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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Friday 10 September 2021

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we start proceedings today, I remind the House that tomorrow the world will mark the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on the United States. I know that colleagues will join with me in remembering the victims of those horrific attacks, and our thoughts will be with the families and loved ones of all those who died.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Mr Bowie, this is really early. Please!

Andrew Bowie: I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163).

The House divided: Ayes 1, Noes 43.

Division No. 64]

[9.34 am

AYES

Bowie, Andrew

Tellers for the Ayes:

Anthony Mangnall and
Mr Peter Bone

NOES

Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bailey, Shaun
Baynes, Simon
Clarkson, Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Crosbie, Virginia
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Double, Steve
Eshalomi, Florence
Fell, Simon
Freer, Mike
Furniss, Gill
Gibson, Peter
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Sally-Ann
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Jenkinson, Mark
Keegan, Gillian
Kyle, Peter

Mann, Scott
McGovern, Alison
McVey, rh Esther
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh
Penny
Murray, Ian
Nici, Lia
Pow, Rebecca
Richardson, Angela
Rodda, Matt
Shannon, Jim
Stuart, Graham
Tarry, Sam
Twist, Liz
Vickers, Martin
Williams, Craig
Wood, Mike
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Michael Tomlinson and
Maggie Throup

Question accordingly negatived.

Education (Careers Guidance in Schools) Bill

Second reading

9.47 am

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When my name was first pulled out of the private Members' Bill ballot, I was presented with a wonderful surprise and a rare opportunity—a chance to take forward real and meaningful change on a matter that is very close to my heart: helping young people to realise their potential. This Bill affords us a genuine opportunity to put words into action by changing the law to extend careers provision in schools.

At present, the statutory duty to provide careers guidance falls on maintained schools, special schools and pupil referral units, but not academies, although many academies do indeed have a contractual obligation to secure independent careers guidance through their own funding agreements. This landmark piece of legislation will seek to address this anomaly by placing the same requirement on all types of state-funded secondary schools, helping to create a much more level playing field. It is also paramount that the advice available to our young people should be consistent, of the highest quality and accessible across the board. The standard of guidance should be based not on a postcode lottery, but on a set of clear principles with the best interests of the children at its heart.

As a father of four, I am acutely aware of the many challenges that children face in school and how difficult it can be to decide on a suitable career path. Choosing a career can be an incredibly daunting experience; I am 39 and I still do not know what I want to be when I grow up. Without the proper guidance, it is easy for young people to find themselves on the wrong path and facing in the wrong direction.

We need early ongoing discussion that involves the young person in a process of continual reorientation, making them aware that they are masters of their own destiny and allowing them to make informed choices at every stage of their journey. This will allow for intervention and advice to prevent them from going too far down a blind alley or a career cul-de-sac, and discovering too late—or certainly not as early as they would ideally like—that they are not where they would like to be. That is why it is so important that we give our young people the best careers advice we can at the very earliest opportunity.

The choices we make at school during this critical early phase help define who we are, what we go on to achieve and ultimately who we become. This legislation is also particularly important and timely given the disruption caused by covid-19. We know that many young people are understandably anxious and uncertain about their education and employment prospects in these unprecedented times. Their ideas about their next steps may well be changing as they respond and adapt to the considerable challenges ahead. We have a saying that the north wind made the Vikings—in other words, adversity can be beneficial if we use it as an opportunity to make us stronger, but even the Vikings would not have got far on their nautical adventures without suitable

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navigation tools or the right skills. That is why it is so important that young people receive the right advice at the right time to make the right choices for them.

In my constituency of Workington, there are pockets of deprivation and unemployment. As someone who grew up in the heart of northern working-class communities, I am aware of the stark disadvantages faced by so many young people. They have so much to contribute, but often they are written off far too soon. Recognising the existence of a problem is the first step in solving it, and we must close this attainment gap and ensure that no child is left behind. If we are serious about levelling up, giving all children access to careers advice is one of the most important weapons in our arsenal.

Young people need support to understand their options and to act on them. Careers guidance helps them make sense of the labour market and navigate successfully into education, training or employment. Providing this enhanced careers education and guidance makes economic sense, too, because it will contribute to a high-skills, high-productivity recovery. It will support all young people in developing the skills and attributes they need to succeed in the workplace, and in some cases will nurture the community leaders of the future.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Can I be clear that the Bill extends the statutory duty to academies to provide careers advice? I am shocked that they are not doing that already. Does he have the number of academies that are not providing careers advice?

Mark Jenkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention as he makes an important point. Many academies, by virtue of the funding agreements put in place over the past eight or nine years, are under a duty to provide this guidance. Many of the others will be doing so. Off the top of my head, I think about 1,300 out of 2,800 do not have it in their funding agreement. The Bill puts them all on the same statutory footing, giving Ofsted the tools it needs to manage consistent careers advice across the board.

The Bill extends careers advice down from year 8 to year 7 to ensure that our children are given the information they need to make the best possible choices. Speaking to the point that my hon. Friend just made, it will bring academies in line with local authority-controlled schools. It will help ensure that everyone has the same opportunity, regardless of their postcode, but it will also give Ofsted the tools it needs to ensure that our children, from across the country, are benefiting from first-rate careers advice throughout their school career.

The Bill will put into statute the Government's commitments in the "Skills for jobs" White Paper for the UK's post-pandemic recovery. It will build on the important work already being done nationally under this Government to develop a coherent and well-established careers system. The Careers and Enterprise Company, for example, is increasing young people's exposure to the world of work.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that where formal careers advice can be given, there is also an opportunity for volunteers to

come into schools and talk about their careers and what they do? That is something we really should be pushing. Lawyers, business owners, doctors or people who work in the Foreign Office can come in and speak to those schools in their local areas and show children what is out there for them to do.

Mark Jenkinson: Indeed, and I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. That is exactly part of the Careers and Enterprise Company's remit: supporting schools and colleges to deliver world-class careers guidance with the use of enterprise advisers from the local business community so that they deliver in line with the Gatsby benchmarks.

We also have the National Careers Service, providing free careers information, advice and guidance to young people and adults through a website and telephone helpline. More than 3,300 business professionals from local businesses are working with schools and colleges as enterprise advisers to strengthen employer links. Almost 3.3 million young people are now having regular encounters with employers, which is up 70% in two years. I am grateful to the Careers and Enterprise Company for its engagement with me on this issue and in particular for its recognition that there is much more to do.

Before I go into further detail about how the Bill fits into all of this, I would like to take some time to commend the excellent work already accomplished in my constituency in the face of often large socioeconomic challenges. The Cumbria Careers Hub was launched in January 2019 to deliver the Government's careers strategy for Cumbria after the local enterprise partnership's skills investment plan identified a significant challenge regarding developing skills in the county. I am pleased to report that the hub currently includes 37 schools and four colleges and has the ambition to achieve full coverage across 52 institutions in the next academic year.

The Cumbria careers hub is exceeding national performance on careers education across three quarters of the Gatsby benchmarks, most notably regarding employer encounters and experiences of the workplace. It also exceeds the national careers hub average. The process is accelerating, with 100% of schools in the hub matched with an enterprise adviser from a pool of senior business volunteers.

The process is being replicated successfully across the country, with 45% of secondary schools and colleges now in careers hubs. We are also seeing rapid improvements, with hubs in disadvantaged areas among the best performers. Careers leaders' roles have been developed in schools and colleges and are becoming a recognised profession.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech and I commend him on the Bill. On deprivation, what is his assessment of the impact that the Bill will have on children in deprived communities and their career aspirations? I apologise if he was about to make that point, but I would love him to emphasise that, because it is at the heart of his fantastic Bill.

Mark Jenkinson: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly powerful and important point on deprivation and the ability to have business volunteers as enterprise advisers face-to-face with those children, showing them that

options are available to them if they may not favour an academic route or be able to go on to university. This year, of course, we have seen the launch of T-levels, which gives alternative options at 18 as well. I will come to some of that further on.

Sally-Ann Hart: To pick up that point, is it the case that the education White Paper that is coming out is putting employers at the heart of the curriculum and that that will benefit children in schools?

Mark Jenkinson: Without a doubt. Again, it is really important to have that face-to-face interaction with employers, showing people who may not be as academically minded as some of their peers and wish to go on to university that there are options available to them post 16 and post 18. In my constituency, we have often led the way on apprenticeships, but it is important that that is replicated across the country.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is being very generous. He is making a powerful speech, and I commend him on the Bill. He mentions technical education, and of course the Baker clause mandated more careers advice on vocational, technical education. I look at the Bill enviously—I will make a speech on it later—as the Baker clause and the Bill pulled together will provide great careers advice in England. Can the Bill also apply to Wales if that was wanted?

Mark Jenkinson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I understand that it is in the competency of the Senedd should it wish to do to something similar. I will come to this, but I have a fantastic university technical college in my constituency and have met regularly with Lord Baker of Dorking on the Baker clause and UTCs. He has done some fantastic work in that space.

By October 2021, 1,950 careers leaders will receive a fully funded training bursary, and 2,750 will benefit from a free online careers leader training course. The link between careers and career pathways is essential for the development and attraction of talent to Cumbria owing to the area's declining working-age population. It is therefore critical that we nurture home-grown talent, giving our young people the skills and confidence that they need to make the most of opportunities in a global Britain. This will help close the skills gap in areas such as Cumbria and attract investment. However, it is not simply enough to nurture talent; we must also retain it. This new Bill will help to ensure that young people are aware of the opportunities that lie on their own doorstep, as well as those that exist further afield.

Cumbria is lucky enough to have an award-winning enterprise adviser, Roger Wilson, enterprise adviser of the year 2018, who works closely with the Careers and Enterprise Company to provide support to the Enterprise Adviser Network. I am delighted that Cumbria careers hub also celebrated two careers champion winners this year—Beacon Hill for innovation and its now former headteacher Judith Schafer for leading the way.

I will also take the opportunity to mention Step Up Cumbria, which was launched to support year 11s to make a transition into further education in response to the challenges of covid-19. It was relaunched with a new website in April 2021, an online platform developed primarily for year 11 school leavers to find information

on further education opportunities in Cumbria. The programme has now been updated in recognition that the covid-19 pandemic has been a particularly challenging time for students, especially for those leaving school this summer and looking to begin the next chapter of their education and career journey. The programme itself was established by the Cumbria LEP's people, employment and skills strategy group and sponsored by the Cumbria careers hub, with learning resources provided by Lakes College in my own constituency, Carlisle College, Furness College and Kendal College.

It may be helpful if at this juncture I set out in a bit more detail what the Bill does and why it is so important. Maintained schools, special schools and pupil referral units now have a statutory duty to secure independent careers guidance for year 8 to year 13 pupils. For pupils of compulsory school age, this must include information on 16-to-18 education and training options, including apprenticeships. This is a good starting point, but it needs to go further. Therefore, this Bill will extend the duty to all pupils in all state-funded secondary education. It will establish consistency across education settings by extending the statutory duty to academy schools and alternative provision academies.

Moreover, all academy schools and alternative provision academies will also be required to have regard to the statutory guidance that underpins this legal obligation. This simplifies the current system, whereby careers duties are imposed on secondary schools through a combination of statutory provisions and contractual arrangements, while some of the older academies are not under any careers requirement whatsoever. The Bill will extend the statutory careers duty to all academy schools and alternative provision academies, placing the same requirements and standards on all types of state-funded secondary school.

These legislative changes will put all pupils in all secondary schools on the same footing. Having spoken with a broad cross-section of education leaders and careers advisers, as well as parents and other stakeholders, I feel that the importance of extending the careers duty to all secondary pupils cannot be overstated. We need to start setting out to children as early as possible the options that will be available to them—not just sixth form and university, but further education, apprenticeships, T-levels and other technical education qualifications. The earlier our young people start to consider these options and receive the appropriate guidance, the greater their chance of making the best possible choice.

University technical colleges form an incredibly important part of our offer, but that could mean changing schools at age 14. We must do more to open up this option to all of our young people, and I pay tribute to colleagues in this House and in the other place, such as the right hon. Lord Baker of Dorking, who works tirelessly in this field.

While it is important that young people are aware of their options, the last thing we want is for them to get to year 9 and feel that their options are being imposed upon them. Young people often tell us that one of the biggest barriers is not knowing what careers exist. Engaging with employers from an early age can inspire young people. It can also help them relate the career opportunities available to their circumstances, abilities and interests.

The legislation recognises and makes use of the work already undertaken as part of the national careers system. But, more importantly, it continues to raise young

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people's aspirations through regular and meaningful engagement with employers and their workplaces. The legislation will build on work to promote access to all pathways from education through encounters with education and training providers, and access to high-quality careers and labour market information. I look forward to seeing the legislation pass through this House, but I am even more interested to see how it will help future generations on their own journey to fulfilling their unique potential.

10.4 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) on bringing this forward. I know this is mainland-only education, because education for Northern Ireland is done through the Northern Ireland Assembly, but I am very happy to support the hon. Gentleman. There is no doubt that the thrust of what he has put forward is the very same thing that we wish to see in Northern Ireland. So I want to replicate and support what he is saying, for the very reasons that he put forward on behalf of his own constituents, but also on behalf of education across the English mainland.

In Strangford, I have a good working relationship with South Eastern Regional College, which has responsibility for careers. I have sat on the board of governors at Glastry College outside Ballyhalbert all my married life. I remember returning from honeymoon, and the board of governors meeting was on and they were surprised that I turned up. That was some 34 or 35 years ago—so a long time ago. The relationship I have had with local colleges has been incredible, and the important role that they play in giving students career pointers is vital. The hon. Gentleman has outlined that point, for which I thank him.

We have a working relationship and partnership with local secondary and grammar schools. In my constituency of Strangford, most of those skills are probably physical. In the Ards peninsula in particular, there is great demand in the construction sector, whether for building, carpentry, plumbing, plastering, or electricity work. All those physical skills are developed through courses at the local college. That means that in many cases, young boys and girls in local grammar and secondary schools perhaps already know where they are going. We live in a rural community, so there will also be great demand for students, boys and girls, young men and women, to go into agriculture, which is also something we wish to see.

Shaun Bailey: A really interesting part of the hon. Gentleman's contribution was about local links and community. How does he think that strengthens communities such as his in Strangford to ensure that they can be vibrant and carry on moving forward?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman has exactly grasped the point about the importance of these interactions, partnerships and local communities. I still sit on the board of governors of Glastry College. I am not going to mention any names, but some young boys there I knew from the beginning were never going to achieve educational standards because they were going to work on the farm—a family farm in the local community. Sometimes it is good to have those opportunities. Not

every person will excel at education—not every person can, because we are all different and have different abilities. The community part of this is important. I have lived there for all but four years of my life.

Sally-Ann Hart: When the hon. Gentleman says that not everyone can excel in education, does he mean that not everyone can excel in academic education, but that we also have technical levels, which give those children an opportunity to excel in something that is not academic, but a more technical vocation that gives them skills and helps them to get amazing jobs?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I thank her for making that point. Although I did not say that, that is what I meant. She put it much better than I was able to and I thank her for that clarification.

ICT skills are also important. There is the business and financial sector, the agrifood sector, as well as renewable energies and recycling. Those are all important businesses for the economy as we move forward. There are health and life opportunities, as well as advanced manufacturing and engineering.

In Northern Ireland, I have talked this over with the Minister for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Edwin Poots, and he was telling me about the dearth of engineering skills in Northern Ireland. It is rather disappointing—I have been in contact with my further education college—that it does not have a course for engineering. All my elected life, whether on the council, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly or now as the MP for Strangford, I have supported engineering opportunities for young boys and young girls. The Minister told me that there were 800 opportunities in engineering in Northern Ireland—the dearth is as big as that. It is important to look at these things as well.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the disproportionate amount of technical education that takes place in academies will lead to a significant boost to the careers facility and careers development overall for secondary schools in England?

Jim Shannon: I certainly do. To be fair, the hon. Member for Workington said that in setting the scene, which is why I am very happy to support the thrust of his contribution.

In Northern Ireland, we have seen a growth in business and financial services, with excellent wages and opportunities for advancement. Although our wage structure in Northern Ireland is not as high as on the mainland, we can already see opportunities for better wages. It is essential that we future-proof and engage our young people to ensure that they can take the opportunities that exist across Northern Ireland.

As I said, that is a devolved matter. I am not convinced that we have fully grasped this approach in Northern Ireland in relation to engineering; it seems that we must not have if there are as many as 800 job opportunities available and people have not taken them up.

Craig Williams: It has been a parliamentary ambition of mine to intervene on the hon. Gentleman, so I am happy to fulfil that today. He is making a powerful point about the devolved nature of this matter. Does he share my view that we must push to get measures such

as the Baker clause and the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) into the devolved nations, and will he implore them to look at today's debate and put something together in a devolved fashion?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I send all my contributions in this House on to the relevant Minister in Northern Ireland. I hope that the relevant Minister reads them. I cannot be sure, but in this case I think she will, because she happens to be a colleague of mine; she is not only a political colleague, but she is elected to the same constituency, Strangford, as an MLA. For me, it is critical to ensure that what is happening here today can be replicated in Northern Ireland. I have already taken up directly with the relevant Minister the issue of the engineering dearth and the importance of filling that gap, but I will follow this through again today.

It is important that we forge a way forward that can deliver the career opportunities that the hon. Member for Workington referred to. It is my belief that the meeting of all these things should be facilitated by a direct Government strategy to bring them together. I know that the hon. Gentleman hopes to get that response from the Minister, and I am quite sure that he will. I know the way the Minister responds to these issues, and the hon. Gentleman will certainly get a good response on investing in our greatest and most important resources—our youth and their ability.

Information and communications technology is concerned with software development, databases and so on. Many questions and strategies are based on a database; no matter what field it is—whether it is health or education—we need the database. I therefore believe that ICT is another career opportunity for young students and pupils.

Let me conclude by congratulating the hon. Member for Workington on bringing forward the Bill and thanking all those who have had a chance to intervene. We look forward to a positive response from the Minister for the hon. Gentleman. I congratulate him on having his Bill before the House in a very short time. I hope that I will be as successful with my Bill later on.

10.14 am

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) on his success in the ballot and on bringing forward this important Bill that I absolutely endorse because if, like me, hon. Members believe in extending opportunity to all, careers guidance is one sure way to do that. In fact, I believe in it so much that more than a decade ago I set up my own charity If Chloe Can to bring careers guidance to schools.

I work with schools across the country, including many in deprived areas, with pupils from all backgrounds in all areas. I bring them successful people from backgrounds such as theirs who have wonderful careers to inspire and motivate them, and to make them start thinking while they are in school, “What would I like to be when I leave school? What can I do? What would I like to achieve in my life?”. How can anybody aspire to work towards something exciting in a career if they do not know what careers exist—more importantly, if they do not know what careers exist for them? They need to see people like them achieving in all walks of life.

Letting pupils know early on, while they are in school, what paths are trodden, what hobbies are done, what work experience can be gained, and what exam grades are needed for a profession is absolutely key. It fires pupils up to do more in school and to go for those grades, because they know what they are in school for. I have seen pupils doing so much better in education once they have a purpose and they know what it is all about.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I am sorry to interrupt, because my right hon. Friend is making an important point about where we find careers advisers and from which backgrounds they come. Would she say a little more about the people who are going into schools and how they are incentivised to do so and to help by preaching about their success, and to lead as an example in their community? We could all do with understanding how to do that in our constituencies to encourage it further.

Esther McVey: Most people, if asked, really want to go in and speak to pupils about what they do and the opportunities that are out there. I work with more than 200 successful women who give up their time for free because they want to help the next generation of pupils to do well. In the last decade, I have worked with thousands of pupils; I have written career books; and I have done a touring play with the National Youth Theatre and spoken to a thousand pupils at a time with panels of experts on stage who, as my hon. Friend mentioned, all gave up their time to talk about an array of different subjects.

Jim Shannon: When it comes to career opportunities, it is sometimes overlooked that there are opportunities in arts and culture, as the right hon. Lady has referred to. It is not always about jobs in construction or engineering; there are other opportunities out there as well.

Esther McVey: Absolutely; that is what it is all about—finding the profession for the individual. What makes them tick and inspires them? Good consistent careers advice can change lives. Without it, some pupils will just drift, not knowing what they want to do.

Without doubt, covid has brought about significant changes in the world of work and in the teaching landscape. Good careers advice has always been important, but never more so than now, with the disruption in schools and the changes in the job market. It is really important to support young people. Data suggests that 65% of children currently in primary school will enter a job that has not been invented yet. As we know, that will not be a job for life. People will do a series of jobs, and that will speed up. That means that they will have to learn, relearn, upskill and reskill on a regular basis.

Clare Hayward, a leading businesswoman and chair of the Cheshire and Warrington local enterprise partnership put it simply: “We need to inspire young people about an array of jobs, new emerging jobs, roles they might never have been thought of in tech, digital, life science, jobs of the future. We need schools to engage with the business community who are alert to these future opportunities and have staff who can talk passionately and excitedly about these jobs. And we need schools not just to push traditional careers and traditional routes after school,” but to focus on all the opportunities that are out there.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): I apologise for interrupting my right hon. Friend; she is making a very powerful point. Placements in work have been extremely important, especially in this post-covid period. Does she agree that when pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, go into a workplace and see that there is something they can do, it raises their aspirations?

Esther McVey: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It is about seeing how things are done. Some people can get all their inspiration by sitting in a classroom, but many cannot. They have to see the practical application. They have to see that job and that is what will inspire them.

Shaun Bailey: My right hon. Friend is articulating her point very well, and I pay tribute to the work that she has done in this area. Does she agree that it is okay for young people not to know straightaway what they want to do, and that by giving them those opportunities, they can be malleable? We all know what a career change is like, and some of us might have another career change after this, but I am sure she would agree that having options is important.

Esther McVey: My hon. Friend is so right. Blessed are those who know immediately what they want to do. Some people might know, perhaps in sport or if they are creatives or those who are gifted in a certain way. Many of us do not know for many years. In fact, life is a journey, finding out where we fit in, and we will do many jobs along the way, hopefully adding to life and society as we go along.

Anthony Mangnall: My right hon. Friend is making an interesting point about the fact that we will have many different careers and relearn and have to look at new jobs that come along. There is an interesting point here: if people are allowed to get experience and gain advice from careers advisers early on, whatever they do later on in their life, they have the understanding of how they can engage with businesses and how they can find out about new careers. Doing it sooner serves people much better later in life if they do decide to make changes. Can my right hon. Friend see the Bill going further on that in future years?

Esther McVey: Absolutely; my hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is important that someone knows that they are going to have to upgrade their skills, where that support is and that it is not a mountain to climb, but that they will probably do it alongside their career throughout their life.

I believe, too, that we cannot put more on the shoulders of teachers. The Government need an updated careers strategy and better links with the National Careers Service and the Careers & Enterprise Company and to signpost better so schools know where they can turn to get the extra support. Not every teacher will know about every profession. They need to bring other people in, so that signposting to those voluntary organisations, charities and businesses is absolutely key.

Simon Baynes: To take up my right hon. Friend's point about access to careers advice, has she found, in the fantastic work that she does through her charity, that covid has meant that more people are using interactive, virtual communication and that this enables a greater throughflow of information on careers? She made the point about the difficulty for teachers of knowing

everything. This will mean that they can have a greater contribution from the outside world than was possible previously.

Esther McVey: I must ask my hon. Friend: has he read my speech? That is exactly the point that I was coming to next, so he has fed me very well for my next line

Technology should be an enabler, too, providing greater and more diverse career advice. In the last 18 months during covid, my charity went online. It is now working with Zoom so that we can deliver online weekly sessions to schools over the year, with role models, guest speakers and modules on confidence, communications, goal setting, assertiveness and resilience. It is up-to-date, of the moment, real-time information, interactive and thoroughly questioning so that children can know where they want to go. It is bringing out pupils' curiosity, linking businesses and schools, pupils and professions, using the Gatsby benchmarks and offering multiple touchpoints over the year, with different role models in different careers. It shows pupils post-school opportunities, whether those are apprenticeships, jobs, further education or universities, and it looks, too, into funding, sponsorships, learning on the job or just getting a job.

Careers advice to support pupils' choice is key. It is about the pupil and their choice and fulfilling their ambitions. It is not about schools ticking boxes about where people go afterwards. We need to make sure it is about the pupil.

This is a big area and there is much to do. This Bill is by no means the end of the story, but it is a very important step. I am particularly pleased to be able to support my hon. Friend the Member for Workington in his mission—his ambition—on something that I know is very dear to his heart.

10.24 am

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) for bringing his private Member's Bill to the House and for his excellent and heartfelt speech. Not only is he the father of four children, but it is quite clear to all of us from his general commitment to the subject that this is a cause very dear to his heart. I also commend the speech, and the huge practical commitment, of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey). It was an outstanding contribution, based on huge experience and huge commitment, and something we can all learn a great deal from.

I strongly support the Bill, which addresses the anomaly whereby academies are not currently bound in the same way that local authority schools are to provide careers guidance. I would also like to pick up on the point, made eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), about the importance of the Welsh Government also learning from this. Speaking as the representative of Clwyd South, which has a considerable number of people who struggle in life, to put it frankly, and need all the help they can get in planning their careers and taking them forward, I think this Bill, and all the important information and objectives in it, is highly relevant to the Welsh education system as well.

As the father of two daughters who have not long left the secondary school system themselves and are now pursuing careers at university, I know just how vital

careers support and guidance can be for pupils of secondary school age. We have considerable experience of discussing with them what they would like to do later in life, and all the help that they can be given is vital. Not only does it give young people the tools they need to make informed decisions about which subjects to study at further and, in some cases, higher education; it helps in channelling the interests and innate talents of our young people into rewarding and fulfilling careers later in life. As other speakers have mentioned, careers guidance and support is particularly vital, as covid-19 has led to uncertain career prospects. Young people, particularly the most disadvantaged—to whom I have referred already—need help from schools to access education, training and careers opportunities, and to navigate the labour market.

In my day—some years ago, it has to be said—careers advice was not up to much, but it was a much simpler process, as the job opportunities were much more limited. Now the range of careers open to people to follow is vastly greater—which is something we should all welcome—and much more varied, more sophisticated and in many ways more fractured, so help is vital. I am pleased that this legislation will not only extend the current requirement to provide careers guidance to include children in year 7, but will implement the proposals in the “Skills for Jobs” White Paper, published in January 2021, which my hon. Friend the Member for Workington referred to. The Bill is therefore part of a wider strategy on the part of the UK Government, which I strongly welcome and support, to develop a more joined-up careers system, which includes personal guidance for young people and improved access to digital services nationwide.

For example, the Department for Education is supporting a range of measures to ensure that all students choose a career that is right for them, including—as has been referred to—the Baker clause, which ensures that all schools and academies must publish a policy statement setting out opportunities for providers of technical education, courses and apprenticeships to visit schools and talk to all pupils, and ensure that the policy is followed. One particularly important theme that has emerged from this morning’s debate is the importance of balancing the academic with the technical and vocational. In my case—I hope they will not mind my saying this in the Chamber of the House of Commons—my children have different aptitudes. One is more technical and vocational; one is more academic. I think that both fields are equally important. Both can lead to equally challenging and fantastic careers. I am delighted that in the 21st century, unlike the last century when I was setting out in life from school, the technical, the vocational, the engineering that has been referred to are considered to be as important—as vital—as the academic careers. That will be further enhanced and strengthened by the Bill, because the academies will bring an influx of increased technical careers advice into the system. I believe that many academies are very well financed, and I hope that one of the unexpected benefits might be a big boost for the whole careers system from that additional demand from the academies.

The National Careers Service, which was launched in 2012, provides people over the age of 13 with free and impartial information, advice and guidance on learning, training and work opportunities. The services are provided face to face, via telephone and online, and, as my right

hon. Friend the Member for Tatton said earlier, the introduction of virtual and Zoom technology will make a significant difference in that respect.

I strongly support what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) about professionals going into schools. I have done so myself, to talk about both my political career—such as it is—and, more importantly, the work that I did in finance and business beforehand. I take on board her point about careers advice being important at all ages and at all stages in a person’s career, because one never knows when one might need it.

Sally-Ann Hart: I have to point out that while my hon. Friend does indeed have a career in politics and had an excellent career in finance beforehand, he missed out the fact that he has also written a book. Perhaps he could talk about that to the schools as well.

Simon Baynes: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for referring to my authorship. I am not sure that the House wants to be detained by significant details of what I have written about, but suffice it to say that it covers the hospitality industry, in the context of Lake Vyrnwy—which resides in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams)—and architectural and social history. The point that I think is implicit in my hon. Friend’s intervention is that one never quite knows where one’s career is going to go, so the more advice one can get earlier on, the better it is.

Let me return to the practical advice given by individuals going into schools. The fieldwork done for the Government studies shows that nearly all face-to-face and telephone customers, and now, I think, virtual customers—96%—experienced some form of positive outcome in the six months following their call or meeting. I think we all know of young people who are nervous about their prospects, and recognise that a helpful conversation with someone who is friendly and experienced can make a significant difference to the choices that they make in life.

The “Skills for Jobs” White Paper aims to improve compliance with the Baker clause, as has been mentioned previously, through the introduction of a three-point plan to create legal requirements and take more action to enforce compliance—something with which I strongly agree.

More broadly, the Government have taken action to address the impact of the pandemic on career opportunities for young people. It includes one of the key policies introduced by the Government, which I think all Members on both sides of the House would strongly support—the kickstart scheme, which provides funds to create new six-month jobs for 16 to 14-year-olds on universal credit—as well the Department for Education’s employment and skills guide. I know from my own constituency, and I have heard other Members say the same about theirs, that the kickstart scheme, which is in many ways closely related to the ambitions of the Bill, has had a massively beneficial effect on young people’s employment prospects.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): One of the great things about the kickstart scheme is that it not only guarantees a job for six months but it guarantees on-the-job training. We are all interested in ensuring that people are not just shoved in somewhere

[Mr Richard Holden]

before being booted out the other end but are getting something that will help them later in life, which is great training and opportunities.

Simon Baynes: I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent intervention, with which I strongly agree. It is important that not only do we give advice but that we give training, too. This point was made earlier in the debate. People do not necessarily know what they want to do career-wise and, therefore, the opportunity to take part in a particular career, albeit at a relatively low level, gives them valuable experience.

Shaun Bailey: The other important thing is instilling ambition. I have many manufacturers and established SMEs on my patch, and one of the things they talk about is having a route from apprentice to managing director. Does my hon. Friend agree that will be a big part of this careers advice?

Simon Baynes: Absolutely. I could not agree more, and one of the hugely beneficial aspects of careers guidance and education, in preparing pupils at secondary school for further education and the working world beyond, is the much greater emphasis on apprenticeships. I am particularly proud of the UK Government's involvement and all the apprenticeships they have introduced, but it is a key part of the private sector, too.

I have spent quite a lot of time over the past five years going to careers fairs with my two daughters, and I noticed even in that five-year period a significant change in the emphasis from the academic and traditional routes to the more technical routes. The apprenticeship system enables those routes to become a reality so that we are now seeing young people who, rather than going to university, are perhaps taking a course with an accountancy firm or a legal firm. They do a combination of apprenticeship training in that particular profession and practical work, which is a very attractive route.

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): I completely and utterly concur with my hon. Friend. Does he agree that the brand of degrees and undergraduate programmes now needs to step up to what we are doing with apprenticeships, career apprenticeships and traineeships because, actually, a person can study to level 2, level 3, level 4 and all the way through to degree apprenticeships, earning while they learn, and not have to gather lots of student loans that will stay with them for a very long time?

Simon Baynes: I could not agree more. I strongly feel that this is a hugely beneficial improvement to the education and careers system. For too long, there has been a stratified, structured approach in which only the academic route at universities really matters. My older daughter is studying a vocational course at university, which is fantastic and is to be strongly supported. My hon. Friend's point is made with passion and great accuracy, and I hope we can develop more of it within the education system.

There is also a point to be made about how the universities are currently approaching education. I strongly hope they will go back to face-to-face teaching, because it is simply not right that teaching should continue virtually while, for instance, we meet in physical form here in the House of Commons.

Anthony Mangnall: I could not have said it better, and it is also essential that universities do not try to charge the same tuition fees if they are going to do courses via Zoom.

Simon Baynes: I strongly support my hon. Friend's intervention. This is something that has been brewing in my mind as I see the fractured form of education that is being provided by the universities attended not only by my children but by the children of many of my friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) spoke about the integration of training and paid work within the further education system, and that process will shake up the universities by making them realise that it is not just about academic courses or the odd lecture. It has to be a much more structured and much more concentrated form of education for our young people.

In conclusion, I add my voice to those of other hon. Members here today in supporting my hon. Friend's Bill, which does a great deal of good for pupils across our country and will no doubt have a tangible and positive impact on our young people at a time when they are making some of the most exciting and important decisions of their entire lives.

10.40 am

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Let me start by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson). He has put a lot of effort into this Bill, and he has obviously cared about this issue for a very long time. The way that he has approached this Bill has been gratefully appreciated by Labour Members. Not only has it been open-hearted, but he came to see me and briefed the team alongside the Minister, showing that he is dedicated to getting the Bill through, not just at any cost but in a way that takes the House with him, so that it will deliver some of the outcomes that he is after. As I say, it was a very open-hearted speech and a very informative one for everyone in the Chamber.

The right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) made a very informative speech, and it was good to learn about some of the practical work that she has been doing in schools up and down the country. She sparked a series of interventions and a debate about her work, which focused on how important it is for people, particularly from deprived communities, to have experience of different workplaces, and I absolutely agree with that. It is really important that people from deprived backgrounds have experience not just of university campuses, but of business environments, especially prestige business environments. I say that not so that we channel young people in a certain direction, but so that, should they choose that career pathway in the future, it will not be a leap into the unknown.

We also need to recognise that there is an equal opposite. I hope that students who attend schools in areas of advantage and affluence also take time to experience the modern manufacturing workplace, because they do not often have experiential time in such settings. They need to get that experience, because the modern manufacturing and vocational workplace is extremely exciting and offers incredible careers. We need to make sure that young people from all backgrounds experience all different types of future pathways so that they will not be making a leap into the unknown.

After the huge expansion of the academy programme, thousands of schools across the country now operate independently from local authority control. An increasing proportion of these schools are now part of multi-academy trusts, pooling resources, expertise and governance with similar groups of institutions. There are real questions about the way that some academies—not all academies—operate. The majority, as with every other school, are very dedicated to the future pathways that local young people take. As a former chair of governors of an academy, I know full well the effort that many academies and schools of all status put into ensuring that the pathways for young people are the best ones for their talents. None the less, some academies and multi-academy trusts operate their career development in a way that is not fit for purpose, and it is clear that the requirements placed on many schools in this area must apply to them, too.

Mr Holden: My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) has in the past few days introduced a Bill to ensure that MATs are looked at by Ofsted. Will the Official Opposition commit to working with him and with people like me, a former special adviser in the Department for Education, who support my hon. Friend and agree that a small number of MATs need extra oversight, particularly in areas such as careers education, which we should be driving forward for everybody?

Peter Kyle: Only on Wednesday I had a conversation with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) about his Bill, for which he, too, is an enthusiastic salesperson. The Opposition are certainly open-minded to that suggestion. I have already met the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North and will stay in touch with him, and he has met the shadow Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), to talk about his Bill. I am happy to meet the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) as well—in fact, I would do so enthusiastically—to talk about not only the issue at hand but others, too, because there are more shared beliefs about the way forward to tackle the core education challenges than is sometimes apparent in the heat of debate, even though we diverge on specific things when it comes to their application in practice.

The Bill before us will go some way towards tackling the challenge of fragmentation and the ways that some schools deliver careers development in different ways. We welcome any moves towards the embedding of high-quality careers education throughout all state schools equally. Such education is a vital way to expose children to options for work that are alternatives to those that surround them as they grow up.

Careers & Enterprise Company research found that 73% of children who receive careers education feel more aware of different careers and 69% have a better understanding of what they need to do to achieve their ambitions. Under this Government, though, far too many children are missing out. According to that research, only 30% of schools and colleges have a stable careers programme, meaning that thousands of kids are missing out.

The expansion of an existing legal duty to cover all schools is welcome—it is common sense—but a more fundamental challenge needs to be addressed. We must

ensure that schools have the capacity and expertise to make careers education a true priority. Cuts to school budgets have had a real effect on school leaders' ability to prioritise careers. The Institute for Fiscal Studies recently found that despite Tory promises to level up spending, per-pupil funding will not return to pre-2010 levels by the end of this Parliament.

When spending is squeezed, it is natural that schools prioritise subjects such as English, maths and science, and topics like careers are so often left behind. Indeed, when one speaks to the academies that do not prioritise careers, often the reason cited is that they simply do not have the resources to do everything.

Lia Nici: The hon. Gentleman talks about funding, but I worked in education for 22 years prior to coming to this place and I have seen the effects of the huge amount of funding that the Labour Government put into education. It did nothing whatsoever to improve education; in fact, it decimated the good work that was happening, because although funding is important, it is more important to get funding in the right places for the right reasons. More funding is not always needed; it is about getting funding in the right places to do the right thing for the students, not the staff.

Peter Kyle: I do not think this is the debate in which we should go down that path—[*Interruption.*] Well, I am happy to compare the two records. We are entering an era in which the school day is reducing at a time when there should be more experience. Just this morning I heard a message from a parent who had been contacted by the school to tell him that the school day was being reduced, to finish at 2.55 in the afternoon, because of the lack of resources to allow teachers to go through the day and to do all the prep work that they need to do. For one day a week, the school day is being reduced for a further half hour: each Tuesday is called a compression day—

Lia Nici *rose*—

Peter Kyle: Let me finish the point; the hon. Lady cannot intervene on a response when it was her own intervention in the first place—I know that enthusiasm is rewarded in this place, but one must not get ahead of oneself. It is not possible to make the argument that there is no link between investment and outcomes in education. We will have plenty of opportunities to debate the comparable records of both approaches.

Groups such as the Careers & Enterprise Company do excellent work, but they need attention and effort from a school careers lead, too. With funding squeezed and super-sized classes on the rise—my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) released data to the House in recent days showing that 70% of students are now in class sizes that are rising above 30—the job has been made more difficult. It is welcome that the Government are beginning to acknowledge the importance of career development. However, with Ofsted characterising provision as a mixed picture, there is much more to do. This Bill is an important step, but it is a first step. The Government need to follow Labour's lead in putting careers education at the heart of its school programme, and we will be working with them to make sure that they do.

10.50 am

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle). I did not agree with everything he said, but some of his points were apt, particularly those about prestige careers; young people from my community certainly have not had access to those.

When I was first elected, I visited my local further education college, Hopwood Hall College. One of the most encouraging things I discovered was that the principal of that college, Julia Heap, said that her version of levelling up was to ensure that every learner from her college had the opportunity to take any job they wanted to and had the aspirations to look at any job, so she was matching her students to those careers from the start. I want to talk briefly about Hopwood because it already has quite a robust careers programme, which is the sort of best practice that we could probably learn a bit from.

The college has been investing in careers for quite a while now. In fact, one of its careers advisers, Ceri Wood, won the national Careers Champion award in 1920—[*Interruption.*] Oh, I mean 2020. I do apologise; we have invented a Tardis. Due to the pandemic, the college was one of the first to have its matrix quality standard review carried out remotely, and it is now part of the working group to review the new matrix framework. It successfully achieved the bronze Quality in Careers kitemark, and continues to work with external agencies such as Positive Steps and the National Careers Service to support the aspirations of 16 to 18-year-olds, adult learners and beyond.

That raises another important point: this is not just about young people. There are lots of adult learners. We have already touched on the fact that several of us will have multiple careers. I am sure that quite a lot of us are hoping that those careers will be in this place, but we have to be realistic about the fact that that may not be the case. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) made an extremely important point when she said that lots of young people will go into jobs that do not yet exist. We need to ensure that there is agility, and constant lifelong learning is an important part of that. In introducing this Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) is embedding some of that into how things are done.

Let me turn to the importance of industry placements. Again, Hopwood Hall is one of the colleges introducing the new T-levels. In fact, I think it is taking on seven courses, which is quite a weighty onboarding. Like a lot of colleges, it has struggled to get industry placements during the pandemic, which starkly shows how important such placements are. In order to make them a success, people need to be able to go into the workplace; that workplace experience will drive a lot of future development. The college is still working with employers to support students. Several large employers in the area, including Engie, Prevail and Pretty Moi take them on already. That is hugely encouraging, but if there are any employers listening right now, I encourage them also to get in touch.

During National Careers Week, the college held virtual events, so it has been trying to keep this programme going during the pandemic. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) mentioned that this is a really good way of getting the information through in a large stream. It is especially true that teachers will not always have access to all the knowledge of what is

available out there in the workplace, so this virtual engagement has been important, notwithstanding the importance of being able physically to go and do stuff; I think we are all enjoying being physically back here.

I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South that universities should absolutely be going back to face-to-face teaching as soon as possible. I spoke to a young trainee nurse the other day, and her single biggest complaint was that she was being charged a fairly substantial amount of money but was not able to do parts of her course. How can she realistically go on to a ward and catheterise somebody or draw blood if she has never physically done it? For some jobs, it does not matter how many technical manuals people read. Some of us are fortunate enough to be academically minded. I count myself in that; I am thoroughly impractical, as anybody who has ever seen me trying to change a tyre or a plug will attest to. But lots of people learn by doing, and that kinaesthetic learning is important. If we are talking about parity of esteem between technical education and academic education, as there should be, we need to give people the tools to do it.

Hopwood's other big achievement is that it is now part of a careers coalition. It has recognised that these things cannot be done in a silo. The charity that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton mentioned is a perfect example of that. People almost need a roving brief when it comes to careers. We cannot say, "This college has a fantastic careers service and this one does not." Best practice needs to be shared, especially when different colleges share different competences. Hopwood has an extremely good relationship with Rochdale College, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), as the name would imply. It tends to specialise more in GCSEs and A-levels, whereas the more technical and vocational courses tend to be at Hopwood.

The college has recognised that sometimes, because of a lack of guidance and a lack of information available, people find themselves on the wrong course. There are plenty of colleges that will simply get them through the course. They will drop them down a grade and say, "Aim for a D"—actually, it is a numbered system now, isn't it? That shows my age. It was not O-levels I did; I did take GCSEs. Hopwood recognises that not everyone is on the right course. People will find a year in that things are not going properly. The college has that constant dialogue and transitions people on to different courses. It will move them on to a technical qualification, or it will move people who have proven themselves to be more academically minded off a vocational course and send them to Rochdale. They will have that dialogue about what they are trying to achieve with their career. That is a really important part of developing this area. If we are to have a statutory footing and we are going to embed that Baker clause, a wider-ranging approach is definitely needed. Colleges need to be having that dialogue as well.

The other thing I would like to pick up on is that the Bill will guide more people into apprenticeships, which is very dear to my heart, so much so that I will give a namecheck to a young man called William Lee, who just joined my constituency team on Monday as an apprentice. That has been a game changer for us. We have this bright young person who clearly wanted to be involved and working in politics, and he did not know what was available to him. He had looked at academic routes. He is very bright and very articulate, but when

someone starts applying for these jobs, employers will say, “What is your experience? What is your background? What is your involvement?” I put out a search for an apprentice researcher, because I wanted to give an opportunity to somebody who knew they wanted to do this, but did not necessarily know how to do it. We are three days in, but he has been an absolute godsend.

If there is anyone out there who is looking for a way to bring someone on board as part of their team—it might be a small team or a big team—apprenticeships are a fantastic way of giving somebody an opportunity. It is about that onboarding without necessarily looking at the traditional academic routes. To be fair, there is a large amount of learning time involved in apprenticeships. They are rigorous. Modern apprenticeships are every bit in parity with an A-level or a tier 3 qualification, and we should definitely be looking at those.

Pardon my rambling—I had a series of ideas I wanted to cover, and some very good points have been made that I wanted to pick up on. This is an incredibly important piece of legislation, because no student should be missing out on that opportunity. It may only be a college of 1,300 students, but that is a lot of young people who are missing out on access to proper careers advice. That is a huge amount of damage being done.

The one thing that we all share across the House is the idea that the worst possible thing is wasted potential. There are a huge number of people out there who, for whatever circumstances—it may be down to the community they grew up in, their economic means or their family situations—do not necessarily have the same opportunity as their peers, and careers advice is a good way of levelling things up. We need to ensure that when we talk about levelling up, equality of opportunity is the basis. Education is the silver bullet in almost every sense. It is the one thing that gives everyone a fighting chance. We have recognised already through how we have reformed education that not everybody learns the same or has the same goals, but everybody wants to get ahead, and the Bill ensures that we embed into the system that people know where they are going with that.

10.59 am

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson). His point at the end on not wanting to waste potential is key to the debate and to the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson), which I rise to support.

I know that my hon. Friend is passionate about this subject, on which I have heard him speak on numerous occasions. His own career path has taken him through a wide range of training providers and led him to these green Benches. His Bill is an excellent set of proposals that supports the aspiration of extending opportunity to all. It would require that all state-funded schools in England provide careers guidance for children for the entirety of their secondary education. That is the right thing to do, because the evidence tells us that starting young is key to making careers advice work and stick as a catalyst for the people it is aimed at. Aligning our legislative framework with the Gatsby benchmarks would put us on the right footing to deal with not just the challenges that young people face as a result of covid but future challenges, which we know are many and varied. We have a changing employment scene, and

people will have to continually upgrade their skills, pivoting right or left—whichever way they might have to go—and this approach would set them on that learning path early doors, which we should encourage and support.

We all know that skills are the most essential thing that people can gain these days. When I was at school, it was presented as a binary choice—either go to university or do not—but now the framework is different. The paths to be followed to a successful career are very different indeed. I have worked in charities, run a small business, worked for a large corporate and worked for small and medium-sized enterprises, and at each stage I learnt something new. That helped me with my career progression. It is essential that we embed that principle in young people as much as we can. Let my example be a warning to anyone that if they spend their tender years—and perhaps not so tender years—not knowing what they want to be when they grow up, they may end up here lecturing people.

The Careers and Enterprise Company ran a survey last year and discovered that almost three quarters of school and college leavers believe that careers education has become even more important because of covid and that they are prioritising it more as a result. High quality careers education is crucial, and evidence shows that it is linked to higher academic attainment in terms of both motivation and exam results, with those who know what they are aiming for and how to get there working harder and being more motivated to get to it. That leads to increased wages on entering the workplace, reduced chances of being not in education, employment or training and a better alignment of careers aspirations with the labour market. My hon. Friend is so right to be aiming towards that.

I will give a real-world example of why that matters, why it is important and why it works. Furness College, based in my constituency, is one of the top-placed colleges for apprenticeship recruitment. Figures from 2020—not 1920—show an increase of more than 12% in students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds taking up apprenticeships in that year. The college trains more than 700 apprentices each year in 20 sectors, with more than 80 apprenticeships to choose from. It genuinely pitches its apprenticeships to the labour market meaning that students entering the college have a higher certainty of getting a job and the right skills to go on not just to a job but to a job beyond that and solid career progression. The college has a dedicated team of development coaches who work with employers to ensure that they are helping to meet training needs. The coaches can often help in accessing skills grants, so the funding piece is supported, too.

That is all good stuff, but it shows how important it is to build those links between industry and education. As many hon. Members have said, we really need to embed aspiration at an early age, when people can see the direct link between a career they hope to get to and how they can accumulate the skills they need to get there. That is what the Bill seeks to unlock, and that is why I am so keen to give it my support.

The Bill is the missing piece from the “Skills for Jobs” White Paper, sitting alongside commitments to help people find a career that is right for them, providing a cohesive careers system, clear information and signposting and the right infrastructure to deliver that strategy. With young people more than ever facing uncertain career prospects, they need help from schools to access

[Simon Fell]

education, training and careers opportunities to navigate the careers market. Crucial as this Bill is, it is worth noting that it comprises only one strand of a thick bowstring of activity being supported by this Government at the moment. Many Members have mentioned the kickstart scheme, which provides funding to create six-month jobs for 16 to 24-year-olds on universal credit. I wish to highlight the work of one provider in my constituency, Right2Work, for which I have a particular soft spot. It helps young people with complex needs through supported internships. It is a back-breaking piece of work trying to find jobs for some of these young people and supporting them into them, but thanks to the kickstart scheme they have been got into not only supported internships, but work. That builds confidence and it gives them skills and a route to grow further. So I wish to pay tribute to the remarkable and, frankly, life-changing work that that provider does.

We also have youth hubs springing up around the country. I am glad that I will be at the opening of my local one on 30 September in Barrow. This crucial work is supported in large part by the Department for Work and Pensions, and the work that my local DWP and jobcentre team are doing is remarkable. They seem to be unrelenting in their efforts to reach out, find more young people and give them access to the skills and training they need to be supported. I should also pay tribute to other similar local organisations in Barrow and Furness: Inspira is also linking skills, jobs and young people together; and the Furness Future Leaders' Academy and Bright Stars are helping young people to gain skills and confidence, in terms of not only leadership, but how to run a campaign and get engaged in their community, and why and how they can spot issues that matter, run with them and gain skills with them. This mix and matrix is equipping young people incredibly well. I wish I had been through a similar environment when I was growing up. This is a good and important Bill. It will help to close that attainment gap that bedevils constituencies such as mine, and I am very happy to support it for that reason.

11.7 am

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) and his Bill. I was delighted to have the opportunity to intervene on the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). He is not in his place at the moment, but I really appreciated his idea of sending a copy of every contribution he makes in this place that has a devolved suggestion or idea to the relevant Minister in the devolved Administration. I will be working on that myself in respect of the Welsh Government, and I pay tribute to the Northern Ireland Executive for responding to every contribution from him—this must be a Department in itself.

On careers, life is presenting a lot of change at the moment for anyone entering the labour market. The fact that I have a pen behind my ear attests to the fact that I come from a family of carpenters, and my brother reminds me time and again that when he had his careers advice, they did not listen. When he went to see his careers manager, he knew he wanted to be a carpenter—his dad and granddad had been carpenters, and he was going to be one, and I can confirm to the House that he

is one—but would the careers adviser listen? There was a keen interest in getting him to university, but that was never going to happen and I could have told him that for years, as he would allude to. Members can imagine my careers conversation and his, and can imagine Christmas dinner conversations between three carpenters and a politician.

In this place, we have alluded to the fact that technical education and academic education need parity, and they absolutely do. That is why I intervened in the opening remarks about the Baker clause and why I am so passionate about getting outside expertise into our schools. I pay tribute, as other Members have, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) for the excellent charitable contribution that she has made. That kind of impact—that lively, active impact in our schools—will change careers advice for the better.

Anthony Mangnall: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, and I hate even to contemplate the sense of disappointment in the Williams family when they learned that he was going to be a politician, not a carpenter, but I am quite interested to know whether he has read the book by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes), of course showing a diverse range of experience.

My point is really about the fact that when we get people, businessmen and those with different skills into schools, we are also getting them to understand how those schools operate and enhancing their relationships with those schools and what they can do in the future. We are developing a relationship that actually lasts far longer than the pupils who are there at the time, and we should be encouraging that all over the country, especially in the devolved Administrations.

Craig Williams: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point, and he has done so far more eloquently than I will in the next few minutes. I am conscious of the next private Member's Bill—my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) is sitting next to me—so I will not go on for too long. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) is right, and I can confirm that I have indeed read the books—not book, but “books” plural—by my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes). I can also say that he offered me a lot of career advice in my day, and indeed may be blamed by most of the Williams family for this career of mine, as he would confirm.

I come back to the main thrust of this Bill, why I am here supporting it, and why I will be imploring the devolved Administrations, particularly the Welsh Government in my case, to follow it for careers advice.

Sally-Ann Hart: I look around the Chamber and across at the Benches where our SNP colleagues normally sit, and do I see any sitting there today? I understand that this is a Friday, but when we are talking about education and with the dire situation of education in Scotland, it is surprising that we do not have any representation from the Scottish national party, which leads the Scottish Government in Scotland.

Craig Williams: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I very rarely find SNP Members quiet, and it is a great privilege today to find them quiet. I will say that,

of course, the border between Scotland and England is very different. A lot of the education delivered in Montgomeryshire is delivered in England, and people often forget that fact. As a cross-border Member of Parliament, I have a lot of education and health casework because many of the public services delivered for my constituents in Wales come from England. In fact, I went to an FE college in England, despite living in Welshpool, which—and the clue is in the name—is in Wales.

It is often forgotten in this place when we talk about public services in relation to such a Bill that, when it says, “England only”, that applies of course to the geographical area, not to the delivery of public services, which are often to Welsh constituents. While I am on my feet today to implore the application of this Bill in Wales, this will also have a direct impact on my constituents. In my opinion, this is a UK Bill because of the interaction in education across the border. I am sure I will be corrected by Members if I am wrong, but about two thirds of the population of Wales live very close to that border, and they interact on a daily basis with the public services in England. It is nowhere near the same as in Scotland. This is about Wales and England, and long may we continue to hear that, not just in cricket with our dear old English cricket team—I remind hon. Members that it is the England and Wales Cricket Board—but I do not want to deviate too far from the Bill.

I come back to the main thrust of my point about lifelong careers. When people entered the jobs market in the last century, they were looking for a career for life or a job for life. As hon. Members have said, when someone has their first job today, they may, like me, not be in that career for life. Now when someone enters the jobs market, the job they will be doing at the end of their career may not and probably will not exist. I remember a particular hon. Friend saying—I have forgotten his constituency and I will not name him directly because I will get told off, but if I say “fourth industrial revolution”, I think we can all picture the now Whip who would mention that over and over again—and he is right, that the jobs that will be in the market in 20 or 30 years, and the jobs that we need business people to come into schools and act as career champions for, do not currently exist, but we are thinking about them. I am conscious that I have had a good outing and that other Members want to contribute, but I pay huge tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington for bringing this Bill to the House. I am happy to admit that, as someone who has put in many, many times for private Member’s Bills, I am incredibly jealous that he got drawn so early on, and that he has brought his Bill to the House so early and championed with such passion something that will help probably hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of the next generation. I think it is terrific.

11.15 am

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) on bringing forward such an important Bill.

How did someone like me become an MP? How did someone like me, whose mother worked in a jam factory and whose grandfather was a miner for 47 years, become an MP? How did someone who became the first person in her family to stay on at school beyond the age of 16,

someone who sounds English but is in fact half Welsh, become the MP for Ynys Môn, the best constituency in the UK?

Sally-Ann Hart: Mr Deputy Speaker, beautiful Hastings and Rye is the best constituency.

Virginia Crosbie: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention and give her an open invitation to experience the joys of Ynys Môn.

How did I become the MP for Ynys Môn, the best constituency in the UK? It is because I had excellent careers advice. I was sitting in my kitchen having a cup of tea with a certain Conservative councillor called Gillian Keegan. Gillian shared her journey, from being an apprentice in a car factory to leading multinational companies, to a chance meeting with a certain Baroness Anne Jenkin, co-chair of Women2Win, in a theatre. She is now the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for apprenticeships and skills and is sitting here on this very Front Bench. I am so proud of her and proud to call her my friend.

I, too, shared my journey. With a degree in microbiology, I went to work for Glaxo Wellcome on the production of interferon. I then became one of the youngest directors at UBS and won awards as a leading pharmaceutical analyst at HSBC, before retraining as a maths teacher. Gillian asked whether I had ever thought about joining the Conservative party. Three years later—yes, just three years—I was privileged to become the MP for Ynys Môn, the best constituency in the UK.

At every step of my life’s journey, I have had careers advice. Someone has helped me along the way; someone has shared their life experiences, their time and their address book. When I was just nine years old, a Conservative councillor suggested that I take my 11-plus for grammar school. He sat with me every Monday night to go through 11-plus papers. Thanks to him and some inspirational teachers, I became the first person in my family to stay on at school beyond the age of 16 and to go to university. A couple of years ago, I was giving a speech and I looked down to see, in the front row, that former councillor—this person who had been so inspirational in changing the direction of my life. He had tears streaming down his face. It was a privilege to be able to thank someone who had changed my life so much.

I have seen at first hand how life-changing excellent careers advice and support can be. I taught young adults maths for four years. They all wanted to be entrepreneurs. They loved “Dragons’ Den” and “The Apprentice”. These TV shows inspired them to want to start their own businesses and to do their maths homework. I have worked with Make It Your Business, a network set up by the brilliant Alison Cork. Make It Your Business has inspired thousands of women across the UK and helped with careers advice, and support and encouragement. For many years, I was also a school governor. As part of that role, I spent the day with one of the UK’s super-heads, Sir Kevin Satchwell, and his team at the Thomas Telford academy. One of the things that struck me was the time and effort that Sir Kevin and his team put into their careers support and work experience.

I have also had the privilege of supporting the excellent charity IntoUniversity since its inception, working with the likes of Dr Rachel Carr and Dr Hugh Rayment-Pickard.

[*Virginia Crosbie*]

One of the key things that IntoUniversity does is mentoring and giving young people careers advice. It gives them the skills to fly. There are many fantastic charities and organisations that give excellent careers advice and mentoring, but how much better would it be for every child, no matter where they live, no matter their background, to have careers advice for the entirety of their time in secondary school?

As a former maths teacher and mentor, I am delighted to see this Bill reach its Second Reading. The prospect of extending the duty to provide independent careers advice to around 2,700 academy secondary schools will help to ensure parity of opportunity. Delivering that advice across all schools from year 7 will benefit an additional 650,000 pupils each year. Careers guidance in schools is critical to securing a healthy future for our children as well as our economy. Through guidance and support, we can ensure that our young people enter jobs in which both they and the UK can flourish.

My constituency of Ynys Môn has one of the lowest GVAs—gross value added—in the UK. Why? We have good schools, good careers advice and some excellent teachers, but every year we see bright, keen, educated young people leave in droves in search of employment because of the limited quality career opportunities on Anglesey. As a result, we are left with a lower than average percentage of the population with qualifications of NVQ 4 and above, and a higher percentage with no qualifications whatsoever. Those that remain struggle to find good employment. Last year, 6% of economically active males aged 16 to 24 on Anglesey were unemployed, compared with the national average of just below 5%. Those that were in work took home an average weekly pay 20% lower than the UK average.

It can be incredibly challenging to provide children and young people with an insight into exciting potential career opportunities when there are relatively few local examples to work with. One of the saddest things posted on my Facebook page—let us be honest, there have been quite a few—was: “Virginia is ambitious. She will leave the island.” Yes, I am ambitious—for the island. I want to give young people ambition. I want to give young people on the island hope. That is why I am working hard to bring investment to Anglesey. I want to secure the future of the island by offering these young people the opportunities that they so desperately need.

At the moment, however, we risk being stuck in a vicious circle. Our young people see no prospects on Anglesey and then they leave, leaving a shortfall in the skilled working population when companies try to set up locally. It is critical to the economic future of my constituency that our school careers education is not just good but forward-looking and integrated with local businesses, and that it starts when children reach secondary school.

Anglesey is known as the energy island. It is looking forward to how we can contribute to the Government’s net zero targets through renewable energy. The jobs that will come online will be varied, but there will be a strong technical aspect to many of them. That means that we need to start positioning our schools so that they can support children into these great opportunities. Careers guidance and education must be tailored to give them the skills that they will need.

For that very reason, one of my first conversations with companies interested in coming to Anglesey concerns how they intend to engage with our schools and support local people into employment. I want organisations on Anglesey that will enhance our local offering, employ and involve local people, use local third-party providers and, ultimately, help to drive our local economy and keep our local culture and our local language alive. Their plans for schools outreach are particularly important, because we need to drive up aspirations and show our young people that there is a prosperous future for them on Anglesey.

Businesses already on Anglesey, such as Orthios in Holyhead, M-SParc and RAF Valley, already engage with local schools, particularly in the science, technology, engineering and maths arena. Others that hope to establish operations on the island should Anglesey gain freeport status, such as Tratos, intend to open skills academies and engage with local education providers.

One example of how we can drive careers support on Anglesey comes from the recent experience of the National Nuclear Laboratory, which has recently opened a new office at M-SParc in Gaerwen. The NNL’s approach to engagement has been to undertake specific and targeted STEM outreach programmes in local communities to excite and encourage local students to think about a career in science. Its engagement plan links with career pathways, whether vocational or academic, and it is working to develop a strong pipeline of talent for the nuclear sector.

I fully support this Bill and the changes it proposes, and I look forward to seeing independent careers advice being offered in all secondary provision from year 7. I urge the Welsh Government to adopt a similar approach and to work to improve careers advice in secondary schools across Wales so that all our young people, who are our future, can receive high-quality careers education.

11.25 am

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), who has the second most beautiful constituency in the country—of course, St Austell and Newquay is the best.

I left full-time education at the age of 16 and went straight to work for Barclays bank. However, I recently had a conversation with one of my former teachers, who remarked that many of my teachers thought I left school long before. I distinctly remember that, in my early years, the only thing I wanted to be in life was a British Airways pilot. I was fixed on this but, unfortunately for me, just before I started my O-levels—I am old enough to have done O-levels—British Airways closed its airline training school, which threw me into complete confusion about what I would do. I ended up doing my O-levels and, almost by accident, going to work for Barclays bank. I look back now and think, “If only there had been better advice to help me think about my career.”

I have since meandered through various opportunities that life has put my way and somehow ended up in this House, but that was never the plan. There was never a sense that this is where I wanted to go. I very much welcome this excellent Bill, and I am pleased that the Government are supporting it to make sure that

good careers advice is available to all our students throughout their secondary education. That is absolutely right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) made the important point that we have to be very clear that careers advice is not about closing down the options for young people too early. Very few of us end up doing what we thought we were going to do when we were at school. It is about giving our schoolchildren a sense of aspiration, a sense of all the opportunities that our incredible country provides for our young people, and giving them the confidence and the attitude that they can go and make the most of it, wherever life may take them. It has to be about inspiring them and getting them to lift their aspirations.

I particularly say that because I represent a Cornish constituency, where we struggle with a lack of aspiration among our young people. Very often their view of the horizon is too low, and one of the best things we can do, particularly in secondary schools, is raise the horizon for our young people. Good-quality careers advice can definitely do that, so this is an excellent Bill.

Anthony Mangnall: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend, because he is making an important point. In the south-west, we know far too well how many people are looking over the horizon and are looking to move away to find their future career. They are not aware of the opportunities within their midst. This Bill presumably allows us the opportunity to find what is both immediately available in such areas but also what can be created or invented.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Since I was first elected to this House, I have focused on the need to create better opportunities for young people in the south-west and, in my case, particularly Cornwall. Too many of my peers had no option but to leave Cornwall and the south-west to achieve their ambitions in life. I count myself incredibly lucky that I was able to stay in Cornwall and make a reasonable life for myself, but that opportunity has not been available to many. That is one reason why I have spent so much time in this place championing such things as the spaceport, renewable energy, lithium extraction and all the things that are creating incredible opportunities in Cornwall for the future, so that young people growing up today can think, “I can have a good career in Cornwall. I don’t have to leave the place I love and call home to achieve that because we are creating opportunities.”

Alongside the great career advice that we need to provide, we have to make sure, particularly in some of the most disadvantaged parts of our country, that we create local opportunities for young people who want to stay in their home town and reach their potential in life. That is why the Government’s levelling-up agenda is so important to people like me. We have to create those opportunities.

One of the things that I did was run a business for several years that employed a lot of school leavers. One of my frustrations was that when school leavers came to me, yes, they had academic qualifications but they did not have the soft skills that employers need for them to become good members of the workforce quickly. Sadly, even today when I talk to employers, they tell me a similar story. That is why I really welcome such things

as T-levels, which are going to provide an excellent connection between education and the workplace to give our young people the right sort of skills, so that they enter the workplace not just with the academic qualifications and skills that they need, but the attitude that they need to get into the workplace and so they know how to relate and be part of a team. People can only really learn those sorts of things by experiencing them. T-levels will provide that and I absolutely welcome them.

Alongside that, we are moving away from this strange idea that 50% of our students need to go to university. I think that has actually been damaging for far too long. Introducing T-levels and vocational and other qualifications is very important. Technical qualifications are so important and having a really strong connection to the workplace is valuable, and I am delighted with the Government’s efforts and the direction in which we are going in that regard.

I represent the constituency that is the most reliant on tourism and hospitality in the country and I am really passionate about changing the view that working in tourism and hospitality is just a dead-end or short-term job. It is one of the best career opportunities for a young person to get on quickly. It is incredible and provides great social mobility. Yes, people enter it by working in a bar but they can progress very quickly to management or HR, or some other aspect of management. We have to change the perception. I plead with schools, in the career advice that they provide, to get away from the negative view of tourism and hospitality as just a dead-end job. It is an incredible opportunity for the right sort of young person. They can go into that sector and have a really successful career and progress quickly. In any career advice that is going to be provided as a result of this excellent Bill, we need to change the perception of tourism and hospitality to make sure that we are providing good advice in that sector.

In conclusion, I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) has introduced the Bill.

Virginia Crosbie: I know that my hon. Friend has become a grandfather recently. Does he agree that this excellent Bill will benefit not only our children, but our grandchildren?

Steve Double: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to say that I have become a grandfather, and baby George Double is doing very well. I am three and a half weeks into being a grandfather and I am loving my new career in life. It is so important that we lay the foundations now not just for the current generation, but for generations to come. The point has been so well made that the jobs of the future will be different. People will change their jobs probably many times during their careers, and it is very important that we not only give our young people the right skills to make the most of that, but create the opportunities and then give them the advice to inspire them to make the most of whatever opportunities life provides them with. I am sure that this excellent Bill will be just one bit of the jigsaw that helps us to achieve that in future.

11.34 am

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) on introducing this important Bill. Giving

[Sally-Ann Hart]

every child the best start in life is a guiding principle of this Government's approach to education in England. Conservatives believe that no matter their background, the wealth of their parents, their race, gender or sexual orientation, every child deserves a fantastic education and the opportunity to build the foundations they need to thrive in the world of work, and become upstanding citizens in their communities.

When I speak of fantastic education, I do not just mean rigorous exploration in science labs, the unlocking of imagination in English classes, the stimulation of solving maths equations, or the exhilaration that comes from competing in sports lessons. Those are crucial foundations that all children should enjoy and be exposed to, but a fantastic education must offer more, and release the ambitions and talents of young people, so that they can expand their horizons, widen their future opportunities, and gain deeper skills. That second element of the school environment is sometimes neglected and forgotten, but it is crucial if a child is to succeed in work and take full advantage of the opportunities available to them, whether that is moving to university, embarking on an apprenticeship, starting a business, or even travelling, volunteering and much more. Part of that aspect of school life is careers advice and support, and I wish to share one example of that local to my constituency.

Not so long ago, a group of pupils in my constituency—my beautiful constituency of Hastings and Rye—were taken to the City of London through the Hastings opportunity area Broadening Horizons programme, organised by the charity A Capital Experience. Hastings opportunity area has given invaluable funding over the past five years, which I would like to be extended further—hint, hint—as it has been so beneficial to young people in my constituency.

Hastings opportunity area benefits from amazing board members, including Helen Kay, who successfully set up the new flagship free school in Hastings, and Lorraine Clarke, the regional Ark Academy director. She has shown me and proved that although funding is essential, the most important thing is to have good leadership, good structure and professional support and development for teachers to become outstanding. That is key to excellent outstanding schools. Carole Dixon is chief executive of the Education Futures Trust, and the board is chaired by Richard Meddings, with all his huge success in financial institutions at national and international level. They all give our children in Hastings and Rye the chance to broaden their horizons.

The children were taken to the offices of a top company in Canary Wharf, and the purpose of the visit was to open their eyes to jobs and careers that are out there and could be available to them. The group took a coach up the A21 to the City, and by lunchtime the children were looking up in awe at the mighty skyscrapers that were hurtling their way into the sky. Those kids had never been to the capital before, and never witnessed such tall, imposing buildings. They had certainly never dreamed of working in such a place.

The children were taken to one of the huge buildings, which housed the company. As they arrived, they noticed the security guards, the receptionists, the cleaners, and others. It was not long before they were seated in a large room—a place where decisions of great importance and

impact are made on a daily basis. That room will have had a monumental impact on those kids. As they sat listening they were asked a simple question: “How many of you could see yourselves working here?” They looked surprised. Some piped up that perhaps they could see themselves working in reception or as a security guard. They were told that they could work hard, and perhaps one day they could be something more than cleaners or receptionists. There is nothing wrong with saying, “You could be directors, CEOs or perhaps even the chairman of an international bank.” They were amazed. Never before had anyone told them to reach for the top, to dream big and realise their deepest ambitions, and that if they worked hard at school, nurtured their talents, they too could be a banker or any other thing they wanted, making big decisions.

I recount that story because it goes to the heart of why I support the Bill. It is no good having an education system that teaches children solely to learn their timetables, do their spelling and memorise equations. We need a system in place that is ambitious for our young people, that offers them hope, and that supports and guides them. Our children in Hastings and Rye are capable of doing what they set their mind to, regardless of their background or where they come from. Sometimes life deals a bad hand, but with the right support, encouragement and aspiration, including from teaching staff, our children can make that bad hand work for them and turn it into a good one.

The speaker in that story was ambitious for those children and gave them encouragement and inspiration to dream bigger and reach further. The teacher offered them support with their education, but the system let them down because they had no careers support, which is vital and crucial. The Bill will ensure that such advice is offered independently to all pupils from year 7 onwards, no matter what sort of state school they are in, including academies. I completely support that.

The Bill builds on the Government's excellent work in this area, such as the “Skills for jobs” White Paper published in January, which lays out the strategy for post-16 education, training and careers provision. It also addresses the Government's renewed strategic approach to careers education, including continued public investment in the expansion of infrastructure. Commitments include the roll-out of careers hubs and investment in the professional development of careers leaders to all schools and colleges across England. The White Paper, coupled with the Bill, could transform the way in which we provide careers advice and guidance to young people across England.

I will mention one final aspect that is linked—the role of businesses and employers in the provision of careers advice to young people. When independent careers support is given, it is vital that colleges and schools engage with local businesses and business leaders to ensure that students can hear directly from employers about the skills and attributes they seek and the local opportunities for young people in the world of work.

In Hastings, I recently visited a fantastic company, Focus SB, that is doing great work with the local college to help to make sure that local students are getting the training and education that they need to go into high skill, high wage jobs locally. Gary Stevens, managing director, recently said:

“As someone who came through the ranks as an apprentice, I am keen to provide opportunities for young people to join us on our exciting journey and to grow with the company, which is why I have agreed to become an Enterprise Adviser in East Sussex. I am also keen to encourage applicants from all corners of the community with all levels of ability and mobility to contribute to our growth and development as well as theirs. At Focus SB we have employed three apprentices over the past three years, have widened our own in-house graduate scheme and we have built links with local schools, colleges and universities. I personally have become an Enterprise Adviser and sacrifice some of my time to build relationships with local educators but we all need to do more if we want this valuable asset to remain.”

Those are strong words from Mr Stevens. The drive and dedication of business leaders like him give me hope that future collaboration between our schools, colleges and businesses will equip young people with the skills and careers advice that they need to achieve their dreams and ambitions.

In conclusion, the Bill will go a long way to supporting students with the advice and guidance they need to make reasoned and timely decisions to help them into the world of work. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Workington again for bringing forward his private Member’s Bill for Second Reading. He has my full support.

11.44 am

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson), first on coming top in the private Member’s Bill ballot and secondly on choosing this particular Bill. I do not think that any proposal would have been more worthy of consideration by the House.

In Dudley South we have many very good academy schools, just as we have many very good local authority maintained schools. Many of the academy schools use the greater freedoms they have to establish a strong ethos and character, but I struggle to fathom what it is in the governance and funding mechanisms of academy schools, excellent as they are, that means that the pupils who attend them are somehow less in need of careers guidance than those who attend maintained schools. The truth is that all young people need guidance on their future careers, and, as many Members have said today, that need continues throughout their working lives.

I think that, as people in a line of work in which jobs are not always entirely secure, many of us can identify with the idea that people’s career options can change throughout their working lives. Indeed, I think that the Boundary Commission is prompting me to look towards some careers advice in the not too distant future. The Whips Office are frequently generous with their careers advice, often in very direct and unambiguous terms, although I fear that not all of it may be parliamentary.

However, I think that the really important aspect of the Bill is not so much the requirement to have careers advice as the independent nature of that advice, and its guaranteed standard. It needs to have value—greater value, I think, than some of the careers advice that was available when I was at school 30 years ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) suggested that the position was similar when he was at school. That advice was probably not as helpful, because it was often provided in-house by teachers who were extremely good at their subjects, but whose understanding

of the jobs market and the economy, which had developed since they were at teacher training college, was quite restricted. Their careers advice was generally focused on graduate-focused roles rather than other career paths.

We need an independent, dedicated and extremely skilled careers service to be available to all young people. What is needed is an up-to-date understanding of the jobs market. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) observed, there are so many jobs of the future that do not even exist yet, so those who are advising young people on forward pathways need to understand the jobs market both as it is today and as it is likely to develop in the near future. They also need to understand the full breadth of the economy and the jobs market, and how that has progressed. For people of my parents’ generation, the whole point of a good education was working hard at school so that you did not end up in the factory, whereas the reality now is that many engineering roles, many technical and vocational careers, have rather better prospects than many of the jobs that would typically be taken by graduates.

We need to ensure that the careers service appreciates the value of sectors that may not have been given the status they deserved but have always been important. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) mentioned the hospitality sector as an example, but there are many, many others, including the technical skills sector and the care sector. We have a wide range of opportunities in our modern economy.

Young people today find themselves in an increasingly complex world. As they leave school, they will be entering an ever-changing jobs market. It has never been more important to have good, high-quality, reliable careers advice, and that applies regardless of the type of school that a child is attending, and I am glad that this Bill will help to guarantee that.

11.50 am

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) on bringing this Bill forward. It is utterly vital that all secondary schools and academies have an expectation of being able to offer good quality, independent careers advice from year 7 all the way through to year 13. Having worked in education for 22 years, I know that it is not just about jobs, but about careers. We need to make sure that our young people, and our slightly older people, understand the opportunities that are out there. When we talk about careers, though, one thing we do not talk about is transferable skills. I met a young man last Friday who had a level 3 qualification in mechanical engineering, and he really did not understand how valuable his qualification was in the marketplace and how sought after he was. He was extremely excited and pleased to hear that that was what he had in his back pocket. We must make sure that all of our young people, especially those from deprived backgrounds, have such qualifications.

What I would like to say to all those independent career advisers is that the quality and the relevance of what they are offering is absolutely vital. Young people have no idea what old fogies like us, who have been in the work market for a very long time, are talking about. Members who are old enough to remember Snoopy might recall the teacher who went, “Bwa-bwa-bwaa-bwa”.

[Lia Nici]

That is how young people hear old fogies like us. I am afraid that anybody over the age of 23 is quite often not listened to.

What I am doing in the constituency of Great Grimsby is making sure that we have not only people with long-standing and impressive careers, but people who are just starting off on their journeys. My plea to careers advisers, schools and academies is to remember that for people to do well in school and to want to do well in school, they need to understand not only the relevance of what they are doing, but that careers and jobs are about having fun in life. What a miserable existence it would be for a person to have to go to work day after day and not enjoy the people with whom they work or the job that they are doing. People also need to understand that a career is about going to different places. Sometimes we do a job because we know that it will get us somewhere else, so an understanding of the journey that people take is important.

I have a core request to those involved in careers. We cannot expect our teachers to do it, as they are specialists in education, not specialists in careers. Employers, councils and careers advisers all need to work together with our local businesses to make people excited about what is happening in their areas. What levelling up is doing at the moment in places such as Great Grimsby is bringing more inward investment into the constituency than has ever been seen before. There are exciting jobs and careers available. We get to know that because we are in privileged positions, but we need to make sure that we say to our colleagues locally and to our schools and academies that there are some really exciting things coming along. There will also be jobs in new technology that have not been invented yet.

I wholeheartedly support this Bill. We need careers guidance, with several touch points from year 7 onwards, and we need it to be fun and relevant, because when it is fun people will really understand what they enjoy and what their future can look like.

11.54 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) on his success in the private Member's Bill ballot. Obviously he is a very lucky man—he knows that in many ways. I am delighted that he was first in the ballot, and I am really delighted that he chose careers guidance in schools as his priority. As we can see, it is also a priority for many Members in the Chamber, and we are all grateful that he chose it, as many young people across the country will be for many years to come.

I know that, like me and now many Conservative MPs, my hon. Friend is a former apprentice who has enjoyed the benefits of technical education and is keen to make sure that all young people get to learn about this brilliant route into the workplace. What a fantastic discussion, debate, and sharing of ideas and experience it has been. It is wonderful to hear of all the great work going on in our constituencies and how many hon. Members are involved in their schools, careers hubs and businesses, trying every day to bring them all together. It is clear that everybody involved in this debate recognises the importance of helping young people to achieve their full potential.

It was interesting to hear from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about the focus on engineering and manufacturing, and what happens when there is a disconnect between what young children can learn in their local environment and the needs of businesses. Indeed, that is a big focus of this Government: to try to bring those things together and to make sure we talk about things such as T-levels, which many hon. Members talked about. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) said that, I think, seven T-levels are coming to his area via Hopwood Hall College, while my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and others talked about the importance of T-levels and what that minimum of nine weeks' work experience brings.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) is a real inspirational role model to us all, through If Chloe Can and the support that she has given schools through her charity for a decade. As the previous Member for Wirral West, she was also part of my careers journey, because I shadowed her for many a week.

A number of Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) and for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell), mentioned the importance of extending careers opportunities to younger children—the year 7s—which is also very important. My hon. Friends the Members for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) and for Ynys Môn—maybe it is something in the water—mentioned the random nature of their careers and their journeys, and the people who helped them along their way. I think it is fair to say that all of us remember the people who help us on our way. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn is still grateful that I helped her on her way into this place, because it can be a tough career at times, although I am sure the people of Ynys Môn are very grateful for her sacrifice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) talked about the importance of lowering the barriers for young people, which is what those interventions can achieve. "You can do it. Reach for the top. Don't put those barriers in your way"—somebody needs to tell them that and give them permission to dream. That often happens in one of those interventions, and it is vital.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) focused on the investment in their areas, all the things happening there, the skills and opportunities that that will bring, and how important it is to align them and bring them all together.

High-quality careers advice is absolutely vital to help young people to prepare for their future. This Bill will play a key part in levelling up opportunity, ensuring that high-quality careers advice is available for all. Disadvantaged young people will gain most, as they face the greatest barriers. They have fewer role models and networks—they probably think networks are something to do with their PCs. This Bill will make a difference, with more opportunities for pupils to meet more employers from an earlier age and to be inspired about the world of work, including about jobs in emerging sectors, such as green jobs.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to this debate, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Workington, who has given us all the opportunity to

come here today, to talk about this issue and to make a difference. I very much look forward to visiting the outstanding Lakes College and the Cumbria Careers Hub, ideally with the Careers and Enterprise Company, in the very near future, because I know that he has been inspired by a lot of the work being done there. We want to go further and faster, and ensure that every young child across the country has the best opportunity to get the best careers advice to help them on their journey in life.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Bill

Second Reading

12 noon

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill may look familiar to some hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who introduced a similar Bill in the 2017-19 Parliament. I am pleased to see him in his place today and thank him for his hard work on the earlier Bill, and I thank all members of the all-party parliamentary group on taxis, which he now chairs.

I am also indebted to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), both former Transport Ministers, who have worked hard on this issue and whose assistance in recent weeks has been invaluable.

I am also grateful to those three Members for co-sponsoring the Bill, along with my right hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) and for Tatton (Esther McVey), the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson).

This Bill has a very simple purpose, which is to ensure that only those fit to hold a licence are entrusted to carry the public. It will enhance public safety by mandating the sharing of relevant and necessary information. Simply put, better decisions are made when more information is available.

Although the Bill's focus is to protect the public, it will also protect the hundreds of thousands of decent, hard-working drivers from having their reputation tarnished and their profession diminished by the abhorrent behaviour of a small minority who would seek to abuse their position of trust.

Just under 343,000 taxi and private hire vehicle driver licences are currently issued in England. Decisions on licensing are made by 276 licensing authorities. In each case, the authority must reach a decision as to whether a person is fit and proper. Although this is not defined in law, there is, by and large, consistency in safety-related criteria and processes. All licensing authorities require an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service criminal background check, and virtually all have the enhanced DBS checks carried out. This is reassuring, but it is only part of the picture.

There will be many cases across the country where the conduct of an individual has been unacceptable. However, these incidents might not result in the involvement of the police, let alone a prosecution or conviction. Some incidents may potentially be a criminal offence, but I am sure we all accept that not every crime reported ends with a conviction. That is not to say these incidents did not happen.

This Bill does not trespass into the realm of the Disclosure and Barring Service; rather it provides an additional means to enable the sharing of relevant information. Neither does it alter any of the existing

[Peter Gibson]

processes that enable a driver to challenge the decision of a licensing authority. It will require licensing authorities to keep registers of licences issued and to make this information available on request. There is no mandatory requirement to share information with other licensing authorities on revocations, refusals or suspensions. Some licensing authorities do use the voluntary national register of taxi and private hire licence revocations and refusals—quite a mouthful, but it is commonly referred to as the NR3. It is commissioned by the Local Government Association and operated by the National Anti Fraud Network. Although some licensing authorities check information on NR3, others rely on applicants self-declaring whether they have had a licence refused, suspended or revoked. As one might expect, those with something to hide are unlikely to declare it, even if they face a greater sanction for not doing so.

Where an authority does not use NR3 to ensure a complete picture, a licensing authority would have to individually contact every one of the other 275 licensing authorities, somehow provide a unique identifier, and await all relevant or nil responses. Such a process is clearly impractical. I am informed that this has resulted in instances where a driver, having been refused a licence for safeguarding reasons by one authority, has then had their application accepted by another, in ignorance of the original safety concern. Once a licence has been granted, it is only the licensing authority that issued it that can revoke or suspend a driver's licence. Although the expectation is that licensing authorities in one area will report concerns that they may have about a driver licensed by another authority and that those concerns will be acted on, there is currently no legal requirement to do so.

This Bill builds on the approach set out in the statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards issued by the Government in 2020, which recommends that licensing authorities share information with other authorities, as better information will mean better decisions. The objective is to improve the knowledge of the tax and private hire vehicle trade's gatekeepers and enforcers: the licensing authorities.

The first part of the Bill is intended to ensure that in their role as gatekeepers to the trade, licensing authorities have as much relevant information as possible when considering new or renewal licence applications. The second part is intended to ensure that, in their role as enforcers, licensing authorities are aware of any incidents involving their drivers, even when they are working in other areas.

I appreciate that there are those here and elsewhere who would like to see wider reforms to our legislative framework, under which taxis and private hire vehicles are licensed, but more substantial changes cannot be done through this Bill. Indeed, in my engagement with industry bodies and operators, many suggestions have been put forward to me about what other wide-ranging improvements could be made, but this Bill simply focuses on passenger safety, which is a key concern to all of us in this House.

The Bill would require all licensing authorities in England to record and input into the database instances where they have refused to grant or renew a driver's licence, or have suspended or revoked a licence, because of a certain safeguarding or road safety concern. When

processing applications, licensing authorities will be required to search the database for any relevant entries made and request any relevant information that the first authority relied on to make their decision. The authority processing the application must then have regard to the previous information when making its own licensing decisions.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this Bill to the House. I noticed that clause 1(g) includes as “relevant information”, whether an applicant

“has threatened, abused or insulted another person”.

That is quite a broad position, which could be misinterpreted by different local authorities. I am quite interested in what my hon. Friend thinks needs to be done in terms of an appeals process in case someone is taken off the road, because that is how a local authority has interpreted whether someone is suitable to be a licensed vehicle driver, taxi driver or whatever it may be. Is there more to be done on the appeals process?

Peter Gibson: My hon. Friend raises an important concern. The Bill would not change or constrict licensing authorities' existing discretion to grant licences to drivers.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I should just clarify that local licensing authorities have licensing panels that hear evidence and give taxi drivers opportunities to make their case, so protections are already in place.

Peter Gibson: My hon. Friend is correct. The Bill does not change the existing licensing authorities regime and does not affect the appeals process, appeals panels or applications to the magistrates court.

The relevant information that led to the decision would not be recorded on the database but kept by the licensing authority and shared with other licensing authorities if they requested it. The information on the database would simply flag instances of applications for a driver's licence being refused or of the suspension or revocation of a driver's licence.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): This is an important Bill. Does my hon. Friend agree that the timeliness of the information sharing is crucial? If someone has their licence revoked but seeks to get one from another authority, we do not want the information not to be on the database for the second licensing authority to check. It is crucial that information is shared in a timely manner and can be checked. Will my hon. Friend speak to that?

Peter Gibson: That very point is considered in the Bill, which gives local authorities a time limit for the entering of such information on the database. In that way, playing one local authority off against another—that circumnavigation, loophole or lacuna—is effectively dealt with.

To achieve its aims, the Bill enables the Secretary of State to provide or designate a person to provide a licensing information database. It enables the database operator to charge a fee in respect of the costs of the database, but such a fee will not be levied automatically.

I risk repeating a mantra, but better decisions are made when more information is available. The existing legislation enables only the authority that issued a licence to take action against it.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this important Bill to the House. Of the 15,000 private hire licences issued by City of Wolverhampton Council in 2019, many were for drivers spread across the United Kingdom, including at least one as far away as Perth, which is quite some taxi drive. Does my hon. Friend think that the Scottish Government and other devolved national Governments should, following what will hopefully be the Bill's passage, work with the UK Government to reciprocate the flow of data to ensure that all authorities throughout the United Kingdom have access to the best possible information?

Peter Gibson: My hon. Friend raises an important point about passenger safety applying throughout all four nations. The Bill will provide for the devolved nations to access the database and they are strongly encouraged to do so.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): To follow up on and clarify that point—I am from a devolved nation—would the Bill only require licensing authorities in England, not those in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, to input the information, but they would have the benefit of that information? Has my hon. Friend had any discussions with devolved authorities about whether they would adopt a similar approach to the inputting of the information?

Peter Gibson: My hon. Friend is correct that the devolved nations would be able to access the database. I am not aware of discussions among or engagement between the devolved nations and the Department for Transport.

As I was saying, the existing legislation enables only the authority that issued a licence to take action against it. The Bill will enhance safety by requiring licensing authorities to report information on certain serious safeguarding or road safety matters to the authority that issued the licence.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Gibson: I would be delighted to take my first intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

Jim Shannon: I am always pleased to get a first. I am aware of occasions where people with wheelchairs or mobility rollators have been unable to use taxis. Will the Bill safeguard accessibility for disabled people to use taxis and ensure that they have equality with those of us who are able-bodied?

Peter Gibson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I feel as though I have obtained my proper parliamentary wings, having now taken an intervention from him. He raises an important point on the rights and needs of disabled passengers. The Bill does not deal with access to vehicles, but it does deal with safeguarding. I believe it will help deliver that provision for those who are most vulnerable in our society and require public authorities to ensure that safety is of paramount concern in licensing decisions.

The Bill would give the Government flexibility to designate a database provider or to provide the database themselves. Given the existence of NR3, it would make

sense to use that database so that the Bill's provisions can come into effect quickly. I recognise that NR3 does not currently allow for the recording of suspensions, but I wanted that in the Bill in case such functionality is added at a later date. Many local authorities already pay a fee to the National Anti Fraud Network for use of a wide range of services, including access to NR3.

The ability of the database operator to charge a fee would enable the National Anti Fraud Network to continue to recover NR3's running costs. Indeed, it is anticipated that rather than starting from scratch with a new database, there will be use of the existing voluntary database operated by the National Anti Fraud Network—of which NR3 forms a part—which is already subscribed to by 256 of the 276 licensing authorities. However, only 138 such authorities use the NR3 element. I am reliably informed by the Local Government Association that, with little or no additional costs, the NR3 database could fulfil the Bill's requirements if the Secretary of State so designates.

The Bill's objective can be illustrated no better than through use of the current voluntary scheme. Luton Borough Council recently ran a check on the NR3 database for a driver applying for a licence. The search revealed a revocation in another local authority area, due to a safeguarding concern, which the applicant failed to disclose. Consequently, Luton—rightly—refused a licence due to that deliberate withholding of information.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): My hon. Friend is being incredibly generous with his time. I commend him on the Bill. I am sure he is aware of the scandalous situation of the special educational needs and disability travel contract in Sandwell, with Sandwell Council having handed it out without checks being conducted. Is the safeguarding of children with special educational needs in respect of large travel firms the sort of thing that the Bill and use of that database would combat to ensure the safety of those children?

Peter Gibson: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. There are many examples across the country of deplorable practices where the failure to access information is failing to safeguard our constituents. For the same reasons as I gave in response to the intervention on disabled passengers by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the Bill will help to support and safeguard our special educational needs children when accessing taxis. The Bill will close the loophole that I identified in the Luton case that enables an applicant to obtain a licence from an authority that does not participate in the voluntary scheme, just as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) alluded to.

Since the Bill's First Reading, I have met a wide variety of groups, from the Local Government Association to operators and industry bodies including the National Private Hire and Taxi Association, the Durham Licensed Taxi Association and the all-party parliamentary group on taxis. I thank them all for their engagement and assistance up to this point. However, the engagement that was organised by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust with Elaine Pickford and Liam O'Callaghan, the mother and brother of Sian O'Callaghan, who was murdered by a taxi driver in Oxfordshire, was the most important to me. I am grateful to them for the time they spent

[*Peter Gibson*]

sharing their tragic story with me, and although this legislation can never bring Sian back, I hope it can serve as a lasting tribute to her.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): As my hon. Friend knows, in County Durham we have a lot of cross-border travel, particularly involving my constituency—with Newcastle and Gateshead—with drivers travelling on both sides. Standards are different across the board, but I welcome this Bill as a real step in the right direction. What further could he say about how this cross-border issue will be addressed by the Bill?

Peter Gibson: We have a situation where 276 licensing authorities have individual discretion to apply the standards they wish to see locally. Although this Bill does not seek to impose a set of national standards or national licensing—we know how important the income from that licensing for their local drivers is to local authorities—by sharing this data and information we seek to get to the position where good practice is spread out across the country.

I hope that hon. Members from across the House will support this Bill, which will bring about a real improvement in the regulation of the taxi and private hire vehicles sector. So many of our constituents, particularly those with mobility difficulties, rely on the sector in their daily lives—to go to the shops, attend hospital appointments, get to school and get out of their homes, as we return to normality. It is important that they can do that safely, and in the secure and certain knowledge that those in authority have done all they can to ensure that the person driving the vehicle they travel in is a fit and proper person to do so. We should do all we can to ensure the safety of our constituents where we can, and this Bill does just that.

12.22 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and support the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) in his efforts to put this Bill into law. I should declare at the outset that I chair the all-party group on taxis. I speak with some passion on this issue, because some three and a half years ago, on another Friday morning, I moved a similar Bill, fully anticipating that with support from across the House and the industry, and with local authority and passenger group support, we would see the Bill progressing. I very much hope that he does better than I did in my efforts.

The intervening time has been tough for many people, and taxi and private hire drivers have had a particularly hard time. Many will have heard, as I have in my constituency, of the financial hardship people have faced, and of issues associated with vehicles being laid up and insurance-related problems. Although some help has been given, it has often been patchy. I have to say that with the Minister responsible being in the Lords, many will share my view that not enough has been done, with the impact on London's black cab trade being a case in point. In June 2020, there were 18,553 licensed black cabs but by 31 October that had fallen to just over 15,000—there has been a 29% fall in the number of black cabs operating on London's roads. At the start of June 2021 there were just 13,884, according

to statistics from the Department for Transport—we are talking about 1,000 fewer licensed taxi drivers. So it has been a hard time for the industry, and I am grateful to the various groups, including Steve McNamara and the Licensed Taxi Drivers' Association, for all they have done in pressing for help, but this has not been enough.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): This is an important Bill and I thank the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for his work on it. I also thank Ministers and colleagues on the Opposition Benches who have also inputted into this important legislation. I wish to comment briefly on my hon. Friend's point about the effect on the taxi industry; these are important key workers who keep our country moving and offer a vital public service. I hope that the Government will look to provide some further support for the taxi industry in the future because of the pressure they have been under. I ask colleagues across the House to consider the needs of disabled people in the Bill. There is a need to do so and ensure a level playing field across the country. I hope the Bill is also an opportunity for that important work to take place.

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The taxi and private hire sector is often misunderstood. It plays a key role in our transport sector. Extraordinarily, it represents the largest number of people employed in transport. My hon. Friend is right that for so many people, particularly disabled people, taxis and private hire vehicles are a lifeline. The fact that they have been under such pressure is a cause for further action from Government.

Three and a half years is a long time to wait, and in the meantime I am grateful that Members across the House have pressed relentlessly for action. The hon. Member for Darlington has already praised the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) for his role when he was Minister. He established what was known as a task and finish group led by Professor Mohammed Abdel-Haq. His group achieved remarkable consensus, because there are competing views, particularly between taxi and private hire. It came back with 34 recommendations, a number of which include the very proposals we are discussing this morning.

There have also been repeated questions to Ministers and Westminster Hall debates. I remember when I was a member of the Transport Committee hearing a passionate appeal from a professor who feared we would see further incidents of the type that the hon. Member for Darlington has already referred to. He felt it was only a matter of time, without improvements in licensing, before we would see further tragedies. At Transport questions on Thursday morning, it sometimes felt like a permanent item on the agenda that Ministers would be pressed on this point. I am sure that many Members across the House will have heard over the past few months from a whole range of constituents about these issues, as well as from safety campaigners, disability organisations, trade unions and so on.

Technology has also produced huge challenges and changes for the sector in recent years. Something that has come across to me in my discussions with people going around the country is just how different the situations are in different parts of the country. I have

already made reference to the black cab trade in London, and we hear about that, but there are different patterns in different towns, cities and market towns across the country. I thought that London and Cambridge were different in their approach, but in learning more about Liverpool, Brighton, Manchester, Rotherham and Wolverhampton, as have already been mentioned, and then looking at the market towns and rural areas, we see it is not a simple task to regulate all these different situations.

There are many, many things we need to tackle, and for those who want a quick history, I refer people to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who had an excellent Adjournment debate a few years ago, where he traced the history of taxi legislation all the way back to the Victorian era. It is astonishing how much of the legislation still refers back and is based on so much of that. When I was talking to Department for Transport civil servants, they pointed me to the volume of legislation, which I am sure the Minister is intimately familiar with. It is lengthy, complicated and, frankly, it probably needs an overhaul, exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) suggests. The world has changed and unfortunately the legislative situation has not changed to keep up, and it cannot be done in a private Member's Bill, as the hon. Member for Darlington clearly acknowledged. There are so many things we need to do, but this is a small part related to passenger safety.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): As a former member of a licensing panel, I completely agree with what the hon. Gentleman just said. Does he agree that the Bill is a valuable first step in bringing uniformity and rigour to how different authorities license their taxi drivers? I think particularly of Rossendale Borough Council, which is next door to Rochdale Borough Council, where I am an MP. They have completely different standards, so we see a preponderance of Rossendale licences in our area, rather than Rochdale ones. There is clearly a disconnect between how they license their taxi drivers, and people are exploiting that.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Member is absolutely right. Rossendale, I am afraid, did feature extensively in some debates. When my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish had his Adjournment debate many years ago, he referred to that issue in particular. I have to say it is astonishing how many Wolverhampton plates still turn up in Cambridge. I was not aware of the Perth example, but one can see the problem. This system was devised in an era where people worked locally, but the world has changed completely with the kind of technologies we have, which is why the legislation needs such a major overhaul.

I was going to go through the details of the Bill, but the hon. Member for Darlington did so impeccably, so I feel no need to trouble the House with them again. He has obviously done very good research. I had intended to contact Tameside to see where the NR3 database had got to. I was struck that it had not yet achieved universal coverage. That is the key point: until it is universal, there will always be the possibility of gaming the system.

There is a danger in this whole debate of implying that there are large numbers of people doing this. The hon. Member was absolutely right to make the point at the outset that most people are not behaving badly, but some are.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): The hon. Member makes the point that until this is universal, there will be a way of gaming the system. As a Member from Wales—a cross-border one—it strikes me that, if this database does not cover Wales and England at the very least, there will still be that opportunity. Most taxi drivers in Montgomeryshire go west and east; they do not go north and south.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Member makes an important point. That is one of the issues of living in a devolved series of nations: we have to try to work with others. I have to say that I am not aware of that being the overwhelming problem at the moment, but should it be so, clearly it would need to be addressed.

It always seemed to me that part of this issue was setting up the database and getting that all resolved, but the other side of the coin was enforcement. When I had discussions with various people about how enforcement worked, I was struck by how complicated it is. Different rules seem to apply depending on who is doing the enforcing. Of course, that is made much more complicated by the difficulty that local council officers face having to enforce in their area while not being able to enforce against people who come from another area. That is why the proposals in the Bill are so important; they begin to address that problem. In theory, the only body that can enforce against that Perth licence holder is the local council in Perth, which would presumably require the council in Perth to be in Penzance to do so. One can see how that is not going to work and why we have that problem.

Another former Transport Minister, the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani)—this has been a long-running debate—pursued this issue. In fact, she was the Minister involved at my previous attempt. I pay tribute to her, because she worked very hard on this. She was a strong believer in national standards, but she always suggested that there would be occasions when we needed local flexibility, which immediately reintroduces the problem. If we have higher standards to deal with particular problems—sadly, we have seen particular problems in some parts of the country—we are back to square one. We need some kind of approach, as is suggested in the second part of the Bill, to make this possible.

I thank all those who spoke to me. I suspect they are the same people who have been talking to the hon. Member for Darlington. I was very impressed by the National Association of Licensing and Enforcement Officers. I always had great support from people at Transport for London and from the trade unions, particularly Unite and GMB. The hon. Member mentioned the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and Guide Dogs; they too have been pressing for action on this issue for many years.

I appreciate that time is always precious on Fridays, so I will conclude at this point. I genuinely hope that we will get cross-party consensus to get this measure forward. We have waited too long, and it really is time to get it done.

12.33 pm

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): I rise to dedicate my wholehearted support to the Bill. It will help increase accountability, raise safety standards in the industry and ensure that licensing authorities have access to the

[Mark Jenkinson]

same pool of data, which will be valuable in my constituency of Workington and for my borough council, Allerdale. Let me take the opportunity to thank the licensing officers and the councillors on the licensing panel in Allerdale for their continued hard work in this area.

I applaud the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) in bringing these measures to the House, and I have no hesitation in endorsing them; they will foster better working practices based on reliable and accessible information. As colleagues have explained, the Bill will help to prevent unsuitable individuals from working the current system to their advantage. By closing the gaps in the information available, local authorities will be in a much better position to make sound decisions. I accept that most local authorities already adhere to good practice when considering whether to grant or revoke licences, but they do not have access to all the data and in many cases they do not share the data on refusals and revocations with other local authorities. This important legislation will change all of that by helping to ensure that local councils are in full possession of the facts that they need.

Currently, licensing authorities are unable to take action against the licence of a taxi or private hire vehicle driver issued by a different licensing authority, even if the driver implicated is working in its own area. Since there is no obligation on licensing authorities to report concerns about drivers to the licensing authority that issued the licence, concerns over safety are often not acted on due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the home licensing authority. This cannot be allowed to continue. This Bill is a huge step in the right direction when it comes to addressing these issues and providing additional assurances when it comes to the safety of the travelling public.

The statutory standards issued in 2020 are absolutely unequivocal about the public safety benefits of information sharing, and in particular of the use of the national register of taxi and private hire vehicle driver licence refusals and revocations. I thank my hon. Friend for his incredibly important work on this issue, and I offer him my unwavering support as this Bill progresses.

12.35 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): I am very pleased to see this Bill before the House today. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for promoting it, and for this thoughtful and very well researched exposition of exactly why this is needed. I hope that, after today's debate, there will be much support on both sides of the House for this very well-timed Bill, which perhaps should have been brought forward some time ago, by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner).

I am pleased that the Bill will be debated today, given that local authorities have repeatedly called in recent years for this Government to update their taxi and private hire vehicle licensing regulations over and above the current statutory standards, because at the moment they simply do not go far enough. I am also pleased that the Bill contains the very same provisions as the Licensing of Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Bill that was introduced in a previous

parliamentary Session by my hon. Friend, whom we heard from earlier. I hope that the work he has done will not be in vain, as this Bill potentially progresses through this House and onwards to make the changes needed to safeguard passengers and enhance the taxi industry.

In 2018, the independent task and finish group on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing published a detailed report that called for sweeping changes to taxi and private hire vehicle licensing and regulation. Its recommendations included national licensing standards, limits on cross-border working, powers to cap licences under certain circumstances and higher safeguarding standards. However, more than three years down the line, we are still waiting for those recommendations to be implemented, unfortunately. This is despite, at that time, the then Transport Minister agreeing the conclusions of that report.

At the time, the Government accepted the need for a national database to achieve a safe service for passengers and were broadly in agreement with the original Bill. However, it would unfortunately appear that the Government have since slightly shied away from taking more robust action to improve licensing and therefore passenger safety. The Minister will perhaps point to the statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards that they published last year, which local authorities are in the process of consulting on and then implementing. However, those standards do not go far enough and, importantly, do not deliver on all of the recommendations made by the task and finish group. In particular, they do not address the vital issue—as mentioned by previous speakers, including the hon. Member for Darlington—of cross-border hiring, which currently undermines the efficacy of licensing right across the country. This is why it is high time for proper legislation with robust national minimum standards that are legally enforceable.

It is also disappointing that it has taken a private Member's Bill to reach this point. I think that was inevitable, having had to wait so long for this to be brought forward. It is vital that the Government consider the measures set out in the Bill today, which address critical issues, including safety concerns, with the overall existing licensing legislation. It would require taxi and private hire vehicle licensing authorities in England to share information of recent adverse licensing history, such as refusals, suspensions and revocations of a licence, and enable this to be taken into consideration to mitigate the risk of unsuitable people being granted or continuing to hold a taxi or private hire vehicle licence.

Let us be clear: at present, licensing authorities are not required to share information with other authorities. This prevents them from being able to take an informed decision about granting or renewing a driver's licence. It creates the conditions for a driver who has been refused a licence, or has had an existing licence suspended or revoked because of safety concerns, to be in a position to apply for a licence in another area where that new licensing authority is completely unaware of the previous refusal, suspension or revocation. We need only look at the totally unacceptable situation in Wolverhampton, where drivers who were the subject of serious allegations were allowed to continue their trade—in one case, more than 150 miles from where the original complaint was made. That is clearly unacceptable, as I think all Members on both sides of the House would agree. It puts the

safety of taxi and private hire vehicle users at risk, and goes against the recommendations of the task and finish group.

The existing statutory standards are no longer fit for purpose, and we have already heard today about NR3 and the database. While they urge data sharing between local authorities and encourage the existing NR3 database, they do not mandate it, which creates clear inconsistencies in the system. The Bill will help to strengthen these obligations. Indeed, the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, to which I spoke just the other day, has welcomed it as “exactly the kind of concrete action we need”.

The association acknowledges that the Bill may not be a silver bullet. However, it would be a positive step, helping to strengthen the noble taxi and private hire vehicle licensing trade and—most important—promote public safety. It would also require licensing authorities in England to report any serious safeguarding or road safety concerns to the licensing authority that issued an individual of concern with a licence, requiring the licensing authorities to consider reviewing an individual’s case.

More broadly, the Government should take urgent action and do more to support the wider taxi sector, which has been decimated by covid-19. In my constituency, many hundreds of people are drivers of black cabs and private hire vehicles. Indeed, in London the taxi fleet is now at its lowest number since 1983, at around 13,400 vehicles, a loss of more than 5,000 since the start of the pandemic. We have seen a similar drop across the whole of England. The DFT’s own figures from July 2021 reveal that the number of licensed vehicles in England has decreased by 15.9% since 2020, to just over a quarter of a million. The Government’s apathy towards taxi and private hire vehicle drivers is undermining drivers’ confidence in the future of the trade and deterring many from returning, or—more important, because we want to tackle climate change—from investing in new low or zero-emission vehicles, because they feel that they are being pushed out and overlooked.

I welcome the Bill. The Government must go further than simply encouraging licensing authorities to adopt the statutory standards. I therefore hope that they will support the Bill and make the changes to the existing legislation that will improve the safety of all users of taxis and private hire vehicles.

12.42 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on the Bill, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on introducing a vital piece of legislation.

I want to talk about the experience that we have had in my borough of Sandwell—which I mentioned in an intervention earlier—and the opportunities that the Bill presents in ensuring that issues such as the scandalous transport contract for children with special educational needs, which was awarded by Sandwell Council to “one of their mates”, never arise again. I hope that the information provided on the database has the scope to ensure that that is included in wider procurement processes for larger transport contracts involving the most vulnerable members of our community.

I must pay tribute to two local councillors, David Fisher and Jay Anandou, who led the charge in exposing that disgraceful scandal, which has put at risk some of

the most vulnerable children in my community. It is timely that my hon. Friend has brought the Bill to the House today. This is exactly the reason we are here: to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. I thank him for that. I think the Bill is vital because, as the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) articulated so well—as have other Members—we have a patchwork licensing system at the moment and probably an antiquated one, which needs reform. This is probably the first step on that journey. We really need a root-and-branch look at how we are licensing and providing authorisation to private hire vehicles. We see how well that can work when it goes right, and we know the important contribution that taxis and private hire vehicles make to our communities and local economies, as many right hon. and hon. Members have said. Private hire vehicles and taxis are at the heart of keeping us moving so it is important that we ensure, not just for our peace of mind but for that of the industry, that they know they are on a level playing field and that there is fairness.

We also need to ensure that firms that are playing by the rules get a fair go, because it is not right that individuals or firms are gaming the system. We heard some examples from my neighbouring city of Wolverhampton about how that can go to the extreme, to the detriment of people who are working hard. As hon. Members said, taxi drivers have been key workers during the pandemic. We know the important contribution that they have made to ensure that we can keep moving, that our frontline healthcare workers can get to where they need to be, that we can keep our most vulnerable members of our community safe, and that people can get the care, shopping, food and resources that they need. It is important to ensure that the system is robust enough and fair enough to put a level playing field in place.

What will be important in the success of the Bill—I say “success” because I am fully confident that my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington will get this through and I really hope so, because it is vital—is its implementation once it is on the statute book. We have to think about that. There has to be, and I am heartened to see, a degree of a duty for local authorities and licensing authorities to co-operate, because that will be the real success of these measures. It will be important to ensure that we have an obligation on local authorities to share that information. I am very pleased to see that a time limit is in place for local authorities to respond to an information request, because it will be really important to ensure that once these issues are flagged, they are dealt with expediently. We have to ensure not only that issues are highlighted, but resolved. That is key, too; it is about ensuring that we can keep our industry moving by resolving these problems and ensuring that we can keep people safe.

This Bill provides many opportunities and it falls into many different areas. It is not just about what we see on the face of the Bill, but so many different things, because we know how far-reaching the private hire industry is in respect of the work it does in our communities. I do not want to repeat what my hon. Friend said, because he introduced the Bill so expertly and with such precision, and I would not do it justice by doing so.

To keep my remarks as succinct as possible to allow colleagues to come in, I will just say that this is a vital Bill. It is one of those that transcends many parts of our

[Shaun Bailey]

communities and I think it is the start of a wider conversation about private hire and taxi firms. From our experience in Sandwell, there is scope for it to be utilised in the procurement processes of local authorities as well. I thank my hon. Friend for introducing the Bill, because this is exactly the sort of legislation needed for my constituents who have had to go through the scandalous situation of the SEND transport contract in Sandwell, and I wish him every success as it passes through the House.

12.48 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): I start by sending my warmest congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on all the work that he has done in introducing the Bill and on being so successful in the private Member's Bill ballot. This issue has perhaps been rather ignored in this place for too long, which is why I am delighted that we are bringing the Bill in today and discussing this really important topic. The Bill represents an important first step in updating what is, unfortunately, outdated legislation in this area.

While licensing authorities are currently required to carry out assessments of whether a driver is fit and proper or of a good character, current laws simply do not go far enough. Technological developments in transport, as well as changes in the wider taxi and private hire vehicle market, have overtaken current laws, meaning they do not always guarantee safety for passengers. Of course, we have fantastic taxi drivers in all our constituencies who wish to do the very best for all of us, for our residents and communities, but we need to make sure that local authorities are able to share concerns, whether about safety, reckless driving or other issues, including drugs,

A worrying case came across my desk two or three weeks ago, when I met a constituent who had contacted me to say that she had video evidence of a couple of taxi drivers using their taxi system to distribute drugs in my constituency, which is absolutely disgraceful—I am told this has been an issue among a minority of taxi drivers for far too long. I provided this video evidence to West Yorkshire police, which I hope it picks up with Bradford Council.

This Bill will help us to provide safety in all our constituencies. It is vital that we protect the taxi drivers who are doing a brilliant job, tackle the minority who are causing an issue and provide safety to our constituents. Not only will this Bill protect passengers but it will aid drivers of taxis and private hire vehicles by guaranteeing high standards to any would-be passengers. Enabling the Department for Transport to provide an information database will streamline the process and ensure there is no passing by of the rules. Likewise, the statutory requirements for licensing authorities to have regard to the database will make sure these standards are kept up.

As has been said, we currently have a patchwork system. It cannot be right that a licensing authority in the Bradford district I sit within is very different from the one in North Yorkshire, which is only two miles away. It is inconceivable that someone could lose their licence for reckless behaviour and be able to get a new licence from a different licensing authority two miles

away. This Bill, presented very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington, will make a huge effort on taking these steps.

I very much welcome this Bill. I would like to see it progress as quickly as possible, because when I hear harrowing stories from constituents who are still worried about safety in the taxi system, and when drugs are being distributed by a minority of individuals, it is right that we drive through legislation that cleans up the system. I am determined to support the Bill's progress in every way I can.

12.53 pm

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on his sensible Bill and on his excellent opening speech setting out why it is so important.

I take this opportunity to thank Mike Smith, an officer at Guildford Borough Council who is a senior specialist in licensing and community safety. He wrote to me on this issue last year, and I sought a ministerial response for him. Such was his concern that he wrote to me again in July 2021:

"As you will be aware, Guildford is an historic university town and principal regional destination for the day and night-time economy. The Council along with other stakeholders works hard to ensure public safety through initiatives such as the Safer Guildford Partnership and is the only town in Surrey to hold the prestigious purple flag award. However, despite this work the Council's efforts to promote safety within the taxi and private hire trade, and ultimately the safety of our residents, remains undermined by the significant number of drivers and vehicles licensed elsewhere... I therefore cannot stress enough that it is only a matter of time until further but entirely preventable tragedies and scandals which have beset other licensing authorities recently are likely to occur due to the failure to update legislation in the taxi and private hire sector."

I passed on to him a ministerial reply, dated August. I am not sure that many of my constituents will be tuned into proceedings in the Chamber, but I hope that any who are will be heartened to hear that their local authority has been assiduous in raising the issue through their Member of Parliament, and that their safety is of paramount importance.

I want to give my constituents some other assurances too, such as that a number of licensing authorities across England have adopted conditions of fitness that are identical or similar to those imposed in London owing to London having a longer history of taxi licensing. Such checks can involve a criminal record check, a comprehensive topographic examination, a medical, a driving test and a check on the financial standing of prospective proprietors. There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to carry out a criminal record check before issuing a licence to a taxi driver, but there is a requirement to ensure that the applicant is a fit and proper person.

I also assure my constituents that, locally, Guildford Borough Council recently updated its taxi and private hire licensing policy to require all vehicles licensed by it to be equipped with CCTV. The council considers that an important measure to deter and detect crimes against passengers and drivers, and to help to promote public confidence in the taxi service. That is particularly relevant for female passengers following the tragic death of Sarah Everard.

The Bill's explanatory notes mention that any concerns raised

“must be sufficiently credible and serious”

for a licence to be considered for suspension. I have one question: how do we protect drivers from vexatious campaigns against their characters? Can the Minister give any reassurances about how we might go about that? It is excellent that a national database is part of the Bill, but we must be mindful of the fact that taxi drivers may sometimes be subject to vexatious campaigns within their communities, so we must protect them against that. Otherwise, it is an excellent Bill that I am happy to support.

12.57 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): It is a pleasure to make some brief comments in support of this excellent Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) and acknowledge the huge input from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and, of course, from past and present Ministers in the Department for Transport.

Between 1972 and 2020, the number of taxis in England and Wales outside of London increased by 334%. In addition to that significant growth in size, the industry has had to adapt to evolving technologies and changes in lifestyle patterns. This legislation is important to ensure the continued safety of passengers. Local authorities, private hire companies and drivers want those using taxis to be safe, but unfortunately there is a small minority of individuals who pose a threat to passengers. We have a responsibility to ensure that dangerous individuals are not permitted to carry passengers at any time.

As we have heard, many local authorities across the United Kingdom already report information to the national register of taxi and private hire licence revocations and refusals—NR3—to help to achieve that, but that is on a voluntary rather than statutory basis. The Bill will help to ensure that local authorities in England are mandated to share such information. It will also place a requirement on licensing authorities to report serious safeguarding or road safety concerns about a taxi or private hire vehicle driver working in its area to the licensing authority that granted a licence to the driver concerned.

The Bill will also play an important role in addressing discrimination in the industry. Again, such practices represent a mercifully small minority, but prosecution data from the Department for Transport last year indicates that it is still a problem. There are instances where individuals using a wheelchair or those with an assistance dog have been refused access or charged additional fees by some drivers. There can be no justification for this. I am glad that the provisions in the Bill should, if victims bravely report discrimination, ensure that such practices cannot continue.

Let me also say how glad I am that provisions in the Bill will help to address road safety issues. Again, the vast majority of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers are experienced and responsible. For those who are not, it is right that additional information be recorded.

As the Bill progresses, I hope that consideration will be given to liaising with the devolved Administrations to make these mandatory measures apply UK-wide.

That is particularly important in areas such as mine, where many taxi drivers work across both north Wales and the north-west of England. In preparing for my speech today and looking at the legislation, I have been in touch with my local authority of Denbighshire to determine whether it is entering data into the existing database and consulting it.

Officers in local authorities already undertake a series of functions, and I recognise that the provision in this Bill would be an additional, albeit relatively small, duty. It is essential that the data-sharing platform is easy to operate and permits simple communication between licensing authorities. I am aware that the Local Government Association has overseen the development of the NR3 database, which is hosted by the National Anti Fraud Network via Tameside Council, which it would presumably make sense to formalise for this purpose. I am also aware of minor amendments to the Bill that the LGA has proposed, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington will consider as the Bill progresses through the House.

Over the pandemic of the past 18 months, taxi drivers have provided an essential service to people throughout our country. The Bill will assist in further boosting public confidence in taxi services by upholding standards of safety and behaviour. It will assist local authorities in their duty of care towards citizens and protect members of the public from the small number of dangerous and discriminatory drivers who operate.

1.2 pm

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for bringing this private Member's Bill to the House and for his speech, which laid out the situation and the proposals clearly and incisively.

We have already touched on the second part of the Bill, which would require licensing authorities in England to report certain safeguarding or road safety concerns about a taxi or private hire vehicle driver working in their area to the licensing authority in England, Wales or Scotland that granted a licence to that driver. The Bill would then require licensing authorities in England to have regard to any such reports received and to consider whether the relevant taxi or private hire vehicle driver should remain licensed.

As a former member of the licensing committee of Powys County Council, I know how important this issue is. Even without this proposal in place, the licensing committee would regularly consider the suitability of certain drivers. As outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies)—with whom I share representation in the Denbighshire County Council area—it is particularly important that we also align these proposals with Welsh authorities. I am therefore pleased to understand from the Bill that the information provided by England will be available in Wales; however we need to reciprocate the process. I know my hon. Friends the Members for Vale of Clwyd and for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) and others in Wales will be taking that up with the relevant authorities in the Welsh Government.

I would also like to echo the point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) about the importance of safeguarding everybody in the Bill, but particularly children and

[Simon Baynes]

young people with special educational needs. My constituency of Clwyd South is no different from anywhere else. There are some fantastic special schools, and taking the young people to those schools is a desperately important part of the taxi service that is provided to people.

I also wish to touch on the existing legislation allowing a person who is granted a taxi or private hire vehicle driver's licence by any licensing authority in England and Wales to be able to take pre-booked journeys anywhere in Great Britain. This has been referred to by several Members and is closely allied to the point that I have just been making about the importance of a Union-wide approach. The point was made eloquently in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams).

Finally, the Bill would require the home licensing authority to consider whether to suspend or revoke a driver's licence as a result of any such information that is reported to them by another licensing authority. That will ensure that the home licensing authority, which is solely able to suspend or revoke that driver's licence, is aware of information that suggests that the driver poses a public safety risk. That is the key point about it. That will help existing taxi and private hire vehicle licensees by eliminating those who bring the profession into disrepute.

Like other Members, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the drivers of taxis and private hire vehicles in my constituency who have suffered during covid from the lack of custom, but who have been a lifeline for many families and especially disabled and elderly people who have needed their help to attend medical appointments or other vital commitments. It is sometimes easy to forget that the taxi drivers provide an incredibly important public service. They may be privately run, but they provide an incredibly important public service, particularly to the more vulnerable in our society.

In conclusion, I fully back this Bill and its intention to safeguard consumers and motorists by putting into statute the requirement that I have mentioned. I warmly congratulate again my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on bringing this very worthy private Member's Bill to the House.

1.7 pm

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for bringing forward this incredibly important Bill. As quite a few colleagues have said, when we use taxis generally, the taxi driver, as a professional person, is potentially in a position of power. We get into their car. Quite often, they pick us up from our homes, our work or places that we are visiting. We need to make sure that those professional taxi drivers are protected from that very small minority who may not be acting professionally. We need to remember that taxi drivers are vital in our communities and in our workplaces, and also vital for our visitor economy. Quite often, they are the first person somebody will meet if they are leaving a train station or a bus station or when they are going to visit somewhere.

Taxi drivers are a mine of information. With my background in education and as someone who was young once, I know that we might use taxis when we are

not in our best frame of mind—if I can put it like that. We might have been to various hostelrys as young people and it is then that we put our trust in taxi drivers. As students, young women will pile into a taxi together and there will always be one friend left at the end of that taxi journey. They need to feel confident that the taxi driver has at heart not only their best interests, but their safety. It is not only the safety of the vehicles and the safety of the driving that is important, but the safeguarding of the individual as well.

I have had reasons to use taxis in recent years. I was not visiting hostelrys, because those days are over, but receiving treatment for an eye condition. When people need a taxi driver to take them to hospital or to pick them up after treatment, they are in a very vulnerable situation. They might not be steady on their feet or able to see, or, as has been pointed out, they might not have the best mobility. This is a vital piece of legislation and I wholeheartedly support it.

1.9 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici), and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) as well as the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) who brought this Bill's spiritual predecessor to the House. I share his frustration this occasion did not happen sooner. I am a former member of the licensing authority on Salford City Council, and we often benefited from the voluntary sharing of information. I particularly pay tribute to the council chair, a great Labour councillor called John Warmisham, with whom, despite our varied politics, I usually found myself in full agreement—that picks up on the point made earlier, that this issue should be supported across the House.

At its heart, this Bill is about confidence. It is about enabling people to feel confident when getting into a private hire cab, and about them knowing that the person who has that licence is a fit and proper person and has not somehow gamed the system. I alluded earlier to the fact that just over the border into Rossendale a slightly different standard was applied to the distribution of taxi licences, and someone would be more likely to find a Rossendale-licensed cab in my Rochdale-based constituency than they would one from our own licensing authority. The Bill is also about confidence for taxi drivers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington pointed out.

Currently, the bad acts of one driver can impact on others—I think of a particularly cogent example in Rochdale. We are all aware of the heart-breaking events of the Rochdale grooming scandal, and many of the people involved in that were taxi drivers. We then had a situation where certain taxi providers in Rochdale were offering white drivers to people as a matter of confidence. That is a shameful situation in which to find ourselves. It besmirches the reputation of honest ethnic minority drivers—obviously it is a very diverse community—and it led to difficulties in an already tense situation in a very diverse town. It also created a situation where people did not feel comfortable using their local provider, which is bad for the local economy.

We know from the pandemic that taxi drivers have been an essential part of keeping this country going. They have been key workers in a very real sense. I do not

drive my own private car because I live in the city centre and it is not practical for me to do so, and I often rely on taxis to get me from A to B. I like to get into a taxi knowing that the driver is a decent person, and I am grateful for the extra effort put into keeping me safe from covid, in addition to all the other things that those drivers have done, sometimes at their own expense. Many are now multi-apping and working across different platforms, to try to keep the wolf from the door. I want them to understand that by introducing this Bill we are trying to make their lives easier. This is not about casting aspersions on the quality of taxi drivers; this is about ensuring that the few who choose to game the system and bend the rules are not allowed to carry on. I fully commend the Bill. I am extremely glad that it is going through the House, and I hope we will press forward with it today. It has my absolute support.

1.12 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to support my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson). He introduced the Bill with aplomb, and went into all the technical details, saving me a good 10 minutes' worth of my speech. I thank him very much indeed.

This important, timely and overdue Bill seems to have cross-party support. I echo the concerns raised by my constituency neighbours and colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes) and for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies). Perhaps on Report—it seems that the Bill will go through at pace—those on the Front Bench could consider whether they could reach out to the devolved Administrations, especially the Welsh Government, and see whether the database could be made cross-border, either through a legislative consent motion or some other form. That seems to have consensus in this House, and I implore Labour Members, if they have the phone number of any Welsh Labour Government Ministers, to join that lobbying charge. In Montgomeryshire we look east and west and, like other cross-border constituencies and counties, someone is more likely to receive a taxi from Birmingham than from Cardiff. That is just the nature of the economy, the traffic flow, and the public services.

I welcome the Government's recent introduction of new robust standards for taxis. That was on an England and Wales basis, and it meant that disclosure and barring service criminal record checks were recommended every six months. I understand that the constitutional settlement of this place means we get these questions of who is responsible for what and times when this House introduces English and Welsh legislation and we question whether it is England-only. The Bill must apply to Wales; otherwise, we will have the gaps that we have been talking about.

I am conscious of the time and that there are other private Members' Bills to consider, but I echo the supporting evidence that I have read from stakeholders. It is great that my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington and other Members went out there and really engaged, and the LGA made some sensible suggestions. I have done my own stakeholder engagement: Elwyn the Taxi—for the uninitiated, he is the Uber of Llanfair Caereinion—takes not just me but my whole community from A to B. In rural areas, we rely on our taxi network, which is made up of small businesses. He has assured me over and over

again that because of a lack of data sharing, we see bad actors in this space, and people can abuse the system by going from one licensing area to another. The database would therefore be a great step forward. I implore the Minister—it is great to see him in his place—to reach out to colleagues in the devolved Administrations, and I will implore anyone to see what we can do on Report to make the Bill apply to England and Wales at the very least.

1.16 pm

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): I will be brief, because I know that other hon. Members want to come in. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for this excellent Bill and to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for all his work on it in the past. The Bill takes a crucial function and makes it universal so that if someone has been disqualified from driving a licensed hire vehicle, that passes on across all local authorities. It also means that people have will confidence in the private licensed hire vehicles they are getting into, which is a key point.

I was privileged to attend the parliamentary taxi awards arranged by the hon. Member for Cambridge, through which we heard incredible stories of the role that these vehicles and their drivers play in keeping our communities together. They have done remarkable things all through covid, from picking people up from hospital to picking up their prescriptions and carrying their bags to the door. It would be remiss not to name Lee Smith from 24/7 Barrow who won the award for Barrow and Furness. Licensed hire vehicle drivers are a key part of our community, and it is essential that we do what we can to strengthen them and give the community faith in them. The Bill goes a long way towards that.

I am delighted that the LGA, with which I have worked extensively, is backing the Bill. I declare an interest: before coming to this place I worked in data sharing in fraud and financial crime, so I have some experience in the area. I have some recommendations, the wonkery of which I will not go into right now, but I will happily meet the Minister on issues such as data matching and speed of processes that we could look at and strengthen—I recognise that he may not want to meet me.

Finally, on the system's governance framework, we need to be assured that if mistakes are made—hopefully they will not be—there is some comeback so that if someone is impugned unfairly on the database, they can seek redress. Similarly, if bad data is put on to the database, the licensing authority who did so should have a penalty put against it. I fully support the Bill and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington for bringing it to the House.

1.19 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on this vital Bill. As a former district councillor for Rother District Council—part of the constituency that I now represent as MP—I welcome this Bill, which will improve safeguarding and data sharing across local authorities' licensing authorities. This is essential. I am not going to go through what the Bill does, but there are two points that I would like to highlight to the Minister.

[Sally-Ann Hart]

The Bill makes enormous improvements to passenger safety, but it does not go far enough. When I was a district councillor sitting on a licensing panel hearing, there was a situation where the taxi driver had not informed the licensing authority, as he should have done, that he had been arrested for stealing tens of thousands of pounds from an elderly customer. He was later convicted. I understand that the police are not under a duty to—or cannot—inform the licensing authority because of issues with data sharing, ongoing investigation, innocent until proven guilty and so on, but I would like the Minister to think about how we can improve this kind of data sharing even further.

The question to ask, of course, is whether we would allow our son or daughter, spouse or partner, mother or father, grandson or granddaughter, or any other person for whom we care, to get into a vehicle with this person alone. The driver I mentioned had been driving around other elderly and vulnerable people, who might have been at risk from him. Data on taxi drivers should be shared between agencies, including the police, to ensure the highest possible standards of safeguard.

I want briefly to highlight Rother District Council's innovative penalty points scheme, which was introduced by the excellent Andy Eaton, a licensing and litigation lawyer and deputy legal services manager for both Wealden District Council and Rother District Council. He is also a fellow of the Institute of Licensing for his outstanding contribution to the field of licensing.

The aim of the penalty points scheme is to work in conjunction with other enforcement options. The purpose of the scheme is to record offences, and to act as a record of a taxi driver's behaviour and conduct so that the licensing authority can find out whether the applicant is a fit and proper person. The primary objectives of the scheme are to improve levels of compliance, improve standards and ensure the safety and protection of the travelling public. The scheme operates without prejudice to the council's ability to take other action that it is entitled to take under legislation, byelaws and regulation. It is an excellent scheme that other licensing authorities could use to improve the safeguarding and protection of passengers.

I understand that the Local Government Association welcomes the Bill. I absolutely support it and commend it to the House.

1.22 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on his success in the private Members' Bill ballot, on bringing the attention of the House to the important issue of unsuitable people obtaining licences to drive taxis and private hire vehicles, and on the excellent way in which he introduced the debate. Let me point out to some Members that my hon. Friend is in charge of this legislation. Private Members' Bills are a wonderful thing that we have in this House; I was fortunate to get one through myself a number of years ago. It means that many of the questions raised are actually for my hon. Friend, but I will try to answer some of them.

There have been some excellent speeches in this debate, including 11 interventions, which shows just how important the subject is. There was a speech from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who is not only supportive, but who has driven this debate previously as best he can to try to get to a resolution. He also kindly mentioned the hard work of previous incumbents in the Department for Transport ministerial team, including my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani).

We heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Workington (Mark Jenkinson), for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), for Keighley (Robbie Moore), for Guildford (Angela Richardson), for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies), for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes), for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici), for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) and for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), who mentioned Elwyn the Taxi.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell)—I am always happy to meet him, but he might want to go first through my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington; perhaps if that was done over a beverage in Strangers, I could join them—as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart), and indeed the hon. Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry), who made some important and valid points, which I am sure we will take on board in due time. I wanted to say one thing to him, though: he called for “proper legislation”, but as someone who got a private Member's Bill on to the statute book—a journey that I hope this Bill will make—I know that private Members' Bills are important and proper legislation.

The Government attach the utmost priority to passenger safety in taxis and PHVs, so we are happy to support the Bill. The licensing process gives the travelling public confidence that the vehicles in which they travel are safe and that drivers have had proper background checks. We have had a really positive debate on that basis.

As we have heard, taxis and PHVs provide valuable services, particularly to vulnerable and disabled people and those without personal transport, and do so at times when there are fewer alternative public transport options. The vast majority of taxi and PHV licensed drivers are entirely trustworthy, of good character and a credit to their trade, but the system must not allow those who are not to obtain or keep a licence.

Last year, the Government published the statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards, outlining how licensing authorities should carry out their licensing function to safeguard children and vulnerable adults, although the recommendations will obviously benefit all passengers. The Department is working with licensing authorities to monitor implementation and good progress is being made.

I could say a whole host of things, but my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington covered the subject in great detail. I am told that the database about which many Members were talking is already actively engaged in Wales and, to a lesser extent, Scotland. The points made by my Welsh colleagues are well founded, and I shall make sure that they are reflected on in the proper fashion.

There is no denying that the proposals in the Bill will impose additional responsibilities on licensing authorities.

Although I would prefer that such burdens were not needed, they are small compared with the benefits they will provide.

The Bill does not seek to address every issue that has been raised today. Members have expressed concerns about whether allegations or vexatious campaigns against drivers could lead to a driver losing his licence unduly; if I may, I will reply to those concerns in writing, through my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington, to give Members the assurance they seek.

I assure the House that the Government remain committed to introducing legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to introduce national minimum standards, national enforcement powers and a national licensing database. That database will build on the proposals in the Bill by extending the database to include the details of all driver, vehicle and PHV operator licences, as well as information on refusals, revocations and suspensions.

We support the Bill and wish it well in Committee and as it travels through the House. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington.

1.27 pm

Peter Gibson: With the leave of the House, may I thank the Minister for his support? I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson), the hon. Member for Ilford South (Sam Tarry) and my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), for Keighley (Robbie Moore), for Guildford (Angela Richardson), for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies), for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes), for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici), for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell) and for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) for their valuable contributions to the debate.

There is clearly cross-party agreement on this issue, for which I am grateful. All our constituents will be pleased to see improvements in the safeguarding of taxi licensing. I put on the record my thanks to the hard-working team at the Department for Transport for their support.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Cultural Objects (Protection from Seizure) Bill

Second reading

1.28 pm

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

May I make a declaration of interest? Many years ago, I qualified as a Blue Badge guide, which entitled me to guide in, among other important historic places, the British Museum. I pay tribute to all the Blue Badge guides who do such fabulous work in explaining our culture and history and, indeed, the cultures and histories of other countries, to those who visit the United Kingdom. This Bill seeks to amend part 6 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007, which provides immunity from seizure for cultural objects on loan from abroad in temporary exhibitions in public museums and galleries in the United Kingdom. The 2007 Act was introduced by the Ministry of Justice and part 6 was given over to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to introduce immunity from seizure. Under section 134 of the Act, cultural objects on loan from abroad to feature in exhibitions in the UK museums and galleries approved under the Act are protected from court-ordered seizures for a period of 12 months from the date the object enters the UK. The legislation was in response to concerns from a number of countries that their art treasures were in danger of being seized while abroad in response to claims by third parties that they were owed money by the foreign state or because of territorial disputes between countries.

Let me add some context to those concerns. In the early 1990s, Noga, a Swiss trading company, claimed that it was owed a substantial sum by the Russian Government and embarked on a series of high-profile claims against Russian property, including the attempted seizure of state-owned assets. In 2005, Noga turned its attention to art when it attempted to seize 54 French impressionist paintings from Russian museums that were on their way back to Russia and travelling through Switzerland. After some delay and concern for the care of the paintings, they were released, but the alarm bells had begun ringing. Understandably, Russia became increasingly nervous about sending its art treasures abroad and announced that it would not lend any works of art to any country without a guarantee of immunity from seizure. That unhelpfully coincided with the planned "From Russia" exhibition at the Royal Academy here in London, which was scheduled to open in January 2008—thankfully, those loans were secured when part 6 of the 2007 Act came into force.

Section 134 provides that an object will be protected against seizure if it is normally kept outside the UK, it is not owned by a UK resident and it is brought here for temporary public display by a museum or gallery approved under section 136 of the Act. For an object to be protected, the borrowing museum must also have complied with regulations made under the Act which relate to publishing information about the loan in advance of it coming into the country. The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for approving institutions in England, and the devolved Administrations have similar powers for other parts of the UK. To gain approval under the Act, institutions

[Mel Stride]

must demonstrate that their procedures for establishing the provenance and ownership of objects are of a high standard. In 2007, it was considered that 12 months was an adequate period of time to allow objects to arrive in the UK and to be returned following their inclusion in a temporary exhibition. Section 134(4) provides therefore that the protection continues

“for not more than 12 months beginning with the day when the object enters the United Kingdom.”

The only exception to that, and when a period can be extended, is when an object suffers damage and repair work is required.

The legislation has been effective over the years and has enabled many exhibitions to be enriched by loans that the public might not otherwise have been able to see. There are now 38 institutions across the UK that have been approved for immunity from seizure and where objects have benefited from protection. In 2020, 14 institutions hosted exhibitions that included objects protected under the 2007 Act. This protection means that international museums are confident in lending some of their most significant cultural objects to appear in these exhibitions for the UK public to enjoy. Some examples of objects that have benefited from protection include the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, on loan from China to the National Museums Liverpool in 2018, and the baby mummified mammoth Lyuba, which was borrowed by the Natural History Museum from Russia in 2014. Indeed, the Egyptian Government made it clear that immunity from seizure was a requirement for the loan of its Tutankhamun treasures to the Saatchi Gallery in 2019 for the exhibition “Tutankhamun”, which was seen by no fewer than 580,000 people.

With their long experience in managing exhibitions, museum staff are incredibly versatile and adept at dealing with unexpected problems, including transportation delays. Thankfully, such delays are uncommon and can normally be managed to the satisfaction of the lending museum, but problems do occur. For example, we all remember the disruption to air travel caused by the Icelandic volcano that erupted in 2010.

Museums rely on international exhibitions as a major part of their income. When museums were required to close last year, many international loans were being held in the UK, having appeared in exhibitions. The restrictions and difficulties of international travel that we have all faced since last March meant that even where exhibitions had concluded, it was not always possible to return loaned items within the 12-month time limit.

The Bill will allow the period of protection to be extended beyond 12 months at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for institutions in England, and of the relevant authorities for the devolved nations. That will ensure that this protection remains fit for purpose and can adequately respond to unforeseen circumstances and increase confidence in the UK’s system for those that generously share their cultural objects with UK audiences.

The new power to extend would apply following an application from a UK museum or gallery, and extensions would be granted for a further three months initially, with a possibility of a further extension if considered necessary. The circumstances under which an extension

may be considered will be set out in guidance to be developed in discussion with the devolved nations. The measure is strongly supported by the museums sector and Arts Council England, the Government’s development agency for museums.

I hope that Members will agree that this is a worthy measure that will benefit our museums and galleries and ensure that the very best cultural objects from around the world can continue to be seen by a UK audience, safe in the knowledge that, should there be delays in returning works, those objects may continue to be protected from seizure while they remain in the UK. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.36 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I commend the right hon. Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) for bringing this Bill to the House. It might be easy to think of it as somewhat narrow and potentially even niche, but we often underestimate the role that public collections in this country play in communicating our history, our story and our identity to the world, and, similarly, the great role that is played, as the right hon. Member well described just a moment ago, by those same institutions receiving works from abroad so that interchange of histories and stories can occur and they can be told to the British public. What might seem a slightly technical point about protecting those institutions’ ability to do that actually underpins a huge and important role that we as a nation play in the world. I can see the Minister nodding, and I hope that that view is shared broadly across the House.

I have experienced several of the shows and exhibitions that the right hon. Member for Central Devon just spoke of; one in particular was part of a very important year in the life of the city of Liverpool. Being able to receive important, globally relevant works of art from around the world allows cities and institutions in our country to do their job. That has a huge impact not just on tourism and the visitor economy, but on the learning that younger generations are able to participate in. Frankly, what might appear to be a narrow and niche interest is actually profoundly important, not just for institutions such as the British Museum but for galleries and art institutions up and down the country.

With that said, I have just a couple of points to make about the Bill, and some questions that I hope the Minister or the right hon. Member for Central Devon may be able to cover. The Bill takes particular account of what has been a very bumpy year for cultural institutions. The Minister and I have exchanged remarks on many occasions across the Dispatch Boxes about the position that cultural institutions have been in. With some reservations about the scope and the manner in which the Government’s programmes of support through the pandemic have reached cultural institutions, the Opposition share the Government’s view that the Government ought to respond to what has been a very difficult year with support and help to facilitate the things that institutions need to get them through this difficult time. The Bill is one of those things.

The covid pandemic has demonstrated to me how important arts and culture are in this country. It used to be an interesting thought experiment to imagine what would happen if we shut every museum and gallery up and down the land. We did not have a thought experiment in the past 18 months; we had it in reality, and it was

horrendous. The Bill shows that if we can make some small changes and facilitations to make things easier, we can see better continuity of our culture, and I think that is a good thing. As I said, it is important, yes for tourism and the visitor economy, but almost more important for learning. Our young people deserve access to the best museums and galleries that our country has to offer, and brilliant works of art from all around the world. People of all ages deserve the comfort and calming influence in their life of cultural institutions. We know about the positive impact that they have on mental health. In order to do that, we have to ensure that the UK protects its leading role. It has an incredible place in the world in demonstrating the very best of global culture. We need to make sure that, despite any turbulence now or in the future, those institutions will still be able to do that.

We have highly experienced and expert curators in the UK. Perhaps in this place we do not recognise enough the diplomatic role that those curators play. As a former chair of the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art, I have seen at first hand the work that the UK's brilliant curators do. They reach out to their equivalent institutions around the world and facilitate the exchange of knowledge, works and expertise. Often, it is those informal connections—institution to institution—that, when the world is a turbulent and difficult place, can really make a difference.

I remind Members of our recent debates on Afghanistan. Hon. Members from all parties mentioned the work of the British Council. I think of the terrible events in Syria and other parts of the middle east and the work that the British artistic and cultural institutions did to try to protect cultural assets and the important heritage of the world. Whichever country you are from, that interchange is extraordinarily important. I hope that, if that is sometimes an issue that does not get the political attention that it deserves, we are going some small way to rectify that this afternoon.

I have a few quick questions for the Minister and the Member promoting the Bill. The Bill provides some powers for the devolved institutions. It is important that in this place we have cognisance of liaison with the devolved institutions. I would be grateful if the Minister said on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Transport how she believes that that will happen now and in the future.

Clearly, covid is not the only global event that could cause interruption to the transport of cultural objects. We know that previous incidents have caused international transport to grind to a halt, which is not much fun for anybody. How does DCMS plan to liaise with the Department for Transport and other relevant Departments, including the Home Office, to make sure we have a smooth transition? Finally, what steps do the Government see themselves taking to prevent future disruption and to make sure that any disruption is handled as smoothly as possible?

I would be grateful to the Minister for those answers. I thank the right hon. Member for Central Devon for introducing this Bill, which hopefully will go some small way towards making sure we keep our place as one of the most important nations in the world for preserving our culture, history and heritage.

1.45 pm

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): In rising to support the Bill, I declare my interest, which predates my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. For a number of years, I was a trustee and director of a small but wonderful local museum, the Helena Thompson Museum. It probably will not be affected by this Bill, which seeks to protect international artefacts alone, but it wonderfully tells the story of Workington and the surrounding area.

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted almost every area of our lives, and it is entirely appropriate that we take time to revisit existing legislation to take account of such unprecedented events that have a major impact on international air travel, which has created significant problems for loaned objects that are due to be returned to their country of origin and have been unexpectedly delayed here.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) referenced the example of the Icelandic volcano—I will not try to repeat its name—in 2010, when 100,000 flights were grounded, causing major international air travel disruption and posing a risk to the timely return of cultural objects.

I have studied the Bill closely, and it addresses the issue clearly and comprehensively. In giving my support, I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing it to the House. As he has outlined, the Bill amends the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 to allow the period of protection from seizure and forfeiture to be extended from 12 months to a further period of up to three months. I hope Members on both sides of the House can see how this puts museums and international lenders on a much firmer legal footing, creating the higher level of certainty that these international exchanges require and implementing the safeguards they need. I am sure the custodians of these treasures will breathe a collective sigh of relief as the Bill progresses.

Although the risk of seizure is extremely small, a number of countries place great emphasis on having this added layer of protection. Providing this greater degree of certainty on the protection available, with the knowledge that it can be extended at the discretion of the relevant authority, will increase the confidence of owners of loaned objects, providing a boost to our exhibition sector, which after the past 18 months certainly needs it. Providing a power to extend the period of protection helps to mitigate the impact of major unforeseen disruptions, and not just to international travel, which might otherwise leave these objects at risk.

The extension is fully justified as a contingency to mitigate unexpected and unprecedented events beyond anyone's control. I commend my right hon. Friend for raising this important issue and for the fervour with which he does so. The Bill has my full support.

1.48 pm

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) on introducing this Bill. He made an excellent, informative speech, in which I learned some new things.

My constituents in Guildford, Cranleigh and our villages take an enormous interest in cultural issues. We have the wonderful Watts Gallery and, of course, our

[Angela Richardson]

much-loved museum. Any measure that militates against collections not coming to this country is very worth while, so I am happy to support the Bill today.

My right hon. Friend referred to unforeseen environmental factors such as the eruption of the Icelandic volcano. I was in New Zealand visiting my family when that volcano erupted, and although I am not a cultural object, I am sure that my parents would have liked to seize me and keep me in New Zealand. My onward flight from Singapore back to the UK was grounded for 11 days. Such disruptions do come along, and of course we have had this horrible time of covid, which has caused much disruption to international travel.

I hope that, as well as looking at this Bill, the Government are looking at and potentially auditing any other bits of legislation whereby a significant disruption to international travel could have unintended consequences, which may also need to be amended. This, however, is a sensible Bill and anything that gives confidence is important. I hope that the Bill moves through the House swiftly and I am very happy to support it.

1.50 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Museums and galleries play an important role in our national life, our heritage, our education and our understanding of who we are and of the world around us, but also, of course, in our enjoyment. That is true of world-renowned venues such as the National Gallery and the British Museum, and also of smaller ones such as the White House Cone Museum of Glass, which is opening in my constituency next summer, and the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, which I understand is now the most popular museum worldwide on TikTok. I think that “1920s Grandpa” was viewed about two and a half million times during the lockdown.

The extensive collections in these museums are supplemented by temporary exhibitions which are enriched by the ability to borrow culturally valuable, significant and relevant pieces from around the world. Clearly most of those exhibitions will be comfortably covered by the 12-month period in the existing legislation, but, as we have seen over the past 18 months, the unexpected happens rather more frequently than people might imagine, whether it is a global pandemic or a catastrophic environmental issue. Events that can stop international travel can, perhaps, disrupt, delay or postpone those exhibitions.

Our country and our cultural life would be very much poorer without access to displays and exhibits that is made possible by the protections in existing legislation. If by allowing for those protections to be extended by a further three months we can secure the ability of our world-class museums and galleries to borrow these exhibits from their partners around the world, that has to be an extremely important thing for us to strive to do. I therefore congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) on an important Bill, which I look forward to supporting during its passage through the House, and wish him all luck.

1.53 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) on a Bill that will enhance our cultural offering.

I am fortunate enough to represent a constituency that contains the Ilkley Toy Museum alongside the Brontë Parsonage Museum, and I think that the ability to bring to such places small exhibitions with the potential to feature objects of huge importance from other parts of the world is incredibly important.

One of the key things that have been highlighted in this debate is the flexibility that the Bill brings in being able to provide an extended three-month period for unforeseen circumstances. I stress the flexibility that the Bill offers with the power for the Secretary of State or the equivalent in the devolved Administrations to consider the period of protection on a case-by-case basis. Flexibility when dealing with objects coming from across the world and being able to transfer them between one museum setting and another is incredibly important.

The current 12-month period of protection typically provides a sufficient length of protection for popular museum exhibitions to take place before an object must be returned, but we have noted that issues such as the pandemic have caused many problems with getting artefacts transferred between one country and another. We can have unforeseen circumstances, such as the eruption of the volcano in Iceland. By extending the period of protection from seizure, owners of these artefacts will have much more confidence in lending them to UK museums. This Bill will provide a much-needed boost to the United Kingdom’s exhibitions sector. The UK is home to a wealth of museums benefiting from the ability to transfer artefacts from one lender to another across the globe. I very much welcome the Bill and will be wholeheartedly supporting its passage through this place.

1.56 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) and to stand in support of this Bill, brought forward by my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride). This is a practical Bill that serves a straightforward purpose, but it will I hope have positive consequences for many people across the country. The closure of so many cultural venues over the past 18 months has highlighted to us all how lucky we are in this country to have access to some of the world’s greatest museums and exhibitions. Thanks to our world-leading vaccination programme, we are now at the point where these places are once again welcoming visitors, and I am keen to provide support in any way that I can, including via this Bill.

While our national institutions own many of the artefacts that are displayed or restored, many pieces here for a short time travel from overseas. The provisions within the Bill, as we have heard, will reassure the lenders of those objects and in turn safeguard the ongoing exchange of cultural artefacts between the UK and partners throughout the world.

Under section 134 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007, cultural objects on loan from abroad to British museums and galleries approved under the Act are protected from seizure or forfeiture for 12 months from the date the object enters the UK. Disruptions caused to international travel during the pandemic created problems whereby loaned objects due to be returned to their country of origin were unexpectedly delayed in Britain. These objects were left at risk of

being unprotected, should the 12-month limit have expired before the borrowing institutions could arrange for their return. Similarly, we have seen environmental factors such as the eruption of unpronounceable volcanos.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): It is pronounced Eyjafjallajökull.

Dr Davies: Very well done. *Hansard* now needs to type it up, of course. Such environmental factors can pose a risk to the timely return of cultural objects on loan from international lenders. While the risk of seizure and forfeiture is extremely small, a number of countries place significant importance on the security of such protection. The Bill will provide greater certainty over the protection available, with the knowledge that it can be extended by up to three months at the discretion of the relevant Minister. It is hoped that, as a result, the confidence of owners of loaned objects will increase, providing a boost to the UK's exhibitions sector and ensuring that this country continues to be recognised as a leader for the display of culturally significant artefacts. I support the Bill.

1.59 pm

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage):

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) not only for introducing this important Bill, but, with his Blue Badge guide status, for guiding us through it so beautifully.

As we have heard, the protection afforded to cultural objects on loan to our UK museums and galleries from abroad is of huge significance to many international lenders. Understandably, the owners of such objects expect and require a degree of certainty that, when agreeing to lend their most precious national treasures, they will be safeguarded from seizure or forfeiture while they remain in the UK. We have heard from Members across the House why this is so important—this is the lifeblood of some of our great cultural institutions—and why it really matters.

Immunity from seizure has provided that certainty since the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act was passed in 2007 and the first of our museums and galleries began to apply for and achieve approved immunity from seizure status. As a result, we have seen a great number of remarkable exhibitions featuring internationally owned objects that have benefited from immunity from seizure. Between 2015 and 2020, over 200 separate exhibitions in the UK benefited from this coverage, with hundreds of fascinating objects protected by the Act while on display for the public to enjoy and learn from.

The loan of objects allows museums across the UK and the world to stage exhibitions and displays that would not otherwise be possible and enables them to further contextualise their collections and attract more diverse audiences, as well as to contribute to the education, learning and wellbeing outcomes that museums are well known to provide. The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), spoke about how we have seen an experiment this year regarding what happens when such places are closed to us and how it really does impact on our everyday lives. We really need those cultural institutions in our lives for our general wellbeing.

All this demonstrates the effectiveness and the value of the legislation so far, but the proposal put forward by my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon is a real opportunity to address a small but important gap. It will ensure that immunity from seizure legislation continues to remain fit for purpose during these uncertain and changeable times. I am happy to say that the proposed measure is therefore very much welcomed and supported by the Government.

While this amendment is small, it is sensible and forward thinking, and it responds to real concerns expressed within the sector about what would happen should circumstances prevent objects being returned to their country of origin within the standard timeframe. The hon. Member for Wirral South asked me how we have worked with the devolved nations on this, and of course they have been consulted on the proposals and have welcomed them, as she would expect. We will of course continue to work with them on implementation and guidance.

The measure will clearly have a positive impact, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon set out in his opening words. It will help to reduce the risk of international cultural property being left unprotected while in the temporary care and custody of UK institutions. International exhibitions are such an important source of income for the sector, and they will be ever more important as museums and galleries recover from the challenges we have seen over the last year. The provisions of this Bill will have a very positive impact on our sector. They will allow museums and galleries to continue to co-ordinate and plan important loans with international partners for tourist-drawing exhibitions, safe in the knowledge that contingency against unpredictable events is available.

This will also help museums and galleries maintain the really strong relationship they have with counterparts in other parts of the world. We have heard about some of the really impressive outcomes produced by the exciting exhibitions our UK museums and galleries have been able to hold as a result of loans of international cultural objects. My right hon. Friend mentioned that a single exhibition, the Saatchi Tutankhamun exhibition, reached more than half a million members of the public. That underlines how valuable the immunity from seizure protection is. It just simply would not have been possible without it.

Another one that my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Wirral South mentioned as having an amazing benefit from this protection was the terracotta warriors exhibition in National Museums Liverpool, which are quite brilliant, in 2018. Some 36% of visitors to this exhibition were from outside the area. It generated about 200,000 staying visits to Liverpool throughout the exhibition's run and contributed over £78 million to the local economy. Is that not incredible? These are really impressive examples showing how immunity from seizure contributes so positively to our culture sector and provides fantastic opportunities for the UK public to experience these incredible pieces of history—these cultural works of art—from across the world. That is why it is so important that the Bill underpins all this as practically as possible for our museums and galleries, and it is clear that it will help to do so.

In conclusion, I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing this incredibly worthy Bill to the House and

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

for setting out so articulately and clearly the benefits that it will bring. I confirm that the Government support the Bill.

2.5 pm

Mel Stride: With the leave of the House, I thank all those who have participated in this debate to support what I think is a very important Bill. The shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), managed to convey far more eloquently than I did the importance of this narrow Bill to the broader issues at stake. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) for sharing his experiences and knowledge of this sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson) told us about the time that the volcano erupted and informed us that she was not a cultural object. Perhaps one day she will be a cultural icon—who knows?

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) shared his experience of many museums, particularly those in his constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) raised the issue of the Ilkley Toy Museum, which sounds absolutely fascinating and I look forward to visiting that at some point in the future. Through my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies), by way of an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), we finally got the pronunciation correctly delivered of the volcano in Iceland, so I thank him for that contribution. Finally, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for all her support and her very hard-working officials at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, who were very patient in answering the many questions I had of them in pursuing the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

Covid-19 Vaccine Damage Bill

Second Reading

2.6 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill addresses a very hot topic and I am not sure that we will be able to do it justice in 23 minutes. I start with the proposition that those of us who have been double jabbed with a vaccine against covid-19 must count our blessings if we have not suffered any adverse consequences, and I am happy to include myself in that category. This Bill is about all those who have suffered injury or even death as a result of enlisting in the war against covid by being vaccinated. The numbers affected are relatively low, which is all the more reason why the Government should not be playing hard to get in relation to the compensation scheme for those who suffer adverse consequences as a result of having done the right thing.

The Government have produced quite a lot of information about the extent of vaccine damage. Some of that is set out in the documents that the Government produce on those who have applied for compensation or have notified under the yellow card scheme. Essentially, what the yellow card scheme shows—from the most recent report, which came out on 9 September and covers the period from 9 December to 1 December—is that there have been 435 reports of major blood clots and low platelet counts, including 74 deaths. It shows that there have been 767 cases of inflammation of the heart, a condition that is almost unheard of in medicine on a normal day-to-day basis. It shows that there have been some 35,000 reports of menstrual disorder, and there are all sorts of other effects set out in the comprehensive report. Very worryingly, it says that there are 1,632 reports of deaths having taken place shortly after vaccination.

If we are trying to build vaccine confidence, we need to ensure that we are open with the public about the facts. That is why I was very disappointed when I asked the Secretary of State on 7 July

“what information his Department holds on the number of deaths that have been reported of people who have died within (a) one month, (b) two months and (c) three months of having received a covid-19 vaccination since 1 January”.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Christopher Chope: Yes, but perhaps it would be more convenient if I actually read out the answer that we received from the Minister. He said:

“Data on the number of deaths reported of people who have died within one, two and three months of having received a COVID-19 vaccination since 1 January 2021 is not available in the format requested.

Public Health England (PHE) monitors the number of people who have been admitted to hospital and died from COVID-19 who have received one or two doses of the vaccine and will publish this data in due course.”

That data has not yet been published. It is very important that we are able to put this issue into context. There is a lot more damage being done to our citizens as a result of covid-19 vaccinations than in any other vaccination programme in history. That does not mean to say that it is not worth while, and I am certainly not an anti-vaxxer

or anything like that, but what is important is that, if people do the right thing, they should not be denied access to compensation.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very strong case. Does he agree that we do not want to send a message from this House that vaccines are a bad thing? Vaccines are right and we should be vaccinated. Equally, on the rare occasion when it goes wrong, is it not right that compensation is made available—on those very rare occasions?

Sir Christopher Chope: That is exactly my point and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for summarising it so succinctly and accurately. That is where the Government come into this. Unfortunately, I know that the Minister will not have much time, if any, in which to expand on this issue today. I hope that he will be willing to arrange for me to be able to come along with one or two colleagues to talk to Ministers about this very important issues.

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): I hope I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that I, or perhaps more appropriately the relevant Minister, will be happy to meet him to discuss this legislation.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am most grateful for that. There is some doubt as to who the relevant Minister is. When I put down questions on this subject, I am told that it is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions to deal with the vaccine damage Act. From that Department I have received information about the number of applications that have been made up until the middle of July. Up until 23 June, there had been 154 applications—obviously, there are many, many more now—but there are only four people in that Department dealing with all vaccine damage applications, so no decisions have been made and there is no indication as to when any decisions will be forthcoming.

Sally-Ann Hart: I am just looking at the Government website. The Government published a press release on 3 December last year, saying that covid-19 would be added to the vaccine damage payment scheme. Are you saying that it has not been yet, or that it has?

Sir Christopher Chope: I do not think that Madam Deputy Speaker is saying anything. I am saying that it was added to the scheme, but, to all intents and purposes, it was just a gesture. In the substance of it, people have now started applying under the Act for compensation and none of those cases has been dealt with. No decisions have been made in any of those cases. No decisions have been made in any of those cases. There is now a worrying Government response to a petition that reflects what is in my Bill, calling for reform to the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979

“to improve support for those harmed by covid-19 vaccines”.

You may remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Pearson commission found that those injured as a result of vaccination should have access to financial support and that that was the background to the 1979 Act. However, the Act makes provision of a maximum payment of £120,000 together with a threshold of 60% disablement. As a result, fewer than 2% of applications are successful. My Bill calls for the Government to set up a judge-led inquiry into the issues raised.

The petition says:

“Reforming the VDPA will maintain vaccine confidence and provide urgent support for those injured/bereaved through covid-19 vaccination.”

What did the Department say in response to the petition? As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, when a petition has gathered more than 10,000 signatures, that triggers a Government response—we do not get a debate in the House until there are 100,000 signatures. The response, dated 5 August, says:

“The Government has a robust system to monitor potential side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine and has added the vaccine to the VDPS. We will consider further action as more evidence becomes available.”

It goes on to tell us what we already know about the 1979 Act. It then says:

“Whilst understanding the desire and need to move forward rapidly with processing these claims, it is important to have an established evidence base around causal links between the vaccine and potential side effects. Not doing so risks claims being declined in error based on a lack of evidence, disadvantaging applicants.”

However, we already have a lot of evidence that people have suffered damage, if not death, as a result of these vaccinations. A recent coroner’s report on somebody—I think in the north of England—came to the verdict was that they had died as a direct result of receiving the covid-19 vaccine. The response continues:

“More widely, the Government is currently looking at how it can improve the operational aspects of the VDPS to better meet the additional demand created by the inclusion of the COVID-19 vaccine and improve the customer experience. Once more is known about the possible links between the vaccine and potential side effects, it will be considered whether a wider review of the VDPS is needed.”

My Bill answers that question by saying that we need such a review now.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Fridays are a wonderful thing in this place. The hon. Member calls for a judge-led inquiry. I quite understand the importance of the issue, but many believe there should be a judge-led inquiry into many aspects of what has happened on covid and will wonder why this issue should get preference over others. Will he give his thoughts on how he would explain to care workers in care homes, for instance, why their concerns should not be considered at the same time as these important concerns?

Sir Christopher Chope: On the requirement that this House has made that all care workers in care homes should be vaccinated even if they have a genuine desire not to be—they may be fearful of the consequences, although consequences are seen in only a minority of cases—it should surely be for the judgment of each individual whether they will take the risk of having a vaccination or not. Obviously we know that, even if people are vaccinated, it does not mean that they are immune from covid-19, and it certainly does not mean that they are incapable of transmitting it to somebody else. Those issues need to be weighed up.

To go back to the hon. Gentleman’s challenge, he seems to be suggesting that those hapless families—10,000 of them, or maybe more—who have suffered real, serious damage as a result of doing the right thing should be left hanging around for years wondering whether they will be eligible for any compensation. That is totally the

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

wrong message. The Government should be sending the message that, “If you do the right thing, you will be looked after by the Government if something goes wrong.” In a sense, that is what we do with the military covenant. People enter the armed forces of our country and, if something goes wrong, they expect the Government to look after them, and we do. We should be doing exactly the same for those who have suffered vaccine damage, instead of talking around the subject in the way that the Minister’s reply to the petition suggests is Government policy.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): My hon. Friend is being generous with his time. I have been listening intently to what he has to say, but I am conscious of the narrative. How do we ensure that, on the one hand, people who suffer severe disablement as a result of the vaccines get that support and payment, but on the other hand, we do not create a culture of hesitancy where people do not uptake vaccines or, equally, do not produce vaccines because of the fear that they might cause mass severe side effects? I am conscious of hearing his views on that.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am trying to address that point. We cannot ignore the fact that there is fear out there about vaccination. We cannot suppress reports of coroners saying that somebody has died as a result of having a vaccination. I know from my own personal knowledge of people who have suffered—people who were in really good health and then had their first vaccine. I know of one person in particular who then had a stroke and was in hospital for some time with that, and then had severe heart problems and even had to be referred to Harefield Hospital. Those are not just anecdotes; those are facts known by people across the country.

The Government may not be too keen to promote that information, but failing to do that is actually counterproductive. Those facts are out there—we know that—so we need to say to people that if they are in that small minority of people who suffer those adverse consequences, we will look after them 100% without expecting them to get lawyers engaged and all the rest, which is agonising for their families and loved ones. That is what I think we owe them. We do that in a number of other fields for people who serve our country, and I would like to equate them to people who get vaccinated, do the right thing and act in the public interest.

By being vaccinated, we are collectively able to contribute to better public health for all. It is because people are doing it for the benefit of the state that the other side of the coin should be a guarantee that, if something goes wrong, the state will help them. It is the Government’s reluctance to deal with that part of the equation that is so distressing, because it feeds into people being vaccine-hesitant. If somebody comes to my surgery and says that they are nervous about having a vaccine for themselves or their children, I cannot say, “Well, don’t worry. If, in the most unlikely event, something goes wrong, you’ll be fully recompensed.” I cannot say that to them, but if I could, they might be more likely to take the risk. That is the issue.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): Could my hon. Friend clarify the application of his Bill to the devolved Administrations, where obviously the vaccination process and the health services have been devolved?

Sir Christopher Chope: My Bill applies to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In so far as legislative consent would be required, I am sure that it would be forthcoming.

The problem with this Bill is that in order to get it on to the statute book, it would have to go through all its stages. It probably would not get on to the statute book until, say, next summer at the earliest, if everything went right. What I really want is action now, which is why I am grateful to the Minister for having agreed that I will be able to discuss this matter with the Minister responsible. This is urgent. Even if the Bill were accepted across the House, some legislation would not resolve the issue, because the Bill, once enacted, would only trigger the judge-led inquiry; it might be years before we had any action. We need action now to help challenge vaccine hesitancy and, most importantly of all, to give some assurance to the people who are already suffering.

Our hospitals have a large number of in-patients who are there only because they took the vaccine. It is causing a lot of angst for consultants across the country. That is why the Government should say now that they are going to look at these issues off their own bat without being required to by Parliament, and that they will carry out a review, which could also include assessing costs and benefits.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am eating into the time for my own Bill, but I wonder if the hon. Gentleman would agree that his Bill would not be required if his own Government agreed a date for an investigation into the Government’s handling of the pandemic, just as the Government in Scotland have agreed to do?

Sir Christopher Chope: I disagree. How long does the hon. Gentleman think the inquiry into the handling of the pandemic is going to take? I suspect that it will take two, three or four years. I am talking about people who are suffering in hospital or at home now because they did the right thing in getting themselves vaccinated but have had adverse reactions as a result. He may think that he is making a clever political point by talking about the delay in starting a mammoth public inquiry, but this matter does not need a public inquiry into the causes of covid; it needs a judge-led inquiry into how we should best and most fairly compensate those who have suffered the adverse consequences of doing the right thing.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about the independent review that he wants actioned and the timescale for that. Does he not agree that over that period of time, the evidence that we need actually to ascertain vaccine damage will probably be found and that those payments will be made?

Sir Christopher Chope: I do not agree. There is no evidence yet that the Government are really getting to grips with this issue. As I have said with reference to

the yellow reporting card system, we know that there is causation between vaccinations and damage caused by those vaccines, yet the Government seem to be denying that in a lot of their literature.

If we can establish and agree that, as a result of people being vaccinated, some are suffering adverse consequences, severe injury or even death, the issues around causation are probably secondary. In those circumstances, the best solution would be to provide a no-fault compensation scheme, meaning that people would not have to prove fault and would automatically qualify for compensation. Ironically, that is the condition which the Government have signed through the international COVAX scheme. Under the World Health Organisation COVAX scheme, the Government have to agree—and are indeed paying into the scheme—to indemnify any claims made for vaccine damage arising from the deployment of the vaccines. If it is good enough for the third world and the COVAX scheme, why are we not doing something similar in our own country for our own people? That is why I am quite passionate about this; not only do I know people who have been adversely affected, but it is fundamental that if we are going to encourage more people to be vaccinated, they should be given the assurance that if they do the right thing, they will receive compensation.

I am glad that the purpose of private Members' Bills is not always to ensure that they get on the statute book but to give us an opportunity to raise a subject in debate. Because I am still on my feet, when this Bill comes back to be debated later—

2.30 pm

The Deputy Speaker interrupted the business (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October.

Business without Debate

EMPLOYMENT BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 18 March.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (NO. 2) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October.

CLIMATE AND ECOLOGY BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 29 October.

HOSPITALS (PARKING CHARGES AND BUSINESS RATES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October.

VOTER REGISTRATION BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October.

ASYLUM SEEKERS (RETURN TO SAFE COUNTRIES) BILL

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am not doing very well, Madam Deputy Speaker, because my Bill seemed to be missed. I wondered whether that meant it had already been passed. It is in line with Government policy and the Home Secretary is behind it. Shall we just get on with it and do it now?

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October.

WORKERS (EMPLOYMENT SECURITY AND DEFINITION) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 18 March.

AUTOMATED EXTERNAL DEFIBRILLATORS (PUBLIC ACCESS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 10 December.

FIRE AND BUILDING SAFETY (PUBLIC INQUIRY) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 18 March.

DOGS (PROTECTION OF LIVESTOCK) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 10 December.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee in respect of the Health and Social Care Levy Bill may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before it has been read a second time.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Kettering General Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)

2.33 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank Mr Speaker for granting me this debate, and I welcome the hospitals Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) to their places. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) would be here, but other engagements sadly prevent him from being here. I thank all staff at Kettering General Hospital, who always perform magnificently but have done so especially over the pandemic period, and in particular Simon Weldon, the magnificent group chief executive.

I commend and thank the Minister for his personal interest over a number of years in this important issue. He visited the hospital on 7 October 2019. He responded to an Adjournment debate that same month, when he outlined plans for a £46 million investment in the new urgent care hub. He also responded to the last Adjournment debate, on 8 June earlier this year, and met the hospital and the three local MPs in February. May I also thank the Prime Minister, who undertook a five-hour nightshift visit to the hospital in February last year?

I welcome the Government's unprecedented investment in the NHS and their commitment to the national hospital building programme. This has resulted in promised commitments to Kettering hospital of £46 million for an on-site urgent care hub, £350 million in health infrastructure plan 2 funding for 2025 to 2030, and a write-off last year of £167 million of trust debt at the hospital. That is a total investment of a staggering £563 million in Kettering hospital, which is a record-breaking figure. However, the Minister will appreciate that promises are one thing but delivery is another. The problem that the hospital faces is that these two funding streams from the Government—£46 million for the urgent care hub and £350 million for the phased rebuild—are not being meshed together by the Health Department and Her Majesty's Treasury.

In a way, the problem is a nice one to have. Kettering hospital has successfully won access to these separate funding streams. To explain in a bit more detail, this is £46 million of STP—sustainability and transformation partnership—wave 4 capital, to be spent by 2024, to build a new on-site urgent care hub to replace and enhance one of the most overcrowded accident and emergencies in the country, and £350 million of HIP2 funding, for the period 2025 to 2030, for a phased rebuild of the hospital on the existing site, as one of the 40 designated hospitals in the national hospital programme.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's persistence on the issue of Kettering General Hospital, which serves my constituency as well. I had to go to Kettering General Hospital A&E with my son last week, and I can only confirm exactly what my hon. Friend says. It needs to be completely—well, knocked down, really, and a new A&E built. Because we had the Corby urgent care centre, I could go there and then to Kettering hospital, which helped. He will

have an urgent care centre at Kettering, and I hope in due course that we will have the same thing in Wellingborough.

Mr Hollobone: I am sorry to hear about my hon. Friend's recent visit to the hospital, but I hope he is better now—he certainly looks fighting fit.

The problem that we face at the hospital is twofold. If the hospital goes ahead and builds the £46 million urgent care hub as a stand-alone project, there will not be enough room on site for the future HIP2 works and the hospital will effectively be ruling itself out of the much-heralded national hospital rebuild programme. On the other hand, if the hospital delays the £46 million urgent care hub development until the start of the HIP2 programme in 2025, it will lose the £46 million funding allocation, which expires in 2024, and the urgent care hub will not be built.

If there is a delay to the funding, the biggest headache may well be the failure of the existing, very high-risk, old steam boilers at the hospital site. This is the main thing that keeps the hospital chief executive awake at night. Part of the extra money that is being requested as part of the advance from the HIP2 funding is for a new net zero on-site power plant, so that the old boilers can be replaced and the power systems needed for the HIP2 programme installed. The value-for-money solution is to dovetail the two funding streams by advancing 15%, or £53 million, of the hospital's already allocated £350 million funding over three years—£6 million in 2021-22, £29 million in 2022-23 and £18 million in 2023-24—and blending it with the £46 million urgent care hub funding.

I wish to make it clear to the Minister that we are not asking for more money; we are asking for an advance of just 15%—£53 million—of the £350 million of HIP2 funding already allocated to the hospital, so as to facilitate a value-for-money start to the hospital's promised redevelopment.

I have five main asks of the Minister. First, will he confirm that the £46 million STP allocation for the urgent care hub can be combined with the new hospital programme funding scheme to create a single development scheme that can proceed to an outline business case on that basis?

Secondly, will the Minister confirm that the £46 million allocated to the hospital can be used to progress early enabling works that are essential to meeting its delivery timescales?

Thirdly, may we have an early advance of £53 million, spread over the next three years, from the £350 million HIP2 commitment, so that the urgent care hub can be built not as a stand-alone project but as the initial part of the phased hospital redevelopment?

Fourthly, will the Minister confirm that, when delays occur in other larger hospital-rebuilding programmes throughout the country, he will look to create an opportunity for Kettering to receive some of the money to move beyond enabling works before 2025?

Fifthly, will the Minister be kind enough to visit the hospital again? It is two years since his last visit. Kettering General Hospital is only 30 miles from Charnwood, straight down the A6. If he is kind enough to visit, I

would be keen to show him the boilers in the power plant, which is a critical part of the required new infrastructure.

Those five asks are not about asking for extra money over and above that which has already been promised; instead, they outline a sensible, flexible, dovetailed approach to funding commitments already given so as to maximise value for money for the taxpayer and ensure that local people get to see as soon as possible the badly needed improvements to our local hospital that we have already been promised. Simply put, the problem is that building the promised urgent care hub is no longer an option on a stand-alone basis, because if it is built as stand-alone project, there will not be enough room on the site for the subsequent HIP2-funding works. The value-for-money solution is to integrate the two funding schemes.

The Minister will know, but I will repeat, that the hospital is ready to go on this work. It owns all the land, so no land deals are required and no extra public consultation is needed. It has written, confirmed support from local planners and the regional NHS. The phased approach would deliver visible and real benefits. It is shovel-ready and has far lower risks than many other hospital-build projects. In developing a whole-site plan that integrates the two funding streams, the hospital has identified the best way of delivering value for money and getting the buildings up, operating and serving local people as quickly as possible.

Kettering General Hospital is unique among the 40 designated hospital rebuilds scheduled to be completed by 2030. First, it already has the Government commitment for a new £46 million urgent care hub, so its future funding is complicated as it comes from two separate funding pipelines; secondly, it is ready to go with an innovative, phased, value-for-money rebuild on land that it already owns, with no planning or consultative hold-ups; thirdly, it serves one of the fastest-growing areas in the whole country; and fourthly, it has one of the most congested A&Es of any hospital—as my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough recently experienced—and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I do not believe that any other hospital in the whole country has such a unique set of circumstances.

Why are improvements at the hospital needed? Kettering General Hospital is a much-loved local hospital. With 500 beds, it has been on its current site, in the heart of the town of Kettering, since 1897—that is 124 years. Most of the residents in the parliamentary seats of Kettering, Corby and Wellingborough were either born there, have been repaired there or, very sadly, have passed away there. There can be few local residents who have not accessed the hospital at some point in their lives. It also has a superb, dedicated, talented and loyal workforce.

The pressure on the hospital is primarily being driven by the very fast population growth locally. The Office for National Statistics shows that we are one of the fastest growing areas in the whole country, at almost double the national average. Kettering ranks sixth for growth in the number of households and 31st for population increase, Corby has the country's highest birth rate and Kettering Hospital expects a 21% increase in over 80s in the next five years alone.

The area has committed to at least 35,000 new houses over the next 10 years, which is a local population rise of some 84,000 to almost 400,000 people. The A&E

[Mr Hollobone]

now sees up to 300 patients every single day, in a department that is sized to see just 110 safely. Over the next 10 years, the hospital expects the number of A&E attendances to increase by 30,000, equivalent to almost 80 extra patients every day. That is why the improvements are so desperately needed.

The big problem at Kettering Hospital is that the A&E is full. It was constructed in 1994 to cope with 45,000 attendances each year. Now, it is already at about 100,000 attendances a year, which is well over 150% of its capacity. By 2045, 170,000 attendances are expected.

The solution, which everyone agrees, including the Government, is for a new urgent care hub facility, costing £46 million. It would be a two-storey, one-stop shop, with GP services, out-of-hours care, an on-site pharmacy, minor injuries unit, social services, mental healthcare, access to community care services for the frail elderly and a replacement for the A&E. All the NHS organisations locally, as well as NHS Improvement nationally, agree that this is the No. 1 clinical priority for Northamptonshire.

I am glad that the Government have recognised the hospital's superb business case for this fit-for-purpose emergency care facility, and that it will meet local population growth for the next 30 years. All the local health and social care partners have been involved in its design, and local people need it to get the local urgent care service that meets Government guidance on good practice. When built, the facility will ensure that people who come to the hospital are seen by the right clinician at the right time, first time.

I also warmly welcome the Government's inclusion of the hospital on the list of 40 hospitals in the national hospital rebuilding programme, and the funding kicks in from 2025. That is important for Kettering Hospital because 70% of the buildings on the main site are more than 30 years old, there is a maintenance backlog of £42 million and 60% of the hospital estate is rated as either poor or bad.

The hospital plan for the redevelopment of the site, as part of the HIP2 programme, offers a phased approach over a number of years, with the extra ward space provided by the funding to be built on top of the urgent care hub. This is in contrast to a number of other hospitals in the HIP2 programme that are seeking an all-in-one-go funding package.

Kettering Hospital is not asking for its HIP2 allocation in an up-front £350 million, all-in-one-go lump sum; instead, it is seeking a modular, annual funding requirement for what would be a phased and, crucially, value-for-money rebuild up to 2030. Out of the £3.7 billion national hospital rebuild programme, just £6 million would be needed this year for Kettering Hospital to get the project started, and just £29 million would be needed next year.

I know Her Majesty's Treasury is currently completing a commercial strategy for all the hospital rebuilds, so as to standardise hospital redesign, to secure key commercial efficiencies in procurement and to address digital and sustainability requirements. Kettering Hospital is 100% committed to these Treasury objectives. Value for money is extremely important in delivering the hospital rebuild programme across the country, and if Kettering Hospital's innovative and sensible approach could be matched

with sufficient flexibility from the Government in applying the relevant funding streams from the Department of Health and Social Care and Her Majesty's Treasury, it would be an exemplar hospital redevelopment that others could follow.

I urge the Government, both the Department of Health and Social Care and Her Majesty's Treasury, to do the sensible thing and dovetail together the two presently separate funding streams for Kettering Hospital not only to optimise value for money for the taxpayer but to deliver sooner, rather than later, the urgent improvement of Kettering General Hospital that all local residents need, wish and deserve to see.

2.50 pm

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) for his speech. It is almost two years to the hour since I was appointed by the Prime Minister to this job, having just by a few days beaten your record in doing this job, Madam Deputy Speaker. He was one of the first colleagues in this House to raise an issue with me, so it is appropriate that he is raising this with me again today. I join him in paying tribute to all at his local hospital for the work they have done in the past year and a half, and for the work they continue to do and have done before the pandemic for his constituents and many others. Equally, I join him in paying tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), whose constituents are also served by this hospital, and of my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), who, sadly, cannot be here today but who has been equally vociferous in campaigning on behalf of his constituents.

Before I turn to the main points that my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering raised, I will answer his fifth question now. He is right to say that I am probably overdue another visit to Kettering. Although in a private capacity I passed through it recently, that is as nothing compared with visiting with him, as the local Member of Parliament. So I am happy to see whether we can find a date to do that, as it would be a pleasure. He is, of course, nothing if not constant and courteously persistent on behalf of his constituents. He rightly highlighted the context of this: the challenges faced by the accident and emergency department at Kettering, with it being congested and facing increasing demand from development in the area, and with the pressures it is feeling. He also highlighted that the solution, or the best way forward for his constituents and for this hospital, is not just the urgent treatment hub that he secured the £46 million-worth of funding for, but for us to look at this hospital in the round to see what needs to be done more broadly in the services and infrastructure available there to meet the changing needs of his constituents and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Wellingborough and for Corby.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering for rightly highlighting the track record of investment in Kettering under this Government: the write-off of £167 million-worth of debt; the £350 million allocated, with £25 million to £30 million for HIP2; and the £46 million investment in the urgent treatment centre. He should be proud that his campaigning helped secure that for his constituents. He touched on a key element of this: given the subsequent allocation of the £350 million-worth, there are benefits to be had from

understanding the project as a whole, rather than simply looking at one thing as one pot and one as another. This is in no way a criticism of Her Majesty's Treasury or of any other Department, as I would never dream of doing such a thing, but often in government individual pots of money and individual projects are looked at as exactly that, rather than taking a step back and looking at the synergistic opportunities that could be achieved by looking at things as a whole.

I turn now to my hon. Friend's specific questions, which I am sure he would wish me to answer. I will do so in order not to run out of time and then I will perhaps say a little more. He asked about the ability to combine the £46 million with the £350 million, and the flexibility to do that. He will know that he and I, and my officials, have had conversations with his hospital trust's chief executive, Simon Weldon—I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to him for the work he does. We wrote to him on 16 June to confirm that the urgent care hub and the HIP2 scheme would be able to be brought together as part of the wider development at the Kettering General Hospital site. The urgent care hub and the new hospital that is to be built share, as my hon. Friend said, a common set of enabling works that are being factored into the new hospital development. So I hope that gives some reassurance on his first and second questions as to whether the two could be brought together as a single project. As I said, we wrote to the hospital chief executive on 16 June. There is the opportunity to use that provision, rather than purely for the urgent treatment hub, as the enabling works are part of a broader scheme. I know that conversations continue about the mechanics of that, but in principle it appears a sensible approach.

Mr Hollobone: I thank the Minister for those encouraging remarks, May I draw his attention to the good work being done by Natalie Forrest in the national hospital rebuilding programme? She has developed a good relationship with Kettering General Hospital, and has been extremely supportive in getting the hospital rebuild delivered.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. This is a challenging programme, and each of the 40 hospitals and their respective representative Members of Parliament argue their case hard, as do their chief executives. He is right to highlight the work of Natalie Forrest, the senior responsible officer for this project, in managing expectations and working collaboratively and openly with hospital trusts—including that of my hon. Friend—to try to achieve the right outcome for the taxpayer and the Exchequer, and for his constituents and others around the country.

Mr Bone: I know this looks like a constituency debate, but is it not actually a litmus test for the new policy? The announcement of £36 billion and a new tax to be put into the health service is great, if we get the outcomes right. As I consider how to vote on Tuesday, it would be helpful if I knew that this programme had been agreed for Kettering General Hospital.

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend tempts me to stray not only into the territory of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor but, possibly even more dangerously, into

the territory of my right hon. Friend the Government Chief Whip. As ever, he makes his point courteously but firmly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering posed two remaining questions. If there are delays in the profiling of other projects, would we be willing to consider whether there was an opportunity to move unspent money in a financial year to Kettering, or to other projects that could move ahead? I have spoken with Natalie Forrest, and we are keen to have that flexibility. He asked about a request for further money—this refers to my hon. Friend's third question, and is the one area where I will have slightly to defer to ongoing discussions and the spending review. As he will appreciate, although £3.7 billion has already been allocated, the overall programme will be more than that across the 40 hospitals. That is subject to the spending review, and as he will appreciate, the Treasury sets annual caps on how much can be drawn down in order to manage public expenditure. To answer my hon. Friend's fourth question, that is where, if we have an underspend against allocations in year, we will have in mind those projects that are ready and willing to go a bit faster if they are able. I take his representations in that respect as a request for his hospital to be considered in that category.

In the few minutes before you call me to order at the end of the sitting, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me return briefly to the ongoing conversation with Simon Weldon and the hospital trust. As a result of the letter we sent and the willingness to be flexible about using the money for enabling works more broadly to maximise benefits from a synergistic scheme, the urgent care hub will now be part of that first stage, obviously utilising the expertise of the hospital trust to see how the money can be spent most effectively.

In conclusion, I once again pay a fulsome tribute to my hon. Friend and his work to support the redevelopment of Kettering General Hospital. As I suspect his constituents know—certainly his election results demonstrate they do—they are extremely lucky to have such a persistent, hardworking and passionate Member of Parliament representing them in this place, as indeed are the residents of Wellingborough and Corby. At times my hon. Friends perhaps leave a few scars on the backs of Ministers on behalf of their constituents, but that is what this House and our representative democracy are here for.

I am delighted we have managed to make progress in addressing the alignment of the urgent care hub and new hospital programme funding streams. I look forward to continuing to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering to ensure that this ambitious and innovative approach to building new hospitals—a common national approach—is a success, not only in Kettering but across the country. I particularly look forward to visiting my hon. Friend in Kettering, and perhaps in another two years we can hold a debate to celebrate the scheme's significant progress on the ground.

Question put and agreed to.

3 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Friday 10 September 2021

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Insolvency Service Performance Targets 2021-22

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): My right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Corporate Responsibility (Lord Callanan) has today made the following statement:

I have set performance targets for the Insolvency Service for the financial year 2021-22. The Insolvency Service is the Government agency that delivers public services to those affected by financial distress or failure by providing frameworks to deal with insolvency and the financial misconduct that sometimes accompanies or leads to it.

The Insolvency Service aims to deliver economic confidence through a fair corporate and personal insolvency regime which gives investors and lenders confidence to take the commercial risks necessary to support economic growth. It has a crucial role to play in supporting businesses and individuals in financial difficulty or facing redundancy owing to their employer's insolvency.

This year, the Insolvency Service has reinforced its commitment to putting customer satisfaction and real-life impacts at the heart of its services, and a new approach has been taken to measuring the quality of customer contact.

I have set measures and targets at a level which will drive the Insolvency Service to deliver its essential services effectively for its stakeholders. These measures include:

| <i>Measure</i> | <i>2020-22 target</i> |
|---|-----------------------|
| Make bankruptcy orders sought by individuals within 2 working days | 95% or greater |
| Determine debt relief order applications within 48 hours | 95% or greater |
| Average time taken to process redundancy payment claims | 14 days or less |
| Issue reports to creditors within fifteen days of interviewing | 92% or greater |
| Deliver against the agency apprentice target for 2021-22 as a percentage of new staff | 2.3% or more |
| Pay supplier invoices within 5 working days | 80% |
| Pay supplier invoices within 30 calendar days | 100% |
| Customer satisfaction score | 84% or greater |

The Insolvency Service's Annual Plan for 2021-22 is published in full on gov.uk.

[HCWS279]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation: Advisory Board and Future Focus

The Minister for Media and Data (Mr John Whittingdale): The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation sits at the heart of the Government's ambitious data agenda, and will play a critical role in helping the UK Government to deliver on the priorities set out in the national data

strategy. The CDEI is the UK Government's expert body on the trustworthy use of data and data-driven technologies, including AI.

Today, we are announcing changes to the CDEI's role and the makeup of its advisory board. Building on the insights of the CDEI's first two years of operation, and having conducted a robust internal review, it is clear that more active support is needed to facilitate responsible innovation on data use across the economy. The CDEI is well placed to play this role, and having listened carefully to the public's views through our consultation on the National Data Strategy, I have decided that this should be the priority for the CDEI's next phase of work. It should be concentrating on current Government priorities with the primary role of operationalising Government's data and AI policy. The CDEI's purpose is making sure that responsible data-driven innovation in complex areas actually happens, boosting the UK's tech and research competitiveness, and supporting the transformation of the use of data and AI by the public and private sectors.

When working in partnership with organisations, the CDEI will deliver, test and refine trustworthy approaches to data and AI governance, and address barriers to innovation. It will operationalise concepts such as "transparency" and "accountability" in the real world, and build the foundations for public trust in the use of data and AI. In doing so, it will help the UK to capitalise on the societal and economic opportunities posed by data and data-driven technologies, while managing the risks.

The CDEI is already working with partners to pilot tech and data policy use cases in a number of sectors including local government, transport, online safety, recruitment and social care. Given these new objectives and activities, the CDEI's current status as an expert committee is adequate and we are not planning for it to be placed on a statutory footing at this time. Similarly, the Government will not require the CDEI to report to Parliament in future separately from its parent department, DCMS. The CDEI will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny in the same way as any other aspect of departmental activity.

To support the delivery of an ambitious new work programme closely aligned with Government priorities, we have appointed an advisory board of leading experts to support the CDEI in its new phase of operations. The open recruitment campaign attracted a stellar group of proven innovators in data use. We are grateful that several outstanding members of the existing board have agreed to continue in their posts as well, including the Deputy Chair, Edwina Dunn. Edwina has agreed to act as interim Chair, while we continue our search for a permanent Chair.

[HCWS277]

Data: A New Direction

The Minister for Media and Data (Mr John Whittingdale):

Today, I am pleased to announce to the House that the Government are launching a consultation on reforms to the UK's regime for the protection of personal data. This consultation will be open for 10 weeks, from 10 September 2021 until 19 November 2021.

The Government will have the freedom to create a bold new data regime outside of the EU. The UK can now reshape its approach to regulation and seize opportunities with its new regulatory freedoms, helping to drive growth, innovation and competition across the country.

This consultation is the first step in delivering on that objective and the next step in the Government's plan for digital regulation, while building on our groundbreaking action to keep people safe online through the Online Safety Bill. Furthermore we recently published plans to establish a new pro-competition regime for digital markets and outlined that we will be seeking to agree data adequacy agreements with leading economies such as the US and Singapore.

Data is a huge strategic asset. As set out in mission 2 of the UK's national data strategy, the Government want to create a more pro-growth and trusted regime for personal data protection. We want to unlock the power of this data to drive innovation and boost the economy, while continuing to protect people's safety and privacy. This is one of our 10 tech priorities.

In order to do this, the UK needs agile and adaptable data protection laws that enhance its global reputation as a hub for responsible data-driven business that respects high standards of data protection. A responsive framework will enable responsible innovation and a focus on privacy outcomes that avoids imposing any rules today that become obsolete tomorrow as technology evolves.

Any data protection regime requires active interpretation and pragmatic application to new and emerging technologies, such as machine learning. Over three years after its introduction, however, there is persistent uncertainty about how to apply the current regime, aspects of which are unnecessarily complex or vague. This risks throwing up barriers to responsible data access, use and sharing.

The reforms outlined in this consultation will:

Strengthen our position as a science superpower, by simplifying data use by researchers and developers of AI and other cutting edge technologies.

Build on the unprecedented and life-saving collaboration between the public and private sectors in using data responsibly to tackle the covid-19 pandemic.

Secure the UK's status as a global hub for the free and responsible flow of personal data, complementing our ambitious agenda for new trade deals and data adequacy agreements with some of the world's fastest growing economies.

Reinforce the responsibility of businesses to keep personal information safe and encourage investment in effective compliance activities that reflect how they operate and their users' expectations.

Ensure that the Information Commissioner's Office remains a world-leading regulator, empowered to ensure people can use data responsibly to achieve economic and social goals.

Throughout this process, the UK intends to maintain its high standards of data protection, while taking a pragmatic and risk-based approach, rather than one that over-emphasises bureaucratic exercises. Far from being a barrier to innovation or trade, we know that regulatory certainty and high data protection standards allow businesses and consumers to thrive.

The reforms proposed in the Government's consultation will create a set of new, ambitious, pro-growth and innovation-friendly data protection rules and regulations that underpins the trustworthy use of data for an even better UK data rights regime.

These reforms have clear benefits for both citizens and businesses. We are proposing to introduce more flexibility in how organisations embed privacy management in their processes alongside greater transparency about how their users' data is protected and clearer procedures for handling complaints. We propose taking action to tackle nuisance calls which can disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people in our society. We will explore whether ICO should have powers to impose higher fines and carry out audits of companies which are responsible for breaching direct marketing rules. We will continue to look into voluntary industry-led action; and explore whether to mandate communications providers to do more to block calls and texts at source or to provide free-of-charge call-blocking services.

Furthermore, our proposed reforms will clarify how all kinds of businesses can navigate the data protection regime to innovate responsibly with personal data. We are also proposing measures that would require the ICO to recognise and account for how its regulatory activity on data protection may impact on competition and innovation in the digital economy.

Internationally, our reforms will allow us to operate a risk-based and proportionate regime that allows the UK to strike deals with some of the fastest growing economies in the world while keeping people's data safe and secure.

These reforms will keep people's data safe and secure, while ushering in a new golden age of growth and innovation right across the UK, as we build back better and I hope you will all join me in supporting this work.

Further details can be found in the consultation and supportive documents, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/data-a-new-direction>.

A copy of the consultation and the analysis of expected impact will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS276]

National Data Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Update

The Minister for Media and Data (Mr John Whittingdale):

I am pleased to inform the House that the Government are, today, publishing an update on the national data strategy which sets out our approach to monitoring and evaluating the strategy. It also launches a 12-week call for evidence on the development of an indicator suite to support implementation of the strategy.

The national data strategy was originally published for consultation in September 2020, setting out for the first time the Government's ambitions to unlock the power of data in a single publication. The consultation confirmed that the strategy framework was fit for purpose, and the Government published a response to the consultation in May 2021 to confirm that our focus would now turn to implementation.

The monitoring and evaluation update published today sets out in more detail our approach to implementation, including how we will track delivery of Government interventions, assess their effectiveness, and plan for further interventions in the future.

We are also calling for evidence to develop an indicator suite that will track developments across the data ecosystem. This is the first time such a product has been produced by Government for data use in the UK. To tackle this challenge, and in the spirit of collaboration with which the national data strategy has been developed to date, we are seeking the widest possible input to inform the indicator suite's development, to create a product which can be of value to all members of the data ecosystem. We will provide an update on the development of the indicator suite in due course.

More broadly, we will continue to engage with all relevant stakeholders to implement the national data strategy, including working through the national data strategy forum to help shape the development of the future vision for the strategy.

A copy of this update will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS278]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Leadership

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): I am pleased to inform Parliament that Her Majesty the Queen has granted a two-year extension to the appointment of Dame Cressida Dick DBE QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

I recommended this extension to Her Majesty having had regard to a recommendation from the Mayor of London as occupant of the Mayor's office for policing and crime.

This extension to 9 April 2024 provides continuity for the Metropolitan Police Service as we move forward, emerging from the restrictions demanded by the coronavirus pandemic, and face the challenges that lie ahead in protecting the safety of people in London and across the country. These include driving down violent crime, boosting the confidence of women, girls and ethnic minorities in law enforcement and responding to the concerns that have emerged from the report of the Daniel Morgan independent panel.

I will continue working closely with the Commissioner and the Mayor to ensure that the Met tackles these key challenges and serves the public well.

[HCWS281]

Immigration Rules: Statement of Changes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying before the House a statement of changes in immigration rules.

We have made changes to the immigration rules which will align the travel document requirements for most EEA and Swiss citizens with those which apply to other third country nationals.

From 1 January 2021, the Government have implemented a single global points-based immigration system.

Inconsistency in the design and security features of EEA national identity cards gives rise to document security risks, and the need for manual processing increases border queues. We therefore announced in October 2020 we would be phasing out the use of most EEA and Swiss national identity cards for entry to the UK.

The changes mean that, from 1 October 2021, EEA and Swiss citizens outside of those with status under the EU settlement scheme or rights under the withdrawal agreements will, like other nationalities, need a passport to demonstrate nationality and identity at the UK border, rather than use a national identity card.

We have also made a change to the immigration rules which reflects the change in the security situation in Afghanistan, by making changes to allow current and former Afghan locally employed staff (LES) and their family members who are outside Afghanistan to relocate to the UK under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy and the ex gratia scheme. The schemes had previously only been available to those in Afghanistan.

Further to this we are also making a further change to grant indefinite leave to enter the UK to LES who are approved for relocation to the UK. This will replace the five years' limited leave they are currently granted. Those already in the UK will be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain before their limited leave expires if they choose to.

These changes emphasise the UK commitment to supporting LES and their families to settle in the UK, and our gratitude for the support they provided to UK forces in Afghanistan.

We are launching the new international sportsperson visa category which will amalgamate and replace the tier 2 and tier 5 categories for professional sporting workers with simplified, dedicated visa arrangements.

The tier 5 visa routes are being rebranded to deliver a package of temporary work routes, providing a better service for customers through simplified rules that are aligned with the new points-based system.

We are also launching a dedicated temporary worker-creative worker visa category, tailored to creative workers to better serve the needs of the sector.

Consequential amendments are being made to appendix AR to provide a right of administrative review for eligible decisions under the new international sportsperson route and the rebranded temporary worker routes.

Some changes are being made in respect of the EU settlement scheme (EUSS), which enables EEA and Swiss citizens resident in the UK by the end of the transition period, and their family members, to obtain the UK immigration status they need to continue living in the UK.

The changes reflect in the immigration rules for the EUSS, in appendix EU, the concession outside the rules for applicants whose continuous residence in the UK has been affected by coronavirus (covid-19) which was published in guidance on 10 June 2021. This will ensure, in a range of circumstances where, due to covid-19, the applicant would have exceeded the permitted absence from the UK, and broken their period of continuous residence, they will continue to qualify for status under the EUSS.

The changes also allow a joining family member to apply to the EUSS whilst in the UK as a visitor, replacing the concession to this effect outside appendix EU currently set out in guidance.

Technical changes are being made to reflect the passing of the 30 June 2021 deadline for applications to the EUSS by those resident in the UK by the end of the transition period (though a late application can still be made where there are reasonable grounds why the person missed that deadline), and to reflect the fact that a person who is exempt from immigration control can, if they wish, apply to the EUSS whilst they remain exempt or they can apply once they have ceased to be exempt.

Changes are being made to the youth mobility scheme (YMS) to rebrand the route from T5 (temporary worker) youth mobility scheme to youth mobility scheme.

We are also expanding our YMS to include new arrangements with Iceland and India. This will deliver on international commitments made via a memorandum of understanding with Iceland and mobility agreements with India. Both schemes are expected to launch on 1 January 2022.

The YMS update will also allow citizens and nationals or the rightful holder of a passport issued by a territory, without deemed sponsorship status, to apply for this route from any post that accepts such applications worldwide.

The allocations for 2022 have also been updated in appendix youth mobility scheme: eligible nationals.

Finally, following a concession made outside the rules to allow the partner and, if applicable, child under 18 of a British national (overseas) (BN(O)) status holder to join the BN(O) status holder following a grant on the Hong Kong British national (overseas) route, this has now been incorporated into the immigration rules for the BN(O) route.

[HCWS280]

TRANSPORT

HGV Driver Shortage

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The HGV driver shortage is a long-standing challenge facing countries across the world.

As a result of the pandemic, driver testing was suspended for large parts of the last year. It is now back up and running and the Government have already increased capacity, but we can go further.

Over the summer, we consulted on three measures which will substantially increase the number of vocational driving tests available. I can announce today that we will proceed with the measures we consulted on:

First, car drivers will no longer need to take another test to tow a trailer or caravan, allowing roughly 30,000 more HGV driving tests to be conducted every year.

Secondly, tests will also be made shorter by removing the “reversing exercise” element—and for vehicles with trailers, the “uncoupling and recoupling” exercise—and having it tested separately by a third party.

And thirdly, we will make it quicker to get a licence to drive an articulated vehicle, without first having to get a licence for a smaller vehicle. This would make around 20,000 more HGV driving tests available every year and mean drivers can gain their licence and enter the industry more quickly, without reducing the rigour of the test.

We have already provided a 50% increase in testing compared to pre-covid. These measures go even further. These new measures follow a public consultation over the summer, which saw thousands of respondents, including industry leaders, support the move as a positive step to help the sector tackle the lorry driver shortage currently affecting countries around the world. Some of these changes will generate additional capacity for HGV tests very rapidly, and we will shortly lay the appropriate licensing regulations before the House. These changes will not change the standard of driving required to drive an HGV, with road safety continuing to be of paramount importance. Any driver who does not demonstrate utmost competence will not be granted a licence. All car drivers will also still be encouraged to undertake training to tow trailers and caravans.

A new cross-Government ministerial group has been set up to monitor labour supply chains, identify pinch points and consider necessary Government action. Chaired by CDL and meeting on a weekly basis, the group includes ministers from numerous Government departments including the DIT, DFE, Home Office, BEIS and DEFRA to make sure all angles are being considered.

The driver shortage is a widespread problem affecting countries across Europe and also the United States, caused by a range of factors, including an ageing workforce. Today’s announcement will ramp up driver testing and numbers and help industry leaders build a resilient haulage sector which attracts drivers from across society.

[HCWS282]

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**not later than
Friday 17 September 2021**

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