who could have claimed asylum in many of the EU countries through which they have travelled. I am sorry that he fails to realise that flagrant abuses are taking place through the use of people smugglers and people traffickers, and that individuals could claim asylum in other countries, but are simply choosing not to do so.

[902578] **Dr Jamie Wallis** (Bridgend) (Con): Prior to the pandemic, UK haulage businesses such as Owens Group in my constituency employed about 600,000 heavy goods vehicle drivers. However, as we come out of covid thousands of HGVs are parked up as the industry simply cannot find drivers; the number of trainee drivers dropped by 63% last year. The industry needs an immediate solution. Will my right hon. Friend consider adding HGV drivers to the UK shortage occupation list?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight first and foremost crucial skills that are obviously important to our labour market. Our new points-based immigration system does exactly that, not just in supporting key sectors but in giving employers an important role in filling labour market places and supporting jobs.

The Government are working with the haulage sector; the Department for Transport is leading on this right now. It has from today temporarily extended rules on HGV drivers' hours to allow them to make slightly longer journeys where necessary. It is also providing support directly to the sector to increase the number of available driving tests so that more people can qualify and support important haulage companies across my hon. Friend's constituency and the country.

[902567] **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): How many EU settled status applications have been refused or rejected where the passport holder applicant is a citizen of an EU member state, due to the applicant's not having been born in that country?

**Priti Patel:** I am very happy to write to the hon. Gentleman about the specifics of his question; I do not have that detail in front of me right now. Throughout the application process, the Home Office has worked with and supported individuals who have issues demonstrating their status through some of the measures that I have already outlined, so that their status can be secured. There are ways in which we have been doing that, and I will write to him with that information.

[902580] **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Changes to the law on abortion are among the most difficult issues that we consider in this place, as the debate last week showed. These will always be matters of conscience, but does my right hon. Friend agree that when four royal colleges and the British Medical Association call for change, as there has been in Northern Ireland, we need to carefully listen to the views of those medical professionals and consider how, as a House, we can consider these important matters in a timely way?

**Priti Patel:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. First and foremost, it is always important to recognise and understand the strength of feeling around this issue. I pay tribute to colleagues in the House who have discussed this issue over the past week; they have aired many not just concerns but approaches based on evidence and information.

My right hon. Friend is right that these are matters of conscience for all Members, but at the same time it is for Parliament to decide. The debate that she has been leading and much of the evidence that she has just touched on are a matter for consideration, which Governments absolutely approach in the right way, particularly with parliamentary debate at the right time.

**Mr Speaker:** May I say that there is a lot of disappointment that we have not gone very far on topicals? I have let them run for longer than I normally would. I am disappointed—we really have to get the Front Benchers working together to speed up those early questions; in the end, it is other Members who miss out.

3.33 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Covid-19 Update

3.37 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Sajid Javid):** Before I update the House on the pandemic, I would like to take a moment to congratulate the England football team on making history and on the way in which they have brought us all together with their skill and spirit over the past few weeks. Last night's result may not have been the one that many of us were hoping for, but they played like heroes and the nation is proud of each and every one of them.

I also want to take this opportunity to condemn the shameful racism experienced by several members of the England team after the match. Racism has no place in football; it has no place in our society. I know that the whole House will agree that we must always show zero tolerance to this appalling behaviour.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on our path out of the pandemic. All the way through our fight against the virus, we have looked forward to the day when we can roll back the legal restrictions and get closer to normal life. Now, thanks to the shared sacrifices of the British people and the protective wall of our vaccination programme, we have made huge advances. Today I would like to update the House on the next decision in front of us: whether to proceed to step 4 of our road map next Monday.

As I set out to the House last week, this will be a major milestone for the country, taking us another step closer to the life that we all used to live. It means carefully removing more of the restrictions that have governed our daily lives, such as how many people we can meet, how many people can attend weddings and how many visitors people in care homes can see, bringing them together with their loved ones. We have all been yearning to get there, and we all want this to be a one-way journey, so we have acted in a measured way, taking one step at a time, and looking at the very latest data and at our four tests before deciding whether to proceed.

The first test is the success of our vaccination programme. Ever since 8 December last year, when the world's first clinically authorised vaccine was given right here in the UK, we have been putting jabs in the arms of people at a phenomenal pace, giving over 18 million doses in just seven months. We have given more doses per capita than any other large nation. As a result, around nine in 10 adults in the UK now have covid-19 antibodies, which are so important in helping us and our bodies to fight this virus. To bolster this protective wall even further, we made the tough but necessary decision to take a four-week pause to step 4, so that we could protect even more people before easing restrictions. Since making the decision, we have been able to give 7 million extra doses across the UK. We have pledged that, by 19 July, we will have offered every adult a first dose of vaccine and given two doses to two thirds of all adults. I am pleased to inform the House today that we are on track to beat both of these targets, so as we make this crucial decision, we are in a stronger position than ever before.

We have looked not just at how many jabs we have put in arms, but at what impact they are having on hospitalisations and the loss of loved ones. This is our second test. There is increasing evidence that the vaccine has severely weakened this link—a link that was once a grim inevitability. Data from Public Health England

estimates that two doses of a covid-19 vaccine offer around 96% protection against hospitalisation, meaning fewer covid patients in hospital beds and fewer people mourning the loss of a loved one. The data also estimates that the vaccination programme in England has prevented between 7.5 million and 8.9 million infections. It has prevented some 46,000 hospitalisations and prevented about 30,000 people from losing their lives, all because of the protection that the vaccines can bring.

Our third test is around whether infection rates would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS. I want to be open about what the data is telling us and why we have reached the decision that we have. Cases are rising, propelled by the new, more transmissible delta variant. The average number of daily cases is over 26,000, and this has doubled over the past 11 days. Sadly, the case numbers will get a lot worse before they get better. We could reach 100,000 cases a day later in the summer.

Hospitalisations are also rising, with sustained growth over the past month. Once again, they will rise too, but we should be encouraged that hospitalisations are far lower than they were at this point during the previous wave, just as we should be encouraged that people over the age of 65, who are more likely to have had both doses of a vaccine, made up 31% of covid admissions last week, compared with 61% in January. This is further evidence that our vaccination programme is doing its job and protecting the NHS. As more people get the jab, our protective wall is getting stronger still.

We will stay vigilant and keep a very close eye on the data, as well as on the impact of long covid, on which we are investing £50 million into new research. But on the basis of the evidence in front of us, we do not believe that infection rates will put unsustainable pressure on the NHS. It is so important that everyone still does their bit in helping the NHS to stand strong. The best thing that each and every one of us can do, if we have not done so already, is get the jab and, crucially, get both doses.

Our final test is that the risks are not fundamentally changed by new variants of concern. We have seen from the growth of the delta variant, which now makes up 99% of new cases in this country, just how quickly a new variant can take hold. However, although the delta variant is more transmissible than the alpha variant, the evidence shows that two doses of the vaccine appears to be just as effective against hospitalisation. But we know that the greatest risk to the progress we have made is the possibility of another new variant, especially one that can escape immunity and puncture the protective wall of our vaccination programme, so even as we look to ease restrictions, we will maintain our tough measures at the borders and we will expand our capacity for genomic sequencing, which is already one of the largest in the world, so that we can come down hard the moment we detect a new variant.

We have looked closely at the data against these four tests and we firmly believe that this is the right time to get our nation closer to normal life, so we will move to the next stage of our road map on 19 July. To those who say, "Why take this step now?", I say, "If not now, when?" There will never be a perfect time to take this step because we simply cannot eradicate this virus. Whether we like it or not, coronavirus is not going away. Moving forward next week, supported by the arrival of summer and the school holidays, gives us the best possible chance of a return to normal life. If we wait



[Sajid Javid]

longer, we risk pushing the virus towards winter, when the virus will have an advantage, or, worse still, we will not be opening up at all. We delayed step 4 by four weeks so that we could build the vaccine wall even higher. We believe that this wall means that we can withstand a summer wave. While the wall would be higher still if we waited until winter, we know the wave would be much more dangerous. So while we know that there are risks with any decision, this is the most responsible decision that we can take.

This step forward is about balancing the harms that are caused by covid with the undeniable harms that restrictions bring. These restrictions were vital to protect the NHS, but we must be upfront about the impact of keeping them just as we are about removing them: the rise in domestic violence, the impact on mental health and the undiagnosed cancer, to name just a few. So we will ease the restrictions next week while at the same time maintaining the defences we have built against this virus, like our vaccination programme, where we still need more young people to come forward; our work to support the most vulnerable; and the contingency plans that we have put in place to stay one step ahead of this virus.

But this is not the end of the road: it is the start of a new phase of continued caution while we live with this virus and we manage the risks. We are today publishing a plan showing the safe and gradual approach that we will be taking throughout the summer. It includes details of how we will be encouraging businesses and large events to use certification in high-risk settings to limit the risk of spreading infection, how we will use guidance for those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and details of a review that we will be conducting in September to assess our preparedness for autumn and winter.

As we make these changes, it is so important that people act with caution and with personal responsibility. For example, everyone should return to work gradually if they are currently working from home, they should try to meet people outside where that is possible, and it is expected and recommended that people should wear face coverings, unless they are exempt, in crowded indoor settings like public transport.

I also want to take this opportunity to update the House on our policies for self-isolation. Last week I announced to the House that from 16 August double-jabbed adults and under-18s will no longer need to self-isolate if they are a close contact of someone with covid-19. Until then, with case rates expected to rise, it is vital that we ensure that our systems for self-isolation are proportionate and reflect the protection given by our vaccine programme. As part of this approach, we will be working with clinicians and the NHS to explore what more can be done for colleagues in patient-facing roles—this would be used only in exceptional circumstances where the self-isolation of fully vaccinated close contacts could directly impact the safety of patients—so that we can keep our vital services going as we safely and gradually get closer to normal life.

Mr Speaker, 19 July will mark another step forward in our road to recovery. Getting here has been hard fought, and it has been long awaited, but this battle is not over yet. Let us move forward in a confident but measured way so that we can get closer to normal life and protect the progress that we have already made.

3.50 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. I join him and others across the House in paying tribute to the England side. They did indeed unite the country, and we are proud of each and every one of them. Of course, those players did take the knee to show they were taking a stand against racism. Labour again offers them our solidarity and joins with others in condemning utterly the racist, vile abuse that we have seen in the last 24 hours.

We want to see the economy reopen in a balanced, safe and sustainable way. That means maintaining certain mitigations to contain the speed at which infections are rising, to help reduce transmission and to help to limit the numbers exposed to the virus before they are fully vaccinated. Instead, the Secretary of State has taken a high-risk, fatalistic approach, trying to game what might happen in the winter and deciding that infections are going up anyway. Instead of caution, he is pushing his foot down on the accelerator while throwing the seatbelts off. He admits that that could mean 100,000 infections a day, which means potentially thousands suffering debilitating long covid and that, as more cases arise, more may escape, with the threat of a new, more transmissible variant emerging.

Two weeks ago, the Secretary of State justified unlocking by suggesting that it would make us healthier. Today, hospital admissions are running at more than 400 a day and there are now 393 people in intensive care units, up by more than 100 since the start of July. Of course, significant increases in admissions have a knock-on effect on the NHS's ability to provide wider care. He says that infection rates will not put unsustainable pressure on the NHS, but last week cancer patients at Leeds were having their surgery cancelled and ambulance trusts across the country were reporting some of their busiest days ever. The 111 service is under intense pressure.

At the weekend, the Secretary of State warned that the elective waiting list could rise as high as 13 million. Perhaps he could therefore define what he means by "unsustainable pressure". What does he predict that hospital admissions will peak at? He has told us he expects 100,000 infections, so how many hospital admissions does he expect? Does his confidence mean that there will be no extra resources for the NHS this summer to get through this summer wave? He again highlights vaccination, but why are vaccination rates slowing down? What will he do to drive up rates among younger people, which are still at only about 56% of 18 to 24-year-olds? When will we begin vaccination of adolescents? Other countries are doing it—why are we not?

To rely only on vaccination as infections climb is the approach of the one-club golfer. The Secretary of State needs to put other measures in place as well. First, Labour would continue with mandatory mask wearing. I notice that his tone has shifted in the last week or so and now his view is that it would be irresponsible not to wear a mask in a crowded room. Surely it is equally irresponsible for the Government to abandon mandatory mask wearing.

Secondly, on working from home, yesterday Susan Hopkins from PHE suggested that for the next four to six weeks at least people should try their best to

work from home, so will the Secretary of State guarantee that anyone who wants to continue working from home will have the right to do so?

Thirdly, we know how important fresh air is. Germany has funded air filtration systems in public buildings. Last week, the Secretary of State referred to the infection control funding given to social care, but that was not for ventilation. There are British firms that manufacture air filtration and ventilation units, so let us support those firms and British jobs, and offer grants to premises to install air filtration units. Will he also use the summer to install air filtration systems in every school?

Fourthly, as more virus circulates, more people will be exposed, more people will become ill and more will have to isolate, but some people still cannot isolate because of their finances, and those with caring responsibilities for someone who has had to isolate can also be financially penalised. Furlough is beginning to be withdrawn, so financial support for isolation will become even more urgent. Will the Secretary of State ensure that those who need to isolate can access adequate sick pay and support?

Fifthly, to get through this third wave and flatten the curve, we will need ongoing testing, and contact tracing will need extra capacity. Will the Secretary of State give local authorities the resources to lead the enhanced retrospective and forward contact tracing they need to do, and will he now abandon the proposed charges for lateral flow tests, which he is set to introduce?

Finally, when the Secretary of State was appointed, he said that any easing on 19 July would be, in his word, “irreversible”. Other countries have thought the same with their road maps, yet Israel has reintroduced masks, and the Netherlands reopened nightclubs and had to close them again after two weeks. Is it still his view that the 19th is terminus day and that everything he has announced today is irreversible, or does he agree that it would be more sensible to have regular review dates in place through the summer as we deal with this third wave and rising infections?

**Sajid Javid:** The right hon. Gentleman started by saying that he supports a balanced approach in a sustainable way, and that is exactly what I have set out today from this Dispatch Box. That is the Government’s approach, so I agree with him. We as the Government have set out the detail, but I am still not sure what his plan actually is. However, given that he set out those objectives, I hope he can support this plan. He talks about the risks that are involved, and I have been very up front about that. The Government have been up front: there is no risk-free way forward. Opening up is not without risk, but ongoing restrictions are not without cost, and I hope he appreciates that.

The right hon. Gentleman raised a number of questions, and one of his first was about hospitalisations. As I have said, case numbers are going up and we expect them to continue going up, but the most important difference today versus the last wave is vaccination—the wall of defence that our country has built—which has meant that hospitalisations, although they are rising as case numbers rise, are rising at a rate that is a lot slower than before. I have set out specifically regarding test 3 in a road map that we believe the pressure, with all the data we are seeing at this point, is not unsustainable for the NHS.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about vaccinations, and I am pleased he is highlighting that, especially for more young people to come forward. As I mentioned in my statement, we are ahead of the plans we set out when step 4 was temporarily pushed out by four weeks. He also asked about the vaccination of children. He knows that we have a group of expert science advisers—the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation—and this is something it is actively looking at. At some point, we will reach a final decision, but I hope he will agree with me that we should take the scientific advice on that and consider it very carefully before making such a move.

On air ventilation units, some of the £90 billion-plus extra the Government have provided to the health and care system during the course of this pandemic has of course gone on air ventilation units, and we should continue to support that. A lot of extra funding has also gone to people to support them financially if they are asked to isolate, and it is important that that is both kept under review and continues to be taken seriously.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned lateral flow tests and something about charging for them. That might be his policy, but it is not this Government’s policy. I do not know where he has got that one from, but we have no plans to charge for lateral flow tests.

Lastly, 19 July is a step forward on our road map. As we have clearly set out, the pandemic is not over, but it is a very significant step forward. The right hon. Gentleman talked about reviews. I have just said that we will have a review in September to make sure that we are properly set up for autumn and winter.

**Jeremy Hunt** (South West Surrey) (Con): The virus today is a totally different creature from a year ago, with only one in 40 new cases being hospitalised, an average age for new cases of 25, and all over-40s being offered two jabs, accounting for 99% of the age group that have had covid fatalities to date, so the Government’s approach is entirely reasonable. However, does the Health Secretary agree that there remain, to paraphrase the late Donald Rumsfeld, a number of unknown unknowns and known unknowns, not least the impact of long covid, the potential for vaccine escape and the potential for new variants? Will he reassure the House that if the data deteriorates beyond what is currently envisaged, he will not hesitate to take decisive action, not just to save lives but to head off the need for a further lockdown which would be enormously damaging for our jobs and businesses?

**Sajid Javid:** I am very happy to give my right hon. Friend that assurance. He made some excellent points. I thank him for his support for the Government’s action, but he is right to point out that there is still uncertainty for us and countries across the world in dealing with this pandemic. I am very pleased to assure him that if that risk matrix changes, for example with variants of concern, we will not hesitate to take the appropriate action.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: I would first like to associate myself and my colleagues with the Health Secretary’s condemnation of the racism sadly faced by members of the England football team after their impressive performance throughout the Euros.

Turning to covid, the Secretary of State himself has suggested that covid cases could soar to 100,000 a day once all restrictions are removed next Monday.



[Dr Philippa Whitford]

While research shows that hospitalisation rates have, thankfully, dropped to 3% of cases because of vaccination, that would still mean up to 3,000 admissions, the same as during the first wave. Can he explain how he will avoid such a surge putting pressure on health services, which would further delay clearance of the backlog of patients waiting with other conditions?

With the likelihood of such high transmission rates, how does the Secretary of State hope to prevent the generation in the UK of yet more new variants, perhaps with significant vaccine resistance? Evidence is growing of the debilitating impact of post-covid morbidity, and the Office for National Statistics estimates that it could affect 10% of those who have had the virus, so how does he plan to avoid an unacceptably high risk of long covid in young adults and children, who are not fully vaccinated?

Finally, why is the Secretary of State ending the mandatory wearing of masks in indoor spaces and on public transport, given that they reduce viral spread and cause no economic detriment? Does he not recognise that, as vulnerable people cannot count on others wearing masks, for them 19 July will not be “freedom day” but the exact opposite?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the hon. Lady for what she said about the English football team, but I noticed that she did not say who she supported. I hope it was England.

The hon. Lady is right to raise hospitalisations, as other colleagues have. Of course, as cases rise, which sadly they will for the reasons I have set out, hospitalisations will rise too. However, again for reasons I have set out—No. 1 being the vaccine—the rate of hospitalisation will be far, far lower than anything we have seen before. She will also know, given her experience, that the treatments available are a lot better and more effective than what we had at the start of the pandemic and during the last wave. That is also helping should people, sadly, find themselves in hospital. That is part of the three tests, test number three, that we have looked at very carefully. We have looked at the data and we of course work very closely with our colleagues in the NHS on an almost minute-by-minute basis to ensure that the increased pressure—I accept there will be increased pressure; I have been very open about that—can be met in a sustained way.

The hon. Lady mentioned the backlog. It is important to understand that the backlog built up over the pandemic because people stayed away from the NHS for perfectly understandable reasons, but we need to start to get back to normal as quickly as we reasonably can so that we can start to see more and more people in the longer term and improve the backlog more quickly.

As for masks, I believe I have answered that question. The most important thing is that our guidelines will be very clear. They will be published later today, too.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Enterprises are having to shut because key members of staff, despite having been vaccinated twice, are having to isolate as contacts. As infections increase, so will contacts who have to isolate and there is every possibility that the economy will grind to a halt. Will the Secretary of State review the need to self-isolate for those who are twice vaccinated and showing a negative test?

**Sajid Javid:** It is precisely for the reasons my right hon. Friend sets out, and for other reasons, that we have already reviewed the rules on self-isolation. That is why we have announced that there will be a change from 16 August. We will keep them under review.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): For the 3.8 million clinically extremely vulnerable people, the prospect of a so-called freedom day next week is actually anything but. They and many clinically vulnerable people, such as pregnant women, are living in fear of what living with covid means for them. Last Monday, the Secretary of State promised me that guidance was forthcoming. Last Wednesday, Members in the other place and charities met his ministerial colleague Lord Bethell and officials, who admitted that this was not good enough and that something more had to be done. Can the Secretary of State tell us today what support and guidance will be forthcoming and when, or is he pursuing a survival-of-the-fittest policy, whereby the most vulnerable will be thrown to the wolves?

**Sajid Javid:** This is one of the most important issues. As the hon. Lady says, many people are immuno-suppressed or severely clinically vulnerable. It is important that at every stage of dealing with this pandemic we are thinking of them and having them at the front of our mind. That is what I believe we have done. Of course, when people in that category are able to take the vaccine they should, but not all are able to do so. She asks about advice, and I can tell her that we are publishing it today.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): First, it is worth saying that I strongly welcome the statement from the Secretary of State. When he is back at the Dispatch Box in the autumn, as I fear he may be, announcing further restrictions, guidance or even another lockdown, one of the things that will have driven that will be hospitalisation data. The big flaw in that data at the moment is that it includes anyone who tests positive for covid who goes into hospital, not whether they have gone into hospital because they are ill with covid. That will drive poor decision making, and it is vital that it is fixed urgently. We cannot have hundreds of thousands of livelihoods and wellbeing sacrificed on the altar of dodgy data.

**Sajid Javid:** That is an important point from my right hon. Friend. He will know—I judge that is why he asked the question—that at the moment the figures available are “with covid”, which does not make a distinction about what is causing that individual to be in hospital, so the data are not precise and detailed enough. I think that is what he is getting at. It is a very good point and I have asked for advice on it. I hope we can start to get clearer data precisely for the reason he raises.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) [V]: Primary care is not only the frontline of the fight against covid; it is also the front door of the NHS and many staff are on their knees at the moment. May I ask the Secretary of State to help more medical students to choose general practice and to stay in it, as that is absolutely fundamental to helping more people get in to see a GP easily?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree. My parents wanted me to be a doctor—a GP—so they were a bit disappointed, although my mum did say that my current role might

make up for it. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He knows our commitment to 50 million more appointments and to having more GPs. That remains a huge priority, which I think this pandemic has made even more important than before.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) [V]: I join the Secretary of State and other colleagues in deploring the appalling racism shown against a football team who have shown the absolute best of our country.

The Secretary of State says that caution is absolutely vital, given the soaring infection rates. I agree, but if caution is absolutely vital, why is he weakening the measures to deliver it? The message around face masks on public transport, for example, has been downgraded from being a clear legal requirement to being an optional personal choice. As more than 100 scientists and medics said last week in a letter to *The Lancet*, this is reckless and risks driving up infections. He asks, "If we do not open up now, then when?". The answer has to be: when a far higher percentage of the total population is vaccinated; when basic public health protection such as test, trace and isolate is properly functioning; when people can afford to self-isolate; and when measures such as air filtration systems are in our classrooms. Frankly, the Government seem to be pursuing a Darwinian strategy, relying on immunity by natural infection. Does he realise how dangerous that is?

**Sajid Javid:** I am afraid that the hon. Lady is just not being realistic. I have set out very clearly in my statement the issues around timing. No one is pretending that there is a perfect time to start lifting some of these restrictions. It therefore requires a balanced and measured approach, and that is exactly what we are doing.

**Sir Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Steroid inhalers, of the type used by millions of asthma sufferers worldwide, are known to be safe and cheap, and trials show that they are also very effective in reducing the severity of covid symptoms and the length of time they are suffered. Will my right hon. Friend take rapid steps to revise the guidance to ensure that this becomes an immediate part of GPs' armoury in dealing with people who present with covid symptoms?

**Sajid Javid:** When my hon. Friend wants something done rapidly, I listen very carefully to him. I am pleased to tell him that the clinical guidelines have been published today that allow the central alerting system to recommend to clinicians that they prescribe inhaled steroids on a case-by-case basis for exactly the purpose that he set out. I hope that is quick enough for him.

**Mr Speaker:** Anyone would have thought that that was lined up.

**Dame Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab) [V]: I hope that I will get an equally happy response to my question. The Secretary of State has said that he is anticipating as many as 100,000 covid infections daily. If that were actually to happen, according to his figures how many people would he expect to be hospitalised, and how many would he expect to develop long covid as a result?

**Sajid Javid:** I can tell the hon. Lady that there are currently about 30,000 infections a day. In the last 24 hours in England, we have seen about 400 people being hospitalised. The last time that infections were

around the same level—at 30,000 cases a day—I believe that more than 2,000 people a day were being hospitalised. That is what I mean when I say that the link has been severely weakened, and for that we have the vaccines to thank.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): I look forward to having a look at and scrutinising the new road map when it is published this afternoon. Further to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), I am just trying to get clear the data on hospitalisations. I was told today of a lady admitted this weekend to a hospital in my region to give birth. She was, of course, tested on admission and was positive, so she is a covid-positive person in hospital. Given the advice that the Secretary of State has just confirmed to the House that he has sought, when does he think he will be able to advise us of the figures for those admitted with covid versus those admitted for covid?

**Sajid Javid:** I know that my hon. Friend speaks with experience, and I am glad he has raised this point again. I have asked for that advice, because it is important that we try to analyse better the primary diagnosis of anyone coming into hospital. I can understand why that was not easily possible in the early days of the pandemic, but I think we have now reached the stage at which we can provide better data, and I hope I can get that done as quickly as possible.

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab) [V]: The recent report from the Health and Social Care Committee on NHS staff burnout showed that low pay was a particular issue for care workers, and that most NHS staff were working unpaid hours on top of their contracts. Those are hours that could otherwise be spent with family members like the brilliant student I met this morning, Brendan from Cardinal Newman School, whose dad works for the NHS. How does the Secretary of State plan to clear the backlog and fill the 40,000 nursing and 112,000 care worker vacancies if this Government continue to say no to the pay rise that NHS heroes like Brendan's dad deserve?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree with the hon. Lady that the workers in the NHS, no matter what their role, have been the heroes of this crisis, as have care workers. I think we agree on that, and that making sure it is recognised also requires us to ensure that they are paid properly. The hon. Lady is also right to link this issue to, for example, the backlog and the huge amount of work that lies ahead. I hope she will bear with me, and in due course we will set out our response to the pay review recommendations.

**Greg Clark** (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. He will know that on 29 April, a pilot scheme to test and release was introduced to avoid the disruption caused by the need for contacts of people with covid to isolate for 10 days. He will also know that our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was a beneficiary of that scheme. Will he say what the results of the pilot have been, and when it might be available to the rest of us, which I hope will be before the third week in August?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his support for my statement. That scheme is very important. I have not yet seen the final results, but results are starting to come into the Department. As my right hon.

[Sajid Javid]

Friend will know, while the pilot has been going on the Government have also made an announcement about more flexibilities for double-vaccinated people from 16 August onwards, but I will endeavour to say more about this and publish more data as soon as I can.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) [V]: I have heard what the Secretary of State has said about masks today, but as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford)—the SNP spokesperson—there will be no “freedom day” for vulnerable people if the legal requirement to wear a mask is scrapped. Many of my constituents wrote to me over the weekend expressing concern about this issue. Along with leading scientists, trade unionists and large sections of the public, they are keen for the legal requirement to wear masks in indoor spaces and on public transport to be kept at least for now. Why can the Secretary of State not make that commitment?

**Sajid Javid:** I think I have set out the general approach at the Dispatch Box a number of times. As we begin to move towards a more normal position, we want to start removing the regulations and replacing them with guidelines, and then to ask people to follow those guidelines. For example, we have made it very clear that in crowded and enclosed spaces we would expect everyone to wear a mask, and we would recommend that. Given all the data that we have set out, including the vaccination rate, we think that now is the time to take that kind of more measured approach, and we will keep it under review.

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said. On Friday I visited Blue Bay Travel, an international travel company based in my constituency which strongly supports the easing of public health restrictions from 19 July for those who are fully vaccinated. Will my right hon. Friend continue to do all he can to ensure that we help jobs and industries of that kind, which have been hit hardest by the covid measures, to recover fully as soon as possible?

**Sajid Javid:** Yes, I can give that commitment to my hon. Friend. He is right to raise this issue. The travel sector has been one of the hardest hit, and I hope that as we take this measured approach and start opening up more, the sector will, in terms of both jobs and opportunities, start to benefit in his constituency and elsewhere. I hope that the company he referred to in his constituency welcomes the changes we have set out so far.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned the serious problems being caused in the NHS by the Government’s pinging system, but schools and businesses are also suffering. Now, in the transport and travel sector, scores of trains were being cancelled over the weekend because drivers and other train staff had been pinged. If he will not bring forward his 16 August date, why on earth will he not continue to mandate masks on public transport, both to protect staff and passengers and to give them the confidence to travel at least up until that 16 August date?

**Sajid Javid:** The right hon. Gentleman may know that when we set the 16 August date, and I think I made this clear in the statement last week, it was based on clinical advice—the public health advice that we received and in particular that it was better to make sure that

more people are vaccinated than will be on 19 July, and I think that is valuable advice. When it comes to masks, I think I have made the Government’s position clear.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con) [V]: Lifting legal restrictions is a massive relief for all those who rely on pubs, restaurants and nightclubs for their livelihoods, the overwhelming majority of which are taking their responsibilities seriously at enormous cost to themselves. Does my right hon. Friend agree that as we open up our society and economy, not only must all hospitality businesses take sensible steps to protect us from disease, but all customers must also play their part and respect venues and their staff, who are working so hard to do the right thing?

**Sajid Javid:** Yes, I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. It is a responsibility as we open up not just for the owners of the businesses, the nightclubs and the pubs to take that sensible, measured attitude, but for customers to give a thought to those who are serving them at the table or behind the bar and to be respectful of their needs.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Last week, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster’s review was reported to this House as having concluded that covid vaccine certification was not necessary and would not go ahead. Since then, however, there seems to have been a review of the review, because the Secretary of State said today that

“the Government will be encouraging businesses and large events to use certification in high-risk settings”.

Can the Secretary of State tell the House now what constitutes a high-risk setting in this context, and who will be the judge of what is a high-risk setting? What constitutes “large events”, and who will judge what they are? What is meant by “encouraging businesses” and what will be the consequences for any businesses that resist the encouragement from Government in this way? Finally, how will the data that is captured in this way, which belongs to us all, be held and protected?

**Sajid Javid:** The remarks that the right hon. Gentleman refers to by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster are absolutely correct. As we move away from regulations, there will no longer be a legal requirement for any establishment to have covid vaccine certification, but the guidelines, which we will publish today, will be very clear that we expect corporate bodies and responsible businesses to have a system. We will continue to provide the infrastructure, where we will work with them and with the respective Government Departments. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are already talking to industry leaders and working with them, and the industry welcomes the work on a basis of guidelines, rather than regulation.

**Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): A rate of 87% for first vaccinations is truly impressive, and it is in excess of all the estimates that I read about when the vaccination programme was first launched, but there is evidence of a worrying fall-off in people coming forward for their second vaccinations in London and the south-east. Can my right hon. Friend say what steps he is taking to ensure that people, especially young people, are committing to completing the vaccination course?



**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this. As she says, the rate of vaccination that we have achieved in this country is the envy of the world. We want to make sure that is maintained. We definitely want to make sure that more young people are coming forward. The walk-in clinics that have popped up around the country, and the mass vaccination events that have been taking place in parts of the country, are part of that. We are also looking actively at other ways to promote the importance of vaccination.

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: A schoolteacher recently told me that some families cannot afford to self-isolate. If we are learning to live with the virus, why has the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care refused to introduce proper financial support to self-isolate, to ensure that those who test positive can safely self-isolate at home?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady will know that we have in place financial support for those who need it and who are asked to self-isolate. It is something that is important. It continues to be important, and it is something that we will keep under review.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con) [V]: Thanks to jabs and far better treatment, the case fatality rate is now 0.085% and falling. Had it been so a year ago, is there the remotest possibility that jurisdictions would have embarked on restrictions of the same breadth and scope? Does it not follow that now is the right time to move to step 4 and release burdens on people, so that we can get society going? Will the Secretary of State please caution the Opposition on their undue reliance on masks? They are not the solution; vaccinations are.

**Sajid Javid:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the importance of vaccination. That has been the key to getting us to where we are on our road map, which is why we cannot emphasise enough the importance of continuing with the programme. That is why we have set out that we plan to have a booster programme in September.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I have constituents who are absolutely ready for restrictions to be lifted, and I have others who are very concerned about the effect of the Johnson variant, which is prevalent in my area, so I can understand entirely the Secretary of State's desire for balance. That balance is not provided by the Prime Minister saying one thing—usually incoherent bluster about freedom day or terminus day—and other Ministers, such as the Secretary of State, saying other things about the need to continue wearing masks. Does he understand that the continued mixed messaging from the Government is not helping us to get through this crisis?

**Sajid Javid:** The Government are speaking with one voice, and I believe our view is very clear.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Tomorrow, my right hon. Friend will be asking the House to approve regulations that will put thousands of care workers in England out of a job. Two weeks ago, we were promised that a regulatory impact assessment was available. As of midday today, it is still not available. When will it be available, and why has it not been made available so far?

**Sajid Javid:** I believe my hon. Friend is referring to the measures that the Government have already announced around vaccinations and people who work in care homes. Ideally, I would like to make sure that the impact assessment is available. I do not know the full detail as to why it has not been completed, but at the same time, I think it is important to get on with this part of building our vaccine wall. We will have more to say about it tomorrow.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that Singapore has announced its plan to navigate from pandemic to endemic and to co-exist with the virus—they could almost have been reading my speeches and articles. Will the Secretary of State get the economy and society moving again and, in particular, take a fresh look at vaccine passports or certificates, including the vaccine card that we all carry? Let us allow our people to get back to normality.

**Sajid Javid:** I take it from that that the right hon. Gentleman supports the measures that I have set out today in this statement, and I thank him very much for his support.

**Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con) [V]: I very much welcome this statement today on the back of the successful vaccine roll-out programme. However, given the rising numbers of people having to isolate and the impact this is having on businesses and our economy, can I reiterate the call to my right hon. Friend to consider bringing forward changes to the requirement to isolate after contact with a confirmed case for those who are fully vaccinated? There has to be a better way forward that does not have the economic impact that the current isolation policy is having.

**Sajid Javid:** I understand the importance of the point my hon. Friend has made. As I said in response to another question, the date of 16 August is based on the best advice that we can get at this point in time. He may be interested to know that, as well as the test and trace system, there is the NHS covid app. A number of people have referred to the so-called pinging. I want to take a careful look at this to ensure that it can also provide a more proportionate and balanced system, given the rate of vaccination.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): There is understandable concern among those who are immunosuppressed, particularly those with blood cancers, about the effectiveness of vaccines and I know that the Secretary of State mentioned this earlier. Can he be really clear: are the vaccines working? Will those people get booster doses early? When will detailed and specific advice on the whole range of conditions be available? I declare an interest, as somebody in my own family and many of my constituents are affected. When will they get clear advice so that their concerns can be put to one side?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this issue. The vaccines are working and I have set out clearly why. The Government have published much evidence on that. The booster programme begins in September and the immunosuppressed and clinically vulnerable will get priority in that; they will be in the initial cohort. The advice that I referred to earlier will be published today.



**Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): In what circumstances or conditions does my right hon. Friend consider that it will be responsible to work in crowded spaces, such as in retail or hospitality—or, indeed, in this place—without wearing a mask?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this and our guidelines on mask wearing will be very clear. If people are in retail spaces and they are crowded—as we know, most of them are enclosed—they should consider wearing a mask. They should be thinking not just about themselves but about the people around them and the people serving them.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: The Secretary of State will have seen the huge and rising number of covid infections in the north-east, and the decision to remove controls will clearly accelerate that and increase concerns about the short-term and long-term impacts of covid and the risk of vaccine-resistant variants. Regardless of the proposed covid passports, businesses in the north-east—especially in sectors such as hospitality, where large numbers of young unvaccinated people work—are already struggling to function with reduced staff and customers cancelling at the last minute to self-isolate. With the Government withdrawing economic support at the same time, does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate the concern that, for many hospitality businesses, the Government's summer of high covid may be too much to survive?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady will know that there is still significant economic support in place, and of course it is the job of the Treasury to keep that under review. When it comes to self-isolation and the impact that it has on businesses, it is important, now that we have such a high level of vaccination, including in the north-east, that we can take a more proportionate and balanced approach, and that is exactly what we are doing.

**Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con) [V]: It is great news that we are moving back to personal responsibility next week, and I thank the Secretary of State for that. However, the rates are increasing in Redcar and Cleveland. Although hospitalisations are not climbing in the same way, my concern is that more and more people are having to self-isolate due to the dreaded ping from the NHS app. We all remember the difficulties of last year when people struggled to get a test, but since then the Government have massively increased the testing capability and getting a test is no longer an issue. What more can be done to utilise this immense testing capability to prevent people from having to self-isolate unnecessarily?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this. The so-called ping does serve a purpose and it has served a huge purpose as we have been dealing with this pandemic, particularly during the last wave. If someone is pinged, it might be very useful information to them if they were planning in the days ahead to visit a vulnerable person, perhaps a grandparent or someone, so I think it is valuable information to give people. But as I said earlier, I think we can look at the approach and make it more measured, given the high rate of vaccination, and then also, as he suggested, make more use of tests, which is exactly what we are doing.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab) [V]: What assessment have the Secretary of State and his Department made of the number of children with long covid, and when will children get vaccinated?

**Sajid Javid:** On children and covid—the hon. Gentleman asked about long covid—a huge amount of research is being done both in the NHS and in my Department. I mentioned, for example, the extra £50 million of funding that we are providing to do even more research and to step this up. As he knows, long covid is a problem the world over, and I hope that the UK can become a world leader in trying to help with this problem and share the research that it does with other countries. On the vaccination of children, as I said in response to a similar question, the JCVI is actively looking at this issue. Once we have its final advice, we will set out our plans.

**Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's confirmation of the return of our freedoms. Knowing what we do now about the impact of some of our interventions, we must never return to those dark days. While we have taken a huge backward step in this regard, does he agree that we should use this great unlock to usher in a new era of personal responsibility? Perhaps we could start with a review of clause 125 of the Health and Care Bill, which would appear, on the face of it, to prevent UK food manufacturers from advertising their products anywhere online, not just in the UK, while conferring advantage on huge, globally recognised brands.

**Sajid Javid:** Obesity is a real problem in this country and others and its causes are very complex, and we want to make sure that we have the best approach possible. My hon. Friend will know that we are planning to debate that Bill on Wednesday and I look forward to seeing him in the debate.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I want to press the Secretary of State a little further on wearing masks. He said that he has been perfectly clear, but the opposite is the case. His Government were dithering on mask wearing in this very week last year, and the dithering and mixed messages continue. He tells us that masks will no longer be compulsory but that wearing them will be expected, as the Chancellor boasts that he will stop wearing a mask on 19 July. The Government chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser say that they will continue to wear masks. Why has this important public health tool been so undermined by the dithering and mixed messages of his Government?

**Sajid Javid:** I believe I have answered that question a number of times during this session.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: It is 16 months since I contracted a fairly mild bout of coronavirus, which, unfortunately, developed into terrible long covid, and the symptoms still persist all these months later. The vaccination programme has been a game changer and I want a return to normality, like everyone else, but does the Secretary of State understand that the consequence of his decision may well be more people with long covid? The money for research is welcome, but what more is he planning to do to support those with long covid with health, rehabilitation and social security measures and to support employers with the reality that sections of their workforce might be unfit for work for periods, too?

**Sajid Javid:** First, as I have said a number of times in this debate, opening up is not without risk, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that keeping restrictions in place is also not without cost, so the Government have to take a balanced approach. He is right to raise the issue of long covid. As I mentioned, this is something that the Government take very seriously. I have announced another £50 million of funding for research into it. This is a problem not just in the UK; it is an issue the world over. We still do not know enough about long covid. We are learning more all the time, but it will be an absolute priority of this Government to work with people with long covid and do everything that we possibly can.

**Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con):** More double-vaccinated people than ever are being asked to self-isolate because they have come into contact with someone who has tested positive for covid. That is incredibly difficult for individuals and families and of course it disrupts jobs and businesses; I have heard cases of people being asked to self-isolate more than once in the same month. May I add my voice to others across the House and ask my right hon. Friend to consider bringing forward before 16 August some form of test and release measure for people who are double-vaccinated?

**Sajid Javid:** Again, this is an important issue. My hon. Friend may have heard the response that I gave earlier about the test and release scheme. I am eagerly waiting to look at the results of that and see whether we can provide further flexibilities. I hope she will also welcome some of the flexibilities that we have already announced, including the changes that will take effect on 16 August.

**Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]:** I take this opportunity to condemn the vile online racism against some members of the England football team yesterday after they had given their all for their country.

The World Health Organisation has expressed its concerns about rising infections in England and the risk to the 17 million people who still remain unprotected by vaccination. But even those who have been vaccinated are at risk of long-term illness and disability if they become infected; Office for National Statistics data indicates that one in seven infected people of working age will experience ill health after 12 weeks.

May I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) in chasing the Health Secretary about his estimates of the incidence of long covid as a result of the third wave? What discussions has he had with the Work and Pensions Secretary about what that means when it comes to support through the social security system if people are unable to work?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady raises the importance of vaccination, and she is right to do so. As I mentioned earlier, according to the ONS, nine out of 10 adults in this country have antibodies, which are part of the wall of protection.

The hon. Lady is right to mention that cases will rise in this wave. We have been very open about that. I hope that she heard earlier in my statement that there is no perfect time to start opening up. The risk is that, if we

do not do it now and wait until after the summer, the schools will be back, and if we wait longer it will be winter—there is a real, serious risk, which we have been advised about, that the wave could be even bigger than anticipated at this point. Many more people would then end up getting infected and, by extension, getting long covid.

I hope that the hon. Lady can consider all that together in a balanced way. If she would like to meet any Ministers or officials in my Department to understand the situation better, I will be happy to arrange that.

**Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con):** From previous answers given, I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is now looking at the underlying settings of the Track and Trace app—I ask him to do that as a matter of urgency. Those settings take no account of vaccination status or any other behaviours; it is just a blunt, bluetooth signal. It might have had value when there were few other tools in the box, but it must now be highly questionable to condemn potentially millions of people to unnecessary self-isolation and the economic impact thereof.

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I hope that he noted my comment that, precisely for the reasons he set out, given the high rate of vaccination, we are taking a fresh look at the app. I have asked for advice—and have just started to receive some of it—about how we can take a more proportionate and balanced approach.

**Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab) [V]:** It is clearly right to take further steps towards unlocking, but it is not the all-or-nothing choice that the Secretary of State has suggested and vaccines are not the only tool available. The wearing of masks in enclosed spaces reduces infection and therefore hospitalisations and deaths. It is supported by health experts and backed by the public. The reasons why the wearing of masks was made mandatory remain the same as when the Government recommended it all those months ago. With hospitalisations up 34% on a week ago, will the Secretary of State not put public health before the pressure from his more vocal Back Benchers and retain mandatory mask wearing for public transport and other enclosed spaces?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is not all or nothing, which is why the Government have been very clear that as we start opening up other measures will rightfully stay in place—I mentioned earlier the border controls, the test and trace system and the plan for booster vaccines. I hope that he would welcome that.

**Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con):** I have had the privilege of seeing some of the terrific work being done in Aberconwy by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board on the delivery of the UK vaccine throughout north Wales. Does my right hon. Friend think that the pandemic has shown us, or perhaps reheated or reinforced, the importance of working together on health matters? Does he agree that the UK Government and the devolved Administrations should now explore opportunities to work together on better health outcomes for all UK residents in all parts of the UK?

**Sajid Javid:** Yes, I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. During this pandemic we have seen that, by working together on all types of public health issues, but especially the vaccine and its delivery, we are stronger together. We should draw some long-term lessons from that about how we can use it not only to protect against future pandemics—sadly, there will be some—but in respect of other public health issues that we face collectively to find a way to do a better job together.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I have written to the Secretary of State to urge him to do everything that he can to protect immunocompromised people as restrictions are eased. We urgently need the results of the OCTAVE study into the efficacy of covid-19 vaccines on this population; when will we get them? In the meantime, will the Government provide antibody tests for immunocompromised people, allowing them to make informed decisions? Better communication and proper support will go a long way towards alleviating the escalating levels of concern.

**Sajid Javid:** On the study to which the hon. Lady referred, I will look into that and write to her, if she will allow me. Immunocompromised people and what we can do to help them has come up a number of times during this statement. I direct the hon. Lady to the comments I have already made and highlight the fact that we will publish some guidance today.

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Last week, I heard from a self-employed small business owner in my constituency of Keighley and Ilkley who has been told to self-isolate three times in the past two months, despite not testing positive on any of those occasions. Such an experience is both impractical for the individual and harmful to our local economy, so will my right hon. Friend assure me that he is exploring all possible options to remedy the situation, whether through adjustments to the NHS app or changes to the self-isolation rules?

**Sajid Javid:** On the app and the so-called pinging—my hon. Friend referred to an individual in his constituency who has perhaps been pinged too many times—it is right, as I have said, that we take a fresh look at any changes that we can make in the light of the success of the mass vaccination campaign. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I think he will be pleased with our course of action.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), the Secretary of State said that the Government speak with one voice. Well, clearly on masks they change in response to whatever the latest YouGov poll says. He has been very clear today that people should wear a mask in confined spaces, so I ask him a direct question: what is his advice to retailers? Should they insist on their customers wearing masks when they enter their shops?

**Sajid Javid:** The guidance that we will publish today will be very clear on that.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It arises directly out of the response that the Secretary of State gave to me. Tomorrow this House is being asked to approve the Draft Health and

Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021. When that instrument was laid on 22 June, the explanatory memorandum said:

"A full impact assessment of the costs and benefits of this instrument is"—

I emphasise "is"—

"available from the Department of Health and Social Care...and is published alongside this instrument".

As of 12 o'clock today, I have been trying, through the good offices of our excellent colleagues in the Library, to get an answer from the Department as to when we are going to get that impact assessment. The officials at the DHSC are quoted by the Library as having said, "The impact assessment has not been laid yet"—we knew that—and, "We will be laying it at the earliest opportunity." This is very serious, because on 6 July the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee referred to the impossibility of being able to scrutinise the legislation properly without the impact assessment. Despite the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee recommending that the debate be deferred, nothing has happened and all that the Secretary of State said in response to me was, "Well, we don't know where it is but don't worry about it—we'll carry on tomorrow anyway." That is just not good enough. I would be grateful for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, as to what we can do to ensure that we have an informed debate with the impact assessment before us.

**Mr Mark Harper:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In intending to be helpful to those on the Treasury Bench, I have noticed, looking at the said regulations, that they do not actually come into force until 16 weeks after they are approved by the House. It seems to me that in four months there is plenty of time for the Government to produce the relevant information for the House and for the House to take a decision, with no detriment at all to the health and safety of anyone in our care homes.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I thank both hon. and right hon. Gentlemen for their points of order. I am sure the House is well aware that it is not a matter for the Chair. I will not spring it on the Secretary of State for him to give an answer on this operational matter, but Mr Speaker usually observes that it is helpful to the House for Members to have as much information as possible before them when a matter of importance is to be considered.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The explanatory memorandum falsely asserted that the full impact assessment is available. Why was the House misled in that way?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Once again, the hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot answer that question, because what is said by Ministers and their Departments is not a matter for the Chair. However, if it were to be the case that a spokesman for a Minister had suggested that something had happened that had not happened, and on which Members were trying to rely and could not rely, Mr Speaker would take a very dim view of that. It is better if Ministers make sure that their Departments give as much information as possible to Members ahead of discussions.



**Jonathan Ashworth** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Is it further to that point of order?

**Jonathan Ashworth:** It is indeed further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise to reinforce the point raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper). What the House is being asked to decide tomorrow is whether to proceed with compulsory vaccination for a certain section of the healthcare workforce. We have not had compulsory vaccination in this country since the 19th century, when it was tried and abandoned. This is an incredibly serious intervention. Is there a procedure by which the House can delay coming to a decision tomorrow until the assessment is published?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I do not believe there is such a procedure, as the matters on the Order Paper are a matter for the Government. I note that the Lord President of the Council has just come into the Chamber, so he will undoubtedly hear the end of this matter, although he did not hear the beginning of it and so I would not dream of asking him to comment. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that a delay should be put in place, I am sure he will be able to make reference to that when he has the opportunity to do so tomorrow.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will it be possible—will it be in order—to question the Leader of the House about this matter, as he is about to make a statement about tomorrow's business?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** No. The right hon. Gentleman is fond of short questions and short answers, and that is my short answer. The statement that will be made after a brief suspension of the House, which I am about to announce, by the Lord President of the Council, will be, I understand, on a very narrow and specific matter, and I will allow questions only on that very narrow and specific matter. Having said all that, I am quite sure that the Secretary of State and those on the Treasury Bench have taken note of what has been said over these past minutes. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State has indeed taken note, so hon. Members have achieved what they set out to achieve. I shall now suspend the House in order that arrangements can be made for the next item of business.

4.56 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Business of the House

5 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):** I should like to make a short business statement.

Further to my statement to the House last Thursday, the first item of business tomorrow will now be consideration of a business of the House motion followed by a general debate on the Treasury update on international aid.

This will be followed by remaining stages of the Armed Forces Bill followed by a motion to approve the draft Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021.

This will be followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to terrorism followed by a motion relating to English votes for English laws.

The last item of business will be a motion relating to the appointment of chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

The business for the rest of the week remains unchanged and I shall make a further business statement as usual on Thursday.

The business for the rest of the week remains unchanged, and I shall make a further business statement as usual on Thursday. It may be useful for Members of the House to know that the call list will be open once the business statement has concluded and will close at 8 o'clock this evening.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for advance sight of the statement. We on the Opposition Benches, along with many on the Government Benches, have argued strongly for a proper debate and an amendable motion with a vote on international aid cuts, so I have various questions about what will happen tomorrow. He says that it is a general debate, but what will be the question? Will the debate be on an amendable motion, and if not, why not? How long will the debate be? If we are to have a vote, will he confirm that it will be legally binding on the Government, or will it be just politically binding?

This evening is obviously not the time for us to debate the merits, or rather the lack of merits, of cutting aid and undermining our legally and morally binding commitments to the world's poorest; that will be for tomorrow. If the motion for the general debate will be votable, what would be the consequences if it were defeated? My suspicions at the moment are that this could be a Treasury road map to 0.7%, which might take a rather roundabout route, rather than this House deciding—and I know that the right hon. Gentleman is usually in favour of that, as someone who defends the rights of this House. Am I correct on that?

Finally, so that we can all understand precisely where we will be, especially as so many Members on both sides of the House have expressed such strong views, if the House votes down the motion, if there is one, on the general debate tomorrow, will international aid go back to 0.7% of gross national income in January 2022—yes or no?



**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The answer to the last question is yes. The written ministerial statement from the Treasury says:

“However, if the House were to negative the motion, rejecting the government’s assessment of the fiscal circumstances, then the government would consequently return to spending 0.7% of GNI on international aid in the next calendar year”—

so that is from January 2022—

“and with likely consequences for the fiscal situation, including for taxation and current public spending plans.”

The motion will be: “That this House has considered the written ministerial statement relating to the Treasury update on international aid, which was laid before this House on Monday 12 July.” The debate will be for three hours and the decision will be binding on Her Majesty’s Government.

Votes have consequences and if the motion were to be negated, that would be a significant consequence for our fiscal situation where, I remind the House, more than £400 billion has had to be spent because of the coronavirus pandemic and yet we remain one of the most generous nations in terms of overseas aid. This is merely an effort to facilitate the House in debating an issue that is of concern to many Members because, unfortunately, some missed the opportunity to do so on the estimates days.

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): Obviously, it was only on Thursday last week that we had the previous business statement, so I guess my first question to the Leader of the House would be, what has changed in the time from Thursday till today? Clearly, it is welcome that such an opportunity is being presented, but it does appear to me to be highly unusual that a general debate is being used as a mechanism to allow this vote to take place, especially when the Government themselves are bringing it forward. Is there a particular reason why the Government are using a general debate, rather than any other more substantive mechanism, to bring this forward? Beyond that, may I ask the Leader of the House what time or protected time will then to be allocated to the other items of business that were already on the agenda for tomorrow?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** What has changed? Well, I do my best to facilitate the House, and very distinguished hon. and right hon. Members wanted further debate because, as I have mentioned, they had rather forgotten their early education on how estimates days work and therefore wanted a further debate. It is being provided in this way to allow the House to come to a clear decision. It will be a yes or no answer. Does this House wish to see the public finances kept under reasonable control, does it recognise that there are limits to what we can do and does it recognise that there are in fact generous billionaires who are giving money for overseas aid, which should be enormously welcome, or on the other hand do we want to hard press our hard-pressed taxpayers even further? That will be the question for the debate tomorrow, and a very clear answer can be given.

On the timings for the debates tomorrow, most of them are set out in Standing Orders, so debates under an Act are always for 90 minutes, and the motion relating to English votes for English laws, on which I think the hon. Gentleman and I will be on the same side, will have an hour.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I had proposed only to hear points or take questions to the Lord President from those on the Front Benches, but if the two right hon. Gentlemen who have caught my eye, the right hon. Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), are asking specifically about the narrow point that the Lord President has brought to the Chamber, I will hear them.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will resist quoting page 688 of “Erskine May” to the Lord President, but can he give us an answer to this question? He has told us about the financial numbers, but will we have an impact assessment on the number of lives lost as a result of this policy, and will the motion be amendable?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I will allow that question because it is very specific.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. Friend is coming on to some of the topics that will be discussed tomorrow. It is in effect a deponent motion: it is passive in form, but active in meaning.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, and following your strictures, I will limit my very specific question to what is in the emergency business statement. The Leader of the House will know that the motion to approve the draft Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021 is also on a very important matter, effective compulsory vaccination for care home workers. What I am not clear about, even from his answer to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson)—and this would be of enormous interest to many outside this House—is whether the Leader of the House can give me an indication of when he would be expecting that debate to take place. In other words, when will the remaining stages of the Armed Forces Bill finish so that that debate can start? That will be of interest to many outside the House.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. Friend is a former Chief Whip, and he will know that the progress of business is dependent upon the loquacity of hon. and right hon. Members, which is not something it is possible for me to predict.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** How true!

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con) *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Right on cue—Sir Christopher Chope.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** Can I ask my right hon. Friend whether it will be possible to amend the business of the House motion to facilitate the deferral of the debate on the draft Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Those matters are matters properly for the Speaker rather than for me, but it may be possible that we could have an interesting discussion on the meaning of the word “forthwith”. I seem to remember that that topic exercised the House to a considerable degree in a previous Parliament.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Indeed we could, but let us hope that we will not.

That concludes the business statement, and I will very briefly suspend the House—for just two minutes.

5.9 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

*[Relevant documents: Fourth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights of Session 2017-19, Freedom of Speech in Universities, HC 589/ HL 111; Eighth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights of Session 2017-19, Freedom of Speech in Universities: Responses, HC 1279/ HL 162; Letter from the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights to Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, regarding the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, dated 24 June 2021; and Letter from Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, to the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, regarding the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, dated 7 July 2021.]*

*Second Reading*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I should report to the House that the reasoned amendment in the name of the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has been selected.

5.12 pm

**The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I wonder how many of us here ever pause to reflect on how very fortunate we are to be able to do what we are doing right now—discussing freely a subject that many of us will feel passionate about. I suspect that most of us accept without pause that this is what democracy is all about. In short, we take freedom of speech and open debate for granted. Nothing that is precious in life should ever be taken for granted.

The privileges that we are enjoying today and that underpin any successful democratic society are essential and fundamental to a free and liberal society. Genuine academic freedom has long been a cornerstone of our world-leading universities. Their mission to stretch the boundaries of human learning, knowledge and wisdom was only possible because they were free to challenge the views of the time. Without their courage and without the bravery of those who defended their right to speak out, the world would be a much darker place today. Those challenges—those dissenting voices—have not always met with approval or agreement at the time. Some paid dearly for their intellectual independence. Take those trailblazers who argued for gay rights or women's suffrage, or Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution was considered blasphemous and deeply offensive by many but which we now accept as simple truth.

One reason why students from all over the world flock to our universities is that they know—or expect—that they will not only get a first-class education but hear a broad range of views and opinions. Academics, whom our outstanding universities similarly attract from a global talent pool, expect to be able freely and fiercely to seek out the truth. What they do not expect and should not tolerate is being prevented from hearing those views or even being silenced themselves. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right in any civilised country but especially for students and faculty in higher education, which has always been a crucible for new ideas and ways of looking at the world. Staff and students should be free to discuss, debate and debunk other views.

[Gavin Williamson]

Fear of censure is deeply saddening and has a chilling effect and spread on campuses. There continue to be too many reported instances where students or staff have been silenced or threatened with a loss of privileges or even dismissal for airing views or opinions that others disagree with. I have previously spoken about how that growing intolerance cannot be allowed to take root and I made it clear that if universities would not protect free speech, the Government would.

I turn to the reasoned amendment, which Mr Speaker has selected. The Government have been clear that the Bill protects lawful speech only. Unlawful speech on campuses will not be tolerated. To be clear, nothing in the Bill encourages higher education providers or students unions to encourage baseless or harmful claims or bad science on campus. We should be proud of our life-saving covid-19 vaccine roll-out, and we are pleased to see that more than half of 18 to 24-year-olds have already received their first dose.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab) *rose*—

**Gavin Williamson:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Jones:** It is the right hon. Gentleman. I agree totally about freedom of speech, which is one of the best things about this country and one that I am proud of, but what data is the Secretary of State using? If he looks at the Office for Students' data for 2017-18, he will see that the instances he referred to amount to 0.009%. In an entire year, there were 17 cases among more than 500 academic institutions. What data is he basing his claims on?

**Gavin Williamson:** I apologise for causing such offence to the right hon. Gentleman by referring to him as "the hon. Gentleman". It was not right to ignore the fitting status that he holds in this House. I am sure he will not take too much offence by that. In terms of what we are tackling, we are talking about principles and the need for people to feel able to speak freely and challenge ideas. One of the great challenges we face on campuses up and down the country is that so many people are concerned they cannot speak out and give their views because they may be censured by those academic institutions.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In response to the point made by the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), had Darwin been suppressed, that would have affected 0.0001% of debates, but it would have changed the course of history.

**Gavin Williamson:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. So much of the legislation that goes through this place is the nuts and bolts for things that the Government must do to ensure good government and the delivery of all the things that we wish to see. However, we must not be blind to the fact that this place is also about principle, and the principle of free speech needs to be defended. There are unfortunately too many instances where people feel as if they cannot speak as freely as they wish.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State believe in evidence-based policy making? If so, can he cite the evidence for the problem that he is seeking to address? It appears that he is manufacturing a problem in order to have today's debate.

**Gavin Williamson:** We are talking about principles. We are talking about the fact that what we want to do is give people the opportunity to have that freedom. Do you know what was so saddening, Madam Deputy Speaker? When we first announced the intention that we would take this action if it was necessary—

**Lilian Greenwood:** If it was necessary. Why is it necessary?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we hoped we would see is universities across the country taking further action, but what was so saddening was that so many people contacted me directly to express their concerns about being able to speak freely on campus at the universities where they worked. They were not able to put down their name and address, because they were concerned about the repercussions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) rightly said that it would be a tragedy if Darwin had not felt that he had the freedom and ability to challenge established thinking. We have to remember that there are Darwins out there who will be challenging the consensus, and we always need to ensure that all our great institutions deliver the freedoms that we expect them to deliver. We are a free and democratic society, and we should never be in a position where we are not doing everything we can to deliver freedom of speech. Does it not seem odd—in Parliament, of all places, where freedom of speech is there to be protected, relished and enjoyed—that the Labour party is not necessarily challenging and trying to amend the Bill, but wants actively to vote it down? It seems perverse that the Labour party is not supporting the principles of freedom of speech and is not doing everything we can to ensure that students and academics have as much freedom as possible to explore ideas.

As we look at how we protect free speech, we should all be appalled that a report by King's College London only two years ago found that a quarter of students believed that violence was an acceptable response to inflammatory speech. The same report showed that a similar proportion of students were beginning to keep their beliefs and opinions to themselves because they were too scared to disagree with their peers.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Gavin Williamson:** If I could just make a little progress, I will give way to the hon. Lady.

I am sure the whole House would agree that this intolerance is simply intolerable. Recent research by Policy Exchange revealed that 32% of those who identified as fairly right or right have refrained from airing views in teaching and research, with 15% of those identifying as centre or left also self-censoring. This is both unwise and unhealthy. Our universities must not become spaces where ideas are debated within a narrow consensus, with those who challenge majority views subject to censorship. Last year, I warned vice-chancellors that this situation could not and would not be allowed to continue. Although some have taken action, we cannot sit by while others do not. Our students and faculty quite simply deserve better.



**Jess Phillips:** As the Secretary of State talks about people being scared on campus and what he has asked vice-chancellors to do, I wonder whether he has the data in front of him for sexual harassment and sexual violence cases, which are rife on our university campuses. On the deep principles that he holds, what exactly is he doing about that, and when can I expect a Bill on that? That is surely a principled priority that the Government would want to take.

**Gavin Williamson:** It absolutely is. I am sure the hon. Lady was about to come on to the amazing work that the Office for Students has commissioned to ensure that all universities take the action required, including looking at whether that is a condition of registration for universities, which, as she will understand, is absolutely fundamental for universities to be able to operate.

The Bill will protect lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom on campus. We are strengthening the legal duties that exist and ensuring that robust action, including imposing fines, will be taken if they are breached. The central core of the Bill is clause 1, which amends the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to extend the duties of higher education providers relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom. That will ensure that those freedoms are protected and promoted within higher education in England.

As we actively protect students from racism, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination, higher education providers will have to take responsibility and reasonably practicable steps to secure lawful freedom of speech for their staff, members, students and visiting speakers. That includes a duty to secure the academic freedom of academic staff. It will mean a change in ethos as well as culture. Providers will be under a duty to promote those fundamental values, as well as to maintain a code of practice setting out how students and staff should act so as to ensure compliance with that duty.

Freedom of speech does not begin and end with providers. As a matter of principle, every student at every university in every corner of the country should have the same freedom and the same rights. Students unions must not be allowed to silence or intimidate other students within a university. That is why clause 2 requires students unions and providers to take “reasonably practicable” steps to secure lawful freedom of speech for their members, students, staff and visiting speakers.

As now, the right to lawful free speech will remain balanced by the important safeguards against harassment, abuse and threats of violence as set out in the Equality Act 2010, the Prevent duty and other legislation, none of which we are changing. This is not an ideological effort; it is about fundamental fairness and common sense. These legal duties are key to ensuring that the higher education sector in England continues to be an environment in which students, staff and visiting speakers are not just able but welcome to freely express their views, as long as those views are lawful. The reason we need this effort is because the existing legislation provides no clear means of enforcement, nor does it give a specific right to individuals to seek compensation for breach of freedom of speech duties, leading to concerns that it does not offer serious, sufficient or significant protection.

This is why clause 3 introduces a new statutory tort that will protect visiting fellows, students and other individuals who may not be able to seek redress through

employment tribunal. Though this legal route is an important backstop, we do not want all cases going to court where they could otherwise be resolved by other means. We are therefore providing that the Office for Students, the regulator for higher education in England, will play a more active role in strengthening freedom of speech and academic freedom standards in higher education.

Clause 4 imposes new freedom of speech duties on the OFS, including requiring it to promote the importance of freedom of speech within the law and the academic freedom of academic staff at higher education providers. The OFS will also play an important role in identifying best practice and providing advice in relation to the promotion of these rights.

The OFS will have a more direct route to regulate the freedom of speech duties under clause 5, which requires the OFS to set new registration conditions relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom. This clause will ensure that the registration conditions relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom are aligned with the duties on higher education providers imposed by the Bill. The OFS will be able to ensure that these are complied with by using its usual powers of accountability and enforcement, such as the power to impose fines.

As I have said, it is vital that students unions are also doing their bit to ensure freedom of speech on campus. Clause 6 extends the regulatory functions of the OFS so that it can effectively regulate and enforce the new freedom of speech duties that we are placing on students unions. The OFS will monitor compliance and have the power to impose fines.

**Lilian Greenwood:** When I heard the Universities Minister discussing this matter on the radio some time ago, she suggested that these proposals in the Bill could enable holocaust deniers to seek compensation. Do the Government really want to protect people like that and those sorts of repugnant views? Why is that the Government's priority?

**Gavin Williamson:** As the hon. Lady will know, it is absolutely clear that this Bill will never create a platform for holocaust deniers. She is probably familiar with the Public Order Act 1986, the Equality Act 2010, which was introduced by the Labour party, and the Prevent duties introduced in 2015. If made an Act, this legislation will never create the space to tolerate holocaust deniers.

There is at the moment no direct way for anyone to complain about freedom of speech matters other than for students against their higher education provider. This scheme will provide a route to individual redress for all students, staff and visiting speakers to back up the new strengthened freedom of speech duties provided in the Bill for providers and students unions.

**Jess Phillips:** The Secretary of State is describing all the protections that will go to the OFS. I simply ask, will any of those protections provide for compensation and regulation in cases where people are raped or sexually abused on university campuses and have no redress? Will that freedom, for those students, be included? Will they be able to get compensation when their universities mismanage their cases?

**Gavin Williamson:** I refer the hon. Lady to the comments that I made some moments ago; we have asked the Office for Students to look into this whole area to see



[Gavin Williamson]

how we can get this redress. She probably noted that I mentioned some of the conditions of registration for higher education institutions that can be part of that process. That is an area that we are looking at and have asked the OFS to address directly.

The OFS will be able to make a recommendation to the higher education provider or students union, which could include, for example, a recommendation to pay a sum in compensation, or reinstate the complainant's job or place on a course. The scheme will be overseen by the newly created position of director for freedom of speech and academic freedom within the OFS. The director will oversee the various free speech functions of the OFS, including compliance and enforcement. The provision in clause 8 means that there will be an individual in the OFS who has exclusive focus on championing these key values in our higher education sector.

Clause 9 gives effect to the schedule to the Bill, which contains minor and consequential amendments to other legislation. These amendments are necessary to give effect to the main provisions of the Bill, and to make all the relevant legislation work seamlessly and consistently.

Of course, Government action in this area cannot by itself be enough. Cultural change is essential, but, as we have seen in so many areas, such as gender equality or anti-discrimination, cultural change occurs more readily when it is backed up by law. I began by saying that many of us take freedom of speech for granted. The facts on the ground and in universities tell us that this must change. By introducing concise, clear consequences for any breach of a freedom of speech duty, these legislative changes will preserve, protect and safeguard free speech, and open debate in our universities right now, tomorrow and for years to come. Some day—not long from now—our children will thank us for what we do today. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.34 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, notwithstanding the need to ensure legal protections for freedom of speech and academic freedom, because the Bill is a hate speech protection bill which could provide legal protection and financial recompense to those seeking to engage in harmful and dangerous speech on university campuses, including Holocaust denial, racism, and anti-vaccination messages.”

Let me start by making absolutely clear the importance that the Labour party attaches to freedom of speech and academic freedom. Indeed, it might be useful for me to remind the House of the histories of my party and the Conservative party on this issue. The Labour party is the party that enshrined the Human Rights Act 1998 in domestic law, guaranteeing legally protected rights to freedom of thought, conscience and expression. That Act is one of the most important legal measures we have to protect the rights of every citizen of this country. How did the Conservative party respond? By seeking to undermine those rights, voting against their enshrinement in domestic law and subsequently threatening to take them off the statute book altogether.

Nobody should be fooled into thinking that the Conservative party has now changed its stance. Recently, the Conservatives introduced a new law with significant consequences for freedom of expression. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill creates a new criminal offence if a person performs an act that causes “serious inconvenience”. It is a dangerous curtailment of the right to protest, which is fundamental to democracy. That Bill and the one before us tell the House and the country everything they need to know about how this Conservative Government really approach our right to freedom of speech and expression. A group of individuals coming together to protest could face criminal charges for causing serious inconvenience, but because of this Bill a group spreading division and hatred on university campuses would be not just legally protected but able to sue a university or student union that tried to stop them. That is what we on the Opposition Benches object to, and what the whole House should object to: a Bill that amounts to legal protection for hate speech. It has no place on campus, no place in our society and no place on our statute book.

The Secretary of State claimed a moment ago that a legislative framework—including, I was pleased to note, Labour's Equality Act 2010, to which he referred—to prevent the spreading of hate speech is already in place, but that was not the view of the Government's Minister for Universities, who, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), acknowledged that holocaust deniers could be protected under this Bill. If the Minister responsible for this legislation believes that the Bill protects or could protect holocaust deniers, that should be a sufficient reason for any Member of this House to oppose it.

It is right, as the Secretary of State said, that we have laws to prevent hate speech, but is not at all clear that they will prevent the kind of harmful speech that will be protected under this Bill. It may not always be the case that there is a victim of harassment as prescribed under the Equality Act if, for instance, there is a meeting to discuss holocaust denial at which only those who support those horrific views are present. Conservative Members have no response on how existing laws will prevent harmful conspiracy theorists—such as anti-vaxxers—who could be protected on campus. Does the Secretary of State's Bill protect the misinformation that causes damage and concern about vaccines and their efficacy, such as was spread by Professor Andrew Wakefield?

Not only could holocaust deniers have their right to speak on campus legally protected, but if they feel they are denied their right, they could take universities and student unions to court to seek financial recompense. They would be able to seek a pay-out from universities, seeking to cash in on public money—students' tuition fees—that should fund teaching and learning.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it also opens the door to states that wish to do us harm? There is a lot of open source evidence about the Chinese communist party using students here to propagate anti-Hong Kong stories and other propaganda on behalf of the Chinese Government. Under the Bill, we would have to allow them to go ahead because otherwise they could take us to court, allowing the harm that they could do to students of Chinese origin who might take a different view.

**Kate Green:** As the House will know, my right hon. Friend commands great expertise on issues of national security, and the Secretary of State must satisfactorily answer his question for the House. I know he would agree with my right hon. Friend, with me and with all right hon. and hon. Members that anything that could put our national security at risk, call it into question or give succour to those who seek to harm this country would have to be prevented. If the Secretary of State can put that assurance on the record now, I know that my right hon. Friend would be grateful for it.

**Gavin Williamson:** Indeed, there is a great deal of concern among students from Hong Kong about the fact that they are being silenced in university campuses up and down this country. They have not had the freedom to speak on campus, which is why this Bill is so important—so that different voices, be they Hong Kongers or Uyghurs, are able to speak on campus and not be silenced by much larger groups. That is exactly why this legislation is so incredibly important. I would love to hear from the hon. Lady what freedoms she actually does think are worth protecting.

**Kate Green:** I am not sure whether the Secretary of State was suggesting that Hong Kong students and Uyghurs are silenced on our campuses, which is of course what we are talking about in this Bill. I am not aware of instances that the Secretary of State has evidenced of such people being silenced on campuses. Indeed, this is a problem with his whole Bill: it is an evidence-free zone when it comes to underpinning the concerns that he says it is addressing.

**Gavin Williamson:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kate Green:** I will take a further intervention—of course I will.

**Gavin Williamson:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Sadly, she is misinformed, as there have been a number of instances where minority students have felt themselves silenced as a result of much larger groups of student bodies putting pressure on, especially within student unions. This is why this legislation is so incredibly important; those students, be they of Hong Kong or Uyghur descent, should always have the ability to be able to talk openly and freely on university campuses so that these challenges can be properly exposed.

**Kate Green:** I am sorry, but I do not think the Secretary of State has been able to answer my direct question about instances of Uyghur and Hong Kong students being deterred from speaking on our campuses. He talks in general terms about some groups being silenced—I agree with him that that is wrong, and I will come on to that point in a moment—but I have asked him to present specific instances to the House. If he cannot do that this afternoon, and I understand that he may not have that information in front of him, perhaps later he will put that evidence in the House of Commons Library so that we can all examine it before the Bill goes into Committee.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady, for whom I have a great deal of respect—I would like to put that on the record—but she is wrong about that. There have been instances, and I am happy to give her detail of them, of

groups of Hong Kong students in British universities being surrounded, physically intimidated and verbally intimidated by students from the Chinese mainland who are also students in this country. This is not isolated; unfortunately, there is a theme of this kind. I know that she would not want to associate herself with this kind of thing.

**Kate Green:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that information, which is clearly shocking. Of course, my question to the Secretary of State would be: if intimidation is involved, why are we not already using the criminal law to address it?

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I am sorry, but the Secretary of State, in his rant, just does not get it, does he? He knows as well as I do that the Chinese communist party is using universities—placing students and funding activities there. If this Bill goes through as outlined, the Chinese communist party will be able to propagate its propaganda, and if a university were to turn around and say no to it, it could then use this Bill to argue for freedom of speech. He may wish to give a safe haven to that type of activity, but I do not.

**Kate Green:** My right hon. Friend makes the point perfectly.

I want to ask the Secretary of State about some other uncertainties that the Bill creates. I think he is seeking to say to the House that the Bill would not protect holocaust deniers. However, if a university did not want to provide a room to holocaust deniers, would the proposed speakers be able to seek compensation through the tort created by clause 3? What if nobody turns up to a meeting that has been booked? Would it be lawful to advertise such a meeting? What about other forms of free speech? Will anti-vax campaigners be protected under the Secretary of State's Bill? Does he believe that a university should be liable under the Bill if it seeks to stop the spread of dangerous misinformation from guest speakers? What about those seeking to spread conspiracy theories or to sow division in our communities? Does he really believe not only that this kind of harmful, hateful, divisive speech should be legally protected on campus, but that those seeking to peddle it can take a university to court for interfering with their right to do so? Those of us on the Opposition Benches believe that there is no place for that on our campuses, and that is why we will be voting for our reasoned amendment this evening.

We have other objections to this Bill. Actually, I cannot understand why the Government think it is needed. An assessment by the Office for Students found that just 53 out of 59,574 events with external speakers were refused permission in 2017-18. Perhaps that was an unusually slow year for cancel culture and there is a real problem. However, last year a survey found, as we have heard, that of 10,000 events with external speakers, only six were cancelled.

**Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): Is not the point that free speech is stifled because people will not even bring these events forward? The hon. Lady must understand from having sat in loads of constituency Labour party meetings how people were silenced for years under the previous Labour leader. In fact, they were driven out of her party, so surely she can understand how that is also happening in education institutions today.

**Kate Green:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my experience of CLP meetings is not that they are silent. However, he does raise a serious point about the chilling effect that I think the Secretary of State, too, suggested. But that cuts both ways. I believe that, subject to this Bill, universities and student unions will become much more fearful that if they host certain events, or allow them to be hosted, they will come under much more pressure to host other unsavoury events, and that that will mean they will stifle debate altogether.

If I may say to the hon. Gentleman, I think it will also mean that the campus will not feel like a safe space for some students. If it is possible for people to come on to campus and assert their right as holocaust deniers to have a meeting room, albeit perhaps to discuss the issue privately, the campus will not feel like a welcoming and safe space for Jewish students.

What is fundamentally wrong with this Bill is that it begins in the wrong place. It has started before we have had a proper national public debate about where we think the acceptable boundary sits between speech that is offensive or hurtful but that ought to be permitted under this Bill, and speech that is harmful, divisive and, though perhaps not unlawful, has no place on campus. I might have been more willing to accept this kind of legislation had that debate taken place across the country and had we had that discussion about boundaries and where we think we sit. Instead, the Government are in a rush to legislate, in the absence of much tangible evidence.

I was talking about the small number of events for which we have evidence that they have been cancelled. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that there will be events that we do not know about that did not take place, but we cannot make legislation on the basis of anecdote and speculation. The figures we have really do not support the idea that there is a crisis of free speech on university campuses. All I can say to the Secretary of State is that if he believes otherwise, will he call on the Office for Students to gather and publish that data every year, so that we can see what sort of legislation might be needed?

The Government's plans, I am afraid, seem to be based pretty much entirely on a report by Policy Exchange, referenced by the Secretary of State and referenced in more than one third of the footnotes of the policy paper that Ministers published in advance of the Bill's publication. The Government's paper cites the report's finding that around one in three academics—I think the Secretary of State referred to this—who identify as being politically right or fairly right have stopped openly airing opinions in teaching and research. He referenced other figures in relation to left and centre-left academics.

Let us examine a bit more of the data. Ten currently serving academics said that they were self-censoring right-wing views. I agree that widespread academic self-censorship would be deeply troubling, but the numbers we have are modest and do not, in my view, really make the case for a legislative response when the Government's priority right now should be students' recovery from the pandemic, making up the learning they have lost and securing their futures. Even if I am wrong, and the Secretary of State is right that there is a chilling effect on campus and that legislation is required to deal with it, do we need this Bill to do it?

**Gavin Williamson:** I am curious to know whether the hon. Lady can state what the acceptable level of self-censorship is that she is comfortable with.

**Kate Green:** The point is not whether I think self-censorship is acceptable—I do not; the question is whether legislation is the right response to it. I just believe that at a time when we have many other priorities to deal with on our university campuses—*[Interruption.]* There should be no self-censorship of lawful and honourable views, but it is not acceptable to make legislation and use valuable parliamentary time to deal with a small number of cases that could be dealt with more effectively without legislation. The reason I say that is that we already have the legislative framework we need on the statute book.

Section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, "Freedom of speech in universities, polytechnics and colleges", reads almost identically to new section A1 under clause 1 of the Bill. It creates a legal duty to promote freedom of speech for students, staff and visiting speakers. Similarly, the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 already creates a duty for the universities regulator to protect academic freedom.

**Gavin Williamson rose—**

**Kate Green:** The Secretary of State should have perhaps made these arguments in his opening speech, but I will of course give way to him again, although I hope he will make time for other colleagues.

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Lady is always incredibly generous, and it is much appreciated. I hope that I always repay the compliment in return when she intervenes. I am sure she will also be able to set out the steps under the existing legislation that an academic, a student or, potentially, a visiting speaker who has been cancelled could take.

**Kate Green:** I think the Secretary of State is driving at clause 3 of the Bill, which would create a statutory tort. *[Interruption.]* I think he is driving at the need for clause 3 and the statutory tort, and I just want to express some of my concerns about that.

**Gavin Williamson:** Would you like me to tell you?

**Kate Green:** I am answering the question that the Secretary of State asked me a moment ago. The Bill means that we will be in a situation where those who wish to challenge a refusal to allow them to speak on campus—

**Gavin Williamson:** Would you like me to tell you?

**Kate Green:** No, I would not like the Secretary of State to intervene again while I am still answering the question he asked me a moment ago. The problem with the Bill and clause 3, which creates a new route for individuals, is that it is more harmful in its effect. It opens up the possibility for vexatious litigants and their lawyers repeatedly to bypass internal complaints procedures, repeatedly to bypass the Office of the Independent Adjudicator route or the Office for Students route and go straight to the courts, undermining confidence in those procedures, undermining the funding of universities and student unions and causing confusion about the routes for redress that speakers should be able to take advantage of.



I am going to make a little bit of progress, because I know that many others want to come into the debate. The Bill before us tonight is wasting legislative time by repeating provisions already found in law to address a problem that has not been evidenced by the debate so far today. I recognise that the Joint Committee on Human Rights raised concerns that the current legislative framework was complex, but the Government's plans seem only to complicate things further by duplicating legal duties and creating new legally actionable wrongs that would operate in parallel to university and student union processes. It seems impossible that the Bill will leave the position clearer than it is currently.

Let me be generous and assume for a moment that, despite the provisions that already exist in our laws, this Bill is needed, that in the face of the evidence we have heard so far there is a crisis of free speech on campuses and that the Bill will remedy the situation. Let us see if it succeeds on its own terms. It does not. It is a mess of duplication, poor definition and ill-thought-through provisions that will set back free speech. Let me start with an easy problem: the extent of the Bill. It applies to registered higher education providers and to student unions, and immediately we appear to hit a gap in coverage. Oxford and Cambridge colleges are not included in the register kept by the Office for Students. Does that mean that if a violation of free speech takes place in a building owned by, say, Balliol college, Oxford, instead of by the University of Oxford, it is not within the scope of the Bill? Or if it takes place in a pub in the city of Cambridge owned by the university, and someone is removed from the pub for offensive but legal speech, could they take legal action against the university?

Who are members of the university for the purposes of the Bill? MillionPlus, for example, has asked whether it would cover emeritus professors. Is it desirable to risk the Office for Students, a body whose board is appointed directly by politicians, effectively becoming a state censor of controversial topics? Why does the Secretary of State believe that clause 3 is needed? Why does he think that we need a route straight to court, bypassing university complaints procedures? If he does believe that a route to court is necessary, can he say whether there will be any limit on the damages that could be awarded? Does he not understand that, as Universities UK has warned, this risks giving a free pass to vexatious litigants and their lawyers?

Even if we thought the Bill were needed, it is poorly drafted and counterproductive. Today, we are debating a Bill that has been put forward in response to a problem that exists largely in the mind of the Secretary of State. Even if the problem did exist, the Bill would not be needed because its core provisions already exist in our laws, and even if new legislation were needed, the Bill creates more problems than it solves and is poorly drafted. In short, in every way that a Bill can fail, this Bill fails.

However, the real menace is what the Bill will achieve if the Conservative party is able to get it on to the statute book. It will enshrine legal protections for harmful and divisive speech. The kind of speech that we would not tolerate in this House would be protected in universities across the country. The Bill creates a new legal framework that allows for those responsible for such harmful speech to take legal action against universities, eating into the resources that ought to be educating our young people

and supporting our world-class research programmes. The Bill is unnecessary and it is poorly drafted, but above all, it is deeply wrong and those of us on the Labour Benches will not support it. I commend our reasoned amendment to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** As the Chairman of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), is now unable to take part in the debate this evening, we will go directly by video link to Carol Monaghan. Just before the hon. Lady begins, I should tell the House that after her speech there will be an immediate time limit of eight minutes, and that that could soon be reduced to a much shorter time limit, depending on how many Members decide at the last minute not to speak, which is a phenomenon that we face quite often at present. That is why we will start with a generous time limit; it is up to Members how we progress after that.

5.59 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: Education and Scots law are devolved, so I will keep my comments brief; hopefully, that will help move things along this evening. However, the issue of free speech is also pertinent to Scotland.

Many concerns have been raised about academic freedom and the role universities play in championing free speech. This Bill is being presented in a worrying climate, where particular views or political positions can lead to calls to remove lecturers from their positions or students from their courses. Free speech within the law includes the right to say things that, though lawful, others may find upsetting, but it cannot be exercised in a way that causes harm to others.

The law prohibits speech that incites murder or violence, stirs up racial or sectarian hatred or is defamatory or malicious, but, as I said, it does not prohibit speech that others might find upsetting or offensive. There is always going to be a challenge in correctly balancing that, but in a democracy it is important that those who hold views that may differ from one's own are allowed to voice them.

Healthy debate on challenging topics has long been an important component of university life, but recently that has come under threat. According to the recent Joint Committee on Human Rights report on freedom of speech in universities, student societies should not stop other student societies holding their meetings: the right to protest does not extend to stopping events entirely. I agree with the shadow Secretary of State that there have been very few incidents, but unfortunately there have been examples of events having been stopped and speakers prevented from speaking.

Every one of us will have made comments for which we find ourselves attacked rather than challenged. An environment that seeks to close down debate is unhealthy. It is important to understand and, when appropriate, to challenge difficult points of view. The move towards a cancel culture should cause any functioning democracy grave concerns. I am a teacher by profession, and in my former life I often presented students with difficult views and difficult positions so that they could research the topic, inform themselves and produce their own balanced argument. That is how we develop our own opinions—through hearing different things that are challenging and forming our own position on them.



[Carol Monaghan]

Although there may be some good intent behind the Bill, it should be approached with caution. To be clear, this Government are curtailing academic freedom by ordering blog posts by academics to be removed. They have told English schools not to use materials from organisations promoting the end of capitalism. I am not convinced that this Government can ever be the champion of free speech; they seem to support free speech when it suits their purposes and oppose it when Conservative ideals are challenged.

More practically, there are concerns about how the Bill will operate. Under the Bill as it is, any lecture, seminar or guest speech could end in a law suit. The Bill is almost unique in the breadth of its provision. In a normal judicial review, if someone wishes to challenge a decision of the Government, they must have standing—in other words, they must be affected by the decision that they wish to challenge—but in this Bill there is no “standing” requirement: any person, business, campaign group or organisation can sue. There are concerns that particular groups, especially well-funded ones, may be able to sue universities in respect of speakers who are there simply to provide debate and a challenging argument for students.

There are also concerns about the ability of universities to balance the new requirements with other statutory obligations. According to the Russell Group, there is a risk that the duty to promote free speech might indirectly undermine universities’ efforts to comply fully with the public sector equality duty, which includes duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to foster the participation in university life of affected groups.

While I recognise many of the issues being discussed here today, it is important that a proper balance is struck between freedom of speech and discrimination. While the SNP will participate in the debates on the Bill, it is important to say that this is a devolved issue, and we will be participating as and when we feel it is appropriate.

6.5 pm

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Before I turn to the substance of my speech, I want to take on a matter raised by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). She was calling, “Where’s the data in this?” There has already been one set of answers with respect to the chilling effect, which we cannot measure, but the issue here is also quite important in terms of the importance of free speech.

I am a scientist by training. All the transformations in science—every single one—have been a challenge of an existing paradigm. They have often been opposed, often by the Church; we heard about Darwin, but there was Kepler and Copernicus and others at the same time. There have always been challenges to existing science. That has been a thousand times more important than anything we can measure, and we cannot judge it in advance. I just make that point about the importance of free speech. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that free speech is a fundamental principle. That is why it is a fundamental principle and why we cannot simply go on a percentage here and a percentage there.

This country—this Parliament, in fact—has for over 300 years enshrined our right to free speech in law. The 1689 Bill of Rights became a symbol of hope for the rights of people everywhere. It is the most fundamental of freedoms, and it became a symbol everywhere. In 1948—we talk about holocaust deniers; that was the most sensitive time for these sorts of arguments—it was enshrined as article 19 of the universal declaration of human rights, which said:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Today that right is under threat. I am amazed that the Labour party has not recognised that, but let us see how we get on. It is under threat in the very institutions where it should be most treasured—namely, our universities. I will return to some facts on the matter in a minute.

Freedom of speech only matters where it is controversial, when it is challenging. That is why the greatest characterisation of free speech is the one attributed to Voltaire, who said:

“I may detest what you say”—

I think that was the original phrasing—

“but I will fight to the death for your right to say it.”

I generally try not to detest or even dislike my political opponents, although there is one Labour Member who attacked J. K. Rowling in the most disgraceful terms. I would not for a second want to see him cancelled, but I want to see him here, debating the issue, because he would lose the debate. That is our protection in terms of free speech—not obliteration, but challenge.

Voltaire understood that creativity and progress in a society are dependent on acts of intellectual rebellion, dissent, disagreement and controversy, no matter how uncomfortable, but today the cancel culture movement thinks it is reasonable to obliterate the views of people it disagrees with, rather than to challenge them in open debate. The interesting element of the latter part of my career has been watching the change to this.

Social media has had an extraordinary impact. It has accelerated the growth of online lynch mobs, magnified their effect and facilitated their organisation. Today there is a terrible outbreak of intolerance in modern society: the so-called culture wars, which remind me of nothing so much as McCarthyism in the United States. When I first, as it were, came of age politically, this was still in living memory—both McCarthyism and the end of Stalinism. This is like the early stages of a totalitarian repression in other countries.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman wholeheartedly regarding the concerns about what is happening on social media. Is that not precisely why we need an online harms Bill to tackle that sort of abuse rather than the Bill we have before us?

**Mr Davis:** Precisely. The hon. Lady prefaces the argument I am going to make, which is that we do need to use the online harms Bill as well, but this Bill is just a part of that.

As I said, the behaviour that we have seen in the online battles that have taken place reminds me of McCarthyism. If hon. Members think that is an exaggeration, I recommend that they read the account in *The Sunday Times* three weeks

ago by Christie Elan-Cane of her mistreatment, or indeed by Suzanne Moore of hers. The incredible and repressive verbal violence, and threats of actual physical violence, alongside heavily orchestrated attacks on their reputations and work, were frightening in the extreme to people whose reputations were already well-established. It is therefore no wonder that ordinary people are terrified to speak out for fear of losing their jobs, their friends and their reputations. This is the “chilling” issue that we have been talking about.

The Bill is to correct a small—I grant you, it is small—but extraordinarily important symbolic aspect of this modern McCarthyism, namely the attempt to no-platform a number of speakers, including Amber Rudd, Julie Bindel, Peter Hitchens, Peter Tatchell and others. I hope it is just a first step in a programme to bring free speech back to Britain. I name them rather than enumerate them for a reason—because they are all established people. If established people with high reputations can be terrorised, suppressed or put down, how is it going to be for somebody without the defences that they have?

As the Secretary of State said, the Bill replaces section 43 of the Education (No. 2) Act—the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston also referred to this—which imposes an obligation to take reasonably practical steps to uphold free speech on campus. The Bill replaces that with a slightly broader duty and extends it to apply to student unions as well. I think that is correct. It creates an enforcement mechanism, which was also missing before, so that students, academics and visiting speakers whose speech rights have been violated can hold higher education providers and student unions to account. Someone whose speech rights are breached by a university can lodge a complaint with the director for freedom of speech, who will have the power to investigate it and, if the complaint is upheld, fine the institution in question and compensate the victim. The students, academics or speakers will also be able to sue for denial of free speech. It is important that these mechanisms work—that is why this is important as an adjunct to the existing legislation—because the suppression of free speech in universities has a chilling effect on free speech in all of society. It is the pinnacle of free speech in our society, so if it is removed there, that facilitates and legitimises removing it everywhere else.

To come back to the point that the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) raised with me, it is important that we follow this up in other areas. In the online harms Bill, we should protect free speech from casual suppression by commercial platforms. We should look hard at the effect of organised online intimidation and seek to make it less easy, perhaps by removing anonymity from perpetrators. The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston talked about anti-vaxxers. I am very pro-vaccine, for fairly obvious reasons. However, in the name of suppressing anti-vaxxers’ propaganda, quite a lot of legitimate scientists who had objections to the exact mechanisms of lockdown, raised concerns about blood clots and so on found themselves suppressed online. We have to recognise that this is not an easy dividing line to draw.

Managed free speech is a very hard idea to promote, pursue and make work. Modern communications are a major force for either good or evil. We should make sure that we facilitate the right one, and this Bill is just the first step in that important process.

6.14 pm

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I feel compelled to speak in today’s debate because higher education is absolutely vital to the success of Nottingham South. In the past, people in my city worked as makers—of textiles, cigarettes and bicycles. Now, the site of the vast Raleigh factory is the University of Nottingham’s Jubilee campus. Nottingham College’s Adams building is a former lace factory, and the old Boots site in the city centre, where ibuprofen was invented, is now BioCity, a business incubator jointly owned by the city’s two universities and using their outstanding research to support the growth of ambitious life science businesses, creating jobs and opportunities for my constituents and ensuring that Nottingham’s economy has a bright future.

I care deeply about the success of higher education and the success of Nottingham’s two world-class universities. They will need to adapt to meet the challenges of a post-pandemic, post-Brexit world and to do much more to ensure that they are accessible to every young person who wants and has the ability to benefit from an academic education, and to ensure that they are welcoming places for young people from all backgrounds that support students to learn and to thrive.

In the interim conclusion of their review of post-18 education and funding—the Augar review—published in January, the Government said that there would be

“bold investments and reforms to build a high quality, unified system.”

They committed to

“introducing a Lifelong Loan Entitlement from 2025”,

described as a “radical change”. If change is coming to post-18 education, as it clearly is, our universities must be ready to meet it, but instead of clarity on those important issues from Government, we have today’s Bill.

I also care deeply about the students who come to study in our city. I want them to have a great experience living in Nottingham. I want them to stay on in the city after they graduate. I want them to think and speak positively and warmly about Nottingham when they return to their homes across the UK and the world. I also want the young people from my constituency who go to study in other places to have good experiences. Students tell me that they are worried about the cost of living when they are studying, particularly the high cost of rent and transport. They tell me that they are concerned about their safety on the streets and on campus, particularly women students. They tell me that they are worried about their mental health and accessing the support they need while away at university.

My constituents raise other concerns. Being home to more than 50,000 students sometimes puts pressure on our city’s local services or gives rise to tensions in neighbourhoods. Rising student numbers have impacted on the local housing market over a long period. In Nottingham, we are working to address all these issues by bringing together residents, local partners, including the two universities and their student unions, and the city council. It is not easy and, in the last year, there have been particularly difficult periods, but we remain focused on finding solutions.

The pandemic has hit Nottingham hard and it continues to impact on students, long-term residents and the universities. There are real concerns about the future of our hospitality sector and our high streets and about

[Lilian Greenwood]

the ability of our health services to cope with a third wave of infections. Our universities, local residents, prospective students, returning students and their parents will all want reassurance about measures to keep them safe ahead of the autumn term. They need to know how Government will support the requirement to quarantine for thousands of overseas students coming to study in our city. They want to know what the covid testing regime will look like. The youngest students want to know how they will be able to access their second vaccinations when they start at university. They want to know when they might be required to self-isolate and how they will be supported if they are. This year, many students have had to pay rent on accommodation that they have been unable to use while the part-time jobs they rely on to support themselves through education have been unavailable. They want to know what the Government are doing to protect them from such unfairness and financial hardship. These are big issues—serious concerns—that demand answers and solutions, none of which are addressed by this Bill.

The issue that this Bill seeks to address is not on anyone's list of priorities. It is a sledgehammer to crack a very small nut, while other important issues in the sector and outside it are not being addressed. Why do we not have a Bill to address online racist abuse of the sort that we have seen in the last 24 hours? Why are we not debating the Government's plans for better student support in order to widen participation? Why is the Government's priority protecting hate speech, rather than the students who face racism or sexual harassment on campus, or students who are struggling with poor mental health?

Freedom of speech, and the free exchange of ideas in pursuit of truth and knowledge, is absolutely central to our universities' whole purpose, but where is the evidence that there is a problem? The vice-chancellor of Nottingham Trent University confirmed to me yesterday that not a single event at the university has been cancelled due to the content to be debated. The Bill is unnecessary and unclear. It risks opening up our universities to vexatious and frivolous claims, and it may actually make universities more risk-averse and more cautious about whom they invite to speak.

Just a few weeks ago, some Conservative MPs seemed determined to create division among our country's football fans by criticising the England team for visibly expressing their opposition to racism by taking the knee—freedom of speech. Today, the Government are trying to manufacture a row about free speech on campus. The Government should be working with universities and students to address the real priorities for higher education. It is shameful that they are not doing so, and that is why I oppose the Bill.

6.21 pm

**Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con): I speak today from experience of working with universities and as an academic studying physics many years ago. What I found during that time was the importance of enabling diversity of thought, the ability to challenge ideas and the ability to propose new ideas, even though they go against the grain of what others may think.

Over 10 years ago, I worked on a project with a Russell Group university that would not allow its academics to blog because it was too scared that they might say the wrong thing. I successfully encouraged the university to set up a new website that included the big debate, which enabled academics to have a yes/no debate on the topic of the day and to provide different points of view. That is what academia and universities should be about: they should be about debating things to get to the truth.

As we have seen over the past year with covid, there have been disagreements about the science. We have seen disagreements about the ethics and morality of different issues that have impacted on us all, and we must make sure that we enable and continue that within our universities. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) mentioned earlier, the challenge is that we have to look at this issue through the lens of modern society. Ten years ago, blogs were a new thing; now, social media is everywhere, and what happens in one campus can go across the country and the world in a matter of minutes.

We see all the time the awful impact of what I call hate-mobbing—the idea that, all of a sudden on social media, one person is targeted for their point of view. In many cases, it might be because they have an absolutely abhorrent point of view and should not be voicing it in the way that they are doing, but the point is that we need to make sure that such views are debated and scrutinised. I worry that we are moving towards what I would call a swipe-left society, like with certain apps, whereby people keep swiping until they get to a point of view or debate with which they agree, and that is the only thing that they see. We must make sure that, in universities, we challenge each other and see the arguments of other points of view, to make sure that the debate is rounded and that, as I say, we get to the truth.

Andy Warhol famously said that, in the future, we would all have 15 minutes of fame, but increasingly I see that we are getting 15 minutes of shame, with people being attacked for their points of view. We have to make sure that we protect them on campus, because the academics and students of today will be in this House in 10 or 20 years' time. They will be the leaders of our culture and society. They will be the people teaching our next generation. If they feel that they are being stifled in their view, and if they are scared of expressing a point of view that is different, we stifle them and society, and the seeds of doubt are planted now for generations to come.

There is another really important point here that we must take into account. We have talked about hate and hate-filled speech, and, of course, we do not want to give those platforms, but we also need to make sure that such views are scrutinised. The shadows are where hate festers. The awfulness of certain people's point of view is not dismissed from their mind because they do not say it, they just hide it and get others to hide it with them, and then it becomes a movement or a moment. We must make sure that we shine a light on hate, that we shine a light on different points of view, because if we do so we can argue that, quite often, what is being said is absolutely foolish and nonsense. Anti-vaxxers are a good example of that. After a year of our inboxes being filled with, at times, utter nonsense and fearmongering, science and the success of our vaccine programme has proved that all wrong.



There is a famous phrase that I like, which is that a mind stretched by a new idea never returns to the same size. With the use of free speech, the truest form of free speech, in academia and universities, we stretch everybody's minds and we challenge each other to have new beliefs and new perspectives. That is why I support this Bill today. We need to make sure that we protect freedom of speech on campuses more than anywhere because that is the one place where we should be challenging each other to find the truth and to be able to support that for our society and our nation to come.

6.26 pm

**Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): Freedom of speech is one of the building blocks of a democratic society. Here in the UK, we take ours for granted, and hearing a variety of opinions on every important issue helps us to form our own and helps us to choose political, societal and cultural leaders who represent our own beliefs, reflect our values, and pledge to uphold them when in public office. Similarly, we learn what we find unacceptable, what to reject at the ballot box, and how to form and strengthen our own arguments against the views with which we disagree.

I remember how sinister it seemed when Mrs Thatcher's Government chose to ban the voices of Sinn Féin from 1988 until 1994, so that broadcasters had to use actors' voices instead. While there were very strong arguments for doing so—I certainly have no agreement or any affinity whatsoever with the actions associated with that group, which, at the time, affected my family directly—banning the public from hearing what they had to say seemed controlling, disturbing, patronising and heavy-handed as it potentially prevented those of us with an interest in politics from forming our own full views on one of the key political topics of that era. Similarly, in a recent Bill, the Government have banned peaceful political protest and demonstrations, which is a vital way to make our views heard.

The recent trend to no-platform those whose opinions we may not like feels somewhat sinister, too. After all, universities are think-tanks and seats of learning. We must be able to hear from a variety of academics, writers and thinkers on both current and historical issues. Increasingly, academic freedom has sadly become a feminist issue, too. It is not an earth-shattering surprise that there is a worrying trend to no-platform or cancel mostly women from some universities. Recent high-profile cases include writers and broadcasters such as Germaine Greer, Julie Bindel, and Jenni Murray; and academics such as Kathleen Stock, Alice Sullivan, Rosa Freedman, Selina Todd, Shereen Benjamin and many others. Far from being just a handful of women accused of wrongdoing and condemned as heretics, this is just the tip of the iceberg as many students, too, have been asking the wrong kinds of questions. Crucially, in such cases, the women and some men themselves are then considered to be banned as people and become the subject of targeted harassment, both in their places of work and across social media. It is vital that women are allowed to speak, vital that we are allowed to question, and vital that we are able to keep pushing open doors that have previously been closed to us.

Of course, academic freedom and freedom of speech must also be balanced. Students and staff have to feel safe from hate and prejudice. Recently, the all-party group against antisemitism, of which I am a vice-chair,

has written several letters to the vice-chancellor of Bristol University to condemn the views expressed by one of their staff. Holocaust denial is not a legitimate opinion or a valid point of view. Perhaps those who think so have missed the testimony of survivors or the very real evidence that still exists on the sites of those atrocious acts of evil. So, too, must we be allowed to dissect our past role in the repulsive histories of slavery and colonialism. Those facts must be taught in an honest and unfiltered way in order for us to view them from where we are now and in the context of our society today.

There has to be a balanced approach, and we have to be able to entrust universities and their staff and unions with this issue, but I am not convinced that legislation is the way to go. Universities are under increasing commercial pressure, and in a more competitive market, threatening legal action over their decisions is not going to help when they have been under considerable financial strain. How do we ensure that the balance between freedom of speech and hateful prejudice is maintained? Is a set of rules and a threat of financial penalties the best way to protect freedom of speech? Why are the proposals framed around freedom of speech, not academic freedom? As the academic Shereen Benjamin writes:

"Academic freedom specifically refers to the freedom of all members of universities...to pursue whatever lines of enquiry they decide, in research, teaching and public engagement, without fear or favour."

While I broadly support the aims of this Bill and think that it raises some really important points for debate, I do not believe legislation right now is entirely necessary; it seems a little like a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

6.31 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con) [V]: I strongly support this much-needed Bill. Over recent years, I have been very concerned to hear of numerous restrictions on freedom of speech in academic settings. A doctorate student told me:

"There really is no point me trying for an academic career with my political and religious views."

A career councillor gives the advice to Christian students—students holding what many in this country would consider to be traditional faith-based views held over hundreds of years—that

"If you're seeking a career in academia, expunge all mention of your faith or Church membership from your CV or social media to avoid difficulties which these could cause in your job chances."

A student told me that he was stressed and worried for a long period about whether he would be disciplined in some way and that it might affect his degree, because his university authorities were investigating a private conversation that he had had with friends in a university bar or common room, which had simply been overheard by someone else and reported. The conversation was not in breach of any regulation, and there was clearly no harassment, no abuse and no threat of violence.

Universities, of all places, should be environments of genuine diversity and of open debate, free exchange and the exploration of ideas—however unpopular or unfashionable—without fear, yet there clearly is real fear today among certain academics about expressing certain views, often deeply held ones. Two years ago, a group of parliamentarians, including me, conducted a cross-party inquiry examining areas of life in the UK today that make it challenging for a Christian to live in

[Fiona Bruce]

accordance with their beliefs, and one such area we looked at was academia. One witness working in academia told us that, in preparation for giving evidence to us, he conducted a short survey. He contacted 69 Christian academics whom he knew in institutions across the country and asked them: “Do you feel your academic career would be adversely affected if you were to be public or more public about your faith?” Virtually half of those asked—34—replied yes, and not one of them on being asked was willing to be identified to our committee for fear of the potential negative impact on their career.

If I may, I will cite one more of the many concerning examples evidencing why this Bill is necessary, and it is one that involved me. I was invited by Oxford Students for Life to talk about my parliamentary campaign to outlaw sex-selective abortion. As I started to speak to a gathering of about 100 students, an attempt was made to no-platform me. A uniformed official arrived in the room and requested that the whole meeting be stopped, apparently as the event, including my views, would cause offence to students sitting in a common room on the far side of the quad opposite. They could see but could not hear me. There were many rich ironies to the situation. I was effectively being discriminated against for speaking against discrimination, for which across the world many more girls are aborted than boys, and I was being prevented from simply relating to my work that is already available in the public domain. Most of it is in *Hansard*. Eventually, the organisers of the meeting, the officials and the objectors reached a compromise: I could continue speaking if all the curtains in the room were closed.

That was a completely unacceptable incident. It subsequently resulted in an apology from the authorities, but it was one of the reasons why I was prompted to join fellow members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights in holding our 2018 inquiry on freedom of speech in universities. The inquiry concluded that, in universities:

“A number of factors are limiting free speech”

It revealed a plethora of such incidents—plenty of evidence that Opposition Members may like to look at—while many more are clearly never reported. One university tutor told us that he had had no idea of the extent of the issue until he started looking into it in response to our inquiry. We heard of challenges such as student groups finding difficulty in getting space at freshers’ fairs, in booking rooms for speakers, in getting approvals for speakers or simply in registering as a university society at all. I had hoped that adequate change would follow our report’s recommendations, perhaps through well enforced guidelines or codes of practice, but not so, hence the need for legislative change and this welcome Bill.

I have three final points. First, on subsections (6) and (9) of proposed new section A1 of the Higher Education and Research Act, I am concerned that the freedom for academic job applicants to express their views should not be limited to freedom in areas

“within their field of expertise.”

In many cases, academics’ expressed views may range more widely, but they should not be affected in their job applications just because of that. I ask the Minister to check with the draftsmen.

Secondly, my role as the Prime Minister’s special envoy for freedom of religion or belief is primarily international facing and, as I and colleagues in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office constantly say, promoting freedom of religion or belief is a key human rights priority for the Government. We aspire to be a global leader in FORB, but I cannot speak credibly in the international community and arena about the discrimination faced by people in other countries on account of their beliefs—whether they cannot get a job, an education or otherwise; of course, much persecution is far worse—if we do not scrupulously apply the principles of article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights in this country. I hope that *Hansard* will put that here in full. That point is frequently made to me in connection with these issues.

Finally, let us be in no doubt that the challenges to freedom of speech and the very real chilling effect that accompanies them are not limited to university settings but extend far more widely. There is more to be done to protect freedom of speech in this country effectively, but the Bill is a good start.

6.38 pm

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I absolutely agree with lots of what has been said about how it is vital that we have robust debate. I am challenged daily by people in one forum or another—and, to be honest, that is the best part of my job. It is the bit that I like the most, and it is the bit that I would seek in our universities.

I wonder if the Secretary of State remembers when, in his time in the Whips Office, one of the Whips wrote to all the universities to ask them what they were teaching about Brexit. That Whip promised us a book, but I have checked with the Library and it is not there. So he was not necessarily writing to the universities for his book research. One wonders why he was writing to them. I look forward to the book. The Secretary of State will remember that and, no doubt, I was robust with his colleague at the time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) highlighted from the Front Bench the fact that last year six in 10,000 events were cancelled, mostly due to incorrect paperwork. I think six is probably too many—unless there was really bad paperwork—so I thought that I should read to the Secretary of State six cases that have come across my desk that I think need a Bill and Government time, rather than Twitter leaking into our Chamber. My husband always says, “It’s funny how you politicians take on issues because the internet has leaked all over you as if that’s all that matters.” This Bill feels a little bit like the internet leaking all over this magnificent building.

I will read about a very serious case of a university student being quite seriously silenced: “I am under an NDA which relates to my experiences of being raped on campus and how the university dealt with my complaint, and threatens me in a written contract of expulsion if I tell anybody about my experiences. In fact, I am breaking my NDA by emailing you and I hope you understand how strongly I feel about this issue given I am putting myself at risk to speak out about it.”

I turn to another case for the Secretary of State to listen to. This involves a university that has already been mentioned today. One woman said,

“we were very explicit—each of us—in describing exactly what had happened...this was not consensual and I want something to be done about that.”

The three women outlined their allegations of varying severity, ranging up to rape. The normal response to this sort of testimony is to lay out the options available—either to go to the police or to complain to their college or university—but the women were not told that; they were told: “It will be too onerous on you to go through the complaints system.” Complaining through the college was presented as an unappealing option. One of the women later wrote that they

“were advised that the process of pursuing any form of disciplinary action would not be worth the emotional toll it would take on us.”

One of the women in this particular case—which involved three women, so we are now up to four of our six—had to leave the university, not the perpetrator of the crimes against her.

Another case that was widely reported on in the newspapers happened at Oxford University Women’s Boat Club. When a woman told a senior scholar of her sexual assault, the professor laughed and said:

“I totally get it, I thought we had sorted it out the last time but we clearly haven’t...It’s a very toxic combination of alcohol and very young athletes at university, it doesn’t work at all.”

In a separate part of the discussion, the professor said:

“This university is not very good on these student welfare-type issues.”

There are the six cases. Where is the action on the widespread problem of sexual harassment and sexual abuse on the campuses in our country? I have just given six cases; where is the Bill and the priority for this thing that silences people whose names we will never hear? They could have brilliant scientific ideas but will leave university because of what has happened to them. Where is the regulator in the Office for Students who will provide the power to impose fines and breaches when universities do things wrong? Where is it? Where can I send this woman with a non-disclosure agreement? Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to intervene on me, because I would love to give that woman some advice.

Where is the role equivalent to the director of freedom of speech and academic freedom? Where is the £1 million in this Bill for an officer to oversee universities’ efforts in this regard? Where is the £1 million to spend on an officer who goes to every university and makes sure that the women on those campuses are safe? Where is that officer? Where is the Bill for that?

This reminds me so much of what happened in schools recently with Everyone’s Invited, which included university campuses as well. The Secretary of State comes forward and says, “We’re going to do something about this. This is horrifying. We are going to make sure that something is done about this.” These issues were highlighted five years ago. It was five years ago, 10 years ago, that the issues that I am standing here talking about today were highlighted. Where is our Bill? Where is the Bill on the sexual harassment and abuse that is silencing thousands of people on campuses in every single town and city up and down this country? Where is our Bill? Why is this the priority? This reminds me very much of the fact that I am constantly told that the Government make a priority of addressing violence against women and girls, but the amount that they are proposing to spend is £100 million less than on the boat that the Queen does not even want. It’s the internet—it’s leaking.

Where is the urgency needed for those women and men on university campuses who have been silenced by a lack of process? Where is the Bill for them? Where is the urgency? Where was the urgency five years ago when we told the Secretary of State about schools, and it took a young girl who had been raped and put back in the classroom with her rapist—the then Secretary of State being taken to court—before any regulation was even written? What do we have to do? Do I have to start a meme on the internet? Do I have to get some sort of following from the bots to make this issue heard? Where is the Bill on sexual harassment and sexual abuse, and the processes that we can take if something bad happens? Where is it? Without it, we will be stifling freedom of speech more than any list of anybody who has not been able to speak at a university.

I like to list the women who have been failed in this country, but eight minutes? Eight hours would not cut it. Where is this Bill on that element of freedom of speech—or is it just not politically expedient enough? I honestly want everyone to have the freedom to speak freely and give out their ideas. Darwin has been used as an example all day today; had Darwin been a woman who had been abused at university, none of you would be able to say her name.

6.46 pm

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): To think and speak freely is the foundation of an open society; there will be little disagreement about that across this House. One might think that the institutions that, in the words of Cardinal Newman, give a man

“a clear...view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them and a force in urging them”,

would be the champions of challenging contrasting ideas—the scions of scrutiny. It is therefore a bitter irony that some people with power in higher education today are the enemies of freedom and that many of those who are not are intimidated into acquiescence. How sad it is that intellectual freedom has to be protected by law from those with power in those institutions.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) cited some examples, and there are many. Let me just give a flavour. Selina Todd, the professor of modern history at Oxford, following pressure from trans activists—she was accused of transphobia, needless to say—was no platformed at Exeter College. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) mentioned, former Home Secretary Amber Rudd also had her invitation to speak at Oxford rescinded.

It is not only visiting speakers but academics and students in our universities who are subject to this kind of intolerance. The University of Plymouth investigated a senior lecturer, Mike McCulloch, for tweeting “All lives matter” in June 2020; a student at Leeds University was placed under investigation for questioning Black Lives Matter; and a first-year student at the University of Kent, as the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) no doubt knows, was placed under investigation for questioning whether George Floyd deserved martyrdom given his criminal record—a violent criminal record, indeed.

Those are all contestable opinions. Of course they are all matters of debate and of course some of them are contentious views, but the whole point about a free society



[Sir John Hayes]

is that we should be able to hold and express contentious views. It is worrying—more than that, chilling—that, as has been said, we are creating a cohort of young people who are hyper-sensitive; no longer daring; no longer prepared to think the unthinkable; deprived of intellectual rigour and imagination. The hallmarks of that woke culture—as we have heard, perpetuated principally on social media—are spite, hate and vitriol. Frank Luntz, the American pollster, has warned that the culture battles we have seen so far are nothing compared with what is on its way. The cultural detritus from the United States is making its way to our shores relentlessly: a culture that is intolerant of measured, principled disagreement. It has gripped many in the United Kingdom, as I have already described. I could go on with a list and I am happy to make that list available to the House of Commons Library if that is helpful to colleagues who doubt the depth of the problem.

The deliberate machinations of the few are dividing the many. We should react with horror when some of those trusted with fostering the flower of Britain's academic youth are instead intent on producing a carbon copy of politically correct individuals: less ambitious, less daring, less imaginative than the generation that came before. Policing the thoughts of those students who disagree has become commonplace, for the defining traits of the unblinking all-seeing eye of wokery are short sight and narrow minds. George Orwell recognised that this is not simply a problem for students. Academics are subject to the same kind of faults. He said that the charlatans of his time were peddling ideas that were so stupid only intellectuals could believe them. The people who seem to want to impose their exclusive vision on us are so often ignorant of history, apparently ignorant of biology and certainly ignorant of human nature.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I wholeheartedly agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that we must remind people that we must hear, if not accept, other arguments, and that if we continue to raise generations who believe their opinion trumps others and that to disagree with them means to hate them, we will find ourselves in a very different UK?

**Sir John Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman is right that having one's views challenged, testing ideas and being scrutinised is the characteristic of the open society advocated at the beginning of my speech. It is right that we should both have our views challenged and sometimes be disturbed by counter-arguments. It is extraordinary that feminists, notably Germaine Greer and Julie Burchill, have been no-platformed for believing in biologically based legal rights that women fought to have protected for so long.

The enemies of an open society have successfully cancelled a litany of students and academics who dared to espouse understandings of race, gender and sex which were once regarded as *a priori* assumptions. Those without wealth or influence to resist have too often been left at the mercy of the mob. These are the quiet everyday stories of the liberal tyranny which go unreported. These are the people who need recourse and outreached hands to assure them that the Government believe in the right to disagree and, yes, disturb—and perhaps, yes, to offend. For to be inspired means first being moved

and changed in a way sufficiently startling to open up new horizons, extend boundaries and give life to opportunities. Deprived of that we are lessened, because in safe spaces where nothing disturbs there is no room for inspiration, no space for innovation. Without the freedom to say what they think, people are poorer. Without laws to defend the lawful entitlement they confer, nations are weaker. Without the chance to read and hear, contest and condone all kinds of ideas, our children are robbed of their future chance to flourish.

The Bill must pass into law in a state that leaves no room for doubters and schemers to carry on with their sanctimoniously bigoted practices. Through ignorance or inaction, we cannot condone the wicked ways of the self-appointed thought police. Make no mistake: this culture war is the issue of our age. It is the struggle of our generation. Nothing matters more. This is our battle of Britain.

6.54 pm

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD) [V]: I start by thanking the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) for her incredibly powerful and moving speech. I offer her my full support and that of my party for her calls for a Bill to tackle sexual abuse and violence on university campuses.

Right now, however, I wish to speak to the reasoned amendment in my name and those of my Liberal Democrat colleagues, even though it was not selected for a vote. I believe in the right to free speech. I welcome the opportunity to challenge people whose views are different from mine and I regard freedom of speech and informed public debate as vital elements of a democratic society. I also believe that universities should absolutely welcome rigorous well informed debate because free speech is, after all, at the heart of academic freedom—the freedom to inquire and explore ideas, facts and data that are difficult and sometimes inconvenient. But the laws required to protect free speech in universities already exist in the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, so no new laws are needed to achieve that goal.

On whether academics are scared to share their own views, the Government's own White Paper acknowledges that the Joint Committee on Human Rights has examined that issue and concluded that it is just not a widespread problem, so no new laws are needed for that either. If the Government believe that there are still concerns, surely a more effective solution would be for them to beef up the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, without having to create a whole new role or whole new piece of legislation.

On no-platforming, research has shown that in 2019-20, of almost 10,000 events involving an external speaker, just six were cancelled—that is 0.06%. Again, the evidence just does not support the Government's claims that this is even really a major problem. It certainly does not justify the heavy-handed approach of giving the Office for Students extended regulatory powers and making it answerable only to the Secretary of State. That is an authoritarian sledgehammer to crack a nut.

The Bill gives students, staff and visiting speakers the right to sue universities and student unions for alleged breaches of free speech, with all the associated costs. That would create an open season for vexatious claims and expensive litigation—and, what is worse, universities would therefore be incentivised to stop holding events

on tricky and controversial issues in the first place, for fear of litigation. The Bill would have a chilling effect because, far from protecting free speech, it would stifle it. At the very least, this legislation must include a threshold for harm, as under the Defamation Act 2013, so that that route cannot be abused by individuals or groups who do not have genuine grievances. There is no place for hate speech in universities, but as it is drafted the Bill would enable holocaust deniers, anti-vaxxers and more to be not only protected on campus but empowered to sue a university in court.

In conclusion, the Liberal Democrats oppose the Bill as worded. It is not based on evidence and is not proportionate. Worst of all, it actively undermines the very principle of free speech that it claims to support. Free speech is about the right of every individual to speak truth to power, but the Bill does the opposite. It gives those in power or with power the ability to determine who is free to say what. Far from protecting our freedoms, it is actually yet another example of this Government's concerted efforts to take our freedoms away. Given that universities are already required to protect freedom of speech and that research suggests that no-platforming is incredibly rare, the Government should drop the Bill entirely. That is what the Liberal Democrat reasoned amendment sought to do.

6.58 pm

**Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con) [V]: I strongly support the Bill, which was a manifesto commitment in an election that gave the Government a landslide majority less than two years ago. Given a growing and worrying cultural trend across our campuses over recent years, the Government are right to bring this legislation forward. It is a matter of deep regret that the Bill is even necessary in 21st-century Britain.

It has been said previously in this House that sunlight is the best disinfectant, and we know that open debate allows good ideas to drive out bad ideas—that, in essence, is the basis of the scientific method. Our places of education should be the last to succumb to the idea of one truth, but freedoms of speech, thought, expression and individuality are now being censored in increasing numbers on campuses across the country, primarily by those of a hard-left mindset but in a manner that has more in common with the European dictatorships of the first part of the last century than a democratic nation such as Britain in the current one. If we do not act now, we risk a central tenet of our democracy being lost.

University used to be a place where students would go to test theories and engage in critical thinking. As Ruth Kelly, the former Labour Education Secretary, said:

“Universities should not only welcome debate and dissent from established ways of thinking—they should actively encourage it, because that’s how we achieve progress and change. If universities were only to allow the regurgitation of the received wisdom, what would be the point of them?”

Well, what indeed?

It is a matter of regret that, too often, political agitators see free speech as something to be destroyed because they are afraid of having their arguments brought out into the open and challenged. The mob mentality is underpinned by a fanatical zeal that they are the enlightened ones and only they hold objective truth. That has given rise to the phenomenon of cancel culture, as hon. Members

have said, whereby anything that challenges the prevailing thought is denounced as heretical, racist or fascist, and in many cases a combination of all three. Examples of the intolerance that has crept into academic life are ever increasing. Peter Hitchens, who was hounded by a mob of students, summarised it well:

“They had absolutely no desire to influence me or debate with me. I was an enemy, not an opponent, and so I should not have dared to be there. My actual existence infuriated them”.

The irony, of course, is that restricting free debate in such a way is deeply undemocratic. Indeed, it is a totalitarian action. This Bill is therefore necessary to prevent a dystopian, Orwellian indoctrination.

Clauses 1 and 2 will amend the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 by creating new duties on governing bodies and student unions to secure freedom of speech. I warmly welcome clause 8, which will enforce that where necessary by creating in the Office for Students a director to champion free speech in academia. Clause 3 is perhaps the most crucial, because proposed new section A6 to the 2017 Act will provide for civil claims to be made where those duties in clauses 1 and 2 are breached. That is critical because it gives the Bill teeth.

The dangers I have outlined are not, of course, isolated to universities. The campus is merely a staging ground for wider civilisation and society. Those who wish to do away with freedom of speech are attempting to dismantle the foundations of our society and to supplant them with their own totalitarian doctrine. By removing freedom of speech, dissenting voices can be silenced and submission ensured. For proof of that we need only look at recent attempts to subject British history to a radical revision and the accompanying attempts to taint our greatest heroes. This is a deliberate and concerted attempt to erode the pillars of our nation so that we are left with nothing to believe in. Once that point is reached, those responsible—the anarcho-Marxist, hard-left agitators—will be able to impose their own, ever-changing standards whereby yesterday’s truth is tomorrow’s crime.

By ensuring in legislation the sanctity of freedom of speech, I hope that the Government set a precedent to consider further actions. There are areas in which the Bill can be improved as it proceeds through its remaining stages, particularly to avoid its being neutered by contradictory interpretations of the Equality Act 2010, but there will be an opportunity to discuss that in more detail at a later stage. I support the Bill’s Second Reading and urge all colleagues on both sides of the House to do likewise.

7.3 pm

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): First, may I congratulate the Minister for Universities on the very reasonable tone with which she has advocated this Bill, and the Secretary of State on his speech? As he said, this Bill is not a battle in a culture war or an ideological effort, but simply an attempt to defend what is already legal in this country. I do not want to aggravate the culture war—which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) says, we are certainly in—but the fact is that there is a battle of ideas going on in our universities, and if we are to prevent the exacerbation of the culture war, we need this Bill, and ideally we need it to be strengthened.

[*Danny Kruger*]

Opposition Members are right in pointing out that there are very few overt instances of censorship, but nevertheless academic freedom is under sustained intellectual attack in our universities. The battle of ideas that we are in is not one in the traditional sense of a clash of opinions and the normal free exchange of ideas that universities are all about. It is much more fundamental than that. It is a battle between, on the one hand, the very idea of the free exchange of opinions and, on the other, the opinion of the radical left, going back to Marx—the idea that the notion of a free exchange of opinions is itself oppressive.

I do not think many Opposition Members are radical Marxists but, in opposing the Bill, they are empowering radicals. I want to do justice to Members on the other side of the House, so I hope you will briefly indulge some student philosophising, Mr Deputy Speaker. The radical left seems to have two strong beliefs. First, it believes that identity is psychological—that a person's true essence and self is constructed by themselves or other people. That explains the extreme sensitivity around people's feelings, because if the self is a psychological construct and people's identity is basically how they feel, being hurt or offended is absolutely catastrophic. An insult is a form of violence—it is almost worse than violence.

The second belief of the radical left is that people can and do suffer what is called false consciousness: they can believe ideas that are not true and that are, in fact, harmful to their own interests. These ideas are also known as conservative opinions, such as a belief in the western political and economic model, in Brexit or in the Conservative party. That explains why the radical left does not have a problem with censorship and why it thinks that censorship is actually necessary for freedom to suppress false consciousness and allow people to discover their real selves, rather than the conservative self that the ruling class has imposed on them.

**Sir John Hayes:** And that is precisely why the word “heretical” is apposite, because views that do not conform in a quasi-religious way to the orthodoxy that my hon. Friend has described are regarded as heresy. Once they are defined as such, almost anything can be legitimised in putting them down.

**Danny Kruger:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he will be delighted that I am about to quote someone with whom he does not strongly agree: Herbert Marcuse. No debate about universities and students would be complete without Marcuse. He is the great Marxist philosopher who basically wrote the script for the radical left. In his “Repressive Tolerance” essay, which is admirably well named, he argued for

“the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism...or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc. Moreover, the restoration of freedom of thought”—

as he calls it—

“may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teachings and practices in the educational institutions”.

That is what we are up against. I do not accuse a single Opposition Member of believing that but, in opposing the Bill, they are empowering those opinions.

We are in a very parlous state in our universities, so I welcome the Bill, its strengthening of the duty for universities to protect free speech, the extension of this duty to student unions as well, the right of academics to sue if they have been no-platformed, and the role of the new free speech champion at the Office for Students. They are all excellent provisions.

To rebut what has been said by Opposition Members, the Bill does not allow hate speech. Hate speech is illegal. The Bill does not protect holocaust denial, which is not protected speech. Under the ECHR, holocaust denial is not protected speech. If a Holocaust denier is no-platformed, they would have no right under the Bill to sue or challenge the university.

**Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is there to deal with the culture of perpetual offence—someone being offended to the point that they are not willing to listen to, or engage in, constructive debate—and that the Bill allows for the promotion of freedom of difference of opinion, so that people can come together and form new ideas but do not always have to agree with what the speaker is saying?

**Danny Kruger:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

I will finish by suggesting a few improvements to the Bill that we might consider in Committee. First, we should go further than insisting that all “reasonably practicable” steps are taken to promote free speech. We should insist that all necessary steps are taken, because there is a real danger in the current wording—for instance, a university might pretend that the cost of security makes an event impracticable, which means that its opponents could effectively boycott it or ensure that it is withdrawn.

Secondly, I think that we should broaden the protections for academics beyond their field of expertise—which begs the question of how we define a field of expertise. What, if a professor of European history were to criticise the Chinese Government, for instance, or indeed criticise his or her own university for being too cosy with the Chinese Government? We need to protect those academics too.

For an academic, in that academic's own field, there is a very important consideration about control of the curriculum—about not so much freedom of speech as the freedom to teach, and the question of who decides what academics should be teaching. We need to explore the concept of conscience rights for academics to resist a drift towards teaching that they would not accept that they should be obliged to carry out. We need some protection for dissent in the system.

As was mentioned by the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), the Bill does not insist that colleges at Oxbridge and Durham take the necessary steps to protect freedom of speech; that applies only to universities and student unions. I think we should extend the obligation to colleges. We should allow academics to appeal not just through the civil law but to an employment tribunal if their academic freedom is restricted. Lastly, I think we need to clarify the role of the Equality Act 2010, which should not be used to close down an event on the grounds that someone says it would constitute harassment or discrimination.



**Mr Kevan Jones:** The hon. Gentleman has just argued for extending the legislation to employment law. Is he aware that universities are covered by a system of tenure which protects their academics? That has nothing to do with employment law.

**Danny Kruger:** The fact is that we are extending protections to universities and all aspects of law should be covered. That should include those who are not covered by tenure—not just academics but visiting speakers, and the students themselves.

As I was saying, I think we need to clarify the role of the Equality Act. Essex University no-platformed two visiting academics who held gender-critical views on the grounds that under the Act the event would constitute harassment or discrimination, and that was quite wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) gave another example earlier.

Opposition Members think that the Bill is unnecessary because there is no real issue and no problem to address. I could not disagree more. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes). I do not think we have debated anything as important as this, except perhaps the Brexit legislation, in the 18 months during which I have been in the House. To prevent a culture war, we need to allow dissident views to be given full expression.

I give all credit to the Minister, and also to Policy Exchange, the Free Speech Union, and all those outside the House who have campaigned for this law. It is very necessary, and I support it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. The next three speakers will still have eight minutes. The speaker who is 19th on the call list has dropped out, so from Beth Winter onwards, the limit will be six minutes.

7.12 pm

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) that there should be no censorship of lawful views, and that there are many pressing issues for students that this Tory Government are not addressing. However, I am convinced that there is mounting evidence that female academics' ability to discuss their rights in law is already being curtailed in our higher education sector.

According to guidance issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2019,

"Freedom of expression is a key part of the higher education experience. Sharing ideas"

freely

"is crucial for learning, and allows students to think critically, challenge and engage with different perspectives."

The guidance states that higher education providers

"should encourage discussion and exchange of views on difficult and controversial"

topics. In the last few years, however, it has come to light that many women in universities across the UK are being censored, harassed and threatened for the simple act of trying to engage in debate and discussion about the impact of gender self-identification on women's sex-based rights.

As has been mentioned, Selina Todd, professor of modern history at Oxford, whose academic specialism is the rise of working-class women, has been given security guards to accompany her to lectures after receiving threats from activists. In late 2019, Essex University rescinded an invitation to Open University professor Jo Phoenix, who had been due to speak at a seminar about trans rights and imprisonment. Protesters labelled her a transphobe, and the seminar was cancelled. This is what concerns me: the labelling of people in that way, especially women. To seek and to ask is to learn, and not to be written off. At around the same time, a Jewish professor of human rights law at Reading University, Rosa Freedman, had been invited to speak at an event on the holocaust at Essex University, only for the invitation to be withdrawn because of her views on gender identity. Professors Freedman and Phoenix both received an apology after Essex University commissioned a review of its proceedings.

It is not only academics whose freedom of expression is being restricted. A PhD student at Bristol University from the Dominican Republic, Raquel Rosario Sánchez, has been bullied and threatened for her involvement in events convened to discuss proposed reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The second female rector of Edinburgh University, Ann Henderson, wrote recently of her experience of being targeted and harassed by students after she retweeted the details of an event that feminist campaign groups had organised for MPs in autumn 2018. At times she feared for her safety on campus, but received minimal support from senior management. In June 2019, feminist campaigner and journalist Julie Bindel spoke at an event at Edinburgh University on women's sex-based rights and was attacked as she left. The individual was later charged by Police Scotland. The event was attended by a number of Members of the Scottish Parliament. Our Labour colleague Jenny Marra later said that

"never in more than 25 years of going to political meetings have I felt the intimidation that I felt then."

In 2021, women across the UK are being censored, harassed and threatened for simply trying to debate and discuss their rights. This is a wholly unacceptable state of affairs and I call on all Members to join me in condemning these pernicious developments.

The issue that we need to discuss as parliamentarians is when freedom of speech becomes hate speech and vice versa. That is what we should be discussing in this House. We should address what is and is not legally allowed. I know that the speech I am making will probably be followed with a torrent of abuse on social media, but as Members of Parliament and legislators, our responsibility lies in speaking truth to power. Our Labour Front Benchers are right: Conservative Members tend to be hypocrites; in fact, they are hypocrites, particularly given other Bills we have seen passed through Parliament. But I understand the need for a balanced argument, and we need to be able to speak truth to power.

7.17 pm

**Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): First, I declare my interest as vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Durham University.

A few years ago, when I was at the Department for Education as a special adviser, I started in a roughly similar position to that of Opposition Members today. I did not think this should be a priority for Government

[Mr Richard Holden]

either, but I have changed my views on that since I became a Member of Parliament. *[Interruption.]* Well, we will see how the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) votes tonight and whether it will be along his party lines in defiance of an overwhelming argument from the Government Benches.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) made some very clear and sensible points about cancel culture, my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) did the same on freedom of religion, and my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) had some interesting suggestions on where the Government should go further. I was particularly gladdened to hear from the hon. Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), who spoke about issues surrounding women in academia and academic freedom. The argument from the Opposition Front Bench on this hate speech has clearly been knocked down by the Government. It is a Potemkin argument. We now argue about whether the Potemkin villages ever even existed. I think we will find that the Opposition Front Benchers' arguments do not really stand scrutiny when the Bill makes further progress through this House.

What has changed my view are recent meetings I have had at the University of Durham. As I said earlier, this is not a sledgehammer to crack a nut, as Opposition Members have suggested. When a leading academic in the politics department told me that he had been castigated by colleagues for teaching about John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty", I found that absolutely astonishing. When I had cases where 18 and 19-year-old kids in my constituency were being cancelled within their own student societies for airing their pretty moderate views, it really surprised and worried me.

I gave a speech at South College, Durham a few weeks ago on this subject of freedom of speech. What has really tipped me over is the concern—the right hon. Member for North Durham and I agree on many things, but we totally disagree on this—about the influence of certain Governments and their financial power within the UK's university education system. Let us consider the example of a university with 10,000 students, 60% of whom are from the UK and 40% of whom are from overseas. In the UK today, we will often find that half of those overseas students come from the People's Republic of China and the amount of money they pay in tuition fees is equal to the income from the 60% from the UK. There is a real issue with freedom of speech if our universities are so dependent on those foreign sources of income, and that issue is present on our campuses today. I know that because I have spoken to students and academics who have been affected by it.

The key thing is that universities just wash their faces with the cash they get from UK students; the extra cash they get from overseas students allows them to do all the extra stuff they want to do. It pays for all the fancy new buildings we will have seen going up. It pays for the extra stuff universities want to be able to do, which allows them to push themselves up international league tables. That is what is really worrying me at the moment—we have a university system that is so reliant on that cash

that it cannot pursue academic freedom itself any more, without the Government standing up to tell it that it has to.

That is one of the most important points about this legislation; it is there not just to protect freedom of speech, but to promote it. This addresses a point I made when I intervened on the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). People will not put themselves forward to say things about the Uyghurs, or about Hong Kong, democracy and freedom, because they are petrified of the impact it will have on their career, faculties and students. That is why this Bill is so apposite and important. We have a duty in our academic institutions in this country, which are some of the most respected in the world, not only to protect free speech, but to promote it. That element is key, because it gives academics the freedom to challenge, and sometimes they will be challenging their own academic institutions. That is at the core of everything we have to do as we look forward.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about universities being dependent on income from overseas students. What concerns me more, and it is not touched by this Bill, is that some universities are getting investment from companies such as Tencent, which is wholly owned by the Chinese Government and is deeply involved in the surveillance state. Tencent has put a huge amount of money into the Chinese centre at Cambridge University, and Professor Nolan is telling students not to criticise the People's Republic of China. Is that not a much bigger concern? It is not covered by this Bill.

**Mr Holden:** The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. I am just pointing out the massive financial ties to foreign Governments, and there is an element of this Bill helping to start to break down that barrier. Anything that contributes to that is a good thing.

Let me wind up by saying that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) made some really important points about sexual assault in universities, and I hope the Minister has taken those on board. Some close friends of mine were affected by that, and the Office for Students really needs to take this forward. I hope she will use her good offices to that end.

7.24 pm

**Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Lab): Freedom of speech does not include the freedom of hate speech. Given the content of the Bill, I would like to begin with a very brief comment on the hate speech being directed at our England stars. This England team represents the very best of a modern, multicultural nation. On and off the pitch, the players have shown their quality. Last night, they came within a whisker of winning the first men's trophy in 55 years. They did us so proud. Off the pitch, from Marcus Rashford helping to feed thousands of working-class kids, to Raheem Sterling combating racism in sport, to Jordan Henderson standing up for trans rights, they showcase an inclusive, progressive England.

After last night's agonising defeat, we have also seen the worst of the country, with disgusting racism targeted at our players. This is not freedom of speech; it is hate speech. But it does not come in a vacuum. It is promoted

by those at the very top—right from the Prime Minister, who sanctions racism by describing Muslim women as “letterboxes” and black people as “piccaninnies” and by refusing to condemn so-called fans booing players taking the knee. I will say this, Mr Deputy Speaker: Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka, Jadon Sancho, three lions who represent the best of modern England, have so much more worth than the vile racists trying to drag them down.

As a young Muslim growing up during the war on terror, I was sharply aware of my community being scapegoated and subjected to surveillance. Before arriving at university, I knew that many British Muslims were treated as second-class citizens. As a student, I quickly learned that this treatment extended to the university campus and that basic democratic rights and freedoms were not afforded to everyone equally.

For students and staff who are Muslim, for staff on precarious contracts and even for student activists, freedom of speech and academic freedom are routinely restricted and denied. Those freedoms are not threatened by over-sensitive students or by academics researching the British empire; they are threatened by this Government’s policies, such as the Prevent duty, which the human rights group Liberty has said is the single biggest threat to freedom of speech on campus.

Under Prevent, students have been policed and treated as suspicious and extreme simply for taking part in mainstream debates on topics such as British foreign policy, Palestine and Kurdistan. Research has shown that one third of Muslim students feel negatively affected by Prevent, and I know that many students, including some of my constituents, are afraid to take part in political debates or even to organise events on campus. If the Secretary of State for Education is really concerned by “the chilling effect...of unacceptable silencing and censoring”,

then he should start by addressing the main sources of that chilling effect in the Home Office and his own Department.

This Government could not care less about the way our marketised higher education system restricts academic freedom. Tens of thousands of academic staff are on precarious contracts, with some living on poverty wages. At the whim of managers, they often feel unable to speak openly or to freely shape their research and their teaching for fear of risking their careers.

Rather than pushing universities to offer permanent, well-paid contracts, the Conservatives are content to sit on the sidelines while launching their own attacks on academic freedom. Whether it is Government Members demanding that the Department for Education sack academics at the University of Warwick in my constituency, or Ministers chasing critics of Britain’s imperial past off the boards of museums and cultural institutions, or Lord Wharton, chair of the Office for Students and previously head of the Prime Minister’s Conservative leadership campaign, telling Oxford academics to “leave their personal politics at home”,

this Government and their allies are happy to silence those who dissent from their agenda, while giving free rein to fascists and holocaust deniers to spout their hate. That is what this Bill represents.

The Bill is part of this Conservative Government’s growing authoritarian agenda, whether that is the police crackdown Bill and its criminalisation of protests, their

voter ID plans and their attempt at voter suppression, their Nationality and Borders Bill and its scapegoating of migrants, or this Bill and its attack on academic freedom, which they claim to protect. Instead of the Government defending the freedom of the super-rich to dominate and exploit, it is time for a Government who advance the freedom of all.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We are now on a six-minute limit.

7.29 pm

**Beth Winter** (Cynon Valley) (Lab) [V]: As someone who has spent a large part of their adult life either studying or working in academia, including as an officer of the University and College Union in Wales, I am deeply disturbed by the content of the Bill. My experience in the sector has demonstrated without a doubt that universities host some of the most vibrant and intellectually challenging discussions in the country. It is simply untrue that they shut down or stifle debate. The measures in the Bill are excessive and unnecessary, taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

The Government’s assertion to justify the Bill—that there is a crisis of free speech and academic freedom resulting in “cancel culture”—is completely baseless, and as the Joint Committee on Human Rights recently found in its inquiry on free speech at UK universities, it is not evidenced-based. The Office for Students’ own research shows that only 0.1% of requests for external speaker events by students at English universities in 2017-18 were rejected. That action tends only to take place with the most extreme speakers—holocaust deniers, anti-vaxxers and others who hold often harmful views. I remind the Minister that universities have a duty of care to their students, including LGBTQ+, BAME and female students, and are often right to prioritise their wellbeing and their right to be free of intimidation over gifting inflammatory speakers a platform to air their views.

There already exists a strong legal framework, which imposes duties on higher education providers to ensure freedom of speech and expression in higher education. There is genuine and understandable concern that the Bill may undermine existing protections against discrimination. I would welcome clarification from the Minister on a matter raised by Universities UK regarding how the Bill will interact with existing legislation and other duties relating to free speech and academic freedom. In fact, the Bill narrows the definition of academic freedom to speak out on social or political issues, enabling someone to do so only when it is

“within the law and within their field of expertise”.

I fully support the UCU’s call for the phrase

“and within their field of expertise”

to be removed from the Bill.

I also share the concerns of the UCU and Universities UK about the statutory tort element of the Bill, which enables individuals to sue a university or student union when they believe it has failed to protect free speech. That provision is ill thought-out and should be removed.

The Bill is extremely divisive, harmful and dangerous in and of itself, but crucially it also exposes the Government’s flawed priorities. In other words, it is a very convenient distraction from the real issues facing the higher education sector: the marketisation of the sector; endemic precarious and casualised employment;



[Beth Winter]

attacks on the arts and humanities; insecurity of research funding, and a failure to protect staff's right to speak out against employers. Those are the kinds of issues that this Government should be addressing if they are serious about protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech.

How could a newly appointed academic researcher on a short-term contract feel confident about speaking out in a critical but constructive manner on any issue, including an employment situation, where there is no employment protection available to them? Two thirds of researchers and almost half of teaching-only academics are on fixed-term contracts. University staff ranked casualisation as the biggest threat to their academic freedom in a survey carried out by the UCU. That instability strips many of their job security, has a devastating effect on staff morale and wellbeing, and distracts from and negatively impacts on their core functions of teaching and research.

That is forcing thousands of staff in higher education across the UK—including in London, Liverpool and Essex—who are facing the very real prospect of redundancy to take action to save their jobs and challenge the Government's inaction and failure to recognise the very real problems facing the sector. That is why I welcomed and fully supported the reasoned amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), which wholly opposed this ill-considered piece of legislation.

In the short term, the Government need to step in to underwrite the sector as we emerge from the covid-19 pandemic. However, in the long run, the UK Government must properly fund universities, end the marketisation of higher education and provide staff with secure employment, all of which would support their freedom of speech and intellectual independence.

7.34 pm

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): Now then, if we control what students in universities can listen to, we are controlling what they can think and the type of person they will become. That may work in places such as North Korea and, possibly, within the Labour party, but it has no place in our society. The Bill will strengthen free speech and academic freedom at universities. It is not the job of the Labour party or anybody else to control who we listen to. The champagne socialists, the Islington elite and the trade unions may agree with the Labour party, but most of the country do not. We fought and won a war to protect our freedoms, and freedom of speech, to my mind, is the most important freedom that we have.

Let us not forget that universities are there to supply our great country with scientists, mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, school teachers, nurses and so on, not to provide us with state-sponsored political activists who have only one opinion or one goal in life. Our young people should be able to flourish at university and be open to all kinds of debate. Let them make their own mistakes, form their own opinions and ask their own questions. We should not dictate who they can and cannot listen to.

By voting against this Bill, Labour is saying that our university students are not capable of making up their own minds. It is a bit like the Brexit debate when it told my residents in Ashfield and Eastwood that they were

thick, they were stupid, they were racist and they did not know what they were voting for. Well, that ended well! It ended up with my standing here tonight.

We know that free speech is being shut down in universities in this country. Professor Jo Phoenix was due to give a talk at Essex University about placing transgender women in women's prisons. Students threatened to barricade the hall. They complained that Ms Phoenix was a transphobe who was likely to engage in hate speech. A flyer with an image of a gun and text reading "Shut the \*\*\*\* up" was circulated. The university told Ms Phoenix and the event was postponed.

What about the human rights lawyer Rosa Freedman, a radical feminist law professor, whose event was cancelled amid allegations of transphobia? She received a passive aggressive email from a University of Reading student who called her views on gender politics "problematic" and warned her to "choose her words carefully". Selina Todd, an Oxford University professor, had her invitation to a conference celebrating women withdrawn owing to pressure from trans activists who had threatened to disrupt the event.

It is a real shame that we have to legislate to allow free speech, but the biggest shame is that Labour Members will vote against the Bill and subsequently vote against free speech. Perhaps they should all come off Twitter, throw their *Guardian* newspapers away, leave the Tea Room, and get out there and speak to the millions of voters they lost at the last election. Let us have some free speech on the doorstep and perhaps that lot on the Opposition Benches will finally realise that they have nothing in common with the very people they expect to vote for them. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker; that is me done.

7.37 pm

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I was going to say that it was a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), but I am not sure that it was.

The point about this is very clear: we legislate in this place to improve people's lives and to right wrongs, and, as was pointed out earlier, we base our decisions on facts. The problem with this Bill stems from the reasons we need it. The Secretary of State was asked on several occasions to provide his evidence and data for the Bill. We have heard all the anecdotes; we have just heard a selection tonight. Clearly, some Government Members watch too much FOX TV, or some other channel, for their information. We did ask the Secretary of State for the figures, but the figures have already been mentioned. In December 2020, 61 university student unions carried out the survey. Six events out of almost 10,000 were cancelled. The Government's own data from the Office for Students show only a tiny percentage of cancellations. In 2017-18, of nearly 60,000 events only 53 were rejected, which is about 0.1%, and the cancellation of some of those events had nothing to do with people's views.

I take great exception to what the hon. Member for Ashfield said. I am a true defender of freedom of speech. I believe in it. It is one of the things that we should be most proud of in terms of being British. We have an ability to disagree. Sometimes it can take a heated format, but we can disagree. He should not label me as somebody who is against free speech. It is people like him who will

close it down. If this legislation were needed, I would support it, but I do not think that it is needed, because, as has already been said, the legislation is already in place. We know the reason why, because we have had it explained. We just had a great example of it from the hon. Member for Ashfield. This is actually about trying to use the so-called woke agenda in a political manner. It is amplifying the message, so we get a situation where anyone who dares to question what happens or who votes against this Bill tonight is said to be against freedom of speech.

**Lee Anderson:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the important points that he is making in the Chamber tonight, but the most important thing I want to thank him for is mentioning the word “Ashfield”. That is the first time ever in this Chamber that a Labour politician has mentioned the word “Ashfield”, so I thank him for that.

**Mr Jones:** I say to the hon. Gentleman that if he wants to make a contribution to this debate, he should read about it and properly represent his constituency.

**Marco Longhi:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Jones:** No, I will not.

We have the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, the Education Act 1994 and the Charity Commission regulations on this, all of which protect and embody the idea of freedom of speech. The Bill also gives powers to universities to regulate themselves. The hon. Member for Ashfield talked about North Korea. I am sorry, but I am vehemently opposed to Governments directing universities on what they should and should not say, do or teach. That is the beauty of academia—they are allowed to have independence—and the Bill is dangerous in that respect.

The other thing that is completely absent from the Bill is information on how it relates to some of the other obligations on universities. The hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) mentioned that he is vice-chair of the all-party group for friends of Durham University. If he is, he will have had the same briefing note that I had. The university has concerns about how it relates this Bill to its responsibilities under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, equalities legislation and other issues. What we are going to do is put in place a regulator that will oversee that—well, I am sorry, but I do not agree with that. If there were an issue with universities and freedom of speech, I would be the first to argue for legislation, but we do not need this legislation. As has been said, what we need is to use existing legislation to enable us to find the data on what is actually happening rather than having to listen to hearsay and have one case being expanded at the expense of another. And we also need not to listen to the Policy Exchange. It does not surprise me that this legislation is from the Policy Exchange. We have already had the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021. That was a terrible Bill that not only did not do what it set out to do, but took rights away from veterans we should have been protecting.

I would also like to touch on the issue of bringing law and compensation into this. I am not a lawyer. No offence to anyone who is, but I am all in favour of anything that can stop lawyers making money. This legislation is a

lawyers’ picnic, frankly. It will end with huge amounts of time taken and vexatious cases. It will also lead to money that should be spent on education in universities being diverted into legal fees. I am sorry, but I am opposed to that. A point was made earlier—Durham University raised this—that an issue with the college system is that the colleges are completely separate from universities, so some may be wealthy, but others are not.

Then we have the ludicrous situation in which the hon. Member for Ashfield and others are quite prepared to spend a million pounds a year of taxpayers’ money employing 10 staff and a new director who will no doubt be part of the Conservative party job creation scheme, as we saw when Lord Wharton got the job of director of the Office for Students. That money should be going into education. There is another side to this as well: the Bill will cost £48 million and most of that will fall on universities. The money should be going to supporting universities and supporting students, and it will not be. This legislation will be a lawyers’ picnic and, actually, I think that it will get unpicked as it goes through the House because it is so full of contradictions. If there were an issue with an attack on free speech in this country, I would be one of those arguing strongly that we should act to protect it; I do not think there is such an issue. This is another example of the Government using an issue to try to put fear into people’s minds about the so-called woke agenda. They are trying to put into people’s minds a fear that anyone who questions that agenda—and I do not think that people who know me would describe me as woke—is seen as somehow not standing up for the interests of their constituency. At the end of the day, the state should not be getting directly involved in the running of our universities, deciding what they teach and how they do it. I hope that the Bill gets radically changed. If that does not happen here, it will in the other place.

7.45 pm

**James Daly (Bury North) (Con):** I want to touch on some legal points. Sadly, I am a lawyer—or, perhaps, happily I am a lawyer—and I would not touch this civil litigation with a 50-foot beanpole.

I think there is a fundamental misunderstanding of some of the points that have been raised. One of the objections put forward by Opposition Members is the issue of principle. Well, there is no objection to this legislation on principle because the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) have both agreed that the principle behind this—the reason why it is being put into law—is good. The defence of freedom of speech is an excellent concept. How anybody can object to that is beyond me. When that argument is overcome, the Opposition return to saying, “Well, it is already on the statute book, so we don’t really need it”, but that is not a reason for not supporting this legislation.

Two examples have been given of abhorrent behaviour—abhorrent statements that could be made on a university campus that would mean that a university may well open itself up to litigation. The first is holocaust denial. Clearly, none of us wants to hear holocaust deniers or see them on university campuses. The Secretary of State—at the Dispatch Box today, on a previous occasion before the House and in any number of interviews that I could read out verbatim—has said quite clearly and

[James Daly]

categorically that this legislation cannot be used to justify the spread of holocaust denial or any other form of antisemitism on our university campuses. When a court interprets legislation, it interprets the intention of Parliament. The intention of Parliament is clear. The Secretary of State has said that no university can justify welcoming or allowing on to its campus anybody who is going to talk about holocaust denial.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**James Daly:** No, I will not—[*Interruption.*] Absolutely not; there is no dispute in respect of this issue. It is the specific intent of this legislation to ensure that holocaust denial is not covered by the free speech recommendations.

**Lilian Greenwood:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**James Daly:** No, I will not.

The second type of behaviour that has been mentioned—the only other example that Opposition Members could put forward—is anti-vaxxers. Now, I disagree with anti-vaxxers, but do we seriously believe that anti-vaxxers should be discriminated against through this legislation to the extent of being banned from state premises and educational establishments?

What this Bill does, which nobody has mentioned, is put universities under a duty to make whatever efforts are “reasonably practicable” to ensure that free speech happens.

**Mr Jones:** That’s already there.

**James Daly:** Well, then, support the legislation if that is the case.

In respect of anti-vaxxers, if the legal duty on the university is to put in place “reasonably practicable” steps, do we think it is a better option for university vice-chancellors to put forward other speakers and insist that other speakers put the other side of the argument, or do we just simply say, or allow university vice-chancellors or whoever makes the decisions to say, “Because we don’t like your view, we’re just going to banish you and not allow you to speak”?

What this debate is really about is the regulation of legal behaviour. The law exists—the Public Order Act, the Equality Act, the Prevent legislation and other legislation—because this House has voted at different times to say that certain behaviour is against the law and that the authorities should act in respect of that. I listened to the powerful speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) regarding the appalling incidents of sexual harm on campuses. That is an utter indictment of universities; it is not a reason for us to allow them and have faith in them to regulate. If they cannot regulate in respect of the most serious sexual complaints, why should we have any faith in them to regulate individuals’ ability to practise freedom of speech, which is a basic right? We cannot confuse freedom of speech with other issues. If there are allegations of serious sexual assault, we should ask police why they are not investigating these things.

In Greater Manchester, which is run by the Mayor of Greater Manchester, the charge rate for serious sexual offences is around 1%. Are we seriously arguing that

that appalling record of the Mayor of Greater Manchester in respect of serious sexual offences should be taken away and we should concentrate on whether university professors are regulating serious criminal behaviour? It is a ludicrous point of view.

This whole debate comes down to a central fact. I thought that some of the comments from Opposition Members were quite dystopian, saying that we should have a debate about what we as individuals think it is right or wrong to say on a university campus. How utterly ludicrous is that? If we feel that something is not to be said on a university campus—that it is harmful or makes a person feel in fear of their safety—we have section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986, which makes it an offence to cause somebody “harassment, alarm or distress”. That is all that is required to prove an offence under that Act.

It is for the law to sanction people’s behaviour, not individuals and certainly not institutions that are the beneficiaries of taxpayers’ money. This is a good Bill, it is a manifesto commitment and it is a commitment to free speech that we should all celebrate and support.

7.51 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Let me declare some interests: I chair the all-party parliamentary university group and I represent an education city with a fantastic further education college, Cambridge Regional College; two great universities that are very different but both outstanding, and very well led by Roderick Watkins and Stephen Toope; and the University of the Third Age. We are brilliant at universities in this country.

There is so much talk of our being world-beating; we actually are world-beating when it comes to universities. Would it not be nice to have a Minister for universities rather than an Education team for doing us down? I am not saying that everything is perfect, because there are huge challenges, not least for students, who have had such a tough time and still face huge debt for an experience very different from that of those who went before. Would it not be nice to hear something positive from the Government Front-Bench team about the amazing work that staff in universities have done as they have transformed their practice to devise online courses to go alongside the traditional teaching methods? The Government could have been talking about that today, or the thorny issues around finance. Where exactly is the Augar review, beyond leaks and rumours?

As we have heard, we live in a world where international students play a huge role in the financing of our universities, but those students cannot be taken for granted. The Government could tell us today about the quarantine arrangements that will be needed when 100,000 students from red-list countries are expected in September—that is urgent; or about the impact of a 43% fall in the number of students applying from the EU; or about the challenges facing research when official development assistance cuts are biting and there is still no clarity on how the Horizon gap will be funded.

All those things matter, but for this Government the only thing that matters is themselves. How can they stoke up some more divisions to throw more red meat to people who do not like universities? It is pretty hard to take this pathetic Bill seriously. Is there an issue around free speech? Of course there is—there always



has been and always will be. Labour's commitment to free speech is uncontested: as we heard from the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), it was Labour that brought the European convention on human rights into UK law. Is free speech more difficult now, in a socially media-driven, instant communication world? Yes, but it is not just universities that face that; it is a wider societal question.

Members on the Government Benches should remember how they got their get-out-of-jail card on the vaccine: it came from universities—researchers working together, using the huge amount of detailed knowledge accumulated across institutions. Our universities are world-changing and world-beating. Are those universities calling for this legislation? Hardly. They know how difficult it is to balance the rights and freedoms of different groups and individuals because they do it every day. They have been doing it for years, since long before the “here today, gone tomorrow” lot opposite snatched power, and they will be doing it for years to come. Will there be incidents and flashpoints? Yes, of course there will, as there always have been, because freedom allows for that.

**Sir John Hayes:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful and measured speech, and I agree with him that the problem is much wider than universities. He talked about social media, as many have, and there is an increasingly vitriolic level of debate that has coarsened and damaged discourse, perhaps irreparably and certainly profoundly. However, dealing with universities is surely part of that, and that is what this Bill attempts to do. He is right to say that it does not solve everything, but it certainly does no harm and, in my judgment, it does a great deal of good. By the way, I ought to have referred Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests when I spoke earlier; I do so now.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I was happy to take the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, but the point about freedom of speech is that it is always difficult to deal with because, as others have pointed out, freedom allows for a fair amount of offence to be given until it becomes too much and we have to respond. However, that is a judgment call. We cannot legislate for that. It is a great irony that a Government who claim to be Conservative are promoting measures that many of their predecessors would have been very quick to criticise in other countries. A commissar for free speech? Come on! But actually, this is not the Conservative party, is it, because its boss expelled those who dared to dissent, and that is where all this leads.

Those who have looked at the Bill can see the problems. I am sure the Government will not have much interest in hearing from those who actually run our universities, but it is worth repeating what they say. Universities UK has warned that those promoting conspiracy theories could easily take the opportunity to sue universities or student unions. It has also pointed out that with existing routes of redress available, the same complaint could lead to very different outcomes depending on whether an individual went to the Office for Students, which will now have a so-called director of free speech, or whether they went down the Office of the Independent Adjudicator route. As have others have said, the likely consequence of all this is that universities and student unions will err on the side of caution and steer away from anything risky. That will lead not to more free speech but to less

free speech, and for those with really outlandish views, there will be a legal stick with which to beat institutions. So, good times for the crazies everywhere—

**James Daly** *rose*—

**Daniel Zeichner:** A good moment for an intervention.

**James Daly:** If the hon. Gentleman thinks that universities will err on the side of caution, does he not agree that that will essentially be restricting freedom of speech, which will guarantee a law suit? The one thing about this Bill is that it will guarantee more freedoms, because if someone does not want the risk of being sued, they will allow people to speak within a university setting.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I have to say that I do wonder how much time some Conservative Members actually spent in universities and how much they know about how they operate. Universities work very carefully and they are very conscious of the threats and challenges to them. Believe me, they will look at this and think it is too risky, and they will not do it. That is what will actually happen, so there will be less discourse. I just hope that there are a few genuine Conservatives on the Government Benches who can see the absurdity of all this, and who must surely at times ask themselves why they have a leader who cannot work out whether it is okay for people to boo our football team or why they have a colleague who ended up supporting our national team by boycotting it, because that is where all this ludicrousness leads.

I suspect that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) said, this Bill will be savaged in the other place. I invite people to read some debates from the other place; it is astonishing to see how Conservatives from a former age are so appalled by this Government. The Bill will be savaged, but if it does make it on to the statute book, I suspect that it will be totally ineffectual and that the provisions will be unenforceable. This time last week, I was talking about the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in Westminster Hall, and I suspect that this will be seen as a similarly ludicrous piece of legislation in times to come. The best thing the Government could do would be to drop it altogether. Our universities and our country deserve so much better. They have, of course, glimpsed a better way, a decent way, and I would hazard a guess that in about nine months' time we will have a glut of newborn children called Gareth, but not many Gavins.

7.58 pm

**Brendan Clarke-Smith** (Bassetlaw) (Con) [V]: Last night I watched the England match with my family and, like many in this Chamber, I had never seen my country appear in a major final. We all felt that football was finally coming home, but it was not to be. But we have been here before and, as an Englishman, I have almost come to expect falling at the final hurdle when glory is within touching distance. It is important to remember that it is a team game and that blaming individuals will not change a thing, so instead, let us be thankful for our second most successful tournament ever, with the World cup only 18 months away.

There is a lot to be celebrated. How disappointing, then, to see the subsequent barrage of abuse that those unfortunate players have received on social media. Even more disappointing are the attempts by the Opposition

[Brendan Clarke-Smith]

to conflate the debate around taking the knee—and the suggestion that to be a real England supporter you must also support that—with something which is quite different and completely unacceptable to all decent people. This is the same cancel culture we see on our campuses. If people wish to, they can criticise the run-ups, the accuracy or the choice of penalty takers, but what we have seen goes beyond mere critical opinion. It is vile abuse and it should be recognised as such. Social media companies and internet service providers must do more to stamp out the cowardly trolls, and they have a responsibility to stop people doing that under the veil of anonymity. I am glad that we will be dealing with the issue later in our online harms Bill.

Many comments will be threats and abuse of a criminal nature. That is not freedom of speech or freedom of opinion, and any reasonable person can clearly see the difference. But that is what today's debate must not be confused with. Instead, this Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will ensure that healthy and reasoned debate is protected on our university campuses. Criminal offences will remain criminal offences, including hate speech.

When hon. Members of this House wish to criticise my stance on an issue, I do not try to prevent them from speaking, I do not demand that I am given a safe space, and I do not attempt to have them cancelled because I do not like their views. Our electorates can cancel us all through the ballot box, if they so wish. That is democracy. So why on earth do we allow this type of behaviour to flourish in our universities? It is quite incredible for organisations in which academic debate and challenging the views of others are part of the experience. We now see the no-platforming of speakers and student unions getting rid of organisations that they simply do not like. We see academics being chased off campus and spiteful open letters calling for them to be removed from their positions.

Yesterday, many condemned the behaviour of a number of football fans and the violent disorder, hooliganism and vandalism perpetrated by some, yet this is not isolated to football. It was not football supporters who tried to pull statutes down or who created a situation where the University of Bristol sought to impose security costs on a student society purely for inviting the Israeli ambassador, because of the behaviour of extreme left groups on campus.

The social justice warriors are certainly not warriors, and they also have a bizarre and warped understanding of social justice. Freedom of speech allows such people, and some Members in this Chamber, the right to hold and express their views. It is a shame that they do not believe in the rights of others to hold alternative beliefs. Some have even referred to Members on the Government side of the Chamber as “evil” in the past. To borrow a saying from a colleague, I do not believe that my opponents are evil; I simply believe that they are mistaken.

Education is one of my passions. However, I can only imagine the storm if I were ever to consider a career in academia now. When I went to university, believing in free-market economics, being a Conservative or simply having a traditional view of what constitutes a man or woman would not be controversial positions. Now, I would be accused of hate speech and screamed at by somebody with bright pink hair who would demand that I be fired, locked up or perhaps both.

Our universities are world-renowned as centres of excellence. They played a key role in our fight against covid-19, as hon. Members have already mentioned, and we must be forever grateful, but they must not turn into organisations that churn out graduates who are unable to think for themselves, tolerate the views of others, or deal with the daily challenges and realities of life. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said earlier about Voltaire, although Voltaire never actually said the line for which he is famous, a little like with “Casablanca”:

“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

Many of us can identify with that. It is time that some of our universities followed suit.

8.3 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) [V]: This Bill will not apply in Scotland, and I could not give it my wholehearted support if it did, because I share some of the reservations already expressed in the debate, particularly those expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). However, I want to be clear that, as she acknowledged, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that there are problems with freedom of speech in our universities.

In 2018, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which I am proud to be deputy Chair, published a report into freedom of expression in universities, in which we found that there were issues and recommended some reforms. We heard evidence about a number of problems, including attempts by students to no-platform leading feminists and LGBT activists with a lengthy pedigree in campaigning for LGBT rights, simply because they had engaged in critical debate about issues around feminism and trans politics. We also took evidence from student unions, which argued that it is necessary to limit speakers who, as they put it, “cause harm through speech”. We on the JCHR were concerned that such an approach is detrimental to free speech and could prevent certain debates and viewpoints from being heard, so we were very careful to emphasise that the right to free speech includes the right to say things that, although lawful, others might find offensive.

Sadly, since 2018 the treatment of leading feminists and lesbian activists engaged in critical debate about issues around feminism and trans politics has worsened at the hands both of student unions and of university authorities. Others have spoken about the attack on Julie Bindel, a well-known feminist activist who was attacked outside an event at Edinburgh University after she had spoken about male violence towards women. Attendance at that event effectively ended the careers of two of the Scottish Parliament's most outstanding MSPs, my friends Joan McAlpine and Andy Wightman. At the same time, Ann Henderson, the well-respected Labour activist who was rector of the university, feared for her own safety on campus after students repeatedly falsely accused her of transphobia. The university failed to take appropriate action to deal with the hostility directed against her. That was not an isolated incident. Another well-respected feminist academic at Edinburgh University, my friend Shereen Benjamin, has faced considerable problems. Both Shereen and Ann are Labour activists. Their comrades should defend them.

I have spoken before in this Chamber about the abuse, threats of violence and deplatforming directed against Professor Selina Todd, Kathleen Stock and

Rosa Freedman at universities across England. Others have mentioned a recently published report on similar events at Essex University, which identified that part of the problem is that universities are not correctly applying the law under the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. The Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), raised that with the Secretary of State when she wrote to him about the Bill. In fairness to him, he did take the trouble to deal with her detailed concerns about the Bill, and copies of both her letter and his can be read on the JCHR website.

The important thing about the University of Essex report on the cancellation of one speaking event and the decision to rescind an invitation to another is that both of those events concerned gender-critical feminists. The report found that the university's decisions were unlawful and recommended that apologies be made. It also highlighted that the university appeared to misunderstand and misrepresent equality laws, to the extent that the impression was given to members of the university that gender-critical academics seeking to exercise their right to free speech could be excluded from the institution.

Thanks to the Employment Appeal Tribunal's important decision on discrimination law in the case of *Forstater v. CGD Europe*, we now know that gender-critical beliefs are protected under the Equality Act 2010. I think, therefore, that it is the Equality Act, more than anything else, that universities need to look at to solve this problem, because it is frequently being misconstrued or ignored in universities, and I am afraid to say that that is a symptom of a wider malaise. To quote the best-selling author and founder of the Positive Birth Movement, Milli Hill,

"those who are being dragged to the pyre are...in most cases, lifelong left-leaning, open minded, educated and tolerant women, often with a history of supporting minority groups".

The efforts to silence us extend to violence and threats of violence, which many in a position of power are too afraid to condemn. There is not much point in pious words about standing up against the abuse of women but then doing nothing when that abuse is going on right under your nose. University authorities often look the other way or, worse still, participate in the witch hunts against lifelong feminists who simply want to make sure that women's voices and women's concerns are heard in important debates.

This Bill might not be the best way to deal with those problems as they represent themselves in the university sector. It is flawed but at least it acknowledges that there is a problem, and those who say that there is not a problem are simply ostriches with their heads in the sand.

8.9 pm

**Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): I do not wish to comment on the speeches of Labour Members other than to highlight one particular speech that I did find moving, which was from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). I did agree with her comments in a substantive way and I suspect a number of Conservative Members also do, so I hope the Minister is aware of that.

Ask Labour Members if they champion free speech, and no doubt they would all queue up to say, "Yes, of course", but is there not a spectacular contradiction

in this stance and their intention to vote against this Bill? The hon. Labour Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) tweeted today:

"The biggest threat to free speech on university campuses is not student societies' no-platform policies. It's the Tory Hate Speech Bill, back in Parliament today, which threatens student societies' freedom to choose who speaks at their events & their ability to protect students."

Forgive me, but is not no-platforming exactly a form of censure? Is not describing the ability—the free ability—to choose a speaker simply an Orwellian turn of phrase, no doubt because some speakers must be more equal than others?

If we want universities to be centres of discussion, debate, expression, challenge and places to develop our young brilliant minds, must we not hear both sides of a debate? A young constituent of mine recently invited me to speak at his university's Conservative Society event. Before I was allowed to speak, the students' union insisted on assessing me, regardless of the fact that I am, like everyone else in this House, a democratically elected Member of Parliament. How can that be right?

Freedom of speech has allowed our society to evolve, to advance and to protect the vulnerable. It is freedom of speech that gave women the vote and it is freedom of speech that decriminalised homosexuality, but an unacceptable culture of censorship—a wokery, a heckler's veto—has been allowed to develop on our campuses and to brainwash our young minds. The parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights released a report on freedom of speech in universities in 2018, and it found that one in four students do not share their true opinions because they clash with those promoted by their university, and a staggering 40% of students stated that views held by speakers had led more frequently to cancellation of events.

This very place is seen as a bastion of democracy and free speech underpins any liberal democracy, so I will be supporting the Bill.

**Sir John Hayes:** The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), whom I respect very greatly, said this has always been a challenge and a problem, and indeed he is right—there have always been challenges to freedom in universities and elsewhere—but the point is that the circumstances have changed both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is to do with the wider problem of the brutalisation of debate, but it finds form in universities in a particularly arch form, and if we do not recognise that and do not respond to it through legislation, we will be failing in our duty to universities and the students who study at them.

**Marco Longhi:** I thank my right hon. Friend for the intervention, which was most welcome. I wholeheartedly agree with it, and how can censorship be something that we cannot take action against?

It would be nice to know how many Labour Members agree with the Voltairean principle that has now been quoted a couple of times in speeches prior to mine—

"I wholly disapprove of what you say—and I will defend to the death your right to say it"—

or perhaps hypocrisy is the order of the day again.



8.14 pm

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy** (Streatham) (Lab) [V]: The University and College Union has rightly argued that there is “no evidence of a free speech crisis on campus”

and, in 2018, the Joint Committee on Human Rights concluded that there was

“no wholesale censorship of debate”,

so why on earth are we here? The Government want us to believe that they are engaged in some liberal defence of freedom of speech, but it is a complete farce. The Bill is in fact a threat that tramples on students unions’ autonomy, overturns students unions’ long-standing no-platform policies, narrows the legal definition of academic freedoms and fails to address the real threats to campus free speech: the ever-failing Prevent duty, casualised employment, insecure research funding and, of course, the Government. The Bill is yet another part of the Government’s authoritarian agenda. For immediate proof of that, it is almost unique in the breadth of its provision. For example, rules on judicial review state that if someone wants to challenge a decision of Government, they must have standing, which means they must be affected by the decision that they are challenging. The Bill requires no standing, so any person, any business or any campaign can sue. What a free-for-all that will create. Where are the safeguards that the Secretary of State spoke of?

I hope that, in my short time in this House, I have proved that I am a civil libertarian. I was also a full-time National Union of Students officer, a liberation officer and the union’s anti-racism and anti-fascism convenor. I defended its long-standing no-platform policy against attack then, and I am proud to defend it today. However, I cannot say how much it irks me to find myself again making those arguments I made 10 years ago and—worse—not on a student campus or at a student conference but in the House of Commons. That is further evidence of how regressive a decade of Conservative government has been.

The Government need to realise that while we decide who should be allowed on university campuses, for many students studying at colleges and universities those campuses are their homes. What has possessed the Government to put demands in law that students must allow anybody—even fascists—into their home and safe space of living and learning? We routinely saw that whenever speakers who espoused fascist views were even promoted as coming on to campus, racist and homophobic attacks against students increased. The Secretary of State said that holocaust deniers would of course not be allowed free rein on campus, but this ill-advised Bill does not realise that, over the years, the no-platform policy has served as the main line of defence for keeping holocaust deniers and other fascists off our campuses. Who gets to decide the remit? The Government—and they routinely pass legislation that goes against our equalities legislation without even publishing an equality impact assessment. Hon. Members will forgive me for not trusting the Government to defend liberation groups even within the law. Why should students trust the same Ministers who repeatedly endorsed the booing of England players at the start of the Euro 2020 tournament? The racist abuse now directed at them was sanctioned from the very top. Students unions cannot depend on the Government to protect them, and the Bill stops them from protecting their members.

I have heard many arguments about what should be debated and how debate should expose things, but the neo-liberal, supposedly free-speech fanatics do not seem to realise that while they are in a room putting together well-informed arguments for fantastic debates, young black, Muslim, Jewish and LGBTQ people out on the streets are being victimised, verbally abused, physically assaulted and, in some cases, murdered. What exactly is there to debate? What possible arguments are there to pose? They are basically saying that those people face discrimination because they cannot argue their case well enough.

The hon. Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) said that we should hear both sides of any debate. Should we debate a paedophile who thinks it is okay to have sex with children? There are people who believe that children should be able to consent. Shall we debate misogynists on whether women should have equal rights to men? We have seen that on the rise with incel groups. Shall we debate people who want an all-white Britain and say that black, Asian and minority ethnic people should not have the right to live and worship as they choose, free from discrimination?

Free speech is not an absolute right. No rights are absolute in a society, because all rights come with responsibilities to others. We legislate for those responsibilities in this House. The right to live free from hate is not up for debate and it never should be. That is not stifling freedom of speech; it is exercising our human rights and defending those of others. The Bill wants to stop that. We do not expose fascist beliefs by debating them. We do not give fascists a platform to give more oxygen to their hate. If we do, we are saying that their views hold the same value as ours, and that is not true in a civilised society. The Government say that the Bill is about freedom of speech, but we know it has got nothing to do with that.

8.19 pm

**Miriam Cates** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): I rise to speak in support of the Bill and to set out why it is so important that as a society we continue to hear and engage with minority and controversial opinions.

We all know what it is like to feel challenged or discomforted, even offended, by what others say or write. This experience of offence is a negative feeling of embarrassment, anger and sometimes hurt, but on occasions this uncomfortable experience can also lead to something absolutely essential for human progress: change. I am not talking about personally offensive or targeted abusive attacks on individuals, which are clearly abhorrent. That kind of persecution and intolerance has no place in civilised society. I am talking about the kind of offence or discomfort that is felt when we hear something that is deeply challenging to our deeply held points of view. It causes us a kind of emotional pain that sometimes forces a response, but history is full of great offenders: people who put forward minority beliefs that were not initially popular, but which nevertheless they sought to bring to the attention of the majority.

Some of these great offenders were, of course, completely wrong and their controversial views have died with them, but there are many others who stand out now as heroes: Churchill, with his opposition to appeasement; Fawcett’s views on women’s rights; Darwin’s findings on

evolution; Galileo's heretical views on the solar system; Martin Luther's challenge to the teachings of the Church. All those great men and women held views that were contentious, even offensive, in their day, but through the force of argument and in time they changed the tide of opinion and brought change—change that I doubt any of us in this House today regrets. That change came because people changed their minds. Listeners, including people of influence, heard those views. Many fought to shut them down, often violently, but enough people responded differently and allowed their attitudes to be altered.

Over recent decades we have enjoyed unprecedented freedom of speech in this country. As a result, new ideas have been thoroughly critiqued, with some being widely adopted while others are rejected. But that freedom is now in danger, particularly in our universities. We have heard Members on both sides of the House speak about alarming incidents of no platforming, particularly of women with gender-critical views.

The understandable but misguided desire to protect students from harmful views is shutting down opportunities for those with different opinions to be heard. That is misguided, because the way to prevent harm to young people who are faced with views they find offensive is not to stop those views being heard—as long as they are within the law—but to prepare our young people and teach them to respond in a mature and open-minded way so that they can criticise, debate and, if appropriate, change their minds. That is why I so strongly support the Bill, which will protect free speech in our universities and secure academic freedoms.

We do our young adults and our whole society a great disservice when we do not allow students to be exposed to the ideas and beliefs that will challenge them and allow them to grow in character and resilience. When we encounter beliefs we find difficult, we have a choice. We can shut our ears, we can react with anger or we can respond thoughtfully and honestly, considering whether our own opinions need to evolve or be strengthened. This is the path to maturity and tolerance, and to individual and societal progress. I am delighted to support the Bill.

8.23 pm

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Although I was stuck getting here, I have listened to a number of speeches. It is entirely normal for me to disagree with speakers and to find what they say objectionable, but I have to say that I heard a couple of speeches—not by the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) but by other Members who spoke before her—that I felt were verging on hate speech themselves and were objectionable to a number of minority groups in this country. I felt that the quality of some of this debate was demeaning to this House.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Alex Sobel:** I will give way, although I might not agree with what the right hon. Gentleman has to say.

**Dr Lewis:** Indeed, and that surely is the point. What really worries people on the Conservative Benches is that what starts off with the justified condemnation of

hate speech ends up by saying that people speaking in a free Parliament are verging on hate speech themselves. Can the hon. Gentleman not see the slippery slope of the argument he is putting forward?

**Alex Sobel:** I will make an argument about the slippery slope. I think there are Government Members, and maybe even some Opposition Members, who feel that supporting the Bill will settle some old scores, make a dog whistle to people who want to hear it and give a nod and a wink to a certain sort of constituent.

As somebody of Jewish descent whose family members came from the war generation in eastern Europe, I feel strongly that the slippery slope we are going down is one that Government Members may not be able to control. I am not saying that they are like this themselves, but other forces in society will take advantage of and utilise this type of legislation in a way that the Government will cease to have control over. It will create a runaway train effect. I do not want that to happen in this country; people like me and others in this Chamber would find it a difficult country to live in.

We just need to look at what happened yesterday to three of our brave England footballers after they missed a penalty—something that happens to every footballer during their career—and the horrendous racism that they experienced. I will come back to the subject, but I was deeply uncomfortable at some of the previous contributions to the debate and I felt that I had to raise that.

During my time at the University of Leeds—I was both a student and staff member there—the two most notorious new faces of the British far right made our campus the site of their race war. Their story tells me all I need to know about why this Bill should never reach the statute book. During my year on the executive of the Leeds University union, supporters of Claire Fox, now Baroness Fox, of *Living Marxism*, established a free speech society to remove the students' "no platform for racists and fascists" policy in the name of libertarianism—maybe the reason why many Government Members support the Bill.

Two unknown first-years joined the society and when the adherents of Baroness Fox graduated, those two took over the society and stepped up their activities on campus. Many known racists and fascists were seen in their company on campus. It was difficult to administer the policy and legal framework that now exists and to vet those whom the free speech society were platforming in rooms they were trying to book out.

The two people involved were Chris Beverley and Mark Collett—now two of the most notorious fascists that this country has seen. Mark Collett was tried alongside Nick Griffin in 2006; I will come back to that. They were both in a number of notorious documentaries produced in the 2000s; I suggest that Members who do not know of them should watch "Young, Nazi and Proud" to understand more about these two characters.

The issue came to a head in Collett's and Beverley's attempt to overturn the "no platform for racists and fascists" policy at the general meeting of the students union. It happened to be held in the refectory that had hosted "The Who" in their seminal "Live at Leeds" concert. There were easily over 300 people there. Many, many Jewish students, as well as the campus rabbi and I,

[Alex Sobel]

spoke against the attempt to remove the policy. Collett and Beverley were the only ones to speak in favour—and in a highly inflammatory way. Their attempt was overwhelmingly defeated.

It had been clear for some time to all on campus who Collett and Beverley really were, but the mask slipped for everybody everywhere that day. If the policy had passed, Collett and Beverley would have invited figures such as Nick Griffin and David Irving, this country's leading Holocaust denier, on to campus under the auspices of free speech. The free speech society soon ran into trouble and at the following AGM the students union fully understood the issue of these two fascists but gave them a room, fearful of legal action. The meeting did not go ahead and the society, which was acting as a front for fascism by that point, was disbanded. That was due not to any policy of the students union, but to protests by students themselves.

Just five years later, at about the same time as Mark Collett was on trial with Nick Griffin at Leeds Crown court for race hate crimes, at Leeds University in February 2006, a contributor to the university newspaper *Leeds Student* gave an interview to Dr Frank Ellis, in which the academic expressed support for the bell curve theory that said that there were racial differences in average intelligence. The *Leeds Student* also published an article by Ellis, "Time to face the truth about Multiculturalism", in which he described the Parekh report as "a very nasty anti-white tract".

He then went on to be interviewed in the media, and the students union put out a statement calling for his dismissal. Leeds University condemned Ellis's views as "abhorrent". I had left the university by then, but I went to meetings there and objected, as a member of the alumni committee, to his continued employment. Ellis was subsequently suspended by the vice-chancellor pending disciplinary proceedings, which never concluded because he retired early.

My point is that if this law had been in place, the student union and the university would never have taken any action against these radical, far-right fascists, whose only intent is erasure of diversity on the planet: the erasure of people like me, Charlotte—I am sorry, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols)—and others in this Chamber. That is why people need to be really careful about how they use free speech. Free speech is something that we all defend—we all talk about pluralism—but it can also be a cover for something much deeper and much more unpleasant, with the consequences that we all know and speak strongly against in this Chamber every year. Yesterday we marked Srebrenica Memorial Day. This Government need to be very careful on the dark road that they are taking us down.

8.30 pm

**Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): First, I apologise about my voice. Like most people, two hours of shouting at a TV screen last night has left me quite hoarse. You will be pleased to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that is the only reference I will make to football today.

It is a delight to follow the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel). Although I share a lot of his concerns with regard to the Bill, I come to a very different

conclusion, which is why I rise to support it. This, to me, goes a long way towards protecting our freedom of speech on university campuses. It is absolutely right that healthy debate—I emphasise the word "healthy"—is encouraged and facilitated, and opinions challenged, but in a safe environment. In recent years, we have seen a growing concern of harassment, abuse and intimidation on our university campuses, from blatant antisemitism espoused by lecturers, to imposing security costs on Jewish student societies, to no-platforming external speakers.

Not all students and staff feel able to express themselves on campus without fear of repercussions, particularly the Jewish students. During the latest round of violence between Israel and Hamas, Jewish students faced antisemitic abuse and even death threats almost on a daily basis. A Jewish student at Glasgow University was told to go and gas herself and a Jewish student at UCL was sent a picture of herself photoshopped under a guillotine. The National Union of Students blamed Israel for the rise in antisemitic incidents, before backtracking. It is absolutely abhorrent that our universities have failed to protect our Jewish students and that students do not even feel protected by the NUS.

**Charlotte Nichols** (Warrington North) (Lab): I am interested in the specific examples that the hon. Gentleman is giving, because surely this Bill would actually promote and protect the right of people to make exactly the kinds of abhorrent remarks that he is talking about, making Jewish students less safe on campus. How does he reconcile this aspect of his speech with his support for the Bill?

**Christian Wakeford**: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but I disagree with her. As we heard from the Education Secretary himself in his opening remarks, that would not be the case.

It should be a source of shame for all of us and for every university that Jewish societies often keep their event locations secret due to concerns about the safety of students. We simply cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that our Jewish students do not feel safe on campuses here in the United Kingdom. Last year, Bristol's student union asked for a fee of £500 to safeguard the former ambassador Mark Regev. This is not an isolated incident. It should not be down to students to provide security themselves. As I have said before, universities have not just a moral obligation but a duty to ensure that all students are protected. This must extend to securing events and putting a stop to no-platforming once and for all. It is not just pro-Israel speakers who have been no-platformed. Indeed, a former Home Secretary was previously no-platformed from speaking at events as well.

It is absolutely crucial that the Government commit to ensuring that the Bill does not become a shield for those who wish to endorse poisonous views, including, as has been mentioned many times, Holocaust deniers and far-right or far-left extremists. Universities must be a safe space for all students and institutions must take their duty of care seriously. After a great deal of encouragement from the Secretary of State and others, over 100 institutions have now adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. This is a crucial step in ensuring that universities take accusations of antisemitism seriously.



While the IHRA definition is now being adopted, I am encouraged that the Bill gives some teeth to implementing it, because far too often we see a lack of implementation. Again, I refer hon. Members to what is going on at Bristol University.

Just last month, the University of Warwick assembly passed a motion to challenge the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The university—I hope that the shadow Minister will address this—has failed to condemn the motion, despite calls from Jewish students to do so. The Union of Jewish Students rightly asked:

“How can they claim they want to fulfil their moral duty to protect all members, which includes Jewish students, when this motion clearly disregards the wants and needs of Jewish students?”

I therefore ask the Minister what further steps the Government are taking to ensure that the definition is not only rolled out across all institutions but fully implemented. What more can be done to ensure that academics face disciplinary action for making remarks or supporting motions considered to be antisemitic under the definition? I refer again to Professor Miller in that regard. Lastly, will the Minister join me in condemning the incident in which the University of Bristol sought to impose security costs on a student society for daring to invite the former ambassador for Israel, and can she confirm that the Bill will help to stop repeat incidents of that nature?

Although the Bill delivers on our manifesto commitment to strengthen academic freedom and free speech in higher education, universities must now follow up and ensure that campuses are truly open to rigorous, healthy contestation of ideas or be held accountable. We cannot rest until all students feel safe on campus.

8.36 pm

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con) [V]: One characteristic of good education settings is that there are opportunities to be challenged. Education must be a place for open minds rather than narrow minds.

Speaking personally, I found that university was an opportunity to have my view of the world challenged. As a newly minted student, I joined the Durham Union Society, a venerable debating society that is known for bringing a very wide range of speakers in front of the student body. It gave me, and thousands of other students, a chance to hear from people on a range of issues, from nuclear power to environmentalism and various forms of human rights. It gave me a chance to hear from people whose views were simply beyond the range of anything I ever heard or learned about at my school in the south Wales valleys.

I heard from Dave Nellist, the inspiration for *Private Eye*'s Dave Spart of the loony left, who set out a very robust defence of his view of socialism, something I had never heard or learned about in my life. I heard Peter Tatchell set out a robust defence of direct action in pursuit of his campaign about gay rights. More importantly, I heard him articulate, in a way that many, like me, will have heard for the first time at university, the long history of injustice and prejudice that needed to be addressed. We then heard and saw his commitment to that action in opposition to the appointment of a Bishop of Durham whom he regarded as having been a hypocrite on that issue.

I had the opportunity to encounter speakers representing organisations as diverse as the Monday Club on the extreme right and the British Communist party on the extreme left, and every point in between. I strongly believe that I am in good company, in that that diverse range of challenges to what I had learned and what I perceived about the world helped me to become, as I believe I am, a more socially liberal and a more enlightened person. It certainly developed my interest in and my commitment to politics.

It is clear from the engagement that I have had with constituents who are students, who are part of the academic life of many of our university campuses across the country, that there is a serious, well-founded and genuine concern that the actions of some in our university system have had a chilling effect on their ability to speak freely, to ensure that future generations of students are able to enjoy the benefit of having their prejudices and views challenged, on whichever side of the spectrum.

While I strongly welcome the fact that we will continue to have, completely unaffected by this Bill, very robust laws that tackle hate speech in all its forms and that deal with the many prejudices that we have as a society decided are unacceptable, as well as enshrined protections for people in the Equality Act 2010, through the Bill we will also have measures in place to ensure that the freedom of speech of our academics and our students and the ability of future generations to be challenged and to develop their thinking—in a way that is fundamentally important and that we see going on every day in our House of Commons and our parliamentary democracy—are preserved for future generations.

Through the Bill, we will not see a narrowing of the thinking or a narrowing of the debate in our universities, but we will ensure that they remain what they have been for generations: a place where open minds can thrive and prejudices can be challenged and where we can develop our thinking as a society in a way that then contributes to our national life. For all those reasons, it seems to me that this proposal from the Government is a sensible step. We need to demonstrate to academics and students who have these concerns that we take them seriously. If we are to be the bastion of democracy that we wish to be, we have to ensure that free speech can happen in our universities and in every other part of our education system as well. That is why I strongly support this legislation from the Government.

I hope that the Bill will bring about the great benefit of demonstrating that the United Kingdom is not just genuinely committed to tackling those who would peddle hate and prejudice in our universities and other education settings, but determined to be a place where open minds, debate and free speech can thrive for the long-term benefit of our democracy.

8.41 pm

**Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): With the many pressing issues that universities are facing right now, such as harassment on campus, a struggling economy, the plummeting number of students enrolling and the challenges posed by remote learning, just to name a few, I am disappointed that the Government have chosen to spend their time focusing on a complete non-issue with this Bill. Indeed, this entire debate is surplus to requirements.

[*Taiwo Owatemi*]

In the minds of Ministers and Government Members, freedom of speech is under relentless attack, so they have decided to pass an entirely new law to protect it. We all know that in reality, that could not be further from the truth. A recent study of 10,000 speaker events on British university campuses found that only six had been cancelled—that is six out of 10,000 speaker events. I am sure that the Minister can give the number to show that that was relatively low. Four of those that were cancelled were due to incorrect paperwork. That is an admin error, so that is something that would happen regardless. One was cancelled simply to move to a larger venue. That was not discriminatory. The other was a pyramid scheme, which I am sure the Minister would not condone.

The Office for Students found that in 2017 and 2018, just 0.9% of speaking invitations across universities had been withdrawn. I therefore find it difficult to understand the fears and concerns of Ministers. We already have the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, which sets out the protection of freedom of speech on campuses. Protections for students' right to freedom of speech already exist, and this Bill does not make any substantive change to the already broad rights that are protected.

As it is crystal clear what the Bill will fail to do, I will focus on what it will actually do. First, it introduces a new mechanism that will allow hate-filled individuals to sue a university if they feel their opinion has not been adequately heard, which will allow extremists, racists and holocaust deniers to have a voice and a much-craved platform on our campuses. Overwhelmingly, student unions and research bodies are telling us that if this Bill is passed as drafted, universities will spend much of their time and resources fighting against such individuals. They will be spending resources on areas that I am sure students and parents would prefer them not to. With the threat of a lawsuit hanging over a university's head, there will be a new incentive to narrow, not widen debates. Universities will avoid inviting certain speakers to campus altogether—speakers who may have stimulated thought-provoking discussion—through fear of financial repercussions.

Empowering those who peddle hate speech will not help protect free speech, and the Government must seek to understand that better. Free speech is the right to say whatever one likes and the ability to think without constraints. It does not matter if one's opinion is unpopular, because free speech is essential to democracy. Hate speech is when somebody takes that right and abuses it so that they can bully, demonise and subjugate others, which is what the Government will end up promoting.

Within this Chamber, the ability to stand up and speak out freely is both essential and cherished. This Chamber illustrates the importance and benefit of free speech each and every day. We are doing that right now in this debate. However, if a Member of the House were to begin to say something vulgar, racist or hateful, the Speaker would quickly interrupt, end the speech and demand that the comment be withdrawn. Why is that? Although we theoretically have the right to say something in a free society, we use our judgment to reject hate speech that threatens, incites, harasses and demeans, because it has no place in a tolerant world. Universities should enjoy the same latitude that we do. This Chamber safeguards

itself against elevating hate speech each and every day, and I have never heard the Government try to dismantle this practice, so I ask them simply to uphold in our universities the same standards that we all work to here in Parliament.

Finally, I politely ask the Government to turn their attention to far more important issues facing higher education in this country. We are all waiting for the online harms Bill, which I am sure universities, students and lecturers will welcome, so I would be grateful if the Government could let us know when that will be coming back.

8.46 pm

**Charlotte Nichols** (Warrington North) (Lab): University students have never had such a raw deal as they do today. Sky-high tuition fees lumber them with decades of debt. Living costs soar, along with private sector rents. Thousands suffered lockdowns and virtual learning last year, without a reduction in what they were charged, and sexual harassment and assaults on university campuses are at shocking levels. But what is the issue that the Government choose to legislate on? Giving peddlers of hate speech the right to sue universities or student unions if their events are cancelled. The Minister for Universities, the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), admitted that this would include Holocaust deniers and, in her words, views that would be “hugely offensive” and “hugely hurtful”.

The star of David around my neck was a gift from my friend and comrade Ria on the occasion of my bat mitzvah. It was bought from a market on the site of the former Jewish ghetto in Poland, and I wear it proudly—not only as a symbol of my faith, but as a reminder of the millions killed because they were like me. Even if Ministers try to row back from their declaration of guaranteeing platforms for holocaust deniers, will they now come up with an official list of what hate speech is protected and what is not? Will their hierarchy of hatred allow denial of the Srebrenica genocide, the 26th anniversary of which was yesterday, or will they accept that giving fascists the legal protection to demand restitution from the courts is a terrible idea?

Fascists incite hatred and oppose our right to live in a non-violent democratic society. We are not obliged to accept their bile or their attempts to fundraise and recruit when given a platform. When Nick Griffin was given a seat on a “Question Time” panel, the British National party reported 3,000 new membership applications and raised thousands of pounds. That platform did not allow his views to be challenged; it validated them and grew the cancer of extremism that he represents.

What academic merit is there in the denial or distortion of the holocaust, or in the kind of ideology that saw a Member of this House killed? How many more people have to be murdered before we realise that these are not ideas that can be debated away? My grandfather Edward Nichols, of blessed memory, did not go to fight Hitler in the marketplace of ideas. That generation had the right idea, and we must do so too.

Communities, including university communities, are not obliged to welcome violent, degrading or dangerous lies from genocide deniers or virus deniers. This Government's lack of commitment to free speech is made clear by their planned crackdown on protests in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. This is a

tawdry piece of vice-signalling to groups who wish students were not so in favour of social equality. This is a bad Bill that offers nothing to students or to society. This is a matter not of cancel culture but of consequences culture. This Bill and the rhetoric around it are nothing more than imports from Trump's playbook in the United States, in furtherance of this Government's nonsense culture wars.

Rightly, we do not have an absolute right to freedom of speech in this country, be it in respect of our libel laws, the criminalisation of hate speech, the Government's push to have universities adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism or universities' statutory duties under the Prevent strategy. Even in this Chamber, as was rightly mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), we do not have freedom of speech, whether that is in the fact that when we say "you" in the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker, we refer to your good self, or that when my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) accidentally named me earlier, he got a little ticking off for it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West said, this is about creating a better culture of debate, so what is the purpose of this Bill? What free speech does it extend beyond the limitations in existing legislation? It does not do that, as those restrictions on absolute free speech remain in place. This was never a policy designed to address the problems in the university sector, and it is revealed as even more cynical and shoddy today as we condemn the racist abuse of our national footballers by the kind of vermin who have received tacit endorsement from the very highest levels of government. As Tyrone Mings rightly said, this Government do not "get to stoke the fire at the beginning of the tournament by labelling our anti-racism message as 'Gesture Politics' & then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we're campaigning against, happens."

This Bill is yet another dog whistle from a Government who are unleashing forces that they will not and cannot hope to control. Let us scrap it and move on to things that really matter to our constituents.

8.52 pm

**Mary Kelly Foy** (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: I am pleased to be speaking in this debate as chair of the all-party group for friends of Durham University.

Let me be clear: I support freedom of speech. I want students and academics to feel comfortable discussing and promoting unpopular views in order to challenge conventional wisdom. After all, that is a vital part of university. However, I do not believe that freedom of speech should mean freedom from consequences. Under this legislation, universities and student unions could be forced to roll out the red carpet for holocaust deniers, transphobes anti-vaxxers and others with deplorable views, and if they do not, they risk being fined or sued. This is not a free speech Bill; it is more of a hate speech Bill.

Aside from being problematic morally, it is not clear how this legislation will work in practice. Durham University has told me that it still does not know how it will fit in with its existing duties. For example, the university subscribes to the IHRA definition of antisemitism, but now could be compelled to host holocaust deniers or face sanctions. Alternatively, speech around

gender identity that might be allowed under this legislation could be in violation of the university's policies on equality and trans rights. The university could therefore be forced to break its own codes of conduct, which are designed to protect staff and student welfare, or face fines. This is clearly wrong. Does this legislation supersede universities' duties under education legislation, Prevent and employment law. It is all a bit of a mess.

What is especially frustrating is that this Bill is aimed at tackling a problem that does not really exist. Although Tories love to decry the so-called cancel culture at our universities, a study of 10,000 university speaker events found that just six were cancelled. As we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), four of them were cancelled for incorrect paperwork, one was cancelled to upgrade to a bigger venue, and one was a pyramid scheme. The words "moral panic" come to mind. In fact, Durham University has informed me that, far from encouraging a wider range of views, the threat of sanction could actually result in a more risk-averse speaker programme. The thing that really irritates me about this legislation is that there are so many other issues in higher education that need fixing. Freedom of speech is threatened less by wokeness and more by insecure work and limited funding. Students are concerned about the cost of rent, tuition fees, levels of sexual harassment and so much more, so where is the legislation to address those issues?

The Bill shows that the Government are more concerned with stirring up a culture war than addressing the real problems in society. It will only make life harder for students and staff in Durham who were already overburdened by introducing more bureaucracy into education. It is just the latest example of the Government's twisted priorities.

I will finish by saying to the Government: stop playing politics, scrap this Bill and introduce some measures that will actually improve higher education.

8.56 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab) [V]: I have to confess that I have some sympathy with the Universities Minister, recognising that she will soon be winding up this debate. She is a decent Minister who knows the real issues facing our universities and their students, and I am sure that she knows that this Bill is nonsense. She has certainly struggled to explain its impact. She knows and she has admitted that it will protect some hate speech, but she is having to defend it to play her part in stoking up the culture wars that are at the heart of this Conservative party's electoral strategy.

Let us be clear: free speech is at the heart of our values. We on the Labour Benches have a long record of protecting it, but it has too often been used by the Conservative party as a political football. I remember 35 years ago, with unemployment at a post-war high of 14% amid the deep gloom of that Tory decade, when Margaret Thatcher produced the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, requiring universities to uphold freedom of speech. I played my part then in drafting the code of practice for the University of Sheffield to ensure our compliance with the legislation. The Act was followed by a series of speaker meetings orchestrated by Conservative students to provoke a reaction and fuel division.



[Paul Blomfield]

Then, almost 10 years later, with John Major's Government struggling, out came the free speech dead cat again with the 1994 Education Act, which this time decided that too much free speech of the wrong sort was a bad thing and tried to limit the activities of student unions.

Now, with the mismanagement of covid leaving the UK with one of the worst recessions and worst death rates in Europe, the Government's flawed Brexit deal hitting businesses in every sector, people at work facing insecurity and rising inequality across society, free speech is again rolled out as a diversion, a "look over there" tactic. With no irony, they are introducing this Bill the week after Ministers were cracking down on free speech with the anti-protest provisions of the policing Bill.

As the Universities Minister acknowledged on Radio 4, this is a Bill that empowers holocaust deniers and other purveyors of hate speech by giving them the powers to make vexatious complaints against universities. As if that did not do enough to fuel the culture war, it also creates a new director for freedom of speech at the Office for Students with a full-time responsibility to keep the issue alive. No doubt it will be another job for another Conservative crony with undue influence over academic debate. Does the Minister really believe that this is the most important addition to the IFS team? Is it more important, for example, than a director of learning remediation to deal with the lost learning experiences for both new and current students as a result of covid? Does she not recognise that the financial and legal liability in the Bill could be a chill factor on open debate, requiring universities to spend more on lawyers and less on students, but, of course, the Bill is not about the real priorities. I represent both of Sheffield's universities and more students than any other Member of this House. Over the last year, I have received hundreds of emails from students, from parents with children at university, from staff working hard to provide the best possible learning during the pandemic against a backdrop of confusion and late decisions from the Government; I have received none on free speech.

We could have spent our time better today looking at the issues that are being raised. We could have discussed the recommendations of the report by the all-party parliamentary group for students, which involved two of the Minister's Conservative predecessors and argued for a learning remediation fund to assist universities to provide access to experiences, specialist facilities and equipment for skills development and more—those things that students have missed during the pandemic. We could have discussed our case for proper hardship funding in respect of rents paid for unused accommodation by students who have lost out from part-time jobs that dried up in hospitality and retail sector. We could have considered why students in England have been treated far worse than those in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, with an average of only £43.70 allocated per student in England for hardship support while those in Wales received an average of £400 per head, Northern Ireland £500 per head and Scotland £80 per head plus other support packages.

We could have talked about the issues for staff who have faced enormous pressure and made huge efforts to move entire courses online, delivering the best possible

teaching but knowing that some of the learning experiences would inevitably be lost. We might have asked why the latest guidance for teaching in the autumn has been issued too late, after timetabling has been done, making things more difficult than needed. We could have been considering the quarantine arrangements for the new session, as those of us on the all-party parliamentary group for international students have been arguing. We could have discussed the vital role that our universities will play as we rebuild our economy after covid. Instead, we are faced with this sorry Bill. The Government really need to deal with the priorities that we face. I hope that they will drop this unnecessary Bill.

9.1 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) [V]: Despite finding no time to legislate for social care reform or employment rights, the Government can find time to protect antisemites and people whose only aim is to cause deep hurt and offence. These are clearly the wrong priorities for us as a Parliament and for the country. The Government should drop this Bill, which has dangerous and deeply troubling consequences, as my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) so eloquently pointed out.

It is a real pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who is on the all-party parliamentary group for universities and chairs the all-party parliamentary groups for students and for international students. I thank him for all the work that he has done in the House to highlight the plight of students. That brings me to what is really troubling my constituents.

No. 1: Jewish families have contacted me as a constituency MP, very worried about the welfare of their children and young people in universities where they have faced abuse. I do not believe that the current Bill seeks to address that issue. In fact, it could make it worse. I have also had briefings from the organisation Tell MAMA, which has explained how Islamophobic attacks have happened against students on university campuses. I am not sure how this Bill would address those sorts of concerns. Not only that, but first-year university students have been contacting me for the last 12 months—first, before they gained access to university, during the exams fiasco—asking how on earth the Secretary of State could have kept his job despite such a huge level of incompetence.

There have been images on our television screens over the last 12 months of international students queuing around the block for food banks because they have not been able to get part-time work due to covid. The broken loans system is an international disgrace. The Government really need to address the financial pressure that students are under. My local university, London Metropolitan University, offers courses for nurses. If nurses need assistance while they are studying nursing—which, of course, is a very much needed occupation with covid and was beforehand due to the shortage of nurses—the fees are still £9,000 a year. Of course, there are also other living costs over the three years. Nurses can come away with a loans bill of £50,000 and then start at the local hospital—Whittington or North Middlesex—on an income of about £25,000. How nurses could ever pay off those ridiculous loans should trouble the Government, not this Bill.

Where are the results and outcomes and the action that the Government will take as a result of the Augar report? Or is it just growing dust and mould on shelves? What about the need to face down the uncertainty and try to clarify the situation for students who are studying in September 2021? We have 10 days left before recess in which we could debate urgent issues such as whether students will be studying under a hybrid system; whether they will be studying in person or remotely; whether they will have to undergo quarantine if they come in from abroad; what will happen to European student numbers, which have dropped because of Brexit; how Horizon will be funded; and how the short-term contracts that currently face so many women academics can be put on a proper employment footing.

While we are on the subject of women, how will the issues for women students raised so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) be addressed? These are real questions. We need proper services for women who have experienced sexual violence, and we need firm action against perpetrators.

Universities are not the enemy. This Bill will cause more paperwork and bureaucracy for a sector that is already struggling. Instead, we need a proper debate on the issues that matter. I hope that the Government will listen to the contributions made this evening, including the serious ones from my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West and for Warrington North about how determined a small far-right group can be to use legislation that is not carefully worded to cause mayhem, as well as the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield Central and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) about how we can work together. We need to see urgent action and to be in the real world, not stoking culture wars.

9.6 pm

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) and her heartfelt sentiments on behalf of students in her constituency. During the pandemic, students from Luton North have got in touch with me about so many of the worries that the Government have put in front of them. There was exam chaos last year, and students worry that they will see the same repeated again this year. They were sent back to covid-filled universities last September and have had to pay for accommodation that they have not been in because of the pandemic. Some universities have moved to permanent remote learning, for the same costs as an in-person degree. There have been missed graduations and freshers weeks, a growing sense of crisis in young people's mental health, and all the rest of it.

This has been a hard time to be a student. But can the House guess how many students from Luton North have got in touch with me about no-platforming or the need to balance out the debate on anti-racism and anti-fascism? Zero. With everything that is going on at the moment—everything that is facing young people—how can this Bill be a Government priority?

One thing that people in Luton North do talk to me about is the impact of the Prevent duty on campuses and in our schools. Of those who reported being affected by Prevent, 43% felt unable to express their views or be

themselves on campus. Only a quarter of Muslim students say they feel entirely free to express their views on Islam in university contexts. This means that Muslim students are less involved in student democracy, more likely to feel there is no space for them and less comfortable engaging in political debate on campus. That is simply not right.

Prevent is the real block on freedom of speech on campuses, but it is mentioned only briefly in the Bill's 21 pages. Given how students, and Muslim students especially, feel that their freedom of speech is being restricted on campus by Prevent, I hope that the Government will change the Bill to help all students to feel more welcome on campus. Seriously: how can a Government talk about free speech when they actively seek to criminalise young people who talk and share opinions on issues that we should all be talking about, from Palestine to plastics in our oceans?

The Government simply cannot have it both ways or take people for fools. This Bill is not really about freedom of speech though, is it? It is about stoking a culture war. It is about enabling those who profit from hate, silencing young Muslim students and students who care about climate change. The Bill is nonsensical and hypocritical, like the Home Secretary's attempt today to condemn the same sorts of racism that the Conservative Government have courted and continue to stoke with divisive Bills such as this and the upcoming Nationality and Borders Bill.

What it boils down to, ultimately, is that Conservative Members are worried—really worried—about the fact that even when they won a landslide victory in the election, only 22% of 18 to 29-year-olds voted for them. That is not because young people are a bunch of liberal, snowflake, red, left-wing, knee-taking, no-platforming work warriors who need to hear balanced debates and will then, all of a sudden, discover how to vote Tory. No: it is because since we last had a Labour Government, 11 years ago, they have seen their fees more than trebled and their education maintenance allowance axed, and most of them are stuck renting at extortionate cost with little prospect of owning their homes in parts of the country.

While we talk about values, young people see a Home Secretary obsessed with deportations and not their own safety. They see a diversity-bashing Prime Minister and a dog-whistle Tory party which spends its time insulting even our English national football team for having the audacity to speak out against racism and try to get food into the bellies of kids who are going hungry because of the Government's shameful policies. No amount of so-called balanced debate will ever cancel out those facts, no matter how hard the Government try to punish young people in this country.

If the Conservative party really wants to fix its electoral prospects with the optimistic, dynamic, hopeful and yes, sometimes radical new generation of our country, perhaps it should stop stoking a culture war and just get on with helping those young people to live freely and securely and realise their ambitions, just as a Labour Government would do. Young people want and deserve hope, not hate.

9.11 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): It is the principled eloquence of my hon. Friend the Member

[John McDonnell]

for Luton North (Sarah Owen) that gives me hope for the future of our country. I feel that the country is safe in the hands of her generation and people like her.

I have listened to the whole of the debate, and I say this. We are in the midst of what in other eras we would have called a plague. Nearly 130,000 members of our community have died. Many of them faced appalling deaths, alone, isolated from their loved ones. Moreover, poverty runs rife among our people. More than 40% of the children in my constituency are living in poverty. It took a footballer to force the Government to act to secure a basic meal for many of our children, and what did he get last night from some of the racist scum populating our country? More racist abuse.

With so much scarring the lives of many of our constituents, with so many wrongs to be righted, what is the House debating? A proposal for a law to legislate against behaviour when there is barely any evidence that it exists. The Office for Students found

“no evidence of free speech being systematically suppressed”.

It went on to say:

“Our experience to date is that providers are working hard to be compliant with their duty under section 43 of the 1986 Education Act.”

Selina Todd has been referred to tonight. She is my friend; I helped her to launch her recent book. I was contacted before the event by a students club urging me not to attend and not to participate. I went ahead, because, as I explained, disagreement with Selina was best dealt with in discussion, and it was left at that: an agreement to disagree.

If any incidences arise of the suppression of free speech, laws and institutions already exist to protect freedom of speech in higher education. There is the Human Rights Act, which, I remind the House, the Conservative party voted against. The Education (No. 2) Act 1986, passed by a Conservative Government, contains section 43, which has been referred to and which requires universities to

“take such steps as are reasonably practicable”

to secure freedom of speech. There are already regulatory bodies to ensure that those provisions are protected and enforced. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator deals with student complaints that cannot be resolved through internal processes of individual universities. Likewise, if academic freedom is being infringed, employment law and employment tribunals can address that.

This is interesting and I have not witnessed it very often, but Universities UK, the National Union of Students, the University and College Union and even the Russell Group are united in opposing this legislation. I say to the Government: do not insult the intelligence of Members of this House or, more importantly, the intelligence of the British people. This is a grubby political stunt, worthy of the derision it has received tonight. It is a propaganda exercise in this Government's persistent provocation of the culture war, as many Members have suggested. But how far does the logic of this policy go? Who is next—further education establishments, schools, Government-funded charities and community groups? If not them, why are the universities being singled out? The logic of this policy is ludicrous.

If Ministers want to know the real issues in universities, they should go to Liverpool and Leicester and speak to the lecturers who have been forced on to picket lines because they are being sacked. They should visit any college and talk to lecturers about how their profession is being casualised, their wages frozen and cut, and their pension put under further threat. They should speak to the University and College Union and see what its members are up against at the moment. None of the issues that are so relevant to higher education, students and lecturers is being addressed by the Government, who are more interested in divisive culture wars than in solving the real issues faced by our universities and the people of this country.

The legislation should be dropped. I am fearful. As others have warned, be careful what this Government wish for, because they could open up serious division in our society and on our university campuses, and open up a can of worms that the fascist right will exploit.

9.16 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I seem to follow the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) in various debates, but I have to say that the content of his speech was very much the opposite of what I want to say.

I will explain my specific point of view. I do not take for granted the right to speak and to speak freely. I treasure and cherish the right to do that in this House. Whenever I speak, I know that there are many in this Chamber who may not agree with me, and I accept that because I understand that we are all different and have different points of view. That is their right, but the fact is that that does not take away my right to speak, as long as I speak with courtesy, manners and respect. I have always tried to do that with everyone in this House, even when my opinion might differ from theirs, and to express my views in a way that is every bit as heartfelt, strong and sincere as them. I have always maintained that freedom of speech does not mean freedom to berate, belittle or bad mouth individuals, but we must be allowed to hold different opinions in a respectful manner.

I am referring to the intrinsic rights that we hold dear. Every day I look at the world and I grieve when I hear someone say, “If you don't agree with me, you shouldn't speak.” I do not subscribe to that view, which seems to be most strongly held in universities throughout the country. That is why I believe that the Government's stance is correct and proper, and why I will support the Bill's Second Reading and cast proxy votes on behalf of my party colleagues as well.

We must remind people that they must hear if not accept other arguments. If we continue to raise generations who believe that their opinion trumps others, that they are right and others are wrong, and that to disagree with them means to hate them, we will find ourselves in a very different United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

We all long for a place of tolerance, which needs to be given to all people, to those who believe in no gods and those who believe in one God—as I do, because I have a faith and I believe very much in it. I know that others in this Chamber have the same faith, while others have a different faith. Each person has a right to speak of their faith and belief.



I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. We speak out for those with Christian beliefs, for those with other beliefs and for those with no beliefs at all. Why do we do that? It is because we have respect for other people. I do that on behalf of Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Ahmadis, Jews, Baha'is and Shi'as because I believe they have the right to their beliefs as I have a right to have my belief. I will speak as strongly for them as I do for people of my own belief, because that is what I believe and what I seek to achieve in this House. I understand that that is what the Government are trying to achieve.

To provide some examples, I read of a shocking case against street preachers—I say this because I am a Christian and I have strong faith—who were drawn into speaking on abortion and other sensitive issues in an attempt to silence them having their rights upheld by the rule of law. I will quote what the judge said in his deliberation in one case, because it is important to have it on the record:

“Free speech includes not only the inoffensive but the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative provided it does not tend to provoke violence.”

We should be able to say words without bringing people to anger. He went on:

“Freedom only to speak inoffensively is not worth having.”

In Northern Ireland we had the case, which was known worldwide, of the Ashers cake sale. I will not rehearse the case in the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I just want to put this on the record. It was a case where those with a strong faith like myself were taken to court for not baking a cake for a certain group of people. They took their case to court. The Christian Institute helped them and they won their case, but those people were dragged through the court because they had a belief. This is about respecting other people. I just see in society today that so much happens in a different way. This is a principle that we must live by and I believe it should be clear in universities.

Today is 12 July, Madam Deputy Speaker, and in Northern Ireland we had a celebration of Orange culture. I am wearing my lodge tie—Kircubbin LOL 1900—because I came straight from the parade on to the plane for this debate. We had a fantastic celebration of our Orange culture in Newtonards, as there was across the whole of the Province. The people who watch those parades—I know them, because it is my constituency—are from all sides of the community. They are there to celebrate and enjoy it, and to have respect for other people. What a great thing it is to have respect for other people. I believe that is an example of people from all communities coming together. It may not necessarily be something they want to be a part of themselves individually, but they are happy to come along, support and enjoy not just the good will as there was in Newtonards today but that time together—*[Interruption.]* I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did not realise there was a time limit—that is my fault. I will come to an end. My apologies.

I will finish with this quote from the Christian Institute:

“Freedom of expression is central to the health of a democratic society. It allows us to seek truth and object to injustice. Without free speech, a society effectively closes the door to the exchange of ideas that can lead to positive change. So we need to be vigilant to protect this vital freedom for future generations.”—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. I thank the hon. Gentleman.

**Jim Shannon:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. All I want to say is that I support the Bill.

9.23 pm

**Claudia Webbe** (Leicester East) (Ind): The Bill is a damaging non-solution to a non-existent problem that only exists in the minds of this reactionary Government and their outriders. Trade unions, led by the University and College Union, rightly argue that there is no evidence to support the notion of a free speech crisis on campus by what the Government deem to be intolerant or even oversensitive students and staff. A 2019 Policy Exchange report, which claimed to find evidence of a free speech campus crisis and which was cited repeatedly in the Government's own White Paper, which informs much of the Bill, has since been discredited. For instance, one of the report's main examples of no-platforming at Cardiff University did not happen at all—the event went ahead as planned.

Democratically elected student unions who represent their student bodies much like trade unions in the workplace have long adhered to a no-platform policy formed in response to the fascist groups who sought to exploit and subvert democratic platforms to promote hate, racism, fascism and holocaust denial. The Government do not understand that if someone is allowed free rein to espouse racist, hateful or discriminatory views without challenge, it can directly contribute to a culture where people of my class, my race and my gender no longer feel safe. Yet no-platforming is an incredibly rare outcome: of the 62,000 requests by students for external speaker events at English universities in 2017-18, only 53—less than 0.1%—were rejected by a student union or university. Despite that, the Government have created a self-serving narrative of an imagined free-speech crisis to force through this authoritarian legislation.

The Bill fails to secure for staff the ability to speak out against their employers and will empower the Office for Students, with appointments by the Government, to interfere politically in university and academic life, thus seriously imperilling academic freedom and democratic norms. It also narrows the legal definition of academic freedom in a way that is almost unprecedented in British law. Unlike rules on judicial review, there will be no standing requirement, so any person, business or campaign can sue universities. The threat to freedom of speech and academic liberties therefore comes not from the imagined free-speech crisis but from the Government and their hugely disproportionate legislation.

As the University and College Union rightly highlights, the much graver threats to academic freedom take the form of casualised employment, sustained attacks on the arts and humanities, insecurity of research funding, the Prevent programme, Government interference with the academic research agenda—especially on decolonisation—and targeted redundancies. More than two thirds of researchers and almost half of teaching-only staff in the higher education sector are on fixed-term contracts. Widespread insecure employment strips academics of the ability to speak and research freely and curtails chances for career development. Indeed, the proposed compulsory redundancies across England's universities including at Leicester, Liverpool, Aston and Chester, are alarming. In Leicester and across the UK, university management must listen to the workers' demands and withdraw compulsory redundancies. The Government must end

[Claudia Webbe]

the marketisation of higher education, which restricts academic freedoms, and instead encourage universities to work constructively with trade union representatives to protect higher education livelihoods.

Many aspects of higher education need urgent redress. For too long, universities have been treated as private businesses and left at the mercy of market forces while top salaries have soared and students have paid more for less. Tuition fees have trebled and maintenance grants have been scrapped, leaving the poorest graduates with an average debt of £57,000. Education must be a universal right, not a costly privilege. The Government must properly fund our universities, scrap tuition fees and cancel student debt. Instead, they are pushing through this legislation that solves none of the real issues facing the higher education sector and will instead compound the problems that they claim they wish to solve. They must end their divisive culture wars, stop stoking the fires of hate, abandon the power grab over the higher education sector, commit to properly supporting the freedom, wellbeing and funding of all staff and students and scrap altogether this free hate speech Bill.

9.29 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank everyone who has participated in today's debate. The Bill uses a sledgehammer to crack a nut—so said my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper). As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) succinctly put it, the Bill will result in legal protection for hate speech.

With this Bill, the Government are seeking headlines. The Bill is mostly about headlines, but of course Labour supports free speech. Labour is the party that has done more than any other when it comes to free speech—just look at our record. In fact, Labour introduced two significant pieces of legislation in this regard: the European convention on human rights, and the Equality Act 2010. Without exception, every one of my colleagues has risen to extol their support for free speech.

The Government are fooling no one with their claims for the Bill, as was laid bare by the contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who chairs the APPG for students and who talked about the numerous attempts by successive Conservative Governments to use the free-speech dead cat. Many will have listened intently to my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols), who made it absolutely clear that this legislation would facilitate the likes of David Irving, Nick Griffin and others to spew out their antisemitic, racist hate speech on our campuses. My hon. Friends asked what hate speech will be allowed. Both called the legislation dog-whistle politics, over which the Government will lose control. What we have before us would be more aptly titled the hate speech protection Bill—a piece of legislation that would protect antisemites, holocaust deniers and people whose only aim is to cause deep hurt and offence.

The Government claim to be advancing the people's priorities, but this issue is certainly not one of them. One would have thought that the Government would

prioritise an inquiry into the covid pandemic; the greater number of challenges that the higher education sector faces; the impact of the pandemic on education, as we have heard; the mental health crisis; or the fact that violence against women is endemic. On the last point, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) asked the Secretary of State about his failure to address violence against women. She pointedly asked where that Bill is, but the Secretary of State remains silent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) asked why the Government have not prioritised support for students throughout the pandemic, which has exposed enormous inequality. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) spoke of the ongoing crisis in mental health on our campuses and asked why it is not a priority. Instead, the Government have manufactured a Bill to once again distract from their own failings. They claim that they have evidence and data, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) said, the Government are in an evidence-free zone.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) said, the Bill is motivated by the cancellation on university campuses of just six scheduled events out of 10,000 last year. Four of those were cancelled due to incorrect paperwork, one was moved off campus, and the other was a pyramid scheme. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) asked, why is the Secretary of State so attentive to a virtually non-existent problem? Why was the Secretary of State not fighting his corner for the £15 billion of catch-up funding that was proposed by Sir Kevan Collins, rather than meekly accepting the £1.4 billion pittance? He would rather focus on six, or truly two, cases where people were not heard on campus.

The Bill is a charter for hate speech. Many people, including my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana), reminded us that the Minister for Universities, the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), was unable to deny that the Bill would create a legislative safeguard for holocaust denial. Why are we devoting our attention to a Bill that provides legislative backing to help holocaust deniers, racial supremacists and other preachers of hate gain special access to university campuses? The simple truth is that the existing legislation—section 43(1) of the Education Act 1986, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which includes Prevent duties, and the Higher Education and Research Act 2017—already covers the issues that the Bill seeks to address. The 2017 Act established the Office for Students and states that the governing body must take

“such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured within the provider.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) questioned why, despite those existing powers, this Bill seeks to create a range of new obligations on higher education providers and to give the OfS new powers to fine an institution.

My hon. Friends have questioned throughout the new tort enabling individuals to seek compensation through the courts, which will result in universities and

student unions having to spend more significant time and money fighting legal battles against vexatious and frivolous claims. What is the unintended consequence? Institutions and student unions will naturally become risk averse and avoid inviting speakers for fear of financial repercussions if they are subsequently cancelled. Remember that many HE institutions and colleges are actually quite small—maybe 2,000 or 3,000 students—and will certainly not be able to cope administratively or financially with the additional burdens placed on them. The result will be fewer speakers, fewer debates and an overall reduction in free speech.

Then there is the threat to academic freedom with the inclusion of a new qualifying concept of “within their field of expertise”.

Perhaps the Minister would elaborate on how academic freedom will be limited in practice and on who would decide. Increasingly, and I have to agree with the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), this begins to sound like the McCarthyism that started in the US in 1950s, but it is McCarthyism against our university sector. As we have heard repeatedly from Labour Members, this is a Bill that claims to safeguard, yet perversely will have the reverse effect in numerous unintended consequences. The idea that this Bill could actually facilitate holocaust deniers to speak on campus should itself send a chill through the public consciousness. Likewise, it would enable other anti-science brigades to hold court on campus. Perhaps I could paraphrase the late Donald Rumsfeld, and suggest that there may be intended unintended consequences. That is to say that the Government may not have fully thought through the forms and scale of damage to the higher education sector, but it seems they would not be dissatisfied with the turmoil of litigation and the financial impact they have unleashed, because this is the precursor to their attack on the sector.

Finally, let me turn to the Office for Students and its central role. If we needed to understand what was going on here, we could do no better than start with the appointment of the new chair to the supposedly independent OfS. I know the Prime Minister is a recent convert to the love of dogs, but appointing his poodle? Of course, one of Lord Wharton's first acts was to make an £8,000 donation to the Conservative party, which is two months' pay from his two-day-a-week job. Now we have what many are describing as an “Office for Stooges” overseeing higher education, and that is how free and independent speech will be in future. It is a body whose purpose now is to do the Government's bidding, particularly when central to this legislation is the appointment of a tsar for free speech and academic freedom. That is chilling—one person with all those powers.

I will be voting for our reasoned amendment. Given that there is no serious evidence to suggest there is a problem with freedom of speech on our campuses, instead of addressing the urgent problems faced by students and higher education institutions, the Bill is yet another case of the wrong priorities from a Government who seek to divide rather than unite. I invite the Minister to explain why the public should trust this Government when it comes to free speech. After all, this is a Government who shut down Parliament illegally—this place, illegally—as well as a Government who interfere with the independent selection of members of parliamentary bodies and the

selection of museum trustees. They are even a Government who tell the National Trust not to explain the history of certain of its properties that were funded on the proceeds of slavery. That is sinister.

The Government should drop this Bill and get on with addressing the urgent needs of the country, where people are more concerned about how they are going to pay their bills this week and this month, and where inflation is ripping through people's hard-earned income, with an economy that has become so distorted and so riven by inequality in the past 11 years that we the people were more vulnerable to the pandemic even before the Government managed to mismanage the crisis. The public simply want good government and a Government who understand that politics is all about priorities, and that is why I urge all Members to vote for our reasoned amendment.

9.39 pm

**The Minister for Universities (Michelle Donelan):** We have heard a range of views today, but the House is united in an understanding that free speech is the cornerstone of democracy and a liberal society. That was passionately articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) and many others, who shared an endless list of examples of the curtailment of free speech on our campuses.

Disappointingly, though, there was disagreement from those on the Opposition Benches over the role that the Government should take to protect and promote free speech. On the Government side of the House, we believe that standing up for free speech is a key responsibility of any democratic Government, we believe that students and lecturers should not be silenced, and we are prepared to stand up for free speech and not just make tokenistic soundings regarding its value. That is why we are bringing forward this legislation to deliver on our manifesto pledge.

Some hon. Members questioned whether there is a problem on our campuses. Tell that to the countless academics and students who have shared their experiences with me. Tell that to the students and academics whose stories have been shared by hon. Members today.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** The hon. Lady has just said that she has countless examples. Will she, after the debate—if she does not have it with her now, that is fine; I accept that—publish the data on which the Bill is based? That would at least show that there is some evidence behind the Bill, rather than just the hearsay she is telling us about.

**Michelle Donelan:** I am confused about how the right hon. Member cannot recognise the evidence. We have heard from so many hon. Members today who have shared examples: my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) and for North West Durham (Mr Holden); the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry); the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield); my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings; the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), and my hon. Friends the Members for Congleton and for Dudley North (Marco Longhi).

Numerous studies have shone a spotlight on the problem, but they only document the tip of the iceberg, given the nature of the chilling effect outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and



[Michelle Donelan]

Howden (Mr Davis). Think for a moment about those who feel too afraid to speak out for fear of repercussion, and feel that they have to self-censor. Our universities should always be bastions of freedom and intellectual discussion. That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell).

As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) stressed, how can we expect society to progress or opinions to modernise unless we can challenge the status quo? The intolerance and influence of some has led students and academics to self-censor their views. Those individuals are some of the best and brightest, yet their ideas go unexpressed. Imagine the potential loss here—we will never know. We can, at least, look back at the past. Where would we be now if the views of 100 or even 200 years had never been challenged? As a woman, I doubt I would be an MP, let alone Universities Minister.

No one can deny the massive impact that covid has had on students, universities and staff. However, to address the question asked by the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) as to why we are doing this now, I would argue that covid has highlighted the value of personal freedoms that many of us used to take for granted. That is on top of the fact that the British public placed their faith in us to deliver on a manifesto—and deliver we certainly will.

We have heard from some Opposition Members that we need cultural, not legislative, change. I remind them that current legislation lacks an enforcement mechanism. Yes, some universities, including Essex, have got their house in order, and we recently saw a strong commitment from the Russell Group, but as so many speakers today have highlighted, there is a problem. We also know the crucial role legislation can play, and has played, in cultural change; take gender equality, race discrimination and human rights as examples.

A number of Members spoke about how higher education providers will have to balance competing duties. It is important to remind the House that they already have to do that. However, the Bill places a duty on providers to take reasonably practicable steps to secure lawful free speech. It does not supersede the Prevent duty or the Equality Act. The requirement to take reasonably practicable steps is right. It cannot be sensible to require providers to act unreasonably or to ignore their other legal duties. The Bill will give providers further clarity, because the new director will give advice and issue comprehensive guidance.

I want to be very clear: this Bill only protects lawful free speech. Harassment, racism, discrimination, hate crimes, and incitement of violence or terrorism will have no place on our campuses or in our society. In fact, I vehemently believe that we should defend and safeguard freedoms on all fronts, from freedom of speech to freedom from persecution.

**Christian Wakeford:** What we have heard from those on the Opposition Benches, in trying to suggest that holocaust deniers will be supported in going on to our university campuses, is clearly fearmongering. Will the Minister set the record straight and highlight that that is not the case and that we are supporting our students?

**Michelle Donelan:** I absolutely confirm that, and I agree with my hon. Friend.

Some Members have asked how the Bill will interact with the Government's work to combat antisemitism. Antisemitism is abhorrent and will not be tolerated in our universities, which is why we have encouraged more than 100 higher education providers to sign up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition. Regarding the specific question of holocaust deniers, any attempt to deny the scale or the occurrence of the holocaust is morally reprehensible and has no factual basis. In many cases, those who deny the holocaust have links to neo-Nazi extremism, antisemitic violence and intimidation. There are numerous reasons why someone who denies the holocaust should not be invited to speak on campus, and nothing in the Bill gives them a right to a platform.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I agree totally with the hon. Lady and I do not think for one minute that she is promoting those individuals, but what is to prevent a holocaust denier who has been denied the opportunity to speak at a university from using the legal framework in the Bill to sue that university? The legal action might not get anywhere, but the university would have to spend a lot of time and effort defending itself.

**Michelle Donelan:** I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention.

The European Court of Human Rights has held that holocaust denial is not protected speech under article 10 of the European convention on human rights and as such is intolerable in a democratic society. I will put on record again, just as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did before, that there is no place in universities for an extremist views that masquerades as fact but is complete fiction while grotesquely seeking to misinterpret global history in a deeply offensive way. To be absolutely clear, the Bill does not override the existing duties under the Equality Act regarding harassment and unlawful discrimination. The public sector equality duty, the Prevent duty, hate crime and, of course, criminal law may apply. That point was excellently articulated by a number of Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly).

The Opposition raised the issue of anti-vaxxers. We have one of the world's most successful vaccination programmes, with over half of 18 to 24-year-olds already having had their first jab. The Bill categorically does not give the right to a platform to anti-vaxxers who may make baseless claims. This makes me wonder whether the Opposition have, in fact, read the Bill. We will not be supporting their amendment today, as it serves only to highlight their desire to inhibit free speech. The hon. Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) argued that the Bill would result in universities refraining from inviting speakers. The reality is that it places a duty on providers to promote free speech, and they will be investigated by the director if they fail to meet that duty. The importance of the new duty to promote was clearly articulated by the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

I want to note the powerful speech by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). I agree 100% that abhorrent sexual harassment has absolutely no place on our campuses, and every university should have a robust complaints process. Two weeks ago, I wrote to all universities stating the Government's clear view that non-disclosure agreements should not be used

in these circumstances, and the OfS has produced a statement of expectation and is looking at creating a new registration condition. I recently met the founders of Everyone's Invited, and I would also be happy to meet the hon. Member to discuss this important topic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) raised the issue of security costs resulting from no-platforming, and cited the example of the Israeli ambassador. Higher education providers should not be no-platforming by the back door. The Bill is clear that reasonably practical steps should be taken to secure freedom of speech for visiting speakers, and I expect the Office for Students guidance to make it clear that this applies to security costs.

The Bill will protect numerous views that are alien to me and to many in this Chamber, but it is not only naive but dangerous to suggest that defending the right of a view in any way endorses a specific view. Surely, as politicians, we should all agree with the sentiment of Evelyn Hall, who stated when summing up Voltaire's views:

"I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

It is disappointing that not all Opposition Members understand this simple principle, which is much at the heart of the Bill: not a right-wing, anti-woke agenda but an agenda that allows all views and ideas to flourish. We have an immeasurable pool of talent in our students and academics, overflowing with ideas and values that will drive forward this country to build back better, and now is the time to unlock their potential.

Universities should not be echo chambers but petri dishes of new, thought-provoking ideas, concepts and visions. That is why this Government are making good on their manifesto commitment to tackle the pattern of self-censorship and its chilling effect by protecting and bolstering free speech and academic freedom. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 367.*

## Division No. 48]

[9.50 pm

### AYES

|                       |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Abbott, rh Ms Diane   | Byrne, rh Liam             |
| Abrahams, Debbie      | Cadbury, Ruth              |
| Ali, Rushanara        | Campbell, rh Sir Alan      |
| Ali, Tahir            | Carden, Dan                |
| Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena | Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair |
| Amesbury, Mike        | Chamberlain, Wendy         |
| Anderson, Fleur       | Champion, Sarah            |
| Antoniazzi, Tonia     | Charalambous, Bambos       |
| Ashworth, rh Jonathan | Clark, Feryal              |
| Barker, Paula         | Cooper, Daisy              |
| Beckett, rh Margaret  | Cooper, Rosie              |
| Begum, Apsana         | Cooper, rh Yvette          |
| Benn, rh Hilary       | Corbyn, rh Jeremy          |
| Betts, Mr Clive       | Coyle, Neil                |
| Blake, Olivia         | Creasy, Stella             |
| Blomfield, Paul       | Cruddas, Jon               |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben   | Cryer, John                |
| Brennan, Kevin        | Cunningham, Alex           |
| Brown, Ms Lyn         | Daby, Janet                |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas | Davey, rh Ed               |
| Bryant, Chris         | David, Wayne               |
| Buck, Ms Karen        | Davies, Geraint            |
| Burton, Richard       | Davies-Jones, Alex         |
| Butler, Dawn          | De Cordova, Marsha         |
| Byrne, Ian            | Debbonaire, Thangam        |

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh | Madders, Justin         |
| Dodds, Anneliese           | Mahmood, Mr Khalid      |
| Doughty, Stephen           | Mahmood, Shabana        |
| Dowd, Peter                | Malhotra, Seema         |
| Dromey, Jack               | Maskell, Rachael        |
| Duffield, Rosie            | Matheson, Christian     |
| Eagle, Dame Angela         | McCabe, Steve           |
| Eagle, Maria               | McCarthy, Kerry         |
| Edwards, Jonathan          | McDonagh, Siobhain      |
| Efford, Clive              | McDonald, Andy          |
| Elliott, Julie             | McDonnell, rh John      |
| Elmore, Chris              | McFadden, rh Mr Pat     |
| Eshalomi, Florence         | McGinn, Conor           |
| Esterson, Bill             | McGovern, Alison        |
| Evans, Chris               | McKinnell, Catherine    |
| Farron, Tim                | McMahon, Jim            |
| Farry, Stephen             | McMorrin, Anna          |
| Ferrier, Margaret          | Mearns, Ian             |
| Fletcher, Colleen          | Miliband, rh Edward     |
| Fovargue, Yvonne           | Mishra, Navendu         |
| Foxcroft, Vicky            | Moran, Layla            |
| Foy, Mary Kelly            | Morden, Jessica         |
| Gardiner, Barry            | Morgan, Stephen         |
| Gill, Preet Kaur           | Morris, Grahame         |
| Green, Kate                | Murray, Ian             |
| Green, Sarah               | Murray, James           |
| Greenwood, Lilian          | Nandy, Lisa             |
| Greenwood, Margaret        | Nichols, Charlotte      |
| Griffith, Nia              | Norris, Alex            |
| Gwynne, Andrew             | Olney, Sarah            |
| Haigh, Louise              | Onwurah, Chi            |
| Hamilton, Fabian           | Oppong-Asare, Abena     |
| Hardy, Emma                | Osamor, Kate            |
| Harman, rh Ms Harriet      | Osborne, Kate           |
| Harris, Carolyn            | Owatemi, Taiwo          |
| Hayes, Helen               | Owen, Sarah             |
| Healey, rh John            | Peacock, Stephanie      |
| Hendrick, Sir Mark         | Pennycook, Matthew      |
| Hillier, Meg               | Perkins, Mr Toby        |
| Hobhouse, Wera             | Phillips, Jess          |
| Hodge, rh Dame Margaret    | Phillipson, Bridget     |
| Hodgson, Mrs Sharon        | Pollard, Luke           |
| Hollern, Kate              | Powell, Lucy            |
| Hopkins, Rachel            | Qureshi, Yasmin         |
| Howarth, rh Sir George     | Rayner, rh Angela       |
| Huq, Dr Rupa               | Reed, Steve             |
| Hussain, Imran             | Rees, Christina         |
| Jardine, Christine         | Reeves, Ellie           |
| Jarvis, Dan                | Reeves, Rachel          |
| Johnson, rh Dame Diana     | Reynolds, Jonathan      |
| Johnson, Kim               | Ribeiro-Addy, Bell      |
| Jones, Darren              | Rimmer, Ms Marie        |
| Jones, Gerald              | Rodda, Matt             |
| Jones, rh Mr Kevan         | Russell-Moyle, Lloyd    |
| Jones, Ruth                | Saville Roberts, rh Liz |
| Jones, Sarah               | Shah, Naz               |
| Kane, Mike                 | Sharma, Mr Virendra     |
| Keeley, Barbara            | Sheerman, Mr Barry      |
| Kendall, Liz               | Siddiq, Tulip           |
| Khan, Afzal                | Slaughter, Andy         |
| Kinnock, Stephen           | Smith, Cat              |
| Kyle, Peter                | Smith, Jeff             |
| Lake, Ben                  | Smith, Nick             |
| Lammy, rh Mr David         | Smyth, Karin            |
| Lavery, Ian                | Sobel, Alex             |
| Leadbeater, Kim            | Spellar, rh John        |
| Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma      | Starmer, rh Keir        |
| Lewis, Clive               | Stevens, Jo             |
| Lloyd, Tony                | Stone, Jamie            |
| Long Bailey, Rebecca       | Streeting, Wes          |
| Lucas, Caroline            | Stringer, Graham        |
| Lynch, Holly               | Sultana, Sarah          |

Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thomas, Gareth  
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Trickett, Jon  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Webbe, Claudia  
West, Catherine

Western, Matt  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Williams, Hywel  
Wilson, Munira  
Winter, Beth  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Gill Furniss and**  
**Mary Glindon**

### 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  
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  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
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  
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  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Holden, Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Howell, John  
Howell, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
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  
Largan, Robert  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
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  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
McVey, rh Esther  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalf, 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  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, 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  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 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  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Maria Caulfield and**  
**Tom Pursglove**

*Question accordingly negated.*

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

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)). That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

## HIGHER EDUCATION (FREEDOM OF SPEECH) BILL (PROGRAMME)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill:

### Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

### Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 23 September 2021.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

### Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

### Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—*(David T. C. Davies.)*

*Question agreed to.*

## HIGHER EDUCATION (FREEDOM OF SPEECH) BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the charging of fees.—*(David T. C. Davies.)*

*Question agreed to.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### PUBLIC HEALTH

That the draft Coronavirus Act 2020 (Early Expiry) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 21 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

#### CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 (Extension of Duration of Non-jury Trial Provisions) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 26 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (Disability Assistance, Young Carer Grants, Short-term Assistance and Winter Heating Assistance) (Consequential Provision and Modifications) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 17 May, be approved.—*(David T. C. Davies.)*

*Question agreed to.*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (13 JULY)

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 13 July—

(1) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg relating to English votes for English laws not later than one hour after their commencement;

(2) such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments to that Motion selected by the Speaker which may then be moved;

(3) the business on that Motion may be entered upon and proceeded with at any hour, though opposed; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS)

*Ordered,*

That the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I., 2021, No. 161), dated 18 February 2021, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19 February 2021, in the last Session of Parliament, be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

## Public Health England: Relocation to Harlow

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

10.2 pm

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con) [V]: It is a huge honour to be doing this debate under your chairmanship today, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank Mr Speaker for granting this debate. Today I would like to update the House on the desperate need for the creation of a new state-of-the-art public health science campus that is fit for the 21st century. This debate is timely as we seek to recover from the devastating covid-19 pandemic that has plagued us for far too long.

In September 2015, the then Chancellor, George Osborne, announced that the Government would be investing £350 million to create world-leading public health laboratories in my constituency of Harlow, Essex. The original intention was for Public Health England's headquarters and scientific functions to be relocated to our town. I pay special tribute to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, my hard-working constituency neighbour. You are not just a Deputy Speaker, but the right hon. Member for Epping Forest (Dame Eleanor Laing), and you have worked hard with me for a long time on supporting Public Health England. I give thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson), with whom I share a constituency office. She has done so much on this issue. I know she will be speaking tonight, and I strongly welcome her solid support, as I do yours, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the move of Public Health England's successor body to Harlow.

I understand that Public Health England is being disbanded and that the organisation is due to be replaced by the newly formed UK Health Security Agency. I have been well assured that this new organisation will also require modernised laboratories. Previous problems have not turned to dust. The current facilities available at Porton Down and Colindale remain exhausted, burned out and ultimately no longer fit for purpose. Significant funding has already been committed to the Harlow site—I understand that the total amount of money spent on project thus far is approaching £250 million.

In a vote of confidence in response to my recent parliamentary question, the Minister explained that a further £120 million-worth of investment has been agreed for the period spanning 2021 to 2022 in Harlow. That shows a real commitment from the Government. I thank the Minister, the Department of Health and Social Care, and in particular the former Health Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), for the continued support for the project and for my constituency of Harlow.

Not only has significant investment taken place, but the plan for the creation of a public health science campus in Harlow is now mature and shovel-ready. Considerable site demolition work has been completed. The buildings have now been stripped to their core and the drainage and power systems are beginning to be installed. Contracts are being drawn up and construction proper could start this year.

In this debate, I would like to outline three reasons why the campus remains necessary and why Harlow is still the best location for the Government's investment. I am pleased to have met Health Ministers, the Chancellor and senior officials at Public Health England to discuss these matters over the past months. First, the need for updated facilities has become even more important given the current public health context. We must learn lessons from the covid-19 pandemic. We should be looking to the future and onwards to the horizon as we climb down from the coronavirus mountain. We cannot afford to be too cautious. Given that there will be ever-increasing public health spending, the Harlow plant provides excellent value for money. Furthermore, the Harlow project has been designed with the threat of a novel pandemic infection in mind, as has been emphasised on the Government's own website, which states:

"Early learnings from COVID-19 clearly show the importance of an integrated public health response and the need for rapid sharing of data, information, new laboratory tests and other innovations, coordinated and led from centres like Harlow."

Those learnings have strengthened the case for the campus, which will place Harlow as one part of the public health system for the development and application of a range of public health interventions. Those can then be adopted across the country.

The construction of a new campus with world-leading laboratory facilities will surely go a long way in improving our resilience and ensuring preparedness for future pandemics. The project will provide a reassuring message for us to give the nation while managing continued uncertainty and scrutiny. This hub could be a shining beacon of hope in the stormy sea from which we are emerging.

Secondly, Harlow's location within the area covered by the UK Innovation Corridor makes it the ideal place for the creation of such a campus. The London-Stansted-Cambridge corridor is a driver for growth in data sciences as well as life sciences and that sets it off as a unique set of opportunities. Creating the campus in Harlow will mean that our nation's core microbiology, epidemiology, genomics and data science capabilities will be close to major universities in Cambridge, Essex, Hertfordshire and north London, and the Wellcome Sanger Institute as well as leading life science multinational companies such as GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca. The east of England could be set to become the public health science capital of the world. We could lead the way in research, science and technology.

The importance of the project was even referenced in the UK Innovation Corridor's submission to the 2020 spending review. It stated:

"The creation of a new public health science campus represents an enormous recognition of the region as being at the forefront of UK science, research and innovation. It is integral to enabling the Innovation Corridor to fully realise its potential in positioning the UK as a scientific superpower."

In addition, Harlow itself has a tradition of life science and public health investment. The proximity of the campus to the town's enterprise zones and science park makes Harlow and the science hub the best location for business and research partnerships. The new Harlow hospital, expected by 2025, will also create greater opportunity for health science partnerships, skill sharing and research.

Thirdly, the project will bring significant benefits to the Harlow constituency and surrounding area and fit neatly with the Government's commitment to level up

disadvantaged areas. The Government should be looking to distribute research capacity widely across the UK, rather than concentrating investment in the big capital cities.

Harlow is the second most deprived town in Essex and has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Even before the pandemic, jobs, growth and educational attainment had stalled. Much of this is rooted in a new town legacy of ageing infrastructure, poor housing stock and poor perceptions of place, by which I mean disused buildings, some levels of antisocial behaviour and low economic capital. The Government are committed to a levelling-up agenda. I have worked hard to ensure that the Harlow constituency has received great investment. Harlow has been given £81 million for the M11 junction 7a, hundreds of millions for our new Harlow hospital, major investment for our enterprise zone and science park, and most recently £23.7 million as a result of the towns fund bid.

Further to that, Harlow College, one of the finest further education colleges in England, is also bidding, with other colleges in Essex, for a new institute of technology. The bid comes on top of a £2.5 million upgrade of the college and the creation of a £12 million advanced manufacturing centre. Public Health England is also helping to provide skills for Harlow and the surrounding area with its construction hub, which was opened at Harlow College in October 2019. We have further exciting developments taking place, such as the Harlow and Gilston garden town project, which could bring thousands of new homes. It is reliant to an extent upon the creation of a new public health campus in Harlow, as that would bring jobs to sustain this new influx of people.

The creation of a new public health science campus in Harlow would be the golden thread that would tie all this investment together; it is the linchpin upon which much else rests. The project represents an opportunity to drive forward Harlow's growth strategy and address some of the socioeconomic challenges faced by our town and the surrounding areas. The impact that this project will have on Harlow is clear, as it has been estimated that it will create 2,900 gross permanent jobs and generate about £80 million a year across Essex, through employment, skills, STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—local procurement and support for the local economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, your place in the Chair tonight signifies your vote of confidence in and hard work for Public Health England. I welcome the Government's investment in PHE and the vote of confidence of £120 million this year in the Harlow plan. Clearly, things will be different with the new UK Health Security Agency. However, for the reasons I have outlined, the Government could not have made a better decision than by investing in Harlow. First, the public health context and the need for new facilities makes this project ever more crucial. Secondly, Harlow's location is second to none; our town is part of the innovation corridor and has a long history of life science investment. Thirdly, this project is an essential part of the Prime Minister's levelling-up agenda and will transform our town by bringing jobs, skills, growth and opportunity.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words, for pointing out how extremely important this project would



[*Madam Deputy Speaker*]

be for my constituency of Epping Forest, which is next door to his constituency of Harlow, and for setting out the case so well.

10.13 pm

**Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): It is a pleasure to have you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is also a real honour to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), and I congratulate him on securing this important debate. I commend the argument he has made. The powerful argument does not recognise boundaries; the economic opportunity that he outlines knows no boundaries, including parliamentary boundaries. The economic and strategic benefits of the PHE successor moving to Harlow will also have a powerful benefit in my constituency.

Hertford and Stortford is a beautiful place to live and work, but we too have pockets of deprivation and we too are part of the Government's levelling-up agenda. We are also building thousands of new homes in the Harlow and Gilston garden town project. The success of that flagship project is so important; as far as I know, it is part of the biggest release of greenbelt land ever. That project is dependent on people and place making—on having skilled jobs for people to do, making it a vibrant new place to live and work.

My constituency is also at the very heart of the Innovation Corridor. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the Innovation Corridor, I am passionate about the strategic benefits and synergies of siting the public health science campus in this globally renowned cluster for life sciences and healthcare. The corridor is part of an ecosystem and by its very nature every ecosystem is complex; it is not just a case of plonking somewhere down randomly. We need to think about housing, skills and infrastructure. We have all this in the London-Stansted-Cambridge corridor. Harlow is at the heart of that, but so is Hertford and Stortford. We really do want to make the absolute most of the clusters and skills that are at their peak in our part of the Innovation Corridor.

I know that this is part of the Government's strategic objective to attract investment into our area, particularly foreign direct investment. At the APPG for the Innovation Corridor's recent annual general meeting, we heard from people in North Carolina and Canada, and asked them, "What are the drivers of success?". They said that it is about clusters and strategic thinking; that is a crucial part of the success. The campus, with its wider benefits for my constituency, my county and the Innovation Corridor, will be a further step in making the area a scientific global superpower. I commend it to the Minister and again congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow on allowing us to have this debate.

10.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill)**: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) for securing this debate and for driving home so eloquently the three core threads of his argument. I pay tribute to him, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson), and, Madam

Deputy Speaker, to you; your passion for your area overflows, and I know that you too have been acting and listening tonight for your constituents in Epping Forest.

Our experience of tackling the covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow said, the fundamental importance of an integrated health response in the United Kingdom. It has illustrated how critical it is to bring together scientific and public health expertise with operational agility. It has underlined the importance of public and private sector collaborations to deliver world-class science and innovation. Getting this right, as my right hon. Friend outlined, is critical to the future security of the nation, and it has arguably required a fundamental rethink of how the public health system and the national health service will work together.

The establishment of the UK Health Security Agency and the Office for Health Promotion are crucial to this new way of working. I am going to focus on the UK HSA, because that is the organisation that has a distinct bearing on what we are talking about this evening. Public health transformation is happening at pace and the UK HSA will be fully operational by October. It will focus on protecting the public's health and ensuring health security for the nation. It will prevent threats by deploying the UK's scientific, genomic and analytical capabilities to tackle infectious diseases and public health hazards such as the one we have faced in the past 18 months. It will be science-led, maintain the highest science and research standards and respond to the threats that may come upon us at pace and scale.

Our immediate priority is to manage the current delta variant while working to ensure that UK HSA has solid, firm foundations. Part of that work is to ensure that the underlying operating model for the national science hub is the right one. UK HSA is responsible for the science hub initiative. The principle remains to deliver a step change in public health science and research capabilities with genuinely world-leading facilities that, as the House would expect, we need to ensure are sustainable in every sense of the word.

I am aware that, prior to UK HSA's creation, one of the key reasons for considering the campus at Harlow was its strategic location, as so eloquently laid out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow and his parliamentary neighbour my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford. As we heard, it is wonderfully placed in the east of England, near to major cities and close not only to the vibrant life sciences industry that my right hon. Friend spoke about but to some of the key aspects of academia.

Throughout the UK we currently have a number of leading centres for life science research and innovation. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, the UK Innovation Corridor between London and Cambridge is one of the fastest growing in Europe and something of which we should be proud as a nation. It is widely recognised in the key areas of genomics and data science. With academia, the Wellcome Sanger Institute and leading multinationals we have the rich environment for academic and commercial partnerships to which my right hon. Friend referred. As we have seen in the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, such partnerships are critical to the future success of the public health response here in the United Kingdom.

As a town, Harlow has ambitious plans for the future and for levelling up. As my right hon. Friend said, it has potential to realise. That lies at the heart of the Innovation Corridor, and anchor institutions play a vital role. As my right hon. Friend said, Harlow recently won support worth over £23 million to underpin local regeneration projects. The local garden town development will bring new housing and improved transport. Further Government support is being sought that, if successful, could take investment for Harlow to over £100 million. Alongside that, the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow is at the vanguard, being one of the six hospitals in the Government's ambitious hospital building programme. There is definitely a bright future for Harlow. The science hub programme is working with my Department to support the transformation in public health. This will

take into account learning so far from the pandemic response and the implementation of the UK Health Security Agency.

In conclusion, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow on his judicious timing of this debate, coming as it does ahead of recess and in the run-up to the official establishment of the UK Health Security Agency in October. I know that his backing for science to be centred in Harlow will be heard and I am sure that we will go on to have further discussions on this interesting topic.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.24 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

*The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:*

| Member eligible for proxy vote                            | Nominated proxy   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)       | 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     |
| Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (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)                 | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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     |
| Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)                  | Stuart Andrew     |
| Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)                  | Chris Elmore      |
| Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)                              | Stuart Andrew     |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                                   | Nominated proxy   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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     |
| Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)                           | Owen Thompson     |
| 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     |
| Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)           | Stuart Andrew     |
| 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)                                | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)                             | Stuart Andrew     |
| Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)                                | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)                                     | Stuart Andrew     |
| Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)                          | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)                        | Chris Elmore      |
| Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)                     | Chris Elmore      |
| Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)                            | Stuart Andrew     |
| 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       |



| Member eligible for proxy vote                                 | Nominated proxy   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)                           | Chris Elmore      |
| Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)              | Wera Hobhouse     |
| 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     |
| Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD)                       | Wera Hobhouse     |
| 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      |
| Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)                             | Stuart Andrew     |
| Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con) | Stuart Andrew     |
| Theo Clarke (Stafford) (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)                                  | Wera Hobhouse     |
| Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)                           | Chris Elmore      |
| Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)     | Chris Elmore      |
| Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)                          | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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     |
| 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      |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                             | Nominated proxy   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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)                      | Wera Hobhouse     |
| 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)                    | Stuart Andrew     |
| Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)             | Owen Thompson     |
| Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)                    | Chris Elmore      |
| Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)                              | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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      |
| 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     |
| Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)                | Stuart Andrew     |
| Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)          | Chris Elmore      |
| Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)                                  | Chris Elmore      |
| Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (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     |
| 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     |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                        | Nominated proxy   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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     |
| Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)               | Stuart Andrew     |
| Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)                   | Stuart Andrew     |
| Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)                          | Stuart Andrew     |
| Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)            | Wera Hobhouse     |
| Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)                 | Wera Hobhouse     |
| 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)                 | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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     |
| Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)        | Stuart Andrew     |
| 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      |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                             | Nominated proxy |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 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    |
| Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD)                    | Wera Hobhouse   |
| 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        |
| Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba)            | Kenny MacAskill |
| Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)      | Chris Elmore    |
| Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)           | Chris Elmore    |
| Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)                      | Stuart Andrew   |
| Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)                        | Chris Elmore    |
| Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)                            | Stuart Andrew   |
| 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 Heapey (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    |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                                | Nominated proxy   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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     |
| 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)                           | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)                 | Stuart Andrew     |
| Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)                       | Wera Hobhouse     |
| 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     |
| 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     |
| 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      |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                               | Nominated proxy   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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)                                  | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)                                | Owen Thompson     |
| Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab)                       | Chris Elmore      |
| 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     |
| 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     |
| David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)                            | Owen Thompson     |
| Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)                                  | Chris Elmore      |
| Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con)                              | Stuart Andrew     |
| Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)                         | Stuart Andrew     |
| Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)               | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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)                  | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)                                  | Chris Elmore      |
| Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)                   | Chris Elmore      |
| Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)                          | Chris Elmore      |
| Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)                         | Stuart Andrew     |
| Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)                               | Stuart Andrew     |



| Member eligible for proxy vote                                         | Nominated proxy   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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)                            | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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 McNally (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      |
| 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)                                           | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)                                             | Stuart Andrew     |
| 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      |
| Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)                               | Stuart Andrew     |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                                | Nominated proxy   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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)                   | Wera Hobhouse     |
| Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)                       | Stuart Andrew     |
| Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab)                           | Chris Elmore      |
| 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      |
| James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)               | Stuart Andrew     |
| 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     |
| 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)                              | Wera Hobhouse     |
| 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)                            | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)                                   | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)                      | Owen Thompson     |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                            | Nominated proxy |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 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   |
| Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (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    |
| 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 (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)            | Chris Elmore    |
| Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)                | Stuart Andrew   |
| Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)                       | Stuart Andrew   |
| Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Ind)                                 | Stuart Andrew   |
| 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    |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                           | Nominated proxy |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con)             | Stuart Andrew   |
| 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)                          | Stuart Andrew   |
| 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   |
| 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   |
| John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)                              | Chris Elmore    |
| Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)           | Stuart Andrew   |
| Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (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) | Wera Hobhouse   |
| Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)               | Stuart Andrew   |
| Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)                       | Chris Elmore    |
| Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)                         | Stuart Andrew   |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                        | Nominated proxy   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)        | Chris Elmore      |
| Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)         | Stuart Andrew     |
| Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)                      | Stuart Andrew     |
| Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)                  | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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     |
| Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)                | Stuart Andrew     |
| Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con)  | Stuart Andrew     |
| Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)               | Stuart Andrew     |
| Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)       | Stuart Andrew     |
| Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)                        | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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     |
| Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab)                     | Chris Elmore      |
| 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     |

| Member eligible for proxy vote                  | Nominated proxy   |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 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)            | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| 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)                 | Wera Hobhouse     |
| Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)                | Bell Ribeiro-Addy |
| Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) | Owen Thompson     |
| Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)                  | Stuart Andrew     |
| Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)    | Stuart Andrew     |
| Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)                  | Chris Elmore      |
| Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)                      | Stuart Andrew     |
| Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)         | Stuart Andrew     |
| Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)               | Chris Elmore      |



# Westminster Hall

Monday 12 July 2021

[JUDITH CUMMINS *in the Chair*]

## Motor Neurone Disease (Research)

*Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).*

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

4.30 pm

**Judith Cummins (in the Chair):** I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice 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 debates. I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate.

I must also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks at [westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk](mailto:westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk). Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

4.31 pm

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 564582, relating to research into motor neurone disease.

Motor neurone disease is a rare disease that is sadly all too common. It is the most common neurodegenerative disease of midlife, and many younger people are also affected. It is currently a terminal and incurable progressive condition. Progression is rapid, with one third of people dying within a year of diagnosis. Because people with the condition generally die so quickly, only 5,000 people in the UK live with the disease at any one time. However, MND is not rare. One in every 300 people across all communities develop MND in their lifetime, and about 200,000 of the current UK population will die of MND unless effective treatments are found. It is diagnosed in 200 Scots every year, and more than 1,500 people in the UK.

Currently, the only drug available to directly affect MND is called Riluzole, or Rilutek, but I am told that it has limitations, so it is hardly surprising that the petition achieved more than 110,000 signatures. The petition calls on the Government

“to significantly increase targeted research funding for motor neurone disease”.

It seeks

“new investment of £50m over 5 years”

to kick-start an MND research institute, which the petitioners argue

“would lead to better, faster and more definitive research outcomes and hope for those with MND.”

In their response, the UK Government recognise the immediate challenges faced by people with motor neurone disease and reiterate their commitment to supporting MND research, which is welcome and I hope gives some encouragement that common ground may be found to take the issue forward. I will return to the Government response to the petition in more detail shortly, with some questions that I hope the Minister will address when responding to today's debate. First, I want to pay tribute to the amazing work carried out by the petitioners and the charities and individuals involved in tackling MND on a daily basis.

George Wilson “Doddie” Weir created the petition and is one of rugby's most recognisable personalities, earning 61 caps for Scotland during a successful playing career. He represented the British and Irish Lions on their successful tour to South Africa in 1997, and won championships with his two club sides, Melrose and Newcastle Falcons. In June 2017, six months after receiving his diagnosis, Doddie revealed he was suffering from motor neurone disease. From then, his mantra has been, “I've just got to crack on.” Five months on from going public, Doddie and his trustees launched and registered the charity, My Name's Doddie Foundation, with a shared vision of a world free of MND. The No. 5 is special for the foundation. It features in its name and is a reference to Doddie's playing number for his clubs and the jersey he wore when he earned 61 caps for Scotland.

On meeting Doddie, albeit virtually, last week, I was struck by the positivity and the energy that he continues to have four and a half years on from his diagnosis. Doddie is not the only high-profile personality to succumb to this terrible disease and face up to it. The most recognisable scientist of modern times, Stephen Hawking, defied it for 55 years. Rob Burrow, another rugby great, was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in December 2019, just two years after ending his playing career by captaining Leeds to a record-extending eighth super league grand final. He described the disease as follows:

“First it comes for your voice. Then it takes your legs. It tries to rob you of your breath. But it can't sap your spirit.”

Inspirational as these people are, that does not portray the difficulties of living with MND. Everyone living with it is inspirational. They understand that what is holding back progression in the development of effective treatment and a cure is a lack of targeted funding.

I have heard testimonies from Emma, a young mother diagnosed with MND at 37, who can no longer stand, and David, diagnosed in 2012, who accepts that he is lucky because of the slow progression of his MND. Both consider themselves lucky still to have a voice. Indeed, everyone I met during my research for today's debate is excited about the progress made thus far, but they also know that MND research is disparate and needs to be targeted. I urge the Government not to dampen the growing expectancy that currently exists among the MND community and to meet the requests of the petitioners.

I would now like to go through the official Government response to the petition in some detail, and to comment and question the Government on it. The response stated:

“Over the past five years, the Government has spent £54m on MND research, through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) via the Medical Research Council.”

Yet according to a written parliamentary answer of 14 January this year, the National Institute for Health Research

“funded no Motor Neurone Disease-related projects”

during 2019-20. Can the Minister provide details of any MND-related projects or programmes that received funding from the NIHR over the past five years? The same answer detailed £5 million for MND-related projects funded by the Medical Research Council during 2019-20. Can the Minister provide details of any other MND-related projects or programmes that have received funding from the MRC over the past five years?

Analysis carried out by the Motor Neurone Disease Association, MND Scotland and the My Name’s Doddie Foundation shows that the figure of £54 million of Government spending over the last five years, which is repeatedly cited in written parliamentary answers, includes general neurological research that often has no tangible link to MND. The same analysis shows that funding for targeted MND research stands at less than £5 million annually, which is more in line with the £5 million allocated in 2019-20 that was detailed in the parliamentary answer of 14 January.

Another passage says:

“The Government remains strongly committed to supporting research into dementia and neurodegeneration, including MND.”

While funding for dementia research is much needed and very welcome, it is reported that, in about 5% of cases of motor neurone disease, there is a family history of either MND or a related condition called frontotemporal dementia. Frontotemporal dementia is just one of the many clinical features of MND, yet dementia features 10 times in the UK Government’s response to this petition. It is therefore understandable that the MND research community, who are all experts in their field, appear to be united in their assertion that MND research should not be adjoined to dementia research. Therefore, I wholeheartedly agree with Ammar Al-Chalabi, professor of neurology and complex disease genetics at King’s College London, when he says that it is no longer appropriate for MND to be tagged on to dementia research initiatives.

Another passage in the response says:

“The UK Dementia Research Institute has significant investment in MND research, with a particular focus on the mechanisms that cause the disease.”

Again, this is positive, but can the Minister give details of that significant investment in MND research? Additionally, the statement talks of research that focuses on the causes of the disease, not treatments. That is an area that needs to be focused on. The MND research community have called for targeted funding for MND research because they understand the substantial progress that has been made in establishing much of the basic science around MND and have identified the need to progress to research into treatment.

Another passage in the Government response said that the 2019 Conservative manifesto committed to doubling funding for dementia research, including MND research, and that the Government are putting plans in place now to deliver that commitment. I checked that manifesto and there is no mention of MND nor of neurodegeneration; there is only mention of dementia. Can the Minister detail what the plans are specifically for MND and say how much funding will be targeted on MND research?

In another passage, the Government response says:

“The Government has been working to establish a rich ecosystem for neurodegeneration research in the UK. Significant elements are the UK Dementia Research Institute, Dementias Platform UK, NIHR Dementia Translational Research Collaboration, and Join Dementia Research.”

Given that four dementia-related organisations are mentioned in a response to a petition calling for targeted research funding for MND, does the Minister accept that the lack of a pioneering MND research institute, which would attract targeted funding, remains a barrier to progress in finding effective treatments and a cure for MND?

Another passage in the Government response says:

“It is not usual practice to ring-fence funding for particular topics or conditions.”

However, it appears from the Government response that funding for dementia has been ring-fenced. In addition, recent global efforts to find a vaccine for coronavirus, including involvement with numerous research institutes, show how quickly progress can be made when funding is ring-fenced for conditions. Those efforts also enabled the fast development of a coronavirus vaccine. People living with MND need fast development of an effective treatment and a cure because of the rapid progression of this disease. Considering recent scientific developments, the UK Government’s levelling-up agenda and the current economic climate that puts charitable funding at risk, the time is right to significantly increase targeted research funding for MND and invest £50 million over five years to kick-start a pioneering MND research institute.

In conclusion, the research for new therapies requires a truly multidisciplinary and pan-national approach, spanning the entire translational pathway. Establishing a virtual MND translational research institute, which the petitioners call for, will deliver that. There is no doubt that extra MND research funding from the UK Government is needed to support effective patient treatment and medicines, in the hope that a cure for MND can be found soon, because that is what the petitioners and the sufferers of this disease need.

**Judith Cummins (in the Chair):** I am looking to call Front-Bench speakers from about 5.25 pm, so if Members could limit their contributions to between four and a half minutes and five minutes, I would be very grateful and we can get everybody in.

4.42 pm

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure, Mrs Cummins, to serve with you in the Chair this afternoon.

I am pleased to take part in the debate on this petition, which has attracted so much support from my own constituents in the Scottish Borders, with my constituency of Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk ranking second in the United Kingdom for the number of signatories in a constituency. I imagine that part of the reason for this is that Doddie Weir, founder of the My Name’s Doddie Foundation, lives in the Scottish Borders. However, Doddie Weir’s impact extends far beyond the Scottish Borders. In fact, the reason we are all here today for this debate is because the petition was launched by Doddie and his foundation.

Doddie is someone I know well, and I can understand why he has persuaded so many people to support his campaign and petition. He has faced his fair share of challenges on the rugby pitch and has a remarkable list of achievements to his name: 61 caps for Scotland; representing the British and Irish Lions; and playing locally for Melrose as well. However, Doddie has said on numerous occasions that the greatest challenge he has faced is off the pitch—battling motor neurone disease.

In June 2017, Doddie revealed that he was suffering from MND, and within months he and his trustees launched a registered charity—My Name’s Doddie Foundation. The way in which Doddie is driven to champion fellow sufferers and research into this devastating and currently incurable disease is both admirable and inspiring. His selfless work has been vital in raising awareness and generating millions of pounds for such an important cause. Doddie and the foundation have generated huge momentum among individuals, sports clubs and other organisations to raise awareness and vital funding for MND research and support. I was honoured to raise money for the cause by running the London marathon in 2018.

Many other borderers have completed challenges for My Name’s Doddie Foundation. There are too many to mention in this short contribution, but challenges such as Lions Trek for Doddie and the Coast to Coast in 24 hours come to mind. The Prime Minister also threw his support behind Doddie’s Active Inter-District challenge, which raised more than £1 million.

At the crux of this debate is a devastating disease—a rapidly progressing neurological condition that leaves individuals unable to walk, talk, eat and, ultimately, breathe. One in 300 people develop it in their lifetime, and a third die within a year of receiving their diagnosis. My Name’s Doddie Foundation provides practical help through grants, and funds research into this terrible disease. It gives considerable sums to the MND Association and MND Scotland to provide support for individuals and their families living with motor neurone disease. Overall, it has raised more than £8 million since 2017. It has granted more than £3 million to medical research projects, and more than £1 million has been given through grants to help sufferers of MND.

In March, when I asked the Prime Minister about funding for MND research in Prime Minister’s questions, I was reassured to hear that the Government have spent £54 million on research over the past five years through the National Institute for Health Research and UK Research and Innovation. I am also glad that the Government are putting in place plans to deliver their 2019 manifesto commitment to double funding for dementia research, which includes MND research. However, it is crucial that we redouble our efforts to consolidate the work that has been done. It is vital that Governments across the UK, the research community and charities work together in the hope that, one day, we can find a cure.

I pay tribute to Doddie, My Name’s Doddie Foundation, MND Scotland and the MND Association. Those organisations are dedicated to supporting sufferers of MND and their families, and are striving relentlessly to find a cure for this horrible disease.

4.47 pm

**Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. Like me, you will be well aware of the position of Rob Burrow, the former Leeds Rhinos player, who had an illustrious career as a rugby league player. He is lending his strong support to Doddie Weir’s campaign for more work to be done on motor neurone disease because of the devastating effect on him, once a super-athlete. It has reduced him to someone who knows that he is enjoying the last of his days on a kind of borrowed time—not the way any super-athlete would expect to end.

I also want to talk about the sheer humanity brought out by motor neurone disease. I have lost friends to this horrendous disease. A very good friend of mine, Steve Mycio, who worked with me when I was a police and crime commissioner—he was the deputy chief executive at Manchester City Council—had a sharp brain and a keen intellect and was a very powerful runner, but when motor neurone disease struck him, it was not long before it had a devastating effect on him. Because he was such a strong character, he did everything he could to make sure life continued as normal. He described the consequences of losing the use of both arms and falling flat on his face as almost comical, but he lost the capacity to do things he had taken for granted for so long. It is such a cruel disease.

The wife of another friend of mine said to me after he died, “Actually, death was a blessing. He didn’t want to live locked into a condition that left him at the mercy of his brain, but not with the use of his body.” That is the reality of MND. That is why this debate and the petition are important. We need research, and I hope the Minister will be able to give us some proper answers today.

When I talk to neuroscientists they say that they believe it is possible to find, if not a cure, at least pharmaceutical solutions that can take people forward on their MND journey, and maybe control MND in the long run. The prospects are truly enormous. The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) made a very good speech. It is right and proper that the funding for MND be there in its own right, not simply linked to other neurodegenerative diseases. Nevertheless, the possibility of cracking the code for MND gives hope, so neuroscientists tell me, that we can begin to look for cures and solutions to other neurodegenerative diseases.

We know that a third of those who contract MND will be dead within a year, and for others the prospects are not good. There may be 5,000 people at any one time suffering from this disease, so £50 million as an investment in stopping that kind of suffering makes human and societal sense. In the end, it makes financial sense, because if we invest now and concentrate efforts, there is a possibility of seeing results very soon. It could be world-advancing science, and this country has the neuroscientists and researchers capable of taking it forward. I join very strongly the demand of the e-petition that we make this investment in an MND translational research institute. It can make a material difference. It can stop the human suffering that MND causes. That is worth spending some of our money on.



4.51 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: I thank the Petitions Committee for arranging a debate on this important topic. We have seen during this pandemic the transformative impact that medical research can have. Whether by creating vaccines on a timescale that was previously thought impossible or identifying effective and low-cost treatments for people with covid-19, the research community has saved millions of lives around the world during this pandemic, but the level of investment related to covid-19 is not replicated for other conditions.

We are discussing motor neurone disease, research on which received only £3.5 million from the Medical Research Council in 2019-20 and no funding at all from the National Institute for Health Research. As we heard earlier, the Government have claimed that they invested £4 million over the last five years in MND research, but as the MND Association found, much of that was spent on general neurological research rather than MND-specific programmes. For a condition that has such a major impact on the lives of people living with it, that is simply not good enough. Failing to invest in that research means condemning more people to go on living with, and eventually dying of, motor neurone disease.

As we have heard, although there may be only 5,000 people living with MND at this time, that is not because it is rare. The condition affects one in 300 people across their lifetime, but many of them will die within a year of diagnosis. That means that, without an effective treatment being developed, 200,000 people alive in Britain today will die from MND. Over the last year, we have rightly poured money into projects looking at covid-19. We now need to use the advances that we have made as an inspiration to prioritise medical research for a far wider range of conditions.

One of the many reasons that motor neurone disease should be a priority is the insights that it can give us into other neurological conditions. MND progresses rapidly, which means that we are able to pioneer and trial treatments on a realistic timeframe, potentially opening the door to treatments for other conditions, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's, which are far slower to develop. The ask from the motor neurone disease community is simple: £50 million for research spread over the next five years to develop an MND translational research institute. That comparatively modest investment has the potential to transform motor neurone disease, to make real progress to make MND treatable, and to accelerate treatments for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Rather than investing in piecemeal projects, that funding could bring together a new central institute to oversee and co-ordinate a range of research into MND. This would allow knowledge and breakthroughs to be shared widely, potentially accelerating our progress.

Part of the Government's life sciences vision is addressing great healthcare challenges, including by improving translational capabilities in neurodegeneration and dementia. That is exactly what this proposal for an MND translational research institute addresses, so will the Minister commit to significantly increasing funding for MND research over the next five years and provide hope to everyone currently living with motor neurone disease? I thank Greg Broadhurst and Alison Raiton of the MND Association and all the

campaigners who are raising awareness of this disease and supporting those living with it and their family carers.

4.55 pm

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I am grateful to the petitioners and those who signed this petition. The purpose of the petition is to seek to secure an increase in targeted research funding for motor neurone disease with a new investment of £50 million over five years to kick-start a pioneering motor neurone disease research institute. We do not need to stand here today and wonder how it could be done, because I hold in my hand an excellent proposal from the Motor Neurone Disease Association, My Name's Doddie Foundation and MND Scotland for how to make progress on a UK motor neurone disease translational research institute, but of course it needs £50 million over five years, as colleagues have spoken about. I understand that about 185 of my constituents signed the petition, which closed on 6 July. They would like progress, and I would like progress, which is why I am here to speak up for them.

We have heard from colleagues that motor neurone disease is not rare, but it is devastating. It is the most common neurodegenerative disease of mid-life, which is a sobering thought for those of us who have just turned 50. I join the My Name's Doddie Foundation in calling on the Government to invest this £50 million. Of course, £50 million is a large sum of money when viewed from the perspective of an individual, but taken over five years and viewed from the perspective of the Government, it seems to me a reasonable sum to invest when progress could be so possible.

I just turn to the charities' briefing, where they set out the opportunities:

"Despite limited investment, MND is one of the fastest moving sectors in UK health and biomedical research. Current trials hold real promise of a licensed treatment in just 2-3 years for some forms of MND...Counterintuitively, MND, with its relatively low prevalence, is incredibly valuable to research into the more common neurodegenerative diseases such as the dementias. The very rapidity of MND progression makes it easier to pioneer and trial treatments in a realistic time frame."

It also says that there is increasing interest in MND research from global pharmaceutical companies, and that although the size of the MND market is not insignificant, drug companies also see this as a route to the treatment markets for Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. That really points to what could be possible if the Government are willing to find this sum of money for a research institute. I implore Ministers to make the case to the Treasury to do that, because this significant cash injection is needed to fund this virtual research institute. I have had a number of exchanges with Ministers in letters and parliamentary questions. I think we need to be clear that the £54 million cited takes within it a broad spectrum of research. What is being asked for is targeted research, specifically on MND. It is about getting this plan done.

It would be reasonable for Ministers to ask what success would look like, and I am happy to say that, on page 15, the proposal sets out what success would look like. I will just make four points. First, the institute would maintain relentless progress and urgency in ensuring

a continuous pipeline of treatment candidates, with at least 10 novel drug compounds prioritised into pre-clinical and early-phase human studies by year five. I believe that would count as tremendous progress. Success would also involve the deployment of an innovative, on-demand clinical trials platform; learning rapidly from each and every trial, successful or not, through newly developed biomarkers; and, crucially, driving nothing short of a total revolution in the consultant-patient discussion, making sure that the offer of a trial of treatment would be the expectation from the very first consultation upon diagnosis, as opposed to the exception, so that it would become part of every patient's care plan.

Because of the particular characteristics of motor neurone disease, and because of the particular sum involved and the nature of the proposal made by the charities and everybody else involved, I implore the Minister to look carefully at how this proposal can fit into the Government's plans. I think we are still passing the Bill to establish the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, the research institute. If we are not going to do this with this money—if we are not going to make this kind of progress, this fast, in people's interests—whatever are we passing that Bill to do? Please, do back this proposal.

5 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mrs Cummins, for chairing this afternoon's debate. I also thank the petitioners for their strength in putting forward the petition we are debating today: I know that for many of them, this issue will be personal. For myself, as a clinician who worked in neurology, I worked with many people with motor neurone disease. I am also a constituency MP who is supporting my constituents, and my uncle—a radical academic in his day—sadly was lost to MND.

One in 300 people is likely to have MND, and once diagnosed, life passes all too quickly, so in opening I put on record my thanks to all those who have supported people with MND over the past year, in what has been the most challenging of all years: the clinicians, the families, the carers, the Motor Neurone Disease Association, and the wider community. At times, it has seemed that covid-19 has been the only battle the NHS has had to face, but its dominance has compounded the challenges that others have had in other areas of medicine. Although we have seen so many miracles in the NHS over the past year, we are now calling for another miracle, which is for the Government to release vital research funding. As clinicians, we want to do everything we can for our patients, and it is frustrating and stressful when we can see the solutions, but do not have the means to deliver them.

As we have seen, when we put the necessary investment into prevention and cure, it provides hope, and our nation has been given that hope about covid-19 by the brilliant scientists who have developed the vaccine. We want that research to lead to a new path for people with motor neurone disease. Of course, we understand that scale matters, and that is why so much focus has been given to the pandemic. However, when a third of a million people at any one time across the globe has motor neurone disease, we can see that scale is important for that disease, too. As internationalists, we must work across borders to ensure we find the right science and

solutions in medicine. To date, the cause of MND is largely unknown, and the cure is yet to be found. Most research has been based on bettering somebody's prognosis over a shorter period, and enhancing their quality of life while they are able to hold on to it.

Although the Government are one source of funding, uniquely in the UK the charity sector funds medical research, accounting for about 51% of all funding through the generous donations of 7 million people, research trusts, and funds. That sector funds about 17,000 researchers in all, and the basis of research in the UK needs to be thought through again so that big pharma is not taking some of the resourcing and the long-term profits, to ensure reinvestment in research and more money going into that area.

Back in 2014, MND had a funding boost through the ice bucket challenge, which certainly increased research opportunities. However, this pandemic has had a significant chilling impact on medical research over this past year—one we can ill afford—as research scientists have had to find work elsewhere. Charities themselves have had fundraising opportunities stopped and their shops shut, and Governments have not stepped in to support the charities that are behind all of this important medical research, not least on motor neurone disease. That is why the proposal to create a bespoke £50 million fund over five years to invest in a specific MND research institute, making the UK a global leader yet again, is so important for all of us. I therefore urge the Minister to seriously consider this proposal, not least because the Association of Medical Research Charities came together last year and made a proposal for a life science charity partnership fund, with £310 million invested over a three-year period, to address the deficit that they have experienced during the pandemic. The Government have not come up with the resources to meet that challenge, which is grossly disappointing.

I trust that the proposal before us will be acknowledged, because for every £1 invested, there is a 25p lifetime return in benefit, which far outstrips the value that other investments made by Government can bring. If health and science development and research is a major industry in the UK, valued investment in that research will bring long-term economic benefit, as well as real personal benefit for those involved.

As our melting pot of research enables world-class research to move forward, as well as enabling innovation here, I trust that the Minister will respond positively and bring real hope to the thousands of families who need to know that hope is on the horizon.

5.6 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) on the way he introduced the debate—I agreed with all his points. I do not have the expertise of the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) in this area, but I wish to make a number of points, mainly on behalf of a friend of mine.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence says that most people with the disease will die within two to three years of developing symptoms, as we have already heard, with only 25% alive after five years and just 10% after 10 years. I certainly appreciate that, in the light of the global coronavirus pandemic, the Minister

has many calls on her time. Of course, many of these illnesses existed before the pandemic and still do now, and they have to be dealt with.

A local Southend guesthouse owner who happens to be a friend of mine had to work 12 hours a day to recover financially from the first lockdown but developed problems with his left hand and leg. Physiotherapy did not help, and pain spread to the entire left-hand side of his body. An appointment was made with a neurologist, and it was revealed that he had motor neurone disease and had only two to four years to live. He is no longer able to work and is having difficulties obtaining financial support.

That upsetting story about my friend is, unfortunately, replicated throughout the country. Relevant up-to-date information about symptoms and how to check for motor neurone disease should, I believe, be widely accessible and discussed in hospitals with relevant communities to raise awareness of the disease.

Furthermore, people living with terminal illness often die before they get the benefits that they need, which is ridiculous. I am very pleased that the Government have announced that they will reform the benefits system for terminally ill people. I hope that is done as a matter of urgency so that patients and their families do not have to spend their valuable time battling for financial support.

The best way to treat a disease and to find a cure is to fully understand it, so as we have already heard, specific research targeted at motor neurone disease, not just general neurological conditions, is very much needed. Increasing Government funding from less than £5 million annually to £50 million annually over five years—I know that is a lot of money—would not only help to fund a new research institute, but help us to discover effective treatments and save the Government in healthcare, social care and benefits in the long run.

If we pioneer the way in motor neurone disease research, it would truly put our country on the map again, at the forefront of international scientific and medical discovery. I was delighted to sign the letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) to the Minister, in which he asked for more investment from the Government in specific motor neurone disease research. That is much needed and would benefit neurodegenerative diseases such as the dementias.

At business questions recently, I asked the Leader of the House to find time for a debate on research into motor neurone disease. In his answer, I was told that our 2019 manifesto

“committed to doubling funding for dementia and neurodegenerative disease research”.—[*Official Report*, 22 April 2021; Vol. 692, c. 1150.]

I hope that that is done urgently and that research into motor neurone disease receives its fair share.

In conclusion, one in 300 people will develop motor neurone disease in their lifetime and there is currently no cure. That is not a small percentage of our population. We need more investment, and I hope that the Minister will commit to it.

5.10 pm

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab) [V]: It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) for introducing this important petition to the House.

I thank the 110,700 people, including 225 of my constituents, who signed the petition and campaigned for an increase in much-needed funding for urgent research into motor neurone disease. I pay tribute to constituents in West Derby who have been diagnosed with motor neurone disease and to their families and friends.

The petition has one clear ask: new Government investment of £50 million over five years to kick-start the pioneering MND research institute. That call is based on the assessments made by the Motor Neurone Disease Association, MND Scotland and My Name’s Doddie Foundation. The Government, in their response to the petition, claim that they have spent £54 million on MND research over the past five years, but analysis by the MND Association shows that the figure includes general neurological research, often with no tangible link to MND. I therefore urge the Minister to come back with the package of targeted support that is needed.

Today, I will speak about a friend and constituent, Mark Maddox, his fight against motor neurone disease and how his work exposed me to the heartbreaking impact that it can have. I will do everything I can to assist in this campaign moving forward.

I first met Mark a decade ago, when I helped to coach his youngest son’s football team—he will laugh, watching this, at the word “coach”. Mark was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2010. It was my first experience of the disease, with the impact that it had on him, his family and friends. Mark is an absolute legend of the local football scene both in Liverpool and at Altrincham football club, where between 1996 and 2006 he made 349 appearance as a tough-tackling captain and centre-half. The bravery with which he has tackled the disease was hewn from that background.

After being diagnosed with motor neurone disease, Mark ran three marathons, skydived, did bike rides, released an album and, in 2011, fronted a nationwide campaign through every football league in the country, reaching more than 2 million people through match-day programmes. He also appeared on Manchester United TV—despite being a huge Liverpool fan—BBC North West and various radio stations, as well as LFCTV making a mini documentary about Mark. That was all done to raise awareness and funds for the campaign to fight this cruel disease.

Mark was told at diagnosis that he would be lucky to live beyond a year—that was 11 years ago. Mark believes that the love and support he receives from his family—his wife in particular—his friends and often complete strangers have helped him to get through to this day. Over the past decade, however, Mark has become increasingly frustrated with the Government’s lack of understanding of people with motor neurone disease and their families and of its devastating effects. He wants change.

To finish, I urge the Minister to listen to Mark and the many other people who have been diagnosed with motor neurone disease and to say, “No more!” Motor neurone disease stopped Mark achieving great things in football and, with world-leading UK scientists on the cusp of major breakthroughs in MND research, we need the Government to commit to the vital funding increase necessary to accelerate the discovery of treatments; and pledge the funding needed to kick-start a pioneering motor neurone disease research institute. Together, we



can work to end motor neurone disease so that people diagnosed, like Mark and countless others, can fulfil their potential.

5.14 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. Like others, I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) for presenting the debate today and for the meticulous, detailed and caring way he laid out the statistics and what motor neurone disease means to so many people in this country.

The statistics are frightening. One in 300 of us, as we have heard, can be struck by motor neurone disease in our lifetimes, but because it claims lives so rapidly we are never as a society fully aware of its impact, of the number of lives disrupted, families torn apart, and the suffering in our own communities. I am sure many of us, as has already been mentioned, have experienced the trauma of watching someone we know and love fighting this debilitating, progressive and ultimately always, at this point in time, fatal effects of motor neurone disease.

Like others, I want to pay tribute to all of those who have done so much to raise this petition and bring this debilitating condition to public attention. Almost 400 people in my constituency of Edinburgh West signed it, and I know that many more of them are aware and determined that we should make a difference—many because my constituency is also the home of Scottish rugby, of Murrayfield, the site of many of Doddie Weir's on-field achievements. For my generation, seeing him on a rugby field or hearing his name in a commentary was reassurance that Scottish rugby was in safe hands. I say “on-field” because the work he is doing to raise awareness and his campaign for research is also a magnificent achievement.

However, it should not be left to those battling the condition to come up with a solution. We have already heard that just £5 million a year is targeted at motor neurone disease research. That is “targeted”. We know that there is general neurological research, but we need to know more about this specific condition itself. That is why it is so important that we have this £50 million investment over five years to establish a virtual motor neurone disease translational research institute and to consolidate the UK's position as a global leader in neurological disease research. We have also heard that research into motor neurons could open the door on other conditions, and there are practical and financial implications for society and the NHS of being able to relieve people of this burden.

The Motor Neurone Disease Association, MND Scotland and the My Name's Doddie Foundation, which have jointly submitted a bid to Government for this year's spending review, are undertaking a task—a crusade almost—for so many people in this country who are struck by this cruellest of conditions. I say to the Government that £50 million over five years is not a lot in monetary terms, but it could be so much in terms of progress against this disease.

5.18 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) [V]: I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) for the eloquent way he introduced this debate. I will try to be as brief as possible so that

everyone can get in. I want to address my remarks to the Minister directly. She has heard why we are here. More than 100 of my constituents signed the petition, and quite a few of them, including myself, have had experience of motor neurone disease affecting either family or friends. It is a brutal, savage condition, but we meet people all the way along the road dealing with this dreadful condition, and they all work on the basis that there will be light at the end of the tunnel, and the light that we see now at the end of the tunnel is research.

Like others, I have been using the Government's figure of £54 million investment without realising that only £5 million was directly targeted. The sense I get from people at the moment, and from the associations and charities that work in this field, is one of optimism that we could be close to a breakthrough in identifying how to predict, prevent, treat and cure this condition. The sense I get is that a little more money, distributed effectively and invested wisely, could tip us over the edge in tackling this condition.

I say to the Minister that the problem we face is fragmented funding sources and the lack of certainty and predictability about the scale of investment that will really help us to bring the science together and tackle the issue effectively. We will assist her in lobbying the Treasury. We are at that stage in the spending review process when departmental bids are going in and hard negotiations are well under way. We will help her in those negotiations, because not only do we believe that we are on the cusp of a breakthrough but it chimes with everything that has been said by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and successive Health Secretaries about how we need to invest in life sciences, link with the pharmaceutical industry, and in that way become world leaders.

In the context of the overall spending review, this is not a great deal of money to be asking for on such a critical issue, which affects so many of our constituents and their families in a heartbreaking way. We will support the Minister as much as we can in her submission on this matter. The £50 million that we are talking about over a five-year period is a drop in the ocean in comparison with some investments in other conditions. Many of us believe that we are clearly on the edge of something big that could, again, chime with what the Prime Minister has been saying about how we can be world leaders in the field of life sciences research.

I urge the Minister to take on board everything that has been said by this cross-party group of Members. Behind us, literally hundreds of thousands of people are looking to the Government for the small step forward that could provide us with such an immense breakthrough.

5.22 pm

**Anum Qaisar-Javed** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Cummins. I welcome the petition and thank each and every person who signed and shared it. This is democracy in action.

I reiterate the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) that extra research funding is essential to support patient treatment and medicines in the hope that a cure for MND can be found soon. The work carried out by organisations and charities such as the MND Association and MND Scotland has ensured that MND research is rightly at the forefront of political debate. I also reiterate

the comments made by my colleague the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) that the work done by the My Name's Doddie Foundation goes beyond the constituency that he represents and where Doddie lives.

It is important to acknowledge that 1,100 people across the UK have been diagnosed with MND. It is thought that diseases related to motor neurones affect approximately 5,000 adults at any one time. Today, we have heard colleagues from across the political spectrum unite. Every one of us has gained an understanding of how debilitating MND can become. While research into this life-limiting illness continues, we recognise that additional funding is required to further advance the ambitions of experts who believe that getting a cure is becoming closer than ever.

As the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) stated, the numbers are frightful. After developing symptoms, most people with MND will die within two to three years. About 25% of people live beyond five years, and that reduces to 10% at 10 years. Additional funding for research will be vital to extend life after diagnosis and improve quality of life by slowing the disease's aggression.

Although today we are discussing research and funding, they cannot be seen as isolated factors. There are clear links between research and investment in palliative care standards to improve the quality of life of those with MND while research continues to develop. As the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) said, we need progress and targeted support.

On a personal level, I remember scrolling through Twitter back in 2014, in the middle of a hotly contested referendum on Scottish independence, and seeing politicians united in their support for MND research. Gordon Aikman, the director of research for the Better Together campaign, who had previously worked for the Labour party, was diagnosed with MND. I pay tribute to him because I was always in awe of him. I never knew him and had never met him, but I always felt a strong sense of resilience from him. His campaign was fearless and forceful, and was exactly what was needed to put MND high on the agenda. He championed more investment, research into MND and general awareness of the disease.

Campaigns have been absolutely vital in raising awareness of MND. The Scottish public raised £500,000 in the ice bucket challenge, through which more than £7 million was raised in the UK and more than \$100 million worldwide. Such challenges may seem trivial, but their impact is profound. As well as raising incredible sums of money, they generate awareness. That is commendable, but we cannot rely on the generosity of the public and internet trends to ensure that the UK leads the way in pioneering research into devastating diseases.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government are committed to ensuring that neurological patients can access the care, support and information they need, and that they can understand their condition following diagnosis. Between 2015 and 2018, they committed more than £700,000 to research for motor neurone disease. Additionally, in 2019, about £400,000 was invested over three years to fund two postdoctoral posts at the UK Dementia Research Institute at the University of Edinburgh to research and develop new treatments for MND.

Recent University of Edinburgh research found a problem with MND patients' nerve cells, which could be repaired by repurposing drugs approved for other

diseases. It found that the damage to nerve cells caused by MND could be repaired by improving the energy levels in mitochondria—the power supply to the motor neurons. In fact, it discovered that in human stem cell models of MND, the axon—the long part of the motor neuron cell, which connects to the muscle—was shorter than in healthy cells, and that the movement of the mitochondria, which travel up and down the axons, was impaired. The scientists showed that that was caused by a defective energy supply from the mitochondria, and that boosting the mitochondria caused the axon to revert to normal. Although the research focused on the people with the most common genetic cause of MND, the researchers said that they were hopeful that the results would also apply to other forms of the disease. The results of the study are now being used to look at existing drugs that boost mitochondrial function.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke about an international approach to tackling MND. The results from the University of Edinburgh show what can be achieved in a single research centre. The MND research strategy now needs to move beyond single centres and small collaborations that answer narrow research questions, towards a large-scale, co-ordinated approach to tackle every aspect of the translational pathway, with the multidisciplinary expertise available nationally and internationally, and rapidly find and develop new effective therapies for MND. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk stated, the search for new therapies requires a truly multidisciplinary, pan-national approach spanning the entire translational pathway. Establishing a virtual MND translational research institute, which the petitioners have called for, will deliver that. We must also note that researchers have developed a line of thinking that suggests that delivering a cure for one neurological disease may in fact make possible effective treatment for others. This is because the disease processes are closely linked. As the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) has said, not only would additional funding from the UK Government result in an increase in MND investment, but it may contribute to tackling other neurological diseases. Does the Minister recognise this, and will she commit to action and not simply words?

The UK Government should follow the lead of the Scottish Government on universal free prescriptions. Although we are specifically discussing research and investment, we must also bear in mind that around one in every 300 people, across all communities, will develop MND in their lifetime. It is not an age-specific illness, and people will experience different circumstances in the early stages of MND. The Government support available must not systematically target those who have this debilitating illness. Free prescriptions are just one way that we can improve the quality of life of those who have been diagnosed with MND while research is still ongoing. Will the Minister commit to considering that?

There is no doubt that extra MND research funding from the UK Government is needed to support effective patient treatment and medicines, in the hope that a cure for MND can be found soon. As the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) noted, over the last year we have poured money into the pandemic response and, as we look forward, additional funding into MND research will transform people's lives.

I conclude by noting that Members today have contributed in an eloquent manner. Many have spoken from personal experience, including the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) and for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). I therefore hope to hear a positive contribution from the Minister and an actual commitment from the UK Government to help to transform MND research.

5.32 pm

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I thank the 110,000 people who signed the petition, including 49 from my own constituency. I also thank the Motor Neurone Disease Association, the My Name's Doddie Foundation and MND Scotland for their tireless campaigning on this really important issue.

All hon. Members have spoken very powerfully and personally about the scale and impact of motor neurone disease, including on their constituents, friends and colleagues. While those who suffer from this disorder face a very fearful future at the moment, there is a real opportunity here and, if we seize it, we can transform people's lives for the better. However, we have to deal with the significant and fundamental challenges in the existing research funding model, and we have to move beyond single centres and small collaborations, to a large-scale, international, collaborative and co-ordinated approach. We know from experience that that is how fundamental change is achieved, and that is what we are calling for today.

I do not simply want to make the case that this funding should be provided and this model adopted for a moral reason—to stop appalling human suffering—although that is clear and unequivocal. Supporting this proposal should be a major part of how, after covid-19, we build back a better country that draws on our amazing nation's world-class strengths in science and research, and that uses the potential of the NHS for clinical trials. Not only will doing so lead to the development of new drugs and treatments that will transform the lives of people with MND and their families and, potentially, those with dementia and other conditions, but it will help to create the high-quality, high-skilled jobs we need, so that we have an economy that is fit for the future.

This case is based on three areas. First, the economic case for funding investment in this sort of research is that if patients get earlier diagnosis and better treatment, and their condition is kept stable earlier on, that delivers better value for money. Treatments in the late stage of MND are up to nine times more expensive, so such investment will ultimately help to deliver better value for money. Secondly, we have real opportunities here for the UK research and pharmaceutical sector, because MND, as many hon. Members have said, is one of the fastest growing sectors in UK health and biomedical research. If that is the case, we should be trying to turbocharge that research and development and give it backing from the broad range of public, private and charitable research funding. That mixed economy approach is a huge strength of this country, and in MND we need to build on that. Thirdly, although everybody has rightly said that the debate is about having very specific funding for research into MND, we know that there may be very

valuable results out of it for advances in the treatment of other degenerative disorders, such as dementia, which is a huge issue facing this country.

What now needs to happen? I do not need to repeat what hon. Members have said, but we need to bring this together into an MND research institute to implement rigorous clinical research programmes and sustainable MND trials programmes, linking up with the NHS, to provide infrastructure to accelerate treatments and bring them to market in a partnership between our research and industry, and support world-leading drug discoveries and development. If the Minister has not already, will she meet those involved in this sector from the medical research charities, universities and industries, and bring them together, alongside her colleagues from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury—we need a cross-Government approach on this—to go through the proposal in detail and look at the value for money, as well as the patient outcomes that it would develop?

On the point that my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) rightly made, will the Minister also meet the Association of Medical Research Charities, if she has not done so already? During the pandemic, all medical research charities have seen their income slashed, and we really need a plan to get that research going again. As my hon. Friend said, the Association of Medical Research Charities has proposed a life sciences charity partnership fund, so that all the research done and the skills, knowledge, people and expertise do not go to waste because of the pandemic, and so that we get this back on track.

Let me end where I began. If we want to build back a better country after this pandemic, we need to think and work differently rather than in the same old ways. We are world leading in science, research and the pharmaceutical sector. Alongside our NHS, with the potential that leaves for clinical trials, it is a no-brainer that this is an area that we should focus on. I ask the Minister to raise her eyes, sights and mind to think about all the potential that this could bring for sufferers and their families, and for the life sciences, in which Britain leads and should continue to lead in future.

5.38 pm

**The Minister for Care (Helen Whately)**: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) and congratulate the petitioners on securing this important debate. I pay particular tribute to the petitioners and to the charities, the MND Association, MND Scotland and My Name's Doddie Foundation, for leading the campaign that has brought us here today. I also thank all hon. Members who have spoken so powerfully, sharing the stories of people suffering from this cruel disease and adding their voices to the petitioners' campaign.

The petition was started in the name of Doddie Weir, the Scottish rugby legend, who has been an inspirational figurehead, campaigning for a world free of MND, since he revealed in 2017 that he was suffering from the disease himself. I had the good fortune to meet, virtually, Doddie and others with MND at a recent roundtable event and I, too, was inspired by their campaign for a brighter future for people living with MND. Doddie's charity, My Name's Doddie Foundation, works tirelessly



to raise funds for research into a cure and to provide grants to people living with MND. I want to express my immense gratitude to Doddie and to everyone living with MND for giving their voices to this campaign and sharing their experiences of this awful disease and their hopes for the future. I know that people living with MND will be listening to the debate today and looking for hope. It is to them and to the more than 100,000 people who stand in solidarity with them that I address my remarks.

MND is a brutal condition that has a devastating impact on those who are diagnosed, and on their families and loved ones. As the petition has highlighted, MND can progress very rapidly, and tragically there is currently no effective treatment and no cure. We still do not know exactly what causes motor neurons to die off. Although a small percentage of cases are genetic, the majority of people with MND have no family history of the disease. There is only one drug treatment for MND, and it may slow the disease's progression for some people. The lifetime risk of developing MND is as high as one in 300 people.

We are making great strides in research, which I will talk about shortly, but we still have a way to go in our research to understand the disease mechanisms and to identify effective treatments. Before I address that progress and our plan to accelerate MND research, I want to speak about how the Government are currently supporting people with MND. Through specialised services delivered by the NHS, people with MND are receiving treatment and support to ease their symptoms and to support their continued independence for as long as possible. That includes the prescribing of complex communication devices to help people with MND to communicate as effectively as possible; offering non-invasive ventilation to support respiratory function; and delivering personal care and support for the needs of the individual.

In 2019, the National Neurosciences Advisory Group published a toolkit for improving care for people with progressive neurological conditions, including MND. That toolkit is helping commissioners to improve the pathways for people with MND, enabling quicker and more accurate diagnoses, services that are more co-ordinated, flexible and responsive to the rapidly changing needs of the patient, and improved choice in end-of-life care for people with MND. That is so that people with MND receive the best possible care. However, although the NHS is delivering that specialised treatment and support to people with MND, we know that it is not the same as a cure.

In recent years, researchers have made major advances in our understanding of MND. For example, we now know more about the types of MND that have a genetic cause, for which gene therapy might be an effective treatment. Although that accounts for only about 10% of people with MND and we still need treatments for the remainder, it is an important development. Researchers are also making progress in the development of the MND register and MND biobanks—data resources that are aiding researchers in understanding the disease. Through the development of novel biomarkers, scientists have more effective ways to monitor responses to treatment in clinical trials; and through innovative and flexible trial designs, researchers are able to conduct faster and cheaper trials, which will deliver potential new treatments to patients more quickly.

I can assure hon. Members here today that this Government are committed to supporting research into MND. I have heard the request from campaigners for Government to invest £50 million to create an MND research institute, and I understand why petitioners are asking for this. However, ring-fencing funding for particular diseases can stop great science. That is why the Government make funding available for researchers in all areas to apply for. Awards are granted in open competition and determined by the quality of the science. Through those funding mechanisms, the Government are supporting a wide range of research into MND.

In 2019-20, UK Research and Innovation, through the Medical Research Council, spent £16 million on MND research. That included research that aims to increase understanding of the causes and genetic mechanisms of MND and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis—ALS—a form of MND. For example, scientists at the UK Dementia Research Institute are working to increase understanding of the root causes of ALS and frontotemporal dementia, and to identify ways of protecting brain cells from damage. There is significant overlap between the genetic causes of MND and some types of dementia, which is why the UK Dementia Research Institute, funded in partnership with Alzheimer's Research UK and the Alzheimer's Society, has made significant investment in MND research.

At the Francis Crick Institute, which is co-funded by the Medical Research Council, Wellcome and Cancer Research UK, researchers are working with stem cells to investigate the earliest molecular events of MND. With support from the Department of Health and Social Care, the National Institute for Health Research is directly funding MND research, for instance the Lighthouse phase 2 study, which is a clinical trial of a drug repurposed from the treatment of HIV. This study, involving 300 people with MND, will test the effectiveness of the repurposed drug in improving survival rate, function and quality of life for people with MND.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful to the Minister for outlining all the research that is being done. However, the benefit of a virtual research institute would be co-ordination, to ensure that there was real focus on bringing about a real resolution for people with MND. Having a piecemeal approach will not provide the real focus that is required. Will she recognise that and therefore reflect on the ability to bring forward such a proposal in the comprehensive spending review in the autumn?

**Helen Whately:** I thank the hon. Member for her point; I will come on to say a bit more about that, and I assure her that I have absolutely heard her argument. However, I am addressing as I go some of the comments and questions raised by hon. Members during the debate, one of which was a request for some examples of research. I have just mentioned one, but there are a couple more that I want to give.

At the NIHR Sheffield Biomedical Research Centre, researchers are trialling the safety and efficacy of a drug called tauroursodeoxycholic acid, or TUDCA, as a treatment for people with ALS. The NIHR is also funding research to enhance support and care for people with MND, with ongoing studies looking at nutrition, diet and therapies to improve psychological health.

Over the past five years, the Government have spent almost £60 million on research into MND and we are currently working on ways to boost this research even further. The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk and other colleagues asked about the total figure of nearly £60 million over the five-year period from 2015-16 to 2019-20. That includes research funded by the Government—through both NIHR and UKRI—focused solely on MND; research on MND and frontotemporal dementia, the causes and mechanisms of which have a substantial overlap with MND; research on neurodegenerative conditions that have many commonalities with MND; and spend on research infrastructure within NIHR, supporting MND studies. I hope that that provides some greater clarity on the research spending. In addition, the Government fund research on the structure of the nervous system, cell biology and genetics, and mental processes such as learning and memory. UKRI supports that research with around £30 million of funding per annum.

**Mr Steve Baker:** I am listening to my hon. Friend the Minister with great interest. Of course, following the relative merits of these different programmes is slightly beyond my capabilities in biological science, much as I try. May I invite her to meet the proponents of the research proposal—it compares business as usual, if I may call it that, with the potential results of the proposal—so that she can hear directly from them the advantages that could be gained from it?

**Helen Whately:** I would be delighted to meet the proposers. I was just coming on to talk about a recent roundtable that I hosted, together with the NIHR Sheffield Biomedical Research Centre, which focused specifically on boosting MND research. It brought together researchers, charities, people with MND and funders to consider ways that we could boost research into MND. Government officials are now working with those who attended that roundtable to take things forward, and to encourage and support MND research proposals.

On the particular point about a research institute, applications for funding for research infrastructure, just as for research itself, can and should be made to NIHR

or UKRI as appropriate. Bids can win funding through that process, which includes peer review and evaluation. A strong case for this institute has clearly been made in the debate. I am happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), and I assure all who are listening that the Government are working with MND charities and researchers on ways we can boost research.

I end by again thanking the petitioners for bringing this issue to the forefront. MND has an enormous impact on individuals and families, and I pay tribute to everyone across the country who is supporting people diagnosed with the condition, and to the incredible and life-changing research that is being undertaken. The Government are committed to working together with the MND community to catalyse further investment and to accelerate progress so that, one day, we will achieve a world free from MND.

5.51 pm

**Martyn Day [V]:** I thank the Members who have taken part in the debate. I trust that the Minister will have seen that there is a considerable degree of both consensus and urgency. Given the quick progression of MND, sufferers simply do not have the time to wait. Urgent action is needed to give them hope, and they need that hope now. The ask is relatively modest in the grand scheme of things, especially given that 200,000 current UK citizens will die from this appalling disease if nothing is done. To slightly misquote Doddie himself, it is time to crack on with it. I hope the Minister will bear that in mind.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 564582, relating to research into motor neurone disease.

5.52 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Water Safety

[DAVID MUNDELL *in the Chair*]

6.15 pm

**David Mundell (in the Chair):** I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made between debates. I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate. I also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be 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](mailto:westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk). Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

6.16 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 576563, relating to water safety.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. The number of accidental water-related deaths in the UK every year is sobering: from 2009 to 2020, there were 7,000 water-related fatalities, and almost 3,000 families have been impacted by fatal accidents in water over the past 10 years. Just last year, 30 people under the age of 20 died from accidents in the water. Every single death is a tragedy. The lead petitioner, Rebecca Ramsay, lost her 13-year-old son Dylan 10 years ago this month. Like so many children and teenagers, Dylan had gone for what he thought would be an innocent swim with his friends on a summer's day. He was an intelligent young man, a talented athlete and a strong swimmer, but tragically he lost his life when his body went into shock in response to the plummeting water temperature, causing him to drown. Losing your child is every parent's worst nightmare, but sadly, Beckie's family are far from the only ones to lose their son or daughter in this way.

I know that the Government's written response to this petition came as an enormous disappointment to Beckie, and to other families that I met on Friday ahead of this debate. Ministers have pointed out that water safety is already on the curriculum, and it is true that since 1994, water safety and swimming have been mandatory as part of the primary curriculum in England and at key stage 3 where necessary. However, although it may be on the curriculum and some schools undoubtedly do a fantastic job of delivering it, the experts and expert groups I met before today's debate, including the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Swim England, the Swimming Teachers Association, the Royal Life Saving Society and Mike Tipton, professor of human and applied physiology at the University of Portsmouth—many of whom deliver water safety lessons in schools themselves

—all said exactly the same thing: in practice, it is just not happening in every school, and where it is, it is often delivered to a poor standard.

That is a real shame, because I think that water safety is something pupils are keen to learn about. One of the reasons I was keen to lead this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee is that the issue of water safety has been consistently raised with me when I have visited schools in Newcastle. So many times, I have asked primary school children, "What one thing would you like me to ask the Prime Minister to change?" expecting to hear answers such as, "More play parks" or "Ice creams on hot days", but water safety comes up again and again. Perhaps because they have grown up close to the River Tyne, children are anxious to learn how to be safe in and around water. Although it is true that children generally are taught to swim at school, the idea that swimming is what safety in the water is all about is a dangerous misconception. That cannot be emphasised enough.

Many of the parents I spoke to ahead of this debate told me that their children were excellent swimmers, but, sadly, it was not enough to save them. Like Dylan, Fiona Gosling's 14-year-old son Cameron was fit and healthy, loved sports and outdoor pursuits, and was a good swimmer, but cold water shock was something he had never learnt about. While out with friends near Bishop Auckland, he jumped into the River Wear. Tragically, when his body hit the water, it could not cope with the drop in temperature and his heart stopped beating.

Jack Pullen, who lost his life in a river accident in Manchester in 2016 aged 16, was not a strong swimmer. He was with friends who were, but, sadly, they were unable to save him when he got into trouble in the water. The water on the surface of the River Etherow had appeared calm on the surface, but it is believed that there might have been strong undercurrents and hidden hazards beneath the surface. Jack's uncle, Chris, told me of his concern that there are so many dangers in the water that children are just not aware of. Something that Beckie Ramsay said about this really struck me. She said that by having school swimming lessons, perhaps giving children a curiosity about the water but neglecting the wider safety aspects, we could be teaching children just enough to get them killed.

Water safety is about having the knowledge to recognise what a rip is, why we should not go in, knowing there are parts of the beach where the tide might come in and trap us, and knowing what cold water shock is and what to do about it. It is about having a healthy wariness of the water and knowing how deceptively dangerous it can be outside the relative safety of a swimming pool. We only need to watch the Royal National Lifeboat Institution programme "Saving Lives" to see that most water accidents occur because people do not know those things. It is about lack of knowledge, not physical fitness or swimming ability. I am a big advocate of swimming. It has so many physical and mental health benefits, and it is a skill that saves lives, but on its own it is not enough. We need to ensure that water safety is also taught in every school.

I know headteachers are tired of politicians telling them to do more to address societal problems when resources are so tight. Since 2010, schools have had to stretch declining per pupil funding to meet more and more Government requirements around mental health,



careers education and many functions that local authorities used to undertake, but can no longer afford. The Government have now increased funding, but analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies points out that the end result will be per pupil funding in 2022-23 that is no higher in real terms than it was in 2009-10. In effect, the Government will be giving schools the same amount of money that they had 11 years ago, while expecting them to do more with it. So I want to be clear that if we want schools to do more on water safety, as the petitioners advocate—it makes sense since almost all children go to school—schools should absolutely be given the extra resources that they need to do it.

In anticipation of the Minister's response, I want to say that the petitioners know that the curriculum already includes requirements on swimming and self-rescue in a range of water-based situations. That is not the issue here. The problem is that that is not achieving the hoped for outcomes in terms of water safety knowledge and saving lives, and that is what we need the Government to do something about. I ask the Minister: is the Department for Education confident that the statutory requirements ensure that all children are taught water safety to a high standard in school? Are pupils really going into year 7 knowing what a rip current is and how to get in and out of it; that tides go in and out and can trap us; and what we should do to give ourselves the best chance of staying alive if we experience cold water shock? If not, will the Government now consider supplementing the curriculum with a requirement for children to receive class-based water safety instruction before they leave primary school?

Secondly, how are we checking on progress against the curriculum? The families and experts that I met repeatedly pointed out failings in the school accountability system and hoped to see an enhanced role for Ofsted. To take just the statutory requirements on swimming, according to a recent report from the all-party parliamentary group on swimming, in 2019-20 just 77% of year 7 pupils were able to fulfil the requirement of swimming 25 metres unaided.

It is a depressing but not surprising reality that the income-based inequalities in attainment that we see more broadly in the education system also affect this. Swim England forecasts that by 2024-25, just 35% of year 7s in the most deprived areas of England will meet the statutory requirement. Sadly, the emerging pattern is that local swimming facilities are now most under threat in those very same areas.

West Denton pool in my constituency sadly closed during the first national lockdown and will not reopen due to the financial impact of the pandemic. It was located in a neighbourhood that already suffered from significant health inequalities, falling in the top 10% in the country, according to the 2009 indices of deprivation. I worry not only that that will compound the problem of children from less affluent backgrounds disproportionately failing to meet the statutory requirements, but that a lack of high-quality swimming facilities may lead to more children swimming in open water, which we know to be a much more dangerous environment.

Despite the statutory requirement in England, in response to a freedom of information request, Ofsted confirmed that after searching 25,000 inspection reports going back 13 years, it found that fewer than 10% mentioned anything to do with swimming. Where they did, it was usually only in a very general sense.

I know that Ofsted would say that it has to take a rounded view of schools and that it is not its role to check that each statutory requirement is being met, and I know that the degree to which Ofsted and inspections genuinely drive school improvement is a hotly debated topic, but when so many children leave primary school unable to meet a key statutory requirement, and there are such grave concerns from families, campaigners and experts about what seems to be a more or less systemic failure on water safety, surely there is a role, if not for Ofsted, for the Department for Education, in looking at what more the school accountability system could be doing.

As 2021 looks like it will be a year of staycations, I worry that we will see more people swimming in open water on hot summer days, unaware of the dangers. The open waters of England are a far cry from a beach in Spain with a lifeguard. The parents of Michael Scaife, who died at age 20, after saving a friend who got into trouble in the water, have been part of a campaign to warn people that even on the hottest days, water can remain very cold, and people will still succumb to cold water shock very quickly. This is somewhat outside the Schools Minister's remit, but I would be grateful if he let us know what the Government are doing to promote water safety, in particular to children, in this year of staycations.

Lastly, I know that the Minister will mention that the DFE has relaxed some of the rules around the use of PE and the sport premium, updating guidance to clarify that such funding can be spent on swimming and water safety. I am sure that that is welcomed, but water safety is not a sport; it is a survival skill, and it is not an optional extra. Accidental water deaths are a UK-wide problem. They are not confined to certain communities or parts of the country. This cannot be targeted at specific pupils or schools; it must be set at a standard that is deliverable across the country, with all pupils entitled to receive proper water safety instruction, just as they do with fire safety or road safety.

Accidental water deaths are a hidden pandemic that has been going on for years. Education is prevention, and that has been proven many times over. We have more children dying in the water than on bikes, yet we have campaigns for cycling proficiency; more than in fires, yet we have campaigns for smoke detectors. Road safety education programmes have reduced the rate of road fatalities by half in the United Kingdom, and a national campaign to teach fire prevention through schools led to significant decreases in deaths. In the same way, by getting water safety into schools and ensuring that it is delivered, we can break the cycle by giving every child that life-saving knowledge.

Before I finish, I want to mention the story of Evan Chrisp from Newcastle to demonstrate just what a difference a little knowledge can make. Three years ago, Evan and his friends went to Beadnell bay in Northumberland to celebrate finishing their exams. A rip current caught hold of Evan, and he was swept into the North sea. As he lost sight of the beach, he remembered what he had heard on a Royal National Lifeboat Institution advert:

"Everyone who falls unexpectedly into cold water wants to follow the same instinct—to swim hard and to fight the cold water. But, when people fight it, the chances are, they lose.

Cold water shock makes them gasp uncontrollably and breathe in water, then they drown. But if they just float, until the cold water shock has passed, they'll be able to control their breathing and have a far better chance of staying alive."

By following that advice, Evan was able to cling on to consciousness for around 45 minutes before he was rescued. He did not learn that at school—he remembered it from a one-minute advert that just happened to have played before a film he went to see at the cinema, but he credits it with saving his life.

Evan is getting on with his life and studying at university now, and I know how lucky he feels to have survived, but too many other families have lost their children and are having to learn to live without them. Beckie Ramsay told me of the deep sadness she has felt over the past 10 years watching Dylan's friends grow up, knowing she will never see her own son get married or enjoy being a grandmother to his children. It is not the way life should be. Since Dylan's death, Beckie has dedicated herself to campaigning for better water safety and has gone into schools up and down the country.

Other parents I have spoken to have done the same, but I also know how tired they are. Beckie has said that after 10 years of speaking to about 170,000 people in schools up and down the country, she feels we are no further forward. They want to save other families from going through what they have, but we cannot leave this at the doorstep of bereaved parents, who have enough to deal with as it is. Society must carry that responsibility, and the best way to deliver that is through schools. It does not need to be expensive or take up a huge amount of time. Professor Mike Tipton's research has shown that something as simple as a 20-minute classroom-based lesson can make a significant difference and be retained by children, just as remembering that one-minute advert saved Evan's life.

There is a huge amount of readily available expertise in the National Water Safety Forum that the Government could draw on. Its chair, Dawn Whittaker, contacted me on Friday to say that it would be keen to support the Department for Education with an enhancement to the curriculum, and produce a credible and robust classroom-based lesson plan and content to support schools to deliver mandatory water safety education. She said it could be delivered by the end of the year with the support of the Department. Will the Minister commit to taking the National Water Safety Forum up on that offer?

Ms Whittaker is also chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council campaign on water safety and told me she would be happy to support discussions on the inclusion of a requirement in the fire service national framework for the fire and rescue services to contribute to the delivery of water safety in schools. That could reduce the burden on teachers and schools, and I urge the Minister and his colleagues at the Home Office to consider it too.

Water accidents are highly preventable if we just get this teaching into schools and make sure it is being delivered. We already know what we need to teach and how to teach it; we just need to get on with it and make it happen. We owe that much to the memory of Dylan, Cameron, Jack, Michael and the countless others who have lost their lives in the water.

6.32 pm

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I am pleased to be able to speak on such an important matter. I extend my gratitude to the Chair of the Petitions

Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), the other Committee members and all those who signed the petition, which allowed us to be here today debating this issue in Parliament.

This petition was created because of the heartbreaking loss of Dylan, who died from drowning 10 years ago. I want to put on the record my thanks for the tireless campaigning of Beckie Ramsay and all those who know all too well of the dangerous consequences of our waterways. I send them my deepest condolences for their huge losses.

There is hardly anything more painful in life than losing a child. Just over three years ago, I was contacted by a distraught father, Mark Scaife, about his late son. I asked a question of the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), at Prime Minister's questions about the death of Michael Scaife, who sadly drowned in the Jubilee river in Slough. I urged the Government to do more on water safety education to ensure that children are taught about the potential dangers of open water and the impact of cold water shock and rip currents.

At that time, the then Prime Minister acknowledged that there is more to do on water safety, yet it seems that very little has changed since then. With other members of the former all-party parliamentary group on water safety and drowning prevention, I have made representations—as have the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, other organisations and headteachers of schools in Slough and across the country—for sufficient resources, but sadly to not much avail.

Drowning is still one of the highest causes of accidental deaths among children. More than 55% of parents admit that they would not be confident that their child would know what to do if they fell into open water. Even before the pandemic, almost one in four children could not swim the statutory 25 metres when they left primary school. While the national curriculum calls for pupils to be able to

“perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations”,

sadly awareness around water safety on waterways is clearly still not good enough. We must ensure that every child has knowledge of the vital swimming and water safety skills that might be needed to save their life or the life of somebody else, particularly considering that 44% of drowning fatalities happen when the victim had no intention of entering the water in the first place.

Throughout the pandemic, things have seemed to decline further, with much of the progress made on swimming lessons and education lost. Some 1.88 million children missed out on swimming participation throughout the 2020-21 academic year, with children living in deprived areas even worse off. Assuming that there are no catch-up lessons and nothing further is done, 1.2 million could leave primary school over the next five years unable to swim. This will result in worse outcomes for our children later in their lives and could even result in further tragedies. Despite this, the latest from the Government is that they have

“no plans to review current curriculum expectations for water safety”.

Their abysmal plan for education does not recognise the scale of the challenge. We must hear from the Minister concrete steps to ensure that our children do not fall

further behind and that the disadvantage gap does not widen; and exactly how the Government will reduce the number of drownings.

I know we are all here to speak because we want to prevent further tragedies and devastation for families across the UK, and to speak out for those who have lost loved ones—for parents who have lost children in the most horrific circumstances, where in some cases these events could and should have been avoided. It is their resilience and strength that has brought us all here. I hope the Minister will listen to their concerns and take much overdue action to save lives.

6.37 pm

**Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con)[V]: It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I am grateful, as always, for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I support the principle behind the petition. The Government must review and, if necessary, enhance curriculum content on water safety. This is a change that the 109 people in my constituency who signed this petition want to see, and I know that there will be many more residents in our area who support improvements in water safety education.

Clacton is a wonderful place, happy to call itself the sunshine coast, which the vast majority of people enjoy in perfect safety, but due to some ignorance of the sea and its habits, we have had our fair share of tragedy. In 2018, local teenager, Ben Quartermaine, was swept out to sea while swimming with friends off Clacton pier. His body was found two days later. In 2020, another local man, Paul Lee, was found lying face down in the water off Clacton pier after going for a swim from the beach. These are two difficult and memorable incidents for the community, but unfortunately they are not isolated. Our hard-working lifeboat and coastguard teams at Clacton and Walton are regularly called out up and down the sunshine coast—something I have experience of as a former volunteer. I take this opportunity to thank all those involved in those hard-working teams across the country. They often work in the worst conditions imaginable and do it for nothing more than their time, although some do receive the reward of a well-earned beer, traditionally bought by the rescued for the lifeboat crews at Walton-on-the-Naze.

Given my experience in this area, and as a yachtsman as well, I am pleased that some of our local schools provide additional water safety lessons, especially after what happened to Ben and Paul. However, these are not universal across the country, and time and again visitors to our area get into difficulty. As an area so beautiful and so close to London, it is not surprising that we get our fair share of visitors, and as has been observed in the debate, we are likely to get many more staycationists. This disparity in the standard of water safety education in coastal and urban areas concerns me, and I believe it led to another tragedy in 2019, when two siblings from Luton died while swimming at Clacton after getting into difficulty.

I recognise the good work that is already being undertaken to educate all children about water safety, as set out in the Government's response to the petition, but it is not enough. We are starting with a blank slate, and we must acknowledge that many people are able to enjoy the water safely because of the content in the curriculum and the work of organisations such as Swim

England. Nevertheless, as has been said, there were still 254 deaths in UK waters from accidental drownings in 2020, an increase of 34 on the previous year, so I believe that there are too many avoidable deaths, which troubles me. It is the young who are most at risk of drowning, according to the World Health Organisation.

In short, our approach to water safety education has had some success, but it is not there yet and there is more that we can do to protect those most at risk, so I was disappointed to read that the Government had no plans to review current curriculum expectations. Surely we need to look at that again. Figures show that inland open water, such as rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs and quarries, continue to be the leading locations, with 58% of deaths. How do we deal with that? Males continue to represent 78% of deaths. How do we better educate men and young boys about the dangers?

Almost half of those people had no intention of entering the water, with 107 either walking, slipping, tripping, falling, or being cut off by the tide or swept in by the waves. What educational resources can be put in place to stop those accidents? That is what a curriculum review should focus on. Doing so would ease the pressure on our hard-working and overstretched lifeboat crews and other emergency services and would prevent the terrible incidents that leave such a scar on our communities and the families affected. With that in mind, I ask the Government and the Minister to consider again implementing such review.

6.41 pm

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell. I thank the Chair of the Petitions Committee, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), for presenting the petition, and all those who signed it. We live in a country that is not only surrounded by sea but has many rivers, from the west coast up to the north coast and all down the east coast, many of which are extremely tidal. I swim in a nearby river, the Parrett, when it is going out to sea. When the tide turns, it is impossible to swim against it. The tide will take a swimmer away faster than they can swim. As long as they know what they are doing and can handle it, they can cope with that, and with the cold water, but what has been raised by so many today is the fact that it is the cold water, its strength and its direction of travel that shock many people.

We have a very experienced Education Minister here this evening, who I am sure can find solutions, because it is about teaching our children to swim, and teaching them about the dangers of cold water. Lakes and other things have undercurrents. At the moment, the weather is not too brilliant, but when we have great weather lots of youngsters often jump in the water because it is something that they really enjoy. They might be egged on by others to do so, and many tragedies have happened.

I wanted to raise a case involving a constituent of mine, Andrea Corrie, who sadly lost her 19-year-old son James in 2005. James was a strong swimmer, who tragically lost his life in a drowning accident in the River Thames at Kingston after a night out with his friends. His family was told that cold water shock was most likely the reason he could not get out of the water. I highlight James's story to emphasise how serious the issue is. On average, 400 people drown accidentally each year in



the UK. That is one every 20 hours on average, and 44% of those who drown did not intend to enter the water. Drowning in the UK accounts for more accidental fatalities each year than fire deaths at home or cycling deaths on the road. I think many members of the public would not think that that statistic was right.

We need to do more to prevent drowning incidents around our shores and in inland waterways. Mrs Corrie has been a tireless campaigner on this issue, working alongside the RNLI on its Respect the Water campaign. Her determination to bring positive change out of her family's tragedy is inspiring. We must raise awareness of the dangers of our waters, so that more families like Mrs Corrie's do not suffer the same heartache.

This year, during what is likely to be a very busy post-lockdown summer around our coasts and inland waters, water-safety measures are more important than ever. We will be seeing a lot of people coming to the west country in particular this summer, and we welcome them, but it is safety that really matters. However, the issue does not stop with simply raising awareness of the dangers of cold water; education has a key part to play. The earlier children become aware of the dangers that lurk in inviting-looking pools of water, the better they will be equipped to help themselves if they get into trouble.

I think that there are three key things we can do, moving forward. First, we must raise awareness of the dangers of British waters through advertising campaigns such as the RNLI's highly effective Respect the Water campaign. The adverts highlight the dangers and unpredictable risks of British coastal waters and the way in which waves, tides and hidden currents can drag people out to sea in seconds. We have only to remember the tragedy of the cockle pickers in order to understand the dangers in some waters. Where there is a very flat beach, the tide comes in incredibly quickly. Again, I do not think that people, unless they have actually experienced really strong tides, realise the speed at which that happens. These campaigns have already saved lives, and I think we need to look at other campaigns that can warn of the dangers of inland waterways.

Secondly, we must ensure that all schoolchildren are taught how to swim, and make sure that they catch up on lessons missed after the disruption of covid. The point was made by other speakers that in some deprived areas it is much more difficult to get access to swimming pools and for those schools to get access to take children to swim. Schoolchildren are required to learn to swim under the national curriculum, but only 77% of year 7 pupils could swim 25 metres unaided in 2020. A recent report by Swim England and the APPG on swimming forecast that that would drop to 43% by 2025 as a result of lessons being missed during the pandemic. It is vital that lessons are caught up on and that those rates are increased and not decreased. I am sure that we will hear from the Minister about how that can be done.

Learning to swim in a pool is the first important step, but we could also do more to ensure that schoolchildren know how to stay safe in open water. There is so much difference between swimming in a swimming pool and being in a fast-flowing river. The Swim Safe initiative is very good for teaching children about water safety in lakes and in the sea. This provides more practical and realistic training on staying safe in and around our waters.

Thirdly, we could look at how we reduce the risks posed by canals and rivers in towns. We need communities to carry out risk assessments and take steps to mitigate those risks. Local safety plans could save lives by preventing people from suffering slips, trips or falls near water. Let us be blunt: when pubs and other hospitality establishments are close to water, it would be quite nice for them to have—without putting everybody off coming to their establishment—something there to tell people just to be a little bit aware when they leave the establishment in order that they do not fall in the water. If it is very cold water and the person has been drinking, it will have an even greater effect on them. Without being a complete nanny state, we just have to point out to people that there are real risks, and I think it is up to some of these establishments—dare I say it?—to have some messaging there that can make people aware. We need to install more public rescue equipment along the waterways, too. We could also ensure that these communities raise awareness of the dangers of such things as drinking alcohol near these spots, which can be dangerous.

In summary, we have a very able Minister who has great experience, and if he can combine a strong public awareness campaign and thorough practical education for schoolchildren with a more local approach to water risk, we can prevent many families from suffering in the way my constituent Mrs Corrie has suffered.

6.50 pm

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** It is an unexpected pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell, but a pleasure none the less. I pay tribute to the Chair of the Petitions Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). The beauty of the Petitions Committee is that it often brings to the House stories and issues that are sadly hidden under the headlines of the day. Yesterday, she chaired an evidence session with people who have been directly affected by this issue, and I think she did a fantastic job of conveying not only the breadth and depth of the policy challenges that we face, but the emotion and passion that the parents and families of affected people expressed to her yesterday. We all benefited from that.

Beneath the headlines are deeply personal issues that often result in loss, grief and tragedy. The debate covers one of those issues. The challenges that people face do not always fall into a neat policy box or splash on the front pages, but they matter. On issues such as the ones we are discussing, there are even questions of life and death. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Petitions Committee for giving voice to challenges on water safety.

I express my sincere condolences to Dylan Ramsay's family, who set up the petition. Their courage has taken tragedy and channelled it into a positive campaign for change so that no others suffer as they have suffered. As the author of the petition writes:

"It will soon be the 10-year anniversary of Dylan's death. I never want you to feel the pain I do."

I am sure that all parties in the House would agree that no parent should have to experience that pain at all, yet all too often, they do.

According to the National Education Union, approximately half the people who drown each year are under the age of 15. Whether that is down to youth, inexperience or something else entirely, it means that

mums, dads, brothers and sisters are grieving when they should be watching their family member grow and thrive. Those statistics speak for themselves, and they demand action.

There are two aspects to this challenge. First, how adequate is our school curriculum? Dylan's family argue that the curriculum must properly prepare our children for the dangers of open water, and the Labour party agrees. If we do not teach kids how to keep themselves safe in water, from cold water shock to rip currents, how can we expose them to so much risk when they explore the water alone? We expect drivers to learn theory to keep themselves and others safe on the roads. Given the clear risk posed by open waters, it is unclear why swimming should be any different.

I represent a constituency in the city of Brighton and Hove. It is a waterfront constituency like the Minister's, which is, in fact, the constituency I grew up in and know well. I spent a lot of time in the water there as a child and young person. I experienced tragedy earlier this year when Gareth Jones, a volunteer for my local party and somebody I called a friend, lost his life to the sea in January. At 69, he was an older person, but his family was robbed of a very loving family member. It is very interesting that his son Robbie, a young person, said recently to the press:

"I grew up in Brighton from the age of eight, and I've never been taught about the dangers of the sea and different tides." Those are the dangers to which his father was lost, and of which he, as a son and young person, is now all too aware.

In the city of Brighton and Hove, which enjoys all sorts of sea activity—sometimes, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) mentioned, people go in after a drink or two—we are very aware of these issues. However, young people in particular who are growing up locally should be far more aware not just of the benefits of exercise at sea but of the challenges that come with it.

The Government point out in response to today's petition that water safety is a mandatory part of the curriculum for physical education at primary school. However, if the proportion of young people dying at sea is so high, the current requirements cannot be working well enough. Perhaps, as the NEU suggests, teachers are not being properly supported to deliver the teaching in such a specialised and life-critical discipline; perhaps provision of high-quality water safety lessons is variable across the country; or perhaps the existing requirements simply do not go far enough. In any of these scenarios, the Government must be more open to reform than they have been to date. They cannot pretend that the problem no longer exists simply because of a basic curriculum requirement.

The second dimension is the problem that relates to swimming ability. The all-party parliamentary group on swimming points out that, even before covid, almost one in four children could not swim the statutory 25 metres when they left primary school. This situation has only been exacerbated by the pandemic, as 1.88 million children have missed out on swimming participation throughout the 2020-21 academic year, with classrooms and swimming centres being shut to limit the spread of the virus. The implications are shocking. The APPG suggests that, without additional top-up lessons, up to 1.2 million children will leave primary school over the next five years entirely unable to swim.

If young people are not confident with the theory of water safety and over a million of them are not even able to swim, we are risking far more of the terrible incidents that we continue to see year upon year. I am sure that the ambition to tackle this problem is shared across the House, but I have to ask the Minister for more action. The Government's educational catch-up proposals featured nothing on extracurricular activities or wellbeing. Labour is committed to this issue. Our own children's recovery plan promised to invest in activities for sport, music, drama and book clubs, helping every child to recover on learning, social play and wellbeing. Our plan would ensure that schools have the time and resources to offer proper water safety lessons, pending a review of curriculum adequacy. What is more, it would give kids more time back in the pool, including after school. Labour wants our kids to learn and grow in the water under proper supervision, so that that figure of 1.2 million can be tackled properly.

The authors of this petition have identified a clear problem, and Members from across the House and the APPG on swimming have suggested solutions. Now it is time for the Government to listen and to act, because the safety of our kids at sea cannot wait any longer.

6.58 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Mundell, which is a first for me, at least.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), the Chair of the Petitions Committee, for bringing forward this debate on increasing curriculum content about water safety as part of swimming lessons, and to Rebecca Ramsay, who created the petition.

Please let me start by expressing my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Dylan Ramsay. Even 10 years later, the pain for the family will be as strong today as it was 10 years ago. I welcome the commitment and determination of Rebecca, Dylan's mother, to help to raise awareness of water safety, particularly through the work of the Do it for Dylan water safety campaign; and I have listened carefully to the powerful speeches from the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North and for Slough (Mr Dhesi), and from my hon. Friends the Members for Clacton (Giles Watling) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish).

The recent annual data on water-related fatalities published by the Water Incident Database showed that we must do all we can to eliminate the tragedy of children and young people drowning. In 2020, of the 176 people in England who drowned as a result of an accident or natural causes, 20 were 19 years old or younger. Water safety is a vital skill, which is why it is a mandatory part of the curriculum for physical education at primary school. The curriculum states that, in addition to being able to swim 25 metres unaided and use a range of strokes effectively, pupils should be taught to perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

Data from the 2019-20 Active Lives children's survey states that 77% of children surveyed in year 7 report that they are able to swim 25 metres unaided, the same as the previous year. The data recognises that schools and teachers need additional support to teach about water safety in a way that is relevant to real-life circumstances. That is why the Department has worked closely with the

swimming and water safety sector to take forward a number of actions. The PE and sport premium can be used by primary schools to support swimming through teacher training and top-up lessons for pupils not able to meet the curriculum expectations by the end of core lessons.

Some 45% of teachers reported that they had used their premium funding to improve the teaching of swimming since 2017, according to a 2019 DFE report on schools' use of the premium funding, and the Department has worked with Swim England to produce additional guidance for schools on how they can use their premium funding to support pupils to swim and to be taught how to be safe in and around water. Funding for the PE and sport premium has recently been confirmed for academic year 2021-22 at £320 million.

Swim England has published a series of guidance documents on school swimming and water safety for schools, parents and swimming teachers. These include a specific guidance document on teaching water safety at key stages 1 and 2. This guidance document provides schools with a clear approach to ensure that pupils receive comprehensive water safety education, covering aspects such as the water safety code, cold water shock, keeping others safe, and how to recognise hazards in different environments.

Schools play an important role in ensuring that all pupils know how to be safe in and around water, providing opportunities for children who may otherwise miss out on swimming activities outside of school. This is more important than ever, as children's access to swimming and water safety lessons has been limited through covid-19 restrictions. Again, the Active Lives survey data reports that swimming proficiency differs depending on affluence, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North pointed out, with 84% of children from the most affluent families being able to swim 25 metres unaided, compared with 41% of those from the least affluent families.

That survey also reports that 23% of children surveyed took part in swimming activities at least once in the past week, a 6.2% decrease compared with data from 2018-19. That is why new online water safety lessons have been made available through Oak National Academy in response to the covid crisis, and those lessons align with Swim England's water safety guidance for primary schools. I am grateful for the support provided by organisations such as the Royal Life Saving Society UK, Swim England and the Youth Sport Trust in the development of these new online lessons. They have shared resources, quality-assured the content, and ensured that lessons are inclusive.

It is important that all pupils have opportunities to be taught to swim and about water safety. That is why the Department has included a specific focus on swimming and water safety in our grant programme to increase opportunities for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities to take part in PE and sport. The most recent programme, Inclusion 2020, was completed in March 2021. That programme has resulted in new resources, self-assessment tools being developed, and continuing professional development lessons for teachers.

Those new resources are available to schools through a new inclusion hub on Swim England's website, providing high-quality, inclusive resources. The Department has recently completed an open competition for a new grant

focused on increasing PE and sport opportunities for children with SEND. This consortium programme will be led by the Youth Sport Trust, and will involve Swim England and include the development of additional inclusive school swimming and water safety resources and training that schools will be able to access.

The Department is working to better understand specific challenges and barriers for children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. For example, data from the 2019-20 Active Lives children's survey shows differences in swimming participation among different ethnic groups. The Department is working with the Black Swimming Association to better understand the barriers to increased participation and to raise awareness of water safety.

Supporting schools to make the best use of their facilities is key to ensuring that pupils have access to high-quality lessons and extracurricular opportunities. In February, the Department announced an additional £10.1 million to improve the use of school sports facilities. That funding can be used to support schools to open swimming pools outside the school day and to fund the additional cleaning, signage and sanitation that they may require in order to be coded secure.

The funding was provided to all 42 active partnerships across England. More than half indicated in their delivery plans that they will work directly with schools to support the effective use of pool facilities. That includes Active Dorset, which focuses on children in year 7 who are unable to swim 25 metres, having missed out on swimming and water safety lessons in year 6 due to covid restrictions. The aim is to provide free pool access on school sites between 3 o'clock and 4.30 pm for pupils in that group.

I welcome the swimming and water safety sector's ongoing work to raise awareness of water safety, and the range of resources and programmes that it delivers to children and young people. This year, the Department continued its support for the Royal Life Saving Society UK's Drowning Prevention Week in June, and I am pleased with early reports that the school-focused element of the campaign was delivered to more than 680,000 children.

The Department will continue to support schools to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn to swim and to be taught water safety, in particular recognising the new challenges brought about by covid restrictions. I will be delighted, of course, to meet the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North, other hon. Members and outside organisations that want to help provide more resources for schools—in particular, for example, in the new relationships, sex and health education curriculum, which has an important first aid element in it—and enhance the resources for the delivery of the PE national curriculum. Finally, I pay tribute once again to Rebecca Ramsay for her important work in raising the profile of swimming and water safety, as she has.

7.7 pm

**Catherine McKinnell [V]:** I thank the Minister for that response and hon. Members for their contributions this evening.

I want to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), because I met Michael's father, Mark, on Friday, alongside the other parents who have lost their children in water accidents. It was an incredibly



moving meeting, and I know that the fact that he has his MP's support will mean a lot to Mark, as will the speech that my hon. Friend made.

The hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) also spoke incredibly powerfully about experiences in his community, and made the case for reviewing the curriculum. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) spoke from personal knowledge and experience of the issue, supported the petitioners' call for teaching the dangers of cold and tidal waters, and shared the tragic experience of his constituent, Mrs Corrie, with the loss of her son, James. Once again, James was a strong swimmer—we hear that over and over again.

I reiterate to the Minister what I said in my opening comments: we know that this is on the curriculum. The problem is that it is just not happening in a consistent way. In many cases, it is not happening at all. That is not my view; it is what five water safety experts from five different organisations and the bereaved parents I spoke to, many of whom have spent years campaigning and speaking in schools, all say. They all reported the same experience. They desperately want the Government to do something about it.

I urge the Minister and the Secretary of State to consider supplementing the curriculum with a requirement for children to receive class-based water safety instruction before they leave primary school, with accountability for ensuring that it happens. The National Water Safety Forum has a huge well of expertise to draw on. As I said, its chair has indicated that it is ready and willing to support the Department for Education in drawing up a plan to get that into the classroom as quickly as possible. I am grateful for the Minister's offer to meet the campaigning groups to see how we can make that happen.

Unlike many other major public health issues, there has been no comparable campaign on drowning prevention, but on 28 April this year the UN adopted its first ever resolution on global drowning prevention. It requests

all member states to develop a national drowning prevention plan and measurable targets, put in place effective water safety laws, promote the research and development of innovative drowning prevention tools and technology, and make water safety, swimming and first aid part of the school curriculum. The resolution also introduces a new UN World Drowning Prevention Day, on 25 July each year.

I hope Members will do what they can to join the initiatives on this year's World Drowning Prevention Day by groups such as the International Drowning Research Alliance, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and many others who work tirelessly to try to eradicate a problem that tragically claims so many lives, but is largely preventable with the help of low cost interventions.

In a letter to the DFE that she was kind enough to share with me, Beckie Ramsay said: "In the past decade I have sadly met with many families who have different stories, but all with the same outcome. One thing that comes across over and over again is that parents only learn about cold water shock when either trying to work out the cause of their loved one's death or at their loved one's inquest". "Isn't it time to break that cycle? When it comes to safety, knowledge is power, and education saves lives, but what we are missing is any universal availability of this life-saving knowledge.

On behalf of the petitioners, I urge the Government to support their campaign to get water safety into schools and ensure it is delivered properly. We did it for road and fire with life-saving results. Now let us do it for water.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 576563, relating to water safety.

7.12 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Monday 12 July 2021*

## CABINET OFFICE

### English Votes for English Laws

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove):** Today, I am informing the House that the Government intend to bring forward a motion for the House of Commons to consider whether to amend the Standing Orders to remove the English Votes for English Laws procedure from the legislative process in the House of Commons.

The English Votes for English Laws procedure, which was introduced in 2015, amended the legislative process for the purpose of providing MPs representing English constituencies—or those representing English and Welsh constituencies—the opportunity to have an additional say on matters that applied to England—or England and Wales only.

It also applies to legislation introducing a tax measure that affects only England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which must be approved by a majority of MPs representing constituencies in those areas.

The English Votes procedure does not apply to the legislative process in the House of Lords, although it is the case that amendments made in the Lords which apply to England—or England and Wales—only are subject to a double majority vote in the House of Commons.

The procedure was introduced as more powers were being devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Senedd but does not reflect the unique nature of the UK Parliament and the principle that all parts of the UK should be, and are, represented equally in the UK Parliament.

The introduction of the procedure in 2015 added additional stages to the legislative process in Parliament and in doing so introduced complexity to our arrangements and has not served our Parliament well. This Standing Order reform is a sensible change that will ensure the effective operation of the legislative process.

Removing English Votes for English Laws does not change the fact that MPs with constituencies in England—and indeed MPs who represent constituencies across the UK—have a strong voice and role in the UK Parliament.

It is a fundamental principle that all constituent parts of the United Kingdom should be equally represented in Parliament, and Parliament should deliver for the whole UK. The operation of this procedure—and the constraints on the role of certain MPs—does not support this aim.

Rather than maintain this procedure, the Government shall on 13 July bring forward a motion in the House of Commons so that MPs can debate whether the English Votes procedure should be removed from the legislative process.

[HCWS169]

## EDUCATION

### Education Update

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** Today, Ofqual and the Department for Education published joint consultations outlining detailed proposals for alternative arrangements for awarding general qualifications in 2022 and vocational and technical qualifications in academic year 2021-22.

These consultations, outlined in “*Proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022*” and “*Arrangements for the assessment and awarding of Vocational and Technical Qualifications and Other General Qualifications in 2021 to 2022*”, will end on 1 August for GCSEs, AS and A levels and on 26 July for vocational and technical and other general qualifications. These changes will be for one year only.

The Government have made clear its intention that exams and other assessments should go ahead in the academic year 2021-22. In order to ensure that they can go ahead fairly, however, we must recognise that students in the 2021-22 cohort have experienced significant disruption to their education, and we are proposing that exams and assessments in 2021-22 should be adapted to take this into account.

For GCSEs, AS and A levels we are proposing a package of measures that includes four elements: in those GCSE subjects where it is possible to do so without undermining the assessment, a choice of topics on which students will be assessed; advance information about how exams will be focused for the majority of GCSE, AS and A level subjects; reducing the burden of non-exam assessment in some subjects; and allowing students to have access to support materials in the exam room in a small number of subjects.

For vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications, the consultation sets out a suite of proposed measures for those qualifications that are included in performance tables including adaptations such as streamlining assessment, early banking of assessments and providing revision guidance. The consultation focuses on the impact of the measures proposed and updating the existing vocational and technical qualifications contingency regulatory framework to reflect our aim that exams and assessments should go ahead in 2021-22.

The consultation seeks the views of students, parents and carers, teachers, school and college leaders, FE colleges and universities, employers and others before decisions are made on final arrangements. We intend to announce decisions for GCSEs, AS and A levels early in the autumn term and for vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications in early August.

As well as these proposed adaptations, Ofqual is considering how best to grade qualifications in 2022 in a way that is as fair as possible to students in that year, those who took qualifications in previous years, and those who will take them in future. Ofqual has statutory responsibility for the maintenance of standards and for public confidence in qualifications, while taking account of Government policy. Ofqual will make a decision once 2021 results are known, and will announce its decisions in the autumn.

We are also continuing to work with Ofqual on contingency plans in case it does not prove possible for exams to go ahead safely and fairly in 2021-22.

[HCWS170]



## TREASURY

### Official Development Assistance Budget

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak):** The Government have acted on a scale unmatched in recent history in responding to the twin health and economic emergencies, with over £400 billion of total support for the economy since the start of the pandemic to protect people's jobs and livelihoods, and to support businesses and public services.

But the damage inflicted on our economy and the public finances by coronavirus has been immense. We have suffered the biggest recession in 300 years. Last year we borrowed nearly £300 billion—equivalent to 14.3% of GDP—the highest since world war two. Debt as a percentage of GDP reached nearly 100%, the highest since 1962. This year we are forecast to borrow the second highest amount on record during peacetime—second only to last year. This is clearly unsustainable, and the economic damage of coronavirus cannot be fixed overnight.

That is why we have had to take difficult decisions to get borrowing down and restore the public finances—including by increasing corporation tax, freezing income tax personal thresholds and maintaining public sector pay at current levels.

As part of these difficult decisions, we took the decision last year to temporarily reduce the ODA budget to spend 0.5% of gross national income on overseas aid in 2021. The International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 clearly envisages situations in which a departure from spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA may be necessary: for example in response to “fiscal circumstances and, in particular, the likely impact of meeting the target on taxation, public spending and public borrowing”.

Spending at 0.5% of gross national income for this year means we will still spend more than £10 billion to improve global health, fight poverty and tackle climate change. In 2020 we were one of only two G7 countries to meet the 0.7% target, and the only one to do so each year since 2013. Based on the latest OECD data, spending 0.5% GNI as ODA in 2021, as we plan to do, would mean that the UK is still the third largest donor in the G7 as a percentage of GNI.

As we have made clear since that decision, this is a temporary measure and the Government are committed to the 2015 Act and to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA once the fiscal situation allows. That is why we are today setting out the responsible fiscal circumstances under which we will return to 0.7%.

Consistent with the fiscal principles set out at March Budget 2021, and with the principles contained within the Conservative Party 2019 Manifesto, the Government commit to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA when the independent Office for Budget Responsibility's fiscal forecast<sup>[1]</sup> confirms that, on a sustainable basis, we are not borrowing for day-to-day spending<sup>[2]</sup> and underlying debt<sup>[3]</sup> is falling, as explained in more detail below.

At the upcoming Spending Review the Government will set the ODA budget for 2022-23—and provisionally for later years—in line with these tests and the latest fiscal forecast.

Each year over this period, the Government will review, in accordance with the 2015 Act, whether a return to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA is possible against the latest fiscal forecast. If it expects to meet the fiscal tests described above in the following financial year, the Government will increase overseas aid spending above 0.5% of GNI to 0.7% of GNI and such that these tests are still met. Once the Government have spent 0.7% of GNI as overseas aid in a given year, these tests will no longer apply to overseas aid spending and the Government will return to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA year on year.

The Government will continue to act compatibly with the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015, under which accountability is to Parliament. The Secretary of State will lay a statement in Parliament in accordance with section 2 of the Act in relation to each calendar year in which the Government do not spend 0.7% GNI on ODA.

A motion will be tabled by the Government alongside this written ministerial statement asking the House of Commons to consider this approach, for debate tomorrow. If the House approves the motion, recognising the need to manage the public finances responsibly and maintaining strong investment in domestic public services like the NHS, schools and police, then the Government will continue with the approach set out in this statement. However, if the House were to negative the motion, rejecting the Government's assessment of the fiscal circumstances, then the Government would consequently return to spending 0.7% of GNI on international aid in the next calendar year, and with likely consequences for the fiscal situation, including for taxation and current public spending plans.

<sup>[1]</sup> By fiscal forecast, we refer to the final post-measures official forecasts by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) as published in their Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

<sup>[2]</sup> By “not borrowing for day-to-day spending”, we mean when the fiscal forecast shows a sustainable current budget surplus. The current budget deficit counts all receipts and all current spending, but excludes spending on net investment.

<sup>[3]</sup> By “underlying debt” we mean public sector net debt—excluding the Bank of England—as a % of GDP. PSND ex BoE is the amount of debt the public sector owes to private sector minus the amount of cash and other short-term assets it holds excluding the liabilities and the liquid assets held on the Bank of England's balance sheet.

[HCWS172]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Employment and Support Allowance

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** I am pleased to confirm that the exercise to correct past Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) underpayments and pay arrears, following conversion from previous incapacity benefits is now complete. All cases have been considered, reviews completed where the information has been provided, and arrears paid where due<sup>1</sup>.

As set out in the final statistical publication published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), as of 1 June 2021:

600,000 cases have completed the review process; and

118,000 arrears payments totalling £613 million have been made.

<sup>1</sup> Completion rate is 100%, rounded to the nearest 1%. Fewer than 100 cases were outstanding as at 1 June 2021.

# Ministerial Corrections

*Monday 12 July 2021*

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Enabling Community Energy

*The following is an extract from a Westminster Hall debate on 1 July 2021.*

**Amanda Solloway:** We need only look at the recent state of the sector report by Community Energy England, which identified 424 active community energy organisations across the United Kingdom run by 396 volunteers, to note that community energy projects can contribute to achieving net zero, not only by stimulating clean growth, but by acting as catalysts for raising awareness. As the hon. Member for Bath and my hon. Friend for Barrow and Furness pointed out, the promotion of behaviour change and the ability to build communities is a key outcome for us to achieve our 2050 goals.

*[Official Report, 1 July 2021, Vol. 698, c. 144WH.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway):*

An error has been identified in my response to the debate secured by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse).

The correct response should have been:

**Amanda Solloway:** We need only look at the recent state of the sector report by Community Energy England, which identified 424 active community energy organisations across the United Kingdom run by **3,096** volunteers, to note that community energy projects can contribute to achieving net zero, not only by stimulating clean growth, but by acting as catalysts for raising awareness.

## CABINET OFFICE Emergency Covid Contracts

The following is an extract from the urgent question on 29 June 2021.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is clear that nothing is clear about the way this Government are procuring goods and services with public money, and it is these dodgy deals that anger my constituents who play by the rules while government fails to. Following the National Audit Office report and the Boardman review's recommendations on process and practice, process in governance, and conflict of interest and bias, what progress has the Minister made in implementing those recommendations? Will she publish an update on the Government's actions and place it in the House of Commons Library? In auditing these contracts, will she ensure that they have fulfilled what they promised to do?

**Julia Lopez:** Yes, I believe that the Public Accounts Committee will be updated on the second Boardman report in July. With regard to the first Boardman report on communications contracts, we are working through all the recommendations. I believe we are up to 20 of 24, but we will endeavour to complete that process by the end of the year.

*[Official Report, 29 June 2021, Vol. 698, c. 133.]*

*Letter from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend/the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez).*

An error has been identified in my response to a question from the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell).

The correct response should have been:

**Julia Lopez:** Yes, I believe that the Public Accounts Committee will be updated on the second Boardman report in July. With regard to the first Boardman report on communications contracts, we are working through all the recommendations. I believe we are up to **24 to 28**, but we will endeavour to complete that process by the end of the year.





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