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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Monday 14 March 2022**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 14 March 2022*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### EDUCATION

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Early Years Support

1. **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help ensure that families are able to access adequate early years support. [906033]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** It is wonderful that the hon. Lady has returned to the theme of families; I remember the passion she showed in her time as shadow Minister for Children and Families.

The Government are investing £300 million to transform family help services in 75 local authorities. That money includes funding for family hubs, the supporting families programme and start for life services.

**Tulip Siddiq:** The Labour Government built more than 3,600 Sure Start centres, which provided a vital lifeline for many families throughout the country. This Government proceeded to close 1,000 Sure Start centres and then undertook a review of the early years sector that found that every parent and child should have access to early years support. Frankly, I could have told the Government that without undertaking a review. The review was published more than a year ago and I have not yet seen any plans for or details on having a family hub in every community in the country. When will the Secretary of State's Department publish details of the family hubs in every community in the country? Or is this another instance of the Government paying lip service to the early years?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** What the hon. Lady omitted to say was that Sure Start was a good policy that was badly implemented under the Labour Government. They focused on bricks and mortar rather than on actually reaching and helping the families we will reach with the family hubs. We will announce very shortly the half of England's local authorities that will have evidence-led, multi-agency family hubs that will reach exactly those families—exactly like I saw when I visited the family hub in Harlow with the Chair of the Education Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon).

## Institutes of Technology

2. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What progress he has made in rolling out institutes of technology. [906035]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alex Burghart):** The Government are investing £290 million to establish a network of 21 institutes of technology throughout the country, actively targeting the areas where they are needed the most. Wave 1 has already established 12 IOTs across 50 locations, and wave 2 will add a further nine IOTs. We are getting the best of the further education sector, alongside the best of the higher education sector and the best of British employers, to deliver world-class technical education.

**Peter Aldous:** It is concerning that, after two waves of IOTs, a vacuum has emerged in East Anglia that places local learners at an unfair disadvantage compared with those elsewhere. I am grateful to the Minister for Higher and Further Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), for the briefing that she provided to Suffolk and Norfolk MPs following the decision to reject the east of England bid; will she or my hon. Friend convene a meeting of those who prepared the bid, the two county councils and MPs to agree a strategy to fill the vacuum as quickly as possible?

**Alex Burghart:** As my hon. Friend noted, he had a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Higher and Further Education on this issue. I know he is a passionate advocate for education in his area and wants to see the excellent success of our IOTs replicated in his region. At this time, there are no plans to extend IOTs, but we very much keep the policy under review and want to see them go from strength to strength.

### SEND Green Paper

3. **Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): What steps he is taking to engage with families with disabled children on the SEND Green Paper. [906036]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Will Quince):** The special educational needs and disability review will be published this month as a Green Paper for full public consultation, so that we can continue to listen. Throughout the review we have listened to hundreds of organisations—including the National Network of Parent Carer Forums, Let Us Learn Too and Special Needs Jungle—children and parents.

**Paula Barker:** A recent survey by the Disabled Children's Partnership and Let Us Learn Too revealed that 60% of families with disabled children have sought mental health support because of the stresses of having to fight for basic services, while previous surveys have shown that nine in 10 disabled children are socially isolated. Given that, will the Minister outline how the Department for Education intends to use the SEND Green Paper to reduce the adversarial nature of the system and plans to improve access to mental health services for disabled children and their families?

**Will Quince:** I thank the hon. Lady for her well-put question. She is right: we want to create a less adversarial system in which parents do not have to fight to get the

rights to which their children are rightly entitled. We want the best outcomes for all children with SEND in this country. The hon. Lady will have to wait only a handful more days for us to publish the review.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that, from September, up to 3,000 new places are being created for children with special educational needs and disability through 35 new special free schools?

**Will Quince:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Through the spending review and the record £2.6 billion of investment in special school places, that will be delivered.

### Digital Divide

4. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help close the digital divide for children without access to the internet or adequate devices at home. [906037]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** We have delivered more than 1.9 million devices to schools, colleges and local authorities for disadvantaged pupils, as part of a £520 million investment during the pandemic. We have also partnered with the UK's leading mobile operators to provide free data to help more than 33,000 disadvantaged children get online, and we have delivered more than 100,000 4G wireless routers for pupils without connections at home.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** When schools closed, the move to remote learning highlighted the digital divide in our society. Schools such as the outstanding Ursuline High School were already at the forefront of technology, giving every pupil a tablet and offering six lessons a day from home right from the start, but others did not have the kit required. For those still on the wrong side of the digital divide, every click widens the attainment gap. Aside from the emergency lockdown devices, what support is being offered to equip schools with the skills, time and kit to ensure that no child is left behind in our technological world?

**Mr Walker:** Let me join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the work that the Ursuline academy did during lockdown. It is very important that schools reached out and provided the help where they could. It is important to recognise that the 1.9 million devices that were provided by the Department during the course of the pandemic were on top of around 2.9 million devices already with schools, so the kit is out there to do this. We will continue to work with colleagues at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that disadvantaged households get the technology that they need.

**Mr Speaker:** I now call the shadow Minister.

**Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): The Education Secretary has announced that his Department will repurpose the Oak National Academy to provide UK-wide online learning. Families facing the Tory cost of living crisis need a guarantee that data used to support learning will not add to their spiralling household bills.

Ofcom's recent affordability report found that 1.1 million households are struggling to afford broadband. With more schools delivering learning via digital means, can the Minister set out whether he intends to keep these services zero-rated indefinitely?

**Mr Walker:** I am pleased to see that the hon. Gentleman has welcomed our announcement this morning on Oak. We think it is a valuable tool that will support exemplification as well as delivering online support to pupils and students. With regard to zero-rating, we welcome the fact that that is continuing and we will continue to work closely with colleagues at DCMS to see how that can be supported over the longer term.

### School Buildings: Refurbishment

5. **Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): What steps he is taking to help refurbish school buildings. [906038]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** I recently met my hon. Friend, who has been a persistent champion of his local school. The Department provides funding annually to improve school buildings and has allocated £11.3 billion since 2015, including £1.8 billion this financial year. We have also opened the next round of our school rebuilding programme, which will transform 500 schools over the next decade.

**Chris Loder:** I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. He will know full well that I have been supporting the Gryphon School in Sherborne to fix its dilapidated temporary classrooms. The school has just submitted a severe needs funding request in order for us to replace those temporary classrooms. Will he review that and support the submission so that we can fix the issue?

**Mr Walker:** I recognise that my hon. Friend has consistently pressed the case for his old school in this Chamber and through meetings with myself and with colleagues in the Lords. The next round of our school rebuilding programme has now opened. We expect to select around 300 projects this year, and our aim is to prioritise those with the greatest condition needs. I welcome the fact that a bid has gone in from his school, demonstrating that condition need. Although I can assure him that he has done everything that he can to draw the attention of our Department to these issues, he will understand that I cannot commit to any individual school until the selection process is complete.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I cannot begin to describe how much Sale High School in my constituency needs a rebuild. There is a local financial solution on the table, which is being put at risk by Department for Education delays. Will the Minister commit to helping me bring this to a resolution today?

**Mr Walker:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I just gave. Of course I am happy to make sure that the Department looks carefully at any individual bid of schools, especially where there is particular condition need. If he would like to write to me, I shall have a look at that case.

**James Daly** (Bury North) (Con): Last week I visited Derby High School in my constituency. It is a brilliant school with a fantastic senior leadership team and kids who are achieving their potential, but the structure of

the building must match the ambition of each child within the school. It has been nominated for the school rebuilding programme. Will my hon. Friend agree to meet me to see what this Government can do to deliver for children in Bury something that the Labour local authority is not doing?

**Mr Walker:** I am happy to meet my hon. Friend. I understand that he has consistently championed the case of children in Bury. As I have mentioned, we have met other colleagues to discuss projects of this nature, so I am sure either I or my colleague in the Lords will be happy to meet him.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Joseph Leckie Academy has still not received the full amount that was allocated under Building Schools for the Future in 2010. Will the Minister please come and visit so that he can see the toilets, the school hall and the dining area, which are in desperate need of refurbishment?

**Mr Walker:** It is always a pleasure to get an invitation to visit a school; I shall certainly consult my diary to see when I might be able to take the right hon. Lady up on that.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Ashlawn School in my constituency is outstanding, with currently the longest waiting list for secondary places in Warwickshire. There is a need to renovate many of the school's 1950s buildings but, regrettably, it does not meet the funding criteria for the school rebuilding programme. Do the Secretary of State or the Minister have any advice for Ashlawn on how it can get buildings that are comparable to the outstanding education it offers?

**Mr Walker:** The Department provides capital through a number of routes. There is, of course, devolved capital to local authorities and to multi-academy trusts, so my hon. Friend might want to look at what opportunities are available through that or through the condition improvement fund, in addition to the school rebuilding programme I have already discussed.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): On the subject of Department for Education delays, residents in Newcastle North are concerned that the new Great Park Academy may be unable to open on schedule next September. Original plans were for an opening in 2020, but that has now been postponed to 2023 and the school is currently in temporary accommodation on another high school's site. We need to see progress on this urgently. I have written to the Minister and asked for a meeting to discuss the cause of the delays. After all the disruption of the past two years, we must deliver stability for our young people. Will he work with me to ensure that we can unblock what is delaying this project?

**Mr Walker:** I will be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that specific project.

**Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): The Minister will know of Westgarth Primary School in Marske, which is in desperate need of urgent building works. May I invite him to visit Redcar and Cleveland in the near future, to meet me and the Galileo Trust to see what can be done to support the school, its pupils and its fantastic teachers?

**Mr Walker:** It sounds as though my diary will be very full, but I would certainly be delighted to come to my hon. Friend's constituency.

### Ukraine: Impact on Students

6. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on (a) Ukrainian students in the UK and (b) UK students in Ukraine. [906040]

17. **Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on (a) Ukrainian students in the UK and (b) UK students in Ukraine. [906052]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** We are working across Government to support Ukrainian students in the United Kingdom by introducing a new humanitarian route; there will be a statement later today from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on that. It will provide them with an opportunity to extend their leave to remain or switch to graduate visas. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is leading on work to ensure that UK students in Ukraine are encouraged to return.

**Deidre Brock:** The announcement of the UK sponsorship scheme and the news that the Secretary of State just mentioned are very welcome for Ukrainian refugees. However, as they are temporary visa holders, will the families of those students be included in the Home Office's Ukraine families scheme? Will the Secretary of State consult his ministerial colleagues on that?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Those Ukrainians who are here on temporary visas will also be able to bring family members.

**Steven Bonnar:** Of the 2.6 million people who have fled Ukraine in the wake of the Russian invasion, UNICEF reports that at least 1 million are children. A large proportion of the 200,000-plus Ukrainian refugees who will enter the UK through the Ukrainian families scheme or the homes for Ukraine programme will be kids. What plans has the Secretary of State put in place to facilitate the integration of vulnerable Ukrainian child refugees into the UK education system?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** We have been working hard in the Department to ensure that we have, certainly in the initial phase, a capacity of up to 100,000 children going into early years, primary and secondary education, and into further and higher education as well.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Education Committee, Robert Halfon.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Has my right hon. Friend seen the investigation by Theo Usherwood on LBC exposing pro-Putinist propaganda at some of our leading universities? At Leeds, Professor Ray Bush, still publicly listed on its website despite retiring, suggested that the US had chemical installations in Ukraine. That is, as we know, a lie that is being spread by the Kremlin. At Edinburgh,

Professor Tim Hayward retweeted a Russian representative to the UN describing the attack on Mariupol's hospital as "fake news". At Leicester, Tom McCormack talks about "ludicrous disinformation" on both sides and boasts about appearing on Russia Today. Will my right hon. Friend contact these universities directly to stop them acting as useful idiots for President Putin's atrocities in Ukraine?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Education Committee for raising this issue. The Minister for Higher and Further Education is already on the case and is contacting those universities. Putin and his cronies are a malign influence on anyone in this country buying their false narrative. I repeat: it is a false and dangerous narrative and we will crack down on it hard.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): As a result of Putin's war in Ukraine, the United Kingdom can expect an influx of a large number of young students. In the long term, they will need proper education, of course, but in the short term, could my right hon. Friend see whether he can build in some flexibility and normality so that these young people can get into schools and make friends as soon as possible?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I know that he and his family are passionate about wanting to support Ukrainians who are so vulnerable. We are making plans to make sure, as we did with the Afghan resettlement, that every child gets into the appropriate early years, primary, secondary or further or higher education, but I will certainly look at this. I think what he is getting at is that if there is a gap they may be wanting to feel welcome at their schools. I am already getting anecdotal stories about many schools where there is excitement about some of the Ukrainian children who are coming in.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to SNP spokesperson Carol Monaghan.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

In Ireland, Ukrainian teachers are being fast-tracked through the teaching registration process to enable them to support youngsters who will be attending school in Ireland. Obviously, language will be a big challenge for these youngsters initially. Has the Secretary of State considered replicating that Irish scheme to ensure that young people coming to school in the UK will be properly supported?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The hon. Lady raises a really important point. That is one of the things I asked my team this morning with regard to the Ukrainians. Clearly, it will be predominantly women and children who are coming over because the men are fighting the Russian invaders. It is a question of whether we can get more recognition of qualifications so that Ukrainians who are able to can get work as soon as possible.

### Prisoners: Retraining

7. **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help prisoners retrain and reduce the risk of reoffending. [906041]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alex Burghart):** The Government absolutely recognise the importance of preparing prisoners for employment upon their release. That is why we are, for the very first time, changing the law to enable serving prisoners who are close to release to start apprenticeships, helping them to retrain and upskill, and providing them with direct routes into jobs with businesses in their communities.

**Alexander Stafford:** Retraining prisoners is vital for rehabilitation. Does my hon. Friend expect these welcome plans for prisoner retraining to reduce reoffending, leading to a safer society for all of us? Will these plans be under way as soon as possible so that we can all start to see the benefits immediately?

**Alex Burghart:** I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that reassurance. Officials in the Department for Education are working at pace with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to make sure that we tear down the barriers so that people leaving prison can have had the best chance to rebuild their lives, earn money for themselves, and contribute to their communities. We expect to make progress on that this calendar year.

### Student Loan Changes: Social Mobility

8. **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to student loan requirements on social mobility. [906042]

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Michelle Donelan):** Our changes mean a fairer deal for students, graduates and the taxpayer, and build on our work to drive up quality so that more young people go on to complete their education and then go on to graduate jobs, delivering real social mobility.

**Margaret Ferrier:** Decreasing eligibility, extending the repayment period and lowering the repayment threshold for student loans will disproportionately impact students from low-income families, and removing education opportunities will impact the trajectories of their lives and careers. What impact assessment has been undertaken on these changes from an equality perspective and how they will stifle student numbers?

**Michelle Donelan:** When we published our response to Augar, we also published our impact assessment in full, but at the heart of our plans is fairness, as I have said, for the taxpayer, for students and for graduates. No student will pay back more in real terms than they borrow. This is the Government delivering on our manifesto pledge to cut interest rates.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Research by the Higher Education Policy Institute shows that 70% of parents with children aged 11 to 15 want their children to go to university, but the Government do not share their ambitions. Instead, the Minister is proposing minimum entry requirements of a grade 4 in GCSE English and maths to access student finance. About 70% of pupils in England achieve a grade 4 in GCSE English and Maths, but that falls to less than half for those on free school meals. Why is the Minister

prepared to sacrifice the aspirations of students and their families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds?

**Michelle Donelan:** Once again, this shows the Opposition's obsession with targets and numbers. We want an education system that delivers for the individual, whether that means going into further education, an apprenticeship or university. We want to ensure that every young person knows that whichever option they pick, it is a high-quality option.

### Children with SEND: Specialist Support

9. **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the availability of specialist support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. [R] [906043]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Will Quince):** We have been conducting a thorough review of the special educational needs and disabilities system, including looking at the specialist support for children and young people to help them to fulfil their potential. By the end of this month we will be publishing our findings and consulting on proposals to strengthen that system.

**Dan Carden:** In conjunction with the University of Liverpool law clinic, I am able to put on a weekly advice surgery for parents with children with special educational needs, and that service itself is over-subscribed. There is a real postcode lottery in provision, and we have seen demand for SEND statements and education, health and care plans soar by 480% over the past five years. Can the Minister say, particularly in terms of the shortage in the workforce and in resources, and the postcode lottery, what is the Government's plan?

**Will Quince:** We know that covid-19 has impacted particularly heavily on therapy services and other support services for children and young people with SEND. I know that a number have adjusted their delivery models. We issued new guidance in September, but I am working closely with my counterpart at the Department of Health and Social Care to try to address this issue. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to look at the SEND review, because in my view the postcode lottery and the inconsistency has to end, and with the SEND review it will.

**Matt Hancock** (West Suffolk) (Con): I warmly welcome the confirmation from the Minister that the SEND review will be published this month. I am also grateful to him for the engagement we have had on how we can ensure that all children—including all dyslexic children—get the right screening and assessment so that they can get the support to be able to join in the gaining of literacy, which is so critical for success in the rest of their lives. I am grateful for his support so far, but can he reiterate that that will be central to this SEND paper?

**Will Quince:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question and all the work he does in this area. It is so very important that at the heart of the SEND review, we have early identification and early support, and I look forward to continuing to work with him on this important agenda.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The Government's own figures show that almost 50% of children with additional needs are waiting longer than five months for an education, health and care plan. One in five requests is refused and 95% of those decisions are overturned by the tribunal. Families fighting for support were promised that the SEND review would help, but two and a half years on, they are still waiting, while children are being systematically let down by this Government. What assurance can the Minister provide that the SEND review will deliver timely support for families and an end to fighting at tribunals?

**Will Quince:** First, let me say that in the next financial year, high-needs funding for children and young people with complex needs is increasing by £1 billion to more than £9.1 billion. That is an unprecedented increase of 13%, and it comes on top of the £1.5 billion increase over the past two years, but that is just the finances. Over and above the £2.6 billion we are investing in capital, the SEND review will answer many of the questions that the hon. Lady rightly poses, and she just has to wait a handful more days.

### Children with SEND: Specialist Teachers

11. **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help ensure that there are adequate numbers of specialist teachers to support children with SEND. [906045]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Will Quince):** We are committed to ensuring that all pupils can reach their potential and receive excellent support from their teachers. Our reformed initial teacher training content framework and the new early career framework, both developed with sector experts, will equip teachers with a clear understanding of the needs of children with SEND.

**Kate Osborne:** Research by the Education Policy Institute found that children from the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to be identified as having SEND than children from more affluent areas, with families in poorer areas facing higher thresholds to accessing support. Why is that the case and what is the Minister's Department doing about it?

**Will Quince:** All teachers are teachers of SEND. We are doing a lot of work, and we will do as part of the SEND review, to ensure that teachers are equipped—but not just equipped, that they have confidence—to teach and identify special educational needs. All I would say, as I have said a few times, is that the hon. Lady should wait a handful more days for the SEND review.

### Home-Schooled Children

12. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What plans he has for the proposed register for home-schooled children. [906046]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** The Government have committed to a form of local authority register for children not in school, as was detailed in the children not in school consultation response that we published on 3 February. We hope to legislate

on that measure at the next available opportunity to create the duty to keep and update a register and for local authorities to provide support to home educators where they want it.

**Andrew Selous:** If a local authority found that illiterate home-schooling parents were unable to teach their children to read, write and add up, would it signpost them to proper adult literacy and numeracy as well as ensuring that the children could access their inalienable right to a good education?

**Mr Walker:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Government guidance sets out the powers that local authorities have and the actions that they can take. He is right that the adult education budget has funding to support literacy and, with the new numeracy programme, to support numeracy. There is a role for stepping up in that space. Local authorities already have powers to specify levels of literacy and numeracy on a case-by-case basis, and having the statutory register will encourage them to use those powers.

### **Young People from Deprived Backgrounds: Access to Higher Education**

13. **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): What steps he is taking to help support young people from deprived backgrounds access higher education. [906047]

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Michelle Donelan):** We have asked the Office for Students to refocus the access and participation regime on real social mobility by getting students on to courses that they complete and that lead to graduate jobs, not just getting them to the door. We have also committed up to £75 million to a national state scholarship to support high-achieving disadvantaged students.

**Andrew Bowie:** In the Secretary of State's statement on the Augar review last month, he said:

"Access to higher education must be dependent on attainment and ability to succeed, and not inhibited by a student's background."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2022; Vol. 709, c. 489.]

Will the Minister expand on how the Department will ensure that that is the case, so that we avoid the situation overseen by the Scottish Government where people from a deprived background are now less likely to enter higher education than when they took office?

**Michelle Donelan:** Under our Government, disadvantaged 18-year-olds in England are now 82% more likely to go to university than in 2010. We want universities to play an even greater role in improving access for those who are disadvantaged, however, so we are asking them to raise standards in schools and colleges; offer flexible and skills-based courses; tackle drop-out rates; and support students throughout university and on to graduation.

**Mr Speaker:** We have shadow Minister Mr Toby Perkins.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Whether we look at the national tutoring programme, which is failing to reach disadvantaged children; qualification changes

that Ofqual admits will hamper progress to HE; the disparaging of university courses with higher numbers of deprived students on them; or the falling apprenticeship numbers, the truth is that this is a "Get back in your place" Government who stand as a barrier to aspiration for deprived students. Does the Minister not realise that the Government have not a shred of credibility on this subject? Their policies are the barrier to working-class aspiration, not the solution.

**Michelle Donelan:** It is a desperate time when we have a question such as that from the Opposition, which is not even really a question. The Government are delivering on our manifesto and enhancing quality, and have aspiration at the heart of everything we do.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think I will decide whether something is in order or not, but thanks for that little lesson for me. Just to say, I do laugh when you talk about policy when the Government have been in power, so I try to balance out the political issues and objections on both sides.

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill is one of the most important Bills now before Parliament. When does my right hon. Friend expect the Bill to come back before the House?

**Michelle Donelan:** I can inform the House that the Bill will be back in due course, and we can guarantee this Government's commitment to honour our manifesto pledge to strengthen free speech in our universities, because of how important we believe it to be.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson, Carol Monaghan.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): According to the Government's own equality analysis of their reforms to student finance, those likely to see a negative impact, with increased lifetime repayments, include female graduates and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Male graduates and those from more privileged backgrounds will benefit more than average from the changes. Can the Minister explain why policies that will hinder social mobility and undermine equality of opportunity in higher education have been introduced?

**Michelle Donelan:** Fairness is at the heart of our announcement that no student will pay back more in real terms than they borrowed. It is also about rebalancing for the taxpayer, as every pound that is not paid back by a student is paid back by a taxpayer.

### **Education Investment Area: Isle of Wight**

14. **Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential impact on education outcomes of an education investment area on the Isle of Wight. [906048]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** I was delighted to announce that the Isle of Wight will be an education investment area, which will receive a range of support to improve schools. We will boost the rate of children meeting reading, writing and maths standards by 2030, ensuring that opportunity is as equally spread as talent is in our country.

**Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): The Island has made good progress in improving its education in recent years, which I am delighted about. I am very keen to get as much out of the education investment area as we possibly can, in order to drive up standards further. That ambition was evident in my recent visit, only a few days ago, to Christ the King College, where I talked to students and pupils. The Education Minister has had many invitations today, so will the Secretary of State please come to the Isle of Wight so that he can see the excellent work being done at the Isle of Wight College and at our schools?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** That invitation is far too tempting to turn down, so I shall make time to visit the Isle of Wight with my hon. Friend. Of course, I will be saying more about the work we are doing in the schools White Paper.

### Green Skills in the Curriculum

15. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps his Department is taking to introduce a curriculum that develops green skills. [906050]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** The science and geography national curriculums provide pupils with knowledge that underpins the development of green skills to help understand issues related to sustainability, climate change and resource use. Further, at COP26 the Secretary of State launched the Department's draft sustainability and climate change strategy, which sets out key actions and commitments to enhance green skills provision across education.

**Mr Sheerman:** May I ask the Minister to work across parties on this issue? For a net zero economy, we need to do far more training for green skills. Too often I find that young people, at age 16, 18 or 21, do not know the pathway. When I talk to teachers in my constituency, and indeed those in early years, they all want to prepare their children for a green economy and to provide them with green skills for wonderful jobs in the green environment. Can he work a little harder and faster towards this?

**Mr Walker:** I welcome what the hon. Gentleman says. We all agree about the importance of this area. That is one of the reasons why it is so important that we pursue the science, technology, engineering and maths agenda. We need to work across the education piece to ensure that we are preparing people for the jobs of the future. The strategy that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published at COP26 is a step in that direction, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we want to work across parties and across the House, and in all parts of the country, to drive this agenda forward.

### Children's Social Care

16. **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): What steps he is taking to help improve children's social care. [906051]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Will Quince):** We launched the independent review of children's social care in March 2021. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform children's social care

services and systems. We will see the review's final recommendations this spring and I look forward to responding in due course.

**Scott Benton:** We know that the first 1,001 days of a child's life are the most influential on their health, wellbeing and opportunities throughout the rest of their lives. This is even more important in towns such as Blackpool, where health outcomes and educational attainment are already low. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the £300 million funding for the new Start for Life offer will help to address these outcomes for children and families in my constituency?

**Will Quince:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our family hubs programme is being developed in 75 local authorities, over and above the 12 in which the programme is already being rolled out, bringing together services for children of all ages and responding to the needs of the whole family. At its core is the Start for Life offer, which includes support for perinatal mental health and breastfeeding, as well parenting programmes. On top of that, there is the £200 million expansion to the Supporting Families programme. I understand that the Secretary of State is visiting my hon. Friend's constituency in the coming weeks.

### Higher Education: Improving Quality

19. **Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to prioritise improving the quality of higher education. [906054]

20. **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to prioritise improving the quality of higher education. [906055]

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Michelle Donelan):** For the first time ever, the Office for Students is setting minimum thresholds for completion and for progression rates to graduate jobs. We are also consulting on stopping the uncontrolled growth of low-quality courses.

**Claire Coutinho:** The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) suggested that it was an injustice to introduce minimum requirements for going to university, but does the Minister agree with me that the greater injustice is that one in five students feels that their course did not add any value to their career? Moreover, the reforms to interest rates will now mean that nobody will pay more than they borrow in real terms.

**Michelle Donelan:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. From September 2023, we are reducing interest rates on student loans to the retail price index only. This, combined with the tuition fee freeze for over seven years, means that students can graduate with up to £11,500 less debt from the off.

**Sir David Evennett:** I fully support the idea of minimum eligibility requirements to maintain the high quality of our degrees. However, will my right hon. Friend assure me that students who do not meet those requirements will have alternative routes open and available to them,

including via foundation years or college courses, that will allow them to progress subsequently to university when they are ready?

**Michelle Donelan:** I agree with my right hon. Friend. Too many young people are pushed on to courses that they are not ready for at the moment, which is why we are capping the cost of foundation years to enable more people to use this as an access route. We are also introducing the lifelong loan entitlement, which will make higher education and higher technical education much more flexible.

### Political Impartiality in Schools

21. **Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help ensure political impartiality in schools. [906056]

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** The Government are committed to ensuring that children and young people receive a balanced education. The Department has recently published new political impartiality in schools guidance, which will help support teachers in tackling sensitive issues in the classroom in a politically impartial way.

**Jonathan Gullis:** A minority of woke-warrior teachers think it is acceptable to push extremist nonsense on to pupils, such as white privilege, and try to cancel important historical figures, such as Sir Winston Churchill. However, these teachers are also aided and abetted by some trade unions, such as the Not Education Union. The failed and disgraced NEU demanded that the welfare state was reformed before approving of pupils going back to school with its ridiculous 100-point plan, and its president blames NATO instead of Vladimir Putin for the illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine. Will my hon. Friend outline how we will hold politically motivated trade unions to account and prevent them from using teachers as a gateway to push their far-left agenda?

**Mr Walker:** I have to say that my hon. Friend always speaks out bravely from his own personal experience as a teacher, and I see that he has done so in his *Telegraph* article today. Pupils must form their own political views, and schools should not indoctrinate or encourage children to pin their colours to any particular political mast. The new guidance will help schools to make good decisions about working with external agencies and ensure that any engagement does not breach their legal duties.

**Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The harrowing scenes in Ukraine have shaken the world, and it has been reported that a number of students from the UK are still trapped in Ukraine. Can the Minister please confirm whether contact has been made with those students, and what support he can provide to them?

**Mr Walker:** Yes—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Minister, that is nothing to do with the question. The problem is that supplementaries have to be linked to the question. If the hon. Lady tries again in topicals, she may just catch my eye.

### Topical Questions

T1. [906023] **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** The United Kingdom has a proud history of supporting refugees in their hour of need. In the last few years alone, we have committed to welcoming over 100,000 Hongkongers, 20,000 Afghans and now an unlimited number of Ukrainians, through an extended family scheme and of course the humanitarian route, for those fleeing the illegal and barbarous acts of Putin and his cronies. Work is under way across Government with charities and local authorities to ensure that people coming from Ukraine are properly supported, so that they can rebuild their lives. I know my Department is ready for this challenge because we have successfully found a school place for every Afghan child who has come here.

**Gill Furniss:** BTECs are a vital lifeline for hundreds of thousands of students, while A-levels and T-levels are not suitable for many because they are not able to achieve level 4. Why are the Government hellbent on cutting back on student choice, and how does that fit in with the Government's levelling-up agenda and the aspiration for everyone?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am surprised that the hon. Lady is attacking T-levels, because they were the noble Lord Sainsbury's idea in the first place. The important thing to remember is that this Government are committed to the ladder of opportunity for everyone, with much better choices and routes for people. This is not about getting rid of BTECs. High quality BTECs will continue, but where there is overlap, we are right to look at that.

T2. [906024] **Cherilyn Mackrory** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Way back in 2020, my Truro and Falmouth constituency successfully secured a new secondary school as part of the Government's free school programme. That much-needed secondary school will be based at Perranporth on the north coast, and it will make a huge difference to families in Perranporth, Goonhavern, Newquay and Truro. I am in regular contact with the Department and local stakeholders, and I believe we are close to getting a site for the school. Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm the Government's commitment to supporting and delivering this new secondary school in my constituency, as soon as possible?

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** The Government remain committed to delivering the free school programme, and appreciate the importance of a new secondary school in the Perranporth area. We are continuing to work with the trust and local authority, to secure the site and deliver new school places for Cornwall.

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State believe that Randstad's delivery of the national tutoring programme has been a success?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The hon. Lady will recall that the national tutoring programme had two pillars—academic mentors and tuition partners—and that programme is run by Randstad. By the way, last week I announced that we have hit 1 million blocks of tutoring, which I hope she welcomes. Schools tell us that those pillars are important, but also that they wanted a school-led route. That is what we did, and more than half a million tutoring blocks have been delivered that way. We must look at the tutoring programme and make those opportunities available for every child, especially those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Bridget Phillipson:** I think families and school staff will find the Secretary of State's response staggering in its complacency, given the failures that we are seeing as part of that programme. Almost two years after schools were closed to most children, and given the immense disruption to their education that they face, it should have been a national mission to support all our children to recover the learning and experiences they have lost in that time. Our children's future, and our country's future, depend on getting it right now. When will the Secretary of State finally get a grip?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I notice that the hon. Lady did not recognise, or at least celebrate, the 1 million tutoring blocks that have been delivered, the majority of which have been delivered by brilliant teachers in our brilliant schools, because people wanted a school-led route to deliver that. That is the right thing to do. We are at 1 million blocks, we will hit 2 million this year, and we will go beyond that and hit 6 million in total—then I hope the hon. Lady will celebrate that. It is right for every child to get that opportunity, which was available only to the fortunate ones before.

T4. [906027] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I welcome Kirklees being an education investment area, and Greenhead College, which I visited on Friday, and Huddersfield New College are outstanding providers of sixth-form education to local students. Does the Secretary of State agree that those existing colleges are best placed to support disadvantaged students in my area into universities?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** My hon. Friend has been a champion for those who do not have the privileges that others have, and of spreading that opportunity equally. It is vital that universities work in partnership with colleges and local schools, to raise standards so that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have more options and can choose the path that is right for them. That is this Government's absolute priority.

T3. [906026] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What plans does the Minister have to help enable universities to diversify their international student cohorts, so that they are not reliant on funding from countries such as China?

**The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Michelle Donelan):** We recently updated our international education strategy, and we are proud to be home to so many international students who enrich our culture in our universities and local towns. We have beaten our target many years ahead, which is testament to how dedicated we are to continue to grow our international pool of students.

T5. [906028] **Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): Government Front Benchers need not bother visiting Ashfield—I have got two new school rebuilds coming, so they can go somewhere else—but they will be aware of the problems that I have had with Kirkby College, which is a failing school. It is going to be rebuilt, which is fantastic news, but will the Minister please use all his levers to ensure that that happens as quickly as possible?

**Mr Walker:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his non-invitation. Kirkby College was confirmed in the school rebuilding programme in July 2021, and the project will make a huge difference to the community. I am happy to commit to delivering it as quickly as possible. We are working closely with the incoming trust to scope the project before securing a construction partner, and we aim for construction to start in 2023.

T6. [906029] **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Parts of the building at Lydiate Primary School are unsafe, the basement floods and the damp conditions are a health hazard. The latest survey shows a significant recent deterioration in conditions, yet the Department for Education says that it will use an out-of-date survey to assess the funding bid made to it. Will the Minister at least promise the children at Lydiate Primary School that the Department will use the latest survey data and information in deciding whether to fund the new building that they need?

**Mr Walker:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. We have consulted on the approach to be taken to assessing such schemes. As we discussed earlier, a change in condition is one factor that the Department can take into consideration in such cases, so I ask him please to write to us with more of the detail.

T9. [906032] **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that essay mills have the potential to cause severe damage to academic integrity? What steps are being taken to tackle them?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alex Burghart):** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: essay mills denigrate the excellent work that the vast majority of students do by allowing a tiny minority to cheat. That is why, in our Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, which will soon receive Royal Assent, we are outlawing them, and we will punish everyone involved in them.

T7. [906030] **Kim Leadbeater** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in congratulating all the girls who took part in the FA's "let girls play" biggest ever football session last week? Will he update the House on the steps that his Department is taking to ensure that girls have equal access to football in schools, and on the work that it is undertaking to ensure that PE is not squeezed out of the curriculum due to the academic over-testing of children?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Will Quince):** I will certainly join the hon. Lady in those congratulations. Only last week I was with girls playing basketball. It is so important that we encourage girls in particular to take part in competitive sport. We know that there is a massive drop-off from primary to secondary. We are investing significant extra money

through the pupil premium as well as £30 million of funding to open up school places after hours. I would be happy to meet her, because I know that she shares my passion in this area. Health and nutrition are really important, and we must get more people playing sport.

**Mr Speaker:** Including rugby league.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Some of the most rapid progress in the world is being made by schools in all countries that use information technology and artificial intelligence to support classroom tuition. Is the Department investigating how we could use that?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I know that my right hon. Friend is passionate in this area. It is not about replacing great teachers; it is about enabling teachers to do their job in a much more efficient way. We are certainly looking at that; I will say more in the schools White Paper.

T8. [906031] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Next week, staff at Glasgow University will be among 50,000 across the UK striking in protest at the 35% cut to their guaranteed pensions. It is in the interests of both students and staff that a negotiated settlement can be reached as soon as possible. What discussion are Ministers having with university employers to encourage them to engage in meaningful dialogue with staff and trade unions?

**Michelle Donelan:** I and the rest of the Government continue to encourage a meaningful dialogue, because, at the end of the day, those missing out are students, who have suffered unbelievably during the pandemic and faced challenges. The last thing they need is strikes and further disruption to their face-to-face education.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Equipping young people with the skills of the future is vital not only for green jobs, as we have heard, but for other emerging technologies. However, many such jobs will be underpinned by an understanding and appreciation of engineering. Will my right hon. Friend therefore consider introducing a new design, technology and engineering course as one of the science options?

**Mr Walker:** I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that further. I recognise the enormous importance of engineering—and, of course, essential to that is the numeracy skills that underpin it. That is one reason why we are so prioritising numeracy.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Russell Scott Primary School in Denton has been dubbed by the national media as:

“Britain’s worst built school where pupils paddle in sewage and get sick from toxic fumes.”

I raised this issue previously and Baroness Barran has now suggested a bid to the Department for Education for funding. Tameside Council is in the process of doing that, but it really should not be subject to a competitive process. I hope the bid will be looked on favourably by Ministers. It is crucial, it is levelling up, it is offering the best educational opportunities in safe buildings, is it not?

**Mr Walker:** I knew the hon. Gentleman would persist and ensure he got his point on the record. I recognise that he has consistently raised this school and I welcome the fact that a bid will be coming in. Of course that has to be assessed, but he makes the case very strongly.

**Siobhan Baillie** (Stroud) (Con): In Stroud and Gloucestershire, we have high numbers of home-schooled children. A lot of care is taken to look after their welfare and educate them to a high standard, and there is a really good relationship with Gloucestershire County Council. While many understand the drive for effective wellbeing and safeguarding, they are worried about the new compulsory registration scheme. Will the Minister meet me and my Stroud community, so we can learn more about the plans?

**Will Quince:** We very much support the right of parents to educate their children at home and we note that it can be driven by many different reasons. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we intend to legislate to ensure we have a “children not in school” register. That is something no parent who is doing the right thing should be concerned about, and, of course, I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend and her constituents.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): Figures provided to me recently by the Department for Education showed that on average a staggering 27% of children were not at the expected reading age when leaving primary school. That figure was pre-pandemic, so it will undoubtedly be worse now, especially in disadvantaged areas. What work is the Department doing to review primary school reading standards and will the Minister commit to the full £15 billion catch-up funding recommended by Sir Kevan Collins?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The hon. Lady is correct in what she says. Some 65% of pupils leave primary school with the appropriate level of reading, writing and maths, but that still leaves one third who do not. The Government’s ambition in the levelling-up White Paper is that 90% of primary school students should achieve the prerequisite level in reading, writing and maths. The £4.9 billion I am putting into recovery is beginning to really make a difference, especially the National Tutoring Programme, which has just hit 1 million courses.

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con): A school in Darlington is concerned about its energy contract with Gazprom. It wants to do the right thing and step away from contracts with connections to the Russian state. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss the situation, which may affect many other schools across the country?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this issue. He will know that Gazprom is no longer on the roster of suppliers to the Government and the Department, but I am very happy to meet him about this particular case.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Secretary of State spoke about the importance of a ladder of opportunity for our children. Can we also have a ladder of opportunity for black children? Many ethnic minority children do well in our school system, but for other groups, particularly black boys,

the statistics show that, year on year, they underachieve academically and have disproportionately high levels of exclusion. What is the Secretary of State going to do about that group of children?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am grateful for the right hon. Lady's question. The really important thing is to make sure we level up across the board. I was at Hammersmith Academy, which has 60% pupil premium and is a really ethnically mixed school, where every child is supported and stretched to be able to deliver the best they can do. That is the right thing to do and that is what we will do with the schools White Paper, which will be published imminently.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): The covid inquiry terms of reference have just a tiny mention of education, suggesting that it looks at "restrictions on attendance". That is like calling a mortuary a negative patient output. Will my right hon. Friend write to the chair of the covid inquiry and make sure that education and children are properly reflected, looking at the mental health problems and lost educational attainment of children during lockdown?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The Chair of the Education Committee raises a number of important points, especially on mental health. This is not lost on this Secretary of State. The terms of reference are extremely broad, covering preparedness, the public health response and the response in the health and care sector, as well as the economic response. The restrictions on attendance at places of education are set out in the terms of reference as well. Moreover, there are other broad areas of potential relevance for education.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I have constituents whose teacher-assessed grades during the pandemic were markedly different from the grades predicted, often by the same teacher just a couple of months previously. When I complain to the school, it says I should go to Ofqual, but when I go to Ofqual, it says I should go to the school. Can we please have a clear appeal mechanism to sort out these long-running problems?

**Mr Robin Walker:** I would be happy to take up the issues the hon. Member raises with Ofqual, which I am due to meet later this week. It is important to reiterate that some of the challenges we have seen with TAGs are among the many reasons we think it is right that exams should go ahead. We need to move back to a proper, independently assessed system. I want to make sure that schools and colleges that have been asked to collect evidence of their students' performance, covering the breadth of content usually seen in exams and assessments, recognise that, once they have that evidence, they are not obliged to collect any more. It is important that we have the fallback of TAGs, of course, but we do not necessarily want schools to be going out of their way to do extra work in this space.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Stoke-on-Trent was delighted to become an education investment area and is seeking a new 16-to-19 specialist school, but I am still waiting for wave 15 of the free school programme to be announced so that I can bid for the long overdue free school in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke. We need to improve academic outcomes and destinations. When is that coming?

**Mr Walker:** My hon. Friend always champions his area passionately and I recognise the strong bid he has put in. Of course the education investment areas provide that opportunity to have extra free school provision.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Secretary of State seen the latest report from the autism commission that I co-chair, which focuses on not only autism, but the impact on the individual throughout their life and their family? Does he realise that the failure to get a statement and to get an assessment for years and years is causing so much unhappiness in those families?

**Will Quince:** I certainly recognise some of the challenges that the hon. Gentleman references. The special educational needs review will be published in the coming days. He may have questions following on from that. I would be happy to meet him to discuss that further.

## Executions in Saudi Arabia

3.32 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Government to make a statement on the executions in Saudi Arabia this weekend.

**The Minister for Asia and the Middle East (Amanda Milling)**: We are shocked by the execution of 81 individuals on 13 March. The United Kingdom strongly opposes the death penalty in all countries and in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. The UK ambassador has already raised the UK's strong concerns with the Saudi national security adviser and the Saudi vice-Foreign Minister. We will continue to raise UK concerns with Saudi counterparts through our ministerial and diplomatic channels and seek further clarification on the details of these cases.

No aspect of our relationship with Saudi Arabia prevents us from speaking frankly about human rights. Saudi Arabia remains a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office human rights priority country, including because of the use of the death penalty, and restrictions on women's rights, freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. We regularly raise concerns with the Saudi authorities through diplomatic channels, including Ministers, our ambassador and our British embassy.

**Crispin Blunt**: Mr Speaker, thank you for granting this urgent question, which recognises the execution of 81 men on one day as of profound concern to this House and to our country, which has so many shared interests with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this represents a new low for human rights and criminal justice in the kingdom, coming only a week after the Crown Prince promised to modernise the Saudi justice system? A decade ago, as a Justice Minister, I supported Government-to-Government work to help Saudi Arabia modernise its justice system, as we worked to build a strong and positive partnership with the kingdom. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that emptying death row in this way is not the kind of modernisation anyone would have had in mind when we signed off support to Saudi Arabia in happier times?

Does my right hon. Friend recognise the exquisite difficulties that this has presented to our Prime Minister? What assurances will she be seeking from Saudi Arabia in respect of human rights on her next visit there? Will she at least seek an assurance that executions of those arrested for crimes alleged to have been committed when they were children will cease? Will she make clear to the Crown Prince how appalled friends of the kingdom are, particularly in the light of the state's assassination of Jamal Al-Khashoggi, only three years ago?

Does my right hon. Friend think that these events have been the behaviour of a friend?

**Amanda Milling**: The UK's relationship with Saudi Arabia is of great importance, ranging from national security to economic interests, but the nature of that relationship does mean that we can speak frankly about human rights. As I said in my opening remarks, the United Kingdom strongly opposes the death penalty in all countries and in all circumstances as a matter of

principle, and Saudi Arabia is well aware of the UK's opposition to its use. We have raised these concerns with the authorities through a range of ministerial and diplomatic channels. We have also raised concerns with the Saudi authorities about the juvenile death penalty application.

The UK has always been clear about the fact that the murder of Khashoggi was a terrible crime. We condemn his killing in the strongest possible terms, which is why we sanctioned 20 Saudi nationals involved in the murder under the global human rights regime.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the shadow Minister, Bambos Charalambous.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): We on this side of the House are appalled by, and utterly condemn, the execution of 81 Saudi men on Saturday. This massacre was the largest execution in Saudi Arabia's history. We do not believe that the timing of the executions—while the world is focusing its attention on atrocities elsewhere—was coincidental. Referring to the killings, the Interior Ministry stated that it

“won't hesitate to deter anyone who threatens security or disrupts public life”.

That demonstrates just how low the bar is for execution in the kingdom, where individuals can be sentenced to death for protest-related offences or for exercising their right to free speech.

This mass execution comes in a week when the Prime Minister reportedly plans to travel to Riyadh to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. We have seen what happens when human rights abuses go unchecked. I therefore ask the Minister these questions. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that human rights are at the forefront of any future trade deals with Saudi Arabia? Will the Prime Minister be expressing Parliament's outrage at this massacre when he meets the Crown Prince? What assurances will the Government be seeking to ensure that such mass executions carried out by a friendly country never happen again?

**Amanda Milling**: As I have said, we were deeply shocked by the executions of the 81 individuals on 13 March. As I have also said, no aspect of our relationship with Saudi Arabia prevents us from speaking frankly about human rights, and we regularly raise our concerns about human rights with Saudi authorities through diplomatic channels, including Ministers and our ambassador, and at the embassy. Saudi Arabia remains an FCDO human rights priority country, particularly because of the use of the death penalty but also because of restrictions on women's rights, freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.

I am not going to speculate in respect of the Prime Minister's visits.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Does not this bad news reinforce the urgency of the UK producing more of its own oil and gas to reduce dependence on these powers? Could not that include onshore gas where the local community of people are willing? Would not that be speeded up if they were given a royalty?

**Amanda Milling:** It is important for all partners to work together to ensure that there is stability in energy markets, and OPEC also has a key role to play in this regard.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the Scottish National party spokesperson, Alyn Smith.

**Alyn Smith** (Stirling) (SNP): I have a deep personal interest in Saudi Arabia. I grew up in Saudi Arabia—we spent much of the 1980s in Riyadh—and I am a friend of Saudi, with all the political issues that it has. I am glad to hear the Minister say there is a frank dialogue with the Saudis on judicial matters, but—I say this gently—it does not seem to be having much effect on the Saudis themselves. Friends speak bluntly to friends, and executing 81 people in public by beheading, whatever their alleged crime, is an atrocity and there need to be consequences beyond harsh criticism. I know the Minister will not speculate on the visit of the Prime Minister, but may I modestly suggest that she can relay the House's concern that his visit should not go ahead and that there should be a consequence? Also, we have a programme of judicial and justice co-operation with the Saudis. Surely that has to end, or at least be suspended, given the deep concern of all in this House over each and every one of these cases.

**Amanda Milling:** I am afraid that, if I am going to get asked multiple times about the Prime Minister's visit, colleagues are going to be disappointed because, as I have said, I am not going to speculate about that. As I have also said, our relationship with Saudi Arabia means that we can speak frankly about human rights matters. I have said from the outset that we were shocked by the execution of these 81 individuals and our ambassador has raised the strong concerns of the UK Government with the Saudi national security adviser and with its vice-Foreign Minister.

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What happened in Saudi Arabia was a gross violation of human rights and it places a strain on global relationships, which are crucial right now. Does the Minister agree that no country found to be complicit in human rights abuses such as those we are currently seeing in Ukraine should receive a penny of UK taxpayers' money in international aid?

**Amanda Milling:** This goes back to the fundamental point that human rights violations are something that we do raise where we see them. We are not ashamed to do so and we will not stand back from raising them where they are seen to happen.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): The UK Government have given the Saudi regime an estimated £20 billion in arms sales since the start of the war in Yemen, despite clear breaches of humanitarian law. It is extremely likely that British weapons have been used to kill civilians. In the light of the executions on Saturday, will the Prime Minister cancel his planned visit, and will this Government do what they should have done long ago and end arms sales to the Saudi regime?

**Amanda Milling:** As I have said before—I suspect I will be saying it a few times—I am not going to pre-empt the Prime Minister's travel plans. In terms of arms exports, we take our strategic export control responsibilities

very seriously and we examine every application on a case-by-case basis against strict criteria. We would not grant an export licence if we thought it was inconsistent with the strategic export licensing criteria, including respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): As a boy, I witnessed two executions, one a beheading, in what is now called Yemen. I am vehemently against the death penalty. Can I ask the Minister if the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has any idea what percentage of the Saudi population is actually in favour of capital punishment?

**Amanda Milling:** I am afraid I do not have the answer to that specific question, but let us be really clear: the United Kingdom strongly opposes the death penalty in all countries and in all circumstances as a matter of principle.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): In 2018, the Saudi Arabian Government told the United Nations that

“if the crime committed by the juvenile is punishable by death, the sentence shall be reduced to a term of not more than 10 years detention”.

However, the following year, six young men sentenced to death for childhood crimes were executed, as was Mustafa al-Darwish in 2019, having recanted a confession that was extracted under torture. The Minister says that we can speak frankly to the Saudi Arabian Government. Will she frankly say to the House of Commons now that the promise the Saudi Arabian Government made to the United Nations that it would not execute minors for crimes committed when they were children was not made in good faith?

**Amanda Milling:** As I said, the Government have raised concerns with the Saudi authorities regarding the juvenile death penalty. We monitor these cases very closely, and we routinely attempt to attend the trials. In April 2020 the Saudi human rights commission announced a moratorium on discretionary death sentences for crimes committed by minors.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): I strongly support the Minister's reluctance to speculate on the Prime Minister's travel arrangements, but does she agree that, should the Prime Minister happen to find himself in Saudi Arabia in the near future, it would be a good opportunity to say to the ruling party, in the strongest possible terms, that these events are a human rights outrage?

**Amanda Milling:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to reiterate that I will not speculate; he understands why. Diplomats and Ministers clearly have frank conversations with Saudi Arabia about human rights. As I said at the outset, we were absolutely shocked by the executions at the weekend.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Minister may be shocked, but she should not be surprised, because this sort of thing has happened before. Actions speak louder than words. If the Prime Minister goes to Saudi Arabia in the next few days, we would be sending a very clear signal that, no matter what we say, we are not really bothered about this sort of thing.

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

It has been reported that we have a judicial co-operation memorandum of understanding with Saudi Arabia. Will the Minister commit to publishing it, along with the related human rights risk assessment made by the Government?

**Amanda Milling:** The key point is that, given our relationship with Saudi Arabia, we are able to have frank conversations about human rights. We are opposed to the death penalty in all countries under all circumstances. As I said, Saudi Arabia remains the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's human rights priority country, particularly because of its use of the death penalty.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Saudi Arabia has, at best, an ambiguous relationship with revolutionary Islamism. Can the Minister confirm that, in seeking to lessen our dependence on one source of oil and gas, we will not end up creating dependency on another unreliable and sometimes hostile regime?

**Amanda Milling:** The key point is that it is important that all international partners work together to ensure the stability of energy markets.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Mass executions are particularly grotesque and barbaric. There is no due process in the Saudi justice system, in which there is widespread use of torture, and 75% of executions are for non-lethal offences. Will the Minister specifically answer the case of Abdullah al-Huwaiti? He was a juvenile when the alleged offence was committed, and he is on death row awaiting execution. She has known about the case for months. What representations has she made to the Saudi authorities? What does she intend to do about it now?

**Amanda Milling:** I have been clear about our opposition to the death penalty. We have raised a number of cases with the Saudi authorities, and I will happily follow up on that particular case in writing.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The Greek writer Aesop once said that a man is known by the company he keeps. That applies equally to states. This week, while the Prime Minister's former friends in Moscow were committing atrocities in Ukraine, his existing friends in Riyadh were executing 81 people. It is obvious that the oft-repeated words of condemnation mean nothing. Is it not time that this country, rather than cosy up with such regimes, completely resets its relationship with regimes that do not share our values and that feel, because of their wealth, that they can continue to trample over basic human rights with impunity?

**Amanda Milling:** What I would say, actually, is that given our relationship with Saudi Arabia, we are able to have frank conversations about human rights.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm whether there is a memorandum of understanding on judicial co-operation between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia? If so, will she publish it?

**Amanda Milling:** As I say, I think I have set out quite clearly the various ways in which we raise human rights with the Saudi Arabian authorities.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): May I press the Minister? Does she not see any contradiction between rightly ending dependence on Putin's Russia for fossil fuels and then seeking to replace them by going cap in hand to another murderous tyrant, who executes his own people and to whom we sell arms that are being used to kill civilians in Yemen? Is she aware of reports in the US that Saudi Arabia is pressurising President Biden to repay access to oil by supplying more military support for its war in Yemen? Can she assure us that this Government would not tolerate a "more arms for oil" deal with that murderous regime?

**Amanda Milling:** In terms of energy, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are having to phase out Russian oil, which is absolutely the right thing to do. It is important that all partners work together to ensure the stability of the markets.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): There seems to be a bit of a pattern developing here. When the Deputy Prime Minister visited Saudi Arabia in June, the regime subsequently executed Mustafa al-Darwish, a child defendant convicted of protest-related offences. Now, days before the Prime Minister is due to go and speak business with the Saudi monarchy, the regime has executed 81 people. Does the Minister agree that the Saudi monarchy sees this UK Government as a soft touch—as people it can ignore—because Ministers do not possess the backbone to stand up for British values and for human rights, and the regime can therefore act with impunity and continue with its bloodshed?

**Amanda Milling:** As I have said on a number of occasions, it is because of our relationship with Saudi Arabia that we are able to have very, very frank conversations about human rights. We were shocked by the executions at the weekend. We do raise our concerns; the ambassador has raised concerns with the Saudi national security adviser and the Vice Foreign Minister.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Is the Saudi Arabian public investment fund a right, proper and fit-for-purpose owner of Newcastle United?

**Amanda Milling:** The Saudi Arabian public investment fund is a significant investor, having invested billions in the UK and other western markets. It operates across a range of sectors. We welcome the purchase of Newcastle United, a sign that the UK remains a great place to invest.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Our foreign policy, including our trade deals, must be underpinned by human rights and the rule of law. Does the Minister agree that it is arguably their absence from our current foreign policy and from our current international dealings that has led President Putin to feel that he can absolutely ignore all of that and do what he wants in Ukraine?

**Amanda Milling:** Let us be really clear. The international community and the UK have been absolutely clear throughout that the Russians' invasion of Ukraine was unprovoked, unjust and illegal, and we will do everything

we can to limit Putin's ability to wage war. On human rights, let us be clear: we call out human rights violations where we see them.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am puzzled as to why the Minister is so shifty about the existence of this memorandum of understanding on judicial co-operation—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Can I just say I am not comfortable with the use of the word “shifty” in the House, especially when it is a straight accusation to the Minister? Whatever we might think, I am sure that the hon. and learned Lady, with her good language from her court days, can come up with a nicer way of putting it.

**Joanna Cherry:** I am happy to put it more politely, Mr Speaker. I am puzzled as to why the Minister is so evasive in respect of the persistent questioning about the existence of this memorandum of understanding on judicial co-operation. If it does not exist, why does she not just say that it does not exist? If it exists, why can we not see a copy? Why can she not tell us whether there is a human rights risk assessment and publish that?

**Amanda Milling:** I do not know about being described as shifty, but I have been really clear about what we do as a UK Government in terms of raising human rights with the Saudi authorities. Saudi Arabia remains a human rights priority country and, as I say, Ministers and the ambassador all raise concerns about human rights.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): It is one thing for the morally bankrupt premier league to accept money from Saudi Arabia but it is another for the UK Government to turn around and say they welcome its investment. Our frank talking to Saudi Arabia has amounted to nothing more than diplomatic finger wagging and created no change whatsoever in Saudi Arabia's attitude. In response to this atrocity, can we expect any change at all in the relationship between the UK and Saudi Arabia?

**Amanda Milling:** As I have said on a number of different occasions during this urgent question, the relationship with Saudi Arabia is of great importance and covers a range of national security and economic interests. It is because of that relationship that we are able to have frank conversations about human rights.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I am wearing the colours of my football team, Newcastle United, and it is important to say that in utterly condemning this atrocious, horrific massacre, I speak for many, many of my constituents and Newcastle United fans. Does the Minister agree that whereas football fans have no control over or influence in the ownership of their beloved clubs—especially in a premier league awash with dirty money—the UK Government have both control over and influence in who they trade with and engage with? The Minister has said what she is not going to do, but what is she going to do with that control and influence? Is she going to make it absolutely clear that sportswashing is not an option?

**Amanda Milling:** With regard to Newcastle United, we never had a role at any point in the club's prospective takeover, which has been a commercial matter for the Premier League.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): This is all incredibly depressing. I remember trying to ask questions in 2012, when I was shadow Minister for international human rights, about David Cameron's visit to Saudi Arabia. The responses were like something out of “Yes Minister”: I kept being told that nothing was off the table or that a wide range of issues were discussed. It went on and on and I never got an answer, but we now hear that two years ago he went camping with Lex Greensill and the Saudi crown prince, which says a lot about what was probably discussed then.

If the Prime Minister does go to Saudi Arabia next week—I hope he does not—will he raise the case of Abdullah al-Huwaiti, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter)? He was 14 years old at the time of the crime and was sentenced to death last week.

**Amanda Milling:** I am trying to think of another way to suggest that I will not be speculating on the Prime Minister's travel plans this week, next week or next month.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): Despite the Minister's protestations, nobody in this Chamber believes that we would see the same weak response from the Government if the murders had taken place in, for example, Iran. Saudi Arabia is Britain's single biggest weapons customer and Britain is Saudi Arabia's second biggest arms supplier; is it not the case that, whether it is weapons for murderers in Saudi Arabia or peerages for Russian oligarchs in London, for this Tory Government money talks louder than human rights ever will?

**Amanda Milling:** I have been pretty clear that the Government were shocked by the execution of these 81 individuals at the weekend. I have also been clear that the UK opposes the death penalty in all countries and under all circumstances as a matter of principle, and Saudi Arabia is well aware of the UK's opposition to the use of the death penalty.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Saudi authorities have said that these executions were carried out in compliance with Saudi law. Given that we know that the Saudi justice system falls far short of international standards, including obtaining confessions through torture and the use of the special criminal court for the prosecution of human rights defenders and political activists, what recent discussions have the Government actually had with the Saudi authorities about the failings of the Saudi justice system and about the cases of those who are in jail for trying to exercise their fundamental human rights?

**Amanda Milling:** As I have said, we regularly raise concerns about human rights, but, specifically, Lord Ahmad, the Minister responsible for human rights, raised them during his visit to Saudi Arabia earlier in February.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Pope Francis recently said that the death penalty is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the human person,

[Mike Kane]

and is inadmissible in all cases. Following on from what the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) said, 1.7 million Catholics live in Saudi Arabia—8% of the population. King Salman has a cordial relationship with the Church, and the Crown Prince recently visited the Archbishop of Canterbury to talk about inter-religious dialogue. What pressure can we put on civil society groups to explain to the royal family there that many of their people do not believe in the death penalty and give them an understanding as to why we do not believe in it?

**Amanda Milling:** The UK Government and partners do raise human rights issues and also our opposition to the death penalty. As I have said, the UK strongly opposes the death penalty. Saudi Arabia remains a human rights priority country, which is, in part, because of its use of the death penalty, but also because of its restrictions on women's rights, freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief.

**Allan Dorans** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): Last week, the Minister for Defence Procurement was in Riyadh at the World Defence Show, actively promoting UK arms exports to the Saudi regime. Does the Minister agree that, in light of the weekend's mass executions, the UK Government should cease all arms trade with a regime that shows no sign of respecting human rights?

**Amanda Milling:** Regarding arms exports, as I have said in an earlier answer, we do have very strong criteria by which we examine every application, and we will not grant an export licence if it is inconsistent with the strategic export licensing criteria, including in respect of human rights and international humanitarian law.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Minister has said many times now that the Government make representations and have frank discussions. Can she point to a single example of any impact or effect of those representations?

**Amanda Milling:** Let me provide one example in terms of what happened this weekend: the UK ambassador has already raised our strong concerns with the Saudi national security adviser and the vice-Foreign Minister. We do raise our concerns with the Saudi authorities, and Lord Ahmad raised human rights concerns during his visit last month.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): To what extent does the Minister personally think that it is appropriate to continue to sell arms to the brutal Saudi regime, which has no regard for the human rights of even its own people, publicly crucifying men after beheading them for homosexuality and stoning to death any woman deemed to have committed adultery?

**Amanda Milling:** I think I have answered the question in relation to arms exports on a number of occasions, so I refer back to previous answers.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): The European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights said that, in the cases that it has been able to document, the charges involved "not a drop of blood", even under Saudi rules used to establish criteria justifying executions. Opacity in the Saudi judicial system and witness intimidation lend further secrecy to the nature of the charges against the executed, many of whom are believed to have been Shi'as. What material steps, not conversations, are the Government taking to show Saudi Arabia that they will not tolerate these barbaric abuses?

**Amanda Milling:** As I have said, we were shocked by the executions. We have raised our concerns and, through our ministerial and diplomatic channels, we will seek further clarification on the details of those cases.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): May I thank the Minister for her reply, declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief and express concern over the restrictions on religious beliefs in Saudi Arabia? These executions are deplorable and they shock the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Has the Minister made any representations to her Saudi counterparts to review the rationale behind this mass execution? Can we apply any diplomatic pressure to urge a reconsideration of executions carried out in that way, which makes them appear as a spectacle rather than the murderous, sombre, sober and shocking events they truly are?

**Amanda Milling:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question and I know how passionately he campaigns on all matters of freedom of religion or belief. As I have said, the UK ambassador has raised our strong concerns about the executions at the weekend; through ministerial and diplomatic channels, we will seek further clarification on the details of those cases.

## Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme

4.6 pm

**The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on our Government's response to help those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.

This Government and this House—indeed, everyone in the UK—continue to be in awe of the bravery of the people of Ukraine. They are victims of savage, indiscriminate, unprovoked aggression. Their courage under fire and determination to resist inspires our total admiration.

The United Kingdom stands with the Ukrainian people. My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary has been in the vanguard of those providing military assistance. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been co-ordinating diplomatic support and, with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and Business Secretary, implementing a new and tougher than ever sanctions regime. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Home Office have also been providing humanitarian support on the ground to Ukraine's neighbours, helping them to cope with the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people—but more can, and must, be done.

To that end, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already expanded the family route. She has also confirmed that from tomorrow Ukrainians with passports will be able to apply for UK visas entirely online without having to visit visa application centres. As a result, the number of Ukrainians now arriving in this country is rapidly increasing and numbers will grow even faster from tomorrow.

We also know, however, that the unfailingly compassionate British public want to help further. That is why today we are answering that call with the announcement of a new sponsorship scheme, Homes for Ukraine. I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and officials in the Home Office, in my own Department and across Government for their work over the course of the past days and weeks to ensure that we can stand up this scheme as quickly as possible. In particular, I thank my noble Friend Richard Harrington, now Lord Harrington of Watford, whose experience in ensuring that the Syrian refugee resettlement programme was a success will prove invaluable in ensuring that we do right by the people of Ukraine.

The scheme that Lord Harrington has helped us to design draws on the enormous good will and generosity of the British public, and our proud history of supporting the vulnerable in their hour of greatest need. The scheme will allow Ukrainians with no family ties to the UK to be sponsored by individuals or organisations who can offer them a home. There will be no limit to the number of Ukrainians who can benefit from it.

The scheme will be open to all Ukrainian nationals and residents, and they will be able to live and work in the United Kingdom for up to three years.<sup>1</sup> They will have full and unrestricted access to benefits, healthcare, employment and other support. Sponsors in the UK can be of any nationality, with any immigration status, provided they have at least six months' leave to remain within the UK.

Sponsors will have to provide accommodation for a minimum of six months. In recognition of their generosity, the Government will provide a monthly payment of £350 to sponsors for each family whom they look after. These payments will be tax-free. They will not affect benefit entitlement or council tax status. Ukrainians arriving in the United Kingdom will have access to the full range of public services—doctors, schools, and full local authority support. Of course we want to minimise bureaucracy and make the process as straightforward as possible while doing everything we can to ensure the safety of all involved. Sponsors will therefore be required to undergo necessary vetting checks, and we are also streamlining processes to security-assess the status of Ukrainians who will be arriving in the United Kingdom.

From today, anyone who wishes to record their interest in sponsorship can do so on gov.uk; the webpage has gone live as I speak. We will then send any individual who registers further information setting out the next steps in this process. We will outline what is required of a sponsor and set out how sponsors can identify a named Ukrainian individual or family who can then take up each sponsorship offer. Because we want the scheme to be up and running as soon as possible, Homes for Ukraine will initially facilitate sponsorship between people with known connections, but we will rapidly expand the scheme in a phased way, with charities, churches and community groups, to ensure that many more prospective sponsors can be matched with Ukrainians who need help. We are of course also working closely with the devolved Administrations to make sure that their kind offers of help are mobilised. I know that all concerned want to play their part in supporting Ukrainians, who have been through so much, to ensure that they feel at home in the United Kingdom, and I am committed to working with everyone of good will to achieve this.

Our country has a long and proud history of supporting the most vulnerable during their darkest hour. We took in refugees fleeing Hitler's Germany, those fleeing repression in Idi Amin's Uganda, and those who fled the atrocities of the Balkan wars. More recently, we have offered support to those fleeing persecution in Syria, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. We are doing so again with Homes for Ukraine. We are a proud democracy. All of us in this House wish to see us defend and uphold our values, stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, and offer a safe haven to people who have been forced to flee war and persecution. The British people have already opened their hearts in so many ways. I am hopeful that many will also be ready to open their homes and help those fleeing persecution to find peace, healing and the prospect of a brighter future. That is why I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I call shadow Secretary of State Lisa Nandy.

4.12 pm

**Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab):** We were so relieved to hear that the Secretary of State was going to announce a scheme to allow Ukrainian refugees a route to safety after weeks of delay, but a press release is not a plan, and we are really deeply concerned about the lack of urgency. Yesterday, he went on TV to claim that Ukrainians could be here by Sunday, but he has just told us that they will still need a visa under the current application process. These are 50-page forms that have to be completed online, asking people who have fled with nothing to

1. [Official Report, 15 March 2022, Vol. 710, c. 9MC.]

[Lisa Nandy]

find an internet café to upload documents they do not have—water bills and mortgage documents—to prove who they are. The Home Office has been incredibly slow in issuing these visas. As of this morning, only 4,000 have been issued. We are lagging way behind the generosity of other countries. We could simplify this process today. We could keep essential checks but drop the excessive bureaucracy. He knows it; why has it not been done?

For weeks the British people have been coming forward in large numbers to offer help. It has been moving and heartwarming to see the decency and spirit on display in every corner of this country. But what exactly will the Government be doing, especially in relation to matching families to sponsors? On the Secretary of State's tour of the TV studios, he suggested several times that people who are willing to sponsor a Ukrainian family need to come to the Government with the name of that family, and they will then rubber-stamp it. He cannot seriously be asking Ukrainian families who are fleeing Vladimir Putin, and who have left their homes with nothing, to get on to Instagram and advertise themselves in the hope that a British family might notice them. Is that genuinely the extent of this scheme? Surely there is a role for the Secretary of State in matching Ukrainian families to their sponsors, not just a DIY asylum scheme where all he does is take the credit. Will he please clarify what the Government's role is going to be?

There has been a lack of urgency in getting people here and there is still a lack of urgency in ensuring that we support them when they do get here. Earlier today, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and I spoke to council leaders, who stand ready and willing to help. Why has not anyone from the Secretary of State's Department picked up the phone to them? Last week, I spoke to charities that he will ask to act as sponsors. They are acutely aware that the people who are coming will be quite unlike previous refugees.

Two million people are on the march—children alone, mums with very young kids and older people. The brutal reality of what is happening in Ukraine is that working-age people have stayed behind to fight. Those leaving will have healthcare needs, and they will need school places, maternity care and social care. One council leader told me today that his city, which traditionally plays a major role in welcoming refugees, has only nine secondary school places available. Has it not occurred to the Secretary of State until this point to pick up the phone to leaders such as the one I spoke to before he went into the TV studios and promised the earth?

These charities and council leaders are the same people who stepped up during covid. They spin gold out of thread every single day, and what is keeping them awake at night right now is how we do right by people and keep them safe. It was only a few months ago that the Home Office placed a child into a hotel in Sheffield that it had been told was unsafe without even bothering to tell the council, and he fell out of a window and died. Will the Secretary of State ensure that every council is contacted by close of play today? Will he work with them to do the vetting checks that are needed? They are experts in safeguarding children. Will he not only trust them, but support them?

Will the Secretary of State put a safety net in place, in case a placement breaks down? His Department confirmed over the weekend that families left homeless in that situation will not be able to claim their housing costs under universal credit. Surely that cannot be true. Surely we are not going to ask people who have fled bombs and bullets to lie homeless on the streets of Britain.

I suspect that the Secretary of State has felt as ashamed as I have to watch how this Government have closed the door to people who need our help. He shakes his head, but people have been turned back at Calais. They have been left freezing by the roadside with their children. We have had planes leaving neighbouring NATO countries packed to the rafters, except those to London, because this Government have turned people away. The British people who have come forward have shown that we are a far better country than our Government, but unless he gets a plan together—a real plan, not just a press release—all he is effectively announcing is plans to fail the people of Ukraine twice over. He said today that they have our total admiration, and they do, but they need more than that; they need our total support.

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her questions and what I think was her support for our scheme. She asked about the visa application process and the length and bureaucracy associated with it. As was announced last week in the House of Commons by the Home Secretary, and as I repeat today, Ukrainians who have a valid passport can have their application turned around within 24 hours, but not in the way to which the hon. Lady referred, which was announced last week. It is time that, instead of manufacturing synthetic outrage, she kept up with what the Government and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary are delivering. [Interruption.] The hon. Lady has already had a go.

The hon. Lady asked about matching families and sponsors. We are moving as quickly as possible to ensure, working with NGOs and local government, that individuals in need can be found the families and sponsors they need in order to get people into this country as quickly as possible. I am grateful to her for speaking to people in local government this morning; we were speaking and I was speaking to people in local government 10 days ago to ensure that this scheme was capable of being delivered.

The hon. Lady asked why we are requiring matching in the way that we are. That is because our scheme has been developed in partnership with non-governmental organisations, which have welcomed our approach. We have been doing the practical work of ensuring that refugee organisations on the ground can help to shape our response in order to help those most in need.

I know that the hon. Lady wants to help. I believe that everyone in this House wants to ensure that this scheme is successful. She makes a number of valid points about the need for school places. That is why additional funding is available to every local authority that will take refugees in order to ensure that school places are provided.

The hon. Lady asked about wraparound care. We are providing additional funding to local government to ensure that the expertise required to provide those who have been traumatised with the support they need will also be there.

The hon. Lady asked not only about the rapidity of vetting checks, but about how the comprehensive nature of those vetting checks can be guaranteed. We have been working with the Home Office to streamline that process so that it is as quick as possible, but also to ensure, as she rightly pointed out, that we do not place vulnerable children in accommodation where they might be at risk.

In all those cases, every single point that the hon. Lady made has been addressed by officials, NGOs and those in local government to ensure that our scheme works. As her questions have been answered, it now falls to her to get behind the scheme and support those open-hearted British people who want to ensure that we can do everything possible to help those in need. It is time to rise above partisan politics and recognise that this is a united effort in which our colleagues in the devolved Administrations and those in NGOs are working with the Government to put humanity first.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend has generated a great deal of progress in the last few days, but he will understand that we still have a long way to go. I do not want to bore the House or you, Mr Speaker, with my experiences in France last weekend, but I learned a lot from them. We need a meet and greet system, and there are other things that we need to put in place quickly if the scheme is going to work, so I would be grateful if he or Lord Harrington of Watford could meet me today or tomorrow to ensure that we avoid some of the elephant traps that face us if we do not get it right.

**Michael Gove:** Over the last 10 days, my right hon. Friend has been in touch with me daily to outline offers of help from his constituents and others. He is a model constituency MP and a humanitarian. Lord Harrington of Watford will meet him tomorrow to ensure that we can operationalise those offers of help.

**Mr Speaker:** We come to SNP spokesperson Stuart C. McDonald.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I, too, start by thanking people across the UK who have come forward with incredibly generous offers of accommodation and support for Ukrainians. Of course, we will do what we can to support the initiative. We regret, however, that this is only phase one; things are still not going fast enough. We will continue to argue that the best response available to the Government is to stop asking Ukrainians to apply for visas altogether. On that point, why will people accepted on to the scheme have to apply for a visa as well? Of course, some of them may be able to apply online, but an online process is not necessarily fast.

On sponsorship, we welcome the fact that people with limited leave to remain are now able to be sponsors, but when does the Secretary of State anticipate that charities, churches and community groups will be able to play their part? He explained a bit about the vetting process, but how will sponsors be supported to undertake their role? It is not just a question of cash. What happens if a sponsorship does not work out? What move-on support will be available?

On financial support, will the £350 a month be available to sponsors such as community groups as well as to individuals? Does access to public funds mean full access, including to the housing element of universal credit? Will there be £10,000 of local authority support per person as reported in the press?

What about the most vulnerable people, such as orphans, the elderly and others who will never know about the scheme's existence, never mind how to apply to it? Can the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for example, refer someone to the scheme or for resettlement? What support would be provided in those circumstances? What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Scottish and Welsh Governments about their request to operate as super-sponsors? Will he endeavour to make that work?

**Michael Gove:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for the scheme. He made the point about ensuring that we speed up all the security and visa checks as quickly as possible. As I mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already acted in that regard.

From tomorrow, anyone with a Ukrainian passport will be able to apply online. Thanks to a surge in the number of caseworkers in the Home Office, they should be able to have permission turned around and granted very quickly. A PDF will be sent straight to them and they can then fly into this country to a warm welcome. As a result, the surge of staff in our visa application centres will be able to deal with individuals who, for whatever reason, do not have a passport or the capacity to secure one quickly, which means that we will be able to more quickly process the number of Ukrainians who wish to come here. As was pointed out earlier, 4,000 visas have been granted and the numbers are due to surge this week.

The hon. Gentleman made the point that charities, churches and community groups have all stepped up. We want to ensure that we are working with all of them this week to facilitate their role, not just in matching individual sponsors and Ukrainians who might benefit but in extending the reach of the support we give so that it is not just a roof over someone's head but the valuable interpersonal support of which so many are capable.

When I was chatting to faith groups earlier today, I had the opportunity to talk to representatives of not just the Ukrainian Churches, but the Church of England, the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church, including the Roman Catholic bishops in Scotland, all of whom are anxious to ensure that we do everything that we can to help. For individuals who, for whatever reason, find that a sponsorship solution does not work for them, we will ensure that the local government partners and charity partners with whom we are working receive the resource that they require. The £350 is there for individuals, but charities and community groups will have a vital role to play in helping to marshal individual offers.

The hon. Gentleman made a point about unaccompanied minors, orphans and others who need our support. We are working with those on the ground to ensure that we can have the right solution for them.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about working with the devolved Administrations. I was grateful to the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales for their generous

[*Michael Gove*]

offer to act as super-sponsors, and we are doing everything we can to facilitate that. My officials are working with those in the Scottish and Welsh Governments to ensure that we can do that in a way that enables everyone to live up to their responsibilities.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. He has answered many of the questions that arose over the weekend, but may I press him specifically on when he expects phase 2 to start and what work is already going on with non-governmental organisations? Those organisations make the point that they have many people who have already been checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service, but the volunteers coming forward in my constituency tend not to have been. We know that there are already backlogs in DBS checking, so can he assure me that that will be sped up?

I have a practical question about people who are planning to move home over the course of the next six months. Will they still be able to take part even if their address changes?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend makes three good points. We are working this week with civil society and NGOs. Indeed, Lord Harrington and I met them in order to ensure that we can expedite phase 2 as quickly as possible, and we will update the House in real time over the next few days. On the second point, about safeguarding, we are working with the Home Office. We do not believe that we need to have full DBS checks in order to ensure that someone is an appropriate sponsor. Very light-touch criminal checks will often be sufficient, and then local authorities can be supported in order to ensure that people are safe, in line with the points made by the Opposition—points that my right hon. Friend made much more sharply, of course. If people are moving house, which is something I have had to do recently, we will do everything possible to facilitate their support.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I think that it is accepted in principle there will be general support for a scheme that allows individuals to welcome refugees into their homes. In terms of detail, the Secretary of State accepted that there would be a cost to local authorities, which will be key to making this work, as I am sure he accepts. Has he agreed with the Local Government Association—I declare my interest as a vice-president of the LGA—the costs that local authorities will get to cover education and other wraparound support services? Will those costs apply to people who come over on the community sponsorship scheme and to those on the family scheme? What about individuals who come here as family members but then cannot be accommodated in their family's home because of the number of refugees involved? What are we going to do to accommodate those people? How is that accommodation going to be provided? What is the plan for that?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for his questions. The amount of money we are giving to local government is based on the Afghan

resettlement scheme, so the amount that will be given to local authorities for early years, primary and secondary education matches exactly. Indeed, the overall local authority tariff—I hate to use the word “tariff” when we are talking about human beings—will be exactly the same. We are building on arrangements that we have with the LGA, and I have been in touch with James Jamieson, the leader of the LGA, as well as individual council leaders, to outline the level of support. Obviously, we will keep things under review to ensure that local government has what it needs.

On the second point, about people who come under the family scheme, there has always been a balance between speed and the comprehensiveness of an offer. The family scheme was introduced because we knew that it could be the speediest possible scheme, but the hon. Gentleman's question points to a particular challenge that we have. We still have around 14,000 Afghan refugees in hotel accommodation, and we still have significant pressure on local authority accommodation and on housing overall. As we look to meet humanitarian needs, we need to be as flexible as possible, and we will be saying more about how we can mobilise other resources at the disposal of the state, local government or the private sector in order to provide additional accommodation of the kind that he mentions.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): With a three-year visa but only six months of guaranteed accommodation, will people have any tenant rights? What is the back-up provision if the sponsor wants to terminate well before the end of the visa?

**Michael Gove:** It is our expectation that those who commit to have someone in their home for six months are undertaking quite a significant commitment, but it is already the case that the expressions of interest suggest that there are many people who want to do exactly that. The experience of previous sponsorship schemes has been that those who have undertaken such a commitment have found it a wonderful thing to have done, and the number of those who have dropped out or opted out has been small. However, it is the case—my right hon. Friend is absolutely right—that there may be occasions where relationships break down, and in those circumstances we will be mobilising the support of not only of central Government and local government, but of civil society, to ensure that individuals who are here can move on. The final thing I would want to say is that many of those on the frontline coming here will of course be women and children, but many of those coming here will want to work, to contribute and to be fully part of society. It is the case already that we have had offers from those in the private sector willing to provide training and jobs to people so that they can fully integrate into society for as long as they are here.

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I want to go back to the Secretary of State's point when he highlighted that over 14,000 Afghan refugees are still in hotels, including hotels in my constituency of Vauxhall—accommodation that, frankly, is unsuitable for people suffering long-term trauma and people fleeing war. I was not quite sure what the Secretary of State's response was, but how is he dealing with that type of long-term, unjustifiable and unsuitable accommodation?

**Michael Gove:** I have enormous sympathy for the hon. Lady. One of the reasons why Lord Harrington has joined my Department and is working with the Home Office is to ensure that we can get people whom we have accepted out of hotel accommodation, which is unsuitable for the long term, and into the community, but that requires us to ensure that those local authorities receiving individuals are supported in the way they are. I would be more than happy to return to the House to outline the steps we are taking to deal with this situation, but it comes back to the essential point that the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), brought out. As we show a warm welcome to people who are fleeing persecution, we need to ensure that that welcome can be truly stable and secure. That means additional accommodation, which means moving beyond hotels and local authorities, and that is why the Homes for Ukraine scheme harnesses the kindness of civil society, but there is more that we must do, and we will update the House in due course.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** I strongly welcome the scheme that my right hon. Friend has set out. It was Sir Nicholas Winton who said:

“If something is not impossible, then there must be a way to do it”.

May I ask my right hon. Friend if he would extend the scheme, or the imagination he has set out today, to make sure that Britain offers a refuge to and harbours Ukrainian orphans who are able to come here, and will he work with Ukraine to bring them over and make sure that these children are looked after?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend makes a characteristically compassionate and acute point. One of the areas of greatest difficulty is helping orphans and unaccompanied children, and that is something we need to do more on, and we will.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):** This is significant and welcome progress, even if I suspect it still leaves us somewhere short of our obligations under the 1951 convention. Can the Secretary of State explain how this sponsorship scheme will interact with the rights of those who are already here, perhaps under a work visa? If their circumstances change, how will they then be able to obtain the same level of protection that will be given to refugees coming here under his scheme?

**Michael Gove:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Of course, the scheme we are introducing today is not perfect, but we hope to work with him and others to make sure that it is improved as it develops. One of the things we want to do is to stress that anyone who has six months' residency in the UK can act as a sponsor, but he quite rightly draws attention to the fact that there are Ukrainians in this country—some are students, for example, and others are in a position where they do not have indefinite leave to remain—and we will seek to regularise their status. The Home Secretary and Lord Harrington are, I know, already on it.

**Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con):** I very much welcome the conduit for the immense generosity of the British public that my right hon. Friend has set out. However, as he has recognised, what a Ukrainian refugee needs is not just a home, but the services that go

with a home and, as others have said, local authorities will be providing those. Can I ask him about the very substantial co-ordination challenges not just between his Department and the Home Office, though that is important, but between the services that are being provided to refugees who are already here from other places and the services for those who will arrive from Ukraine? The fact is that, under the scheme he has described, people will go where there is a home for them, not necessarily where there is service provision for them, and he will need to ensure, will he not, that that service provision is indeed provided?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend makes a good point, and this is a cross-Government, and beyond Government effort. As he reminds us, we have welcomed people who have come here from Syria or Afghanistan in a compassionate fashion, but there are delivery challenges for everyone in Government that we need to work out, to ensure the right services are there. We expect, but do not predict, that many of those who will benefit in the first stages of this scheme will be people moving to areas where there are already a significant number of people of Ukrainian ancestry. Some of the social networks will help, but we must ensure that as the scheme expands, the support is there.

**Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab):** The Secretary of State said that the webpage to volunteer to sponsor a Ukrainian refugee has gone live, but the ITV journalist, Paul Brand, has just reported that it does not work and the site cannot be reached.

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his real-time update. I am sorry if Paul Brand's internet connection is wonky. It seems that the connection of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) is superior, as she has just signed up.

**Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con):** I welcome today's announcement, and I have been inundated by offers from my constituents who have rooms or homes that they would like to make available. May I ask a prosaic question? One or two of my constituents have asked about set-up costs and things like cots and children's beds. What steps will my right hon. Friend take, either through his Department or working with local authorities, to match up individuals with charities, so that that initial equipment and clothing—all the things families will need—can be arranged at the start?

**Michael Gove:** I know my hon. Friend has already been working with her constituents in west Berkshire to do everything possible to support those who may benefit from this scheme. The charities, church groups and others with whom I and Lord Harrington have been in conversation over the past few days are already making the sorts of connections that she has been responsible for making, to ensure that detailed practical help can be there for those who are acting so generously.

**Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab):** Like many, I was confused by the Secretary of State's suggestion that sponsors could match with refugees using Twitter and Instagram. That has raised a number of safeguarding concerns, given the trauma that many of these people will have been exposed to. Will refugees have access to the specialist support they need, and how will they be protected from exploitation in the UK?

**Michael Gove:** They absolutely will have access to that support. Anyone who acts as a sponsor will face light-touch vetting checks initially, and subsequently will be visited by those from local government who, to be fair, and as the hon. Lady rightly pointed out, are experts in safeguarding.

**Damian Green (Ashford) (Con):** I very much welcome this announcement, and I am grateful to the Secretary of State and the Government for listening to voices from across the House who have been urging this kind of action. Let me return to local authorities, and particularly lower-tier local authorities. My council in Ashford has been active and generous in helping refugees from Syria and Afghanistan. What should such local authorities that want to help be doing today to plug themselves into the system?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend and the One Nation group of Conservative MPs helped in the development of our policy with some of the ideas that they shared with the Department. I am grateful to him and his colleagues, and to individuals across the House who played a collaborative part in that. The money that we are giving to local authorities will go to lower-tier local authorities, and I will ask my Department to ensure that in Ashford, and elsewhere, and through the good offices of the Local Government Association, local authorities know how to access the resources they need.

**Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab):** The Government's response to the refugee crisis so far has shamed our country and damaged our reputation abroad. Today's announcement is a step forward, but we need to go faster than the statement suggests to make up for lost time. Will the Secretary of State confirm to the many groups that have contacted me in Sheffield over the weekend a date by which the community sponsorship route will be open?

**Michael Gove:** Friday.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** My right hon. Friend is quite right to have a light-touch approach to vetting for those seeking security. Clearly, large numbers of the people arriving will be vulnerable—they will be women and children—and ideally they will be placed with families with connections. However, inevitably, some will be placed with others. Will he go further and explain who will do the vetting—will it be local authorities or be done nationally—to ensure that these vulnerable people are not placed with anyone who may exploit them?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. It will be a national vetting process initially, with local authorities following up. As ever—this point has been made across the House—we have to balance two things: the speed with which people can be placed and the security of the setting in which they are placed. Our light-touch approach can ensure that we are not placing vulnerable individuals with anyone with any record of criminality. Subsequent to that, of course, there will be additional checks to ensure that the quality of accommodation and the basis on which people are housed is decent and fair.

**Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** My local authority, Cyngor Gwynedd, has been inundated with warm-hearted offers of accommodation and support. It is concerned, however, that it is still being left in the dark. For instance, despite the announcement of a

hotline for the public, Gwynedd Council has not yet been given a regional contact from the Government. What will the Secretary of State do to fix his scheme's weaknesses in communications and ensure that there are no brakes from here in Westminster on Wales's ambition to be a super-sponsor as a nation of sanctuary for Ukrainian refugees?

**Michael Gove:** In the conversations that I have had with the Welsh Government, they have been anxious about co-ordinating with local government in Wales and indeed civil society so that they can provide support. On the right hon. Lady's point about the Welsh Government being a super-sponsor, I discussed exactly what can be done with Minister Jane Hutt alongside the First Minister of Scotland. If Gwynedd Council and its councillors require more information, my Department will endeavour to provide that. If she faces any challenges, I hope that she will contact me direct to ensure that her constituents are aware of how to help.

**Dean Russell (Watford) (Con):** May I first welcome the appointment of Lord Harrington of Watford to his post? Yesterday, I spent time in the peace garden in Cassiobury park with the Watford Interfaith Association, who took prayers from many faiths across the area. I know how important faith is, especially at this difficult time, so will my right hon. Friend please set out the steps that his Department is taking to work with the Ukrainian people and the religious organisations here in the UK so that we can support them spiritually as well as physically?

**Michael Gove:** People of all faiths and none have stepped up to demonstrate their support for those fleeing persecution. In particular, I thank representatives of Ukrainian Churches here in the United Kingdom and, in particular, Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, who has been talking to the Minister for Levelling Up Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch), in her role as Minister for faith. Thanks to his and her direct intervention, a number of Ukrainian-speaking priests were able to come into the country at an accelerated rate to ensure that we provide the pastoral care that the Ukrainian community was so keen to see.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab):** As with previous refugee crises, the Government's response to the Ukraine crisis has been pathetic, revealing the true extent of the callousness within their hostile environment policy. By the way, the only reason we have had such a statement, which in itself was wholly inadequate, was that the Government have been dragged here, kicking and screaming, by the Opposition, the media and the good British people, who have said, "This debacle simply doesn't represent us. We are much better than this."

I want to press the Secretary of State on my Slough constituent's case. A 15-year-old Ukrainian girl is currently in Poland. She has had to leave behind the death and destruction as well as her parents and brother in Ukraine. Her only family outside Ukraine is in the UK. They have tried their level best to bring her here, but the Government have shamefully said that she is ineligible for the Ukraine family scheme because she is not considered to be a close enough relation. Instead, they prefer to leave a vulnerable child to fend for herself. What can my constituents do to bring that young girl to safety?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Just before the Secretary of State answers that, the hon. Gentleman knows that his question was far too long. All we need here is questions. Everybody knows the background, and every Member who stands up does not need to explain it. Just ask the question, because we have got an awful lot to get through today, and this is very important.

**Michael Gove:** On the hon. Gentleman's individual case, Home Office officials are working incredibly hard every day in Portcullis House to deal with individual surgery cases of the kind that he mentions. I urge him to visit the caseworkers there. If for any reason that is inadequate, just email me direct and we will do everything we can.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman says that there is more that the scheme needs to do in order to be better. It is always the case that more needs to be done at every point when we are dealing with a humanitarian tragedy. We all recognise that, but I would respectfully say to him two things. First, this country has taken in people from Syria and Afghanistan, we are taking in people from Ukraine, and it is an uncapped scheme. Secondly, while we are going to disagree politically, I have had it up to here with people trying to suggest that this country is not generous. And as for all this stuff about the hostile environment, that was invented under a Labour Home Secretary, so can we just chuck the partisan nonsense and get on with delivery?

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I applaud the generosity of the scheme. It is a shame that the Opposition have been on a scavenger hunt for the negatives in a very churlish way. May I ask two practical questions? First, some people do not have accommodation free for the whole year, for example where students have gone off to university, so will there be a scheme whereby there can be shared responsibility to take on family members? Secondly, on sponsoring work placements, how will the many hospitality businesses in Worthing that want to bring in chefs go about that? It needs to be done locally, because it is no good offering a job to somebody in a restaurant in Worthing if they have been placed in a home in Sunderland.

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making those points. To provide people with the jobs and support they need, we will work with him and others who are making business offers. I am very grateful to him for the work he has already done and continues to do to help the most vulnerable who are fleeing persecution.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I have been humbled by the response of the people of Argyll and Bute who have contacted me already to offer accommodation to fleeing Ukrainian refugees. Similarly, having met the chief executive of the council on Friday, I know that it, too, stands ready to play its part, as it did magnificently when Syrian refugees found shelter in Argyll and Bute after having also fled Putin's bombs. Under the terms of the scheme, will local authorities be allowed to be sponsors for refugees?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the welcome that local authorities and people across Scotland showed to Syrians fleeing persecution,

and the willingness they are showing to help Ukrainians fleeing persecution, is great. He is absolutely right that people in Argyll and island communities have already done that. We hope to allow the Scottish Government to be a super sponsor and allow them to work with local authorities in Scotland. That is what Scottish Government Ministers have proposed to us as the best way forward, and it seems sensible to me. We just need to try to make it work.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I strongly welcome the scheme that my right hon. Friend set out, but may I urge him to ensure that safeguarding and checking measures remain proportionate? As Conservatives, we generally believe that people can make decisions for themselves. I agree that with unaccompanied children safeguarding is critical, but the state should not get in the way of the generous response of the British people. Let us ensure that the checks are proportionate to the risk. Let the British people respond in the way that they already have.

**Michael Gove:** I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for his common-sense perspective, which I completely share.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): My constituency has a proud record of welcoming refugees. Of the families who require settlement here, there will be some with an adult or a child with a disability who will have specific needs and require specific support. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether specialist support will be available—his statement did not allude to that—and whether there will be additional funding for it?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Lady makes a very important point. I know what a passionate and effective spokesperson she is for those living with disabilities. Absolutely, we will work with local government to ensure support is there for women, children and others fleeing persecution, many of whom will be living with disabilities and will need additional support.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I know that Buckinghamshire Council stands ready to do all it can to support and give a warm welcome, with good services, to Ukrainian families coming to Buckinghamshire under the scheme. To assist it with its planning, will he confirm whether funds made available to local authorities will just be for local authority services or will councils have to have a dual function of commissioning services from the NHS, academy trusts in schools and so on?

**Michael Gove:** The funding we will make available will cover general local authority costs. There will be an additional supplement for education, for the early years, for primary school and for secondary schools, but we are working with Martin Tett, a great local council leader, and others to ensure that any specific additional support that may be required is tailored appropriately.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I seek some clarifications from the Secretary of State. Charities such as Refugees at Home arrange hosting of refugees following a visit from a referrer or home visitor to assess the potential placement and liaise with potential hosts. Is that the role in the scheme that he envisages for such charities? He mentioned churches, charities and

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community organisations. The third sector is ready to help and has always stepped up, but it is not easy when it has already given such a lot during the pandemic. Will such charities be properly supported financially to help them expand the work they do quickly?

**Michael Gove:** On the first point, Refugees at Home has done an amazing job in helping to support the existing sponsorship route, which, as colleagues from across the House have pointed out, although admirable is not appropriate, in its own limited way, for what we are doing now. We have been talking to charities over the past 10 days to make sure that we learn from them about what level of support may be required. If more capacity building is needed within the third sector, we stand ready to do that. But we have been working with Reset Communities and Refugees, Citizens UK, the Sanctuary Foundation, the Red Cross and others to make sure that we can support them.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): May I ask for an official point of contact for a very valuable resource, the Council for At-Risk Academics, which has not only been rescuing scholars from dictatorial regimes since 1933 but co-ordinates sponsorship from a network of universities? The main danger is a disconnect between the work it can do and the new sponsorship organisation and admission organisation. May we have an official point of contact for CARA?

**Michael Gove:** I was able to talk to a leading academic at the University of Manchester earlier today who is working in a very similar field. I will make sure that my right hon. Friend is put in touch with an appropriate official contact in my Department, and either I or Lord Harrington will be back in touch with my right hon. Friend in the next 24 hours.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): The media contribution yesterday and the statement this afternoon have spurred on optimistic aspiration for those in my constituency and across the UK who wish to help. Will the Secretary of State dedicate a hotline for parliamentarians like us who want to iron out the cracks for individuals to assist them? We have heard about Wales and Scotland, but we know that the political situation is not as fertile as we would like it to be in Northern Ireland. Is he confident that schools, hospitals and housing will be made available, knowing, as he does, that they do not rest within local government?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. I have two points to make. First, we know the political situation in Northern Ireland, but we did have an opportunity to talk to Jayne Brady of the Northern Ireland civil service in order to make sure that Northern Ireland was fully looped into this approach. Both the Secretary of State and the Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office are committed to doing everything to help. Lord Harrington will be holding regular surgeries for Members of Parliament, from all parties, who wish to help and mobilise local resource.

**Siobhan Baillie** (Stroud) (Con): The people of Stroud are extremely big-hearted and they want to help in as many ways as possible, so we really welcome this innovative scheme, which I understand is the first of its kind anywhere.

This offer is, however, complex, with many moving parts. As my right hon. Friend said, many refugees coming here will be mothers and women with children, so will he confirm that he is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure that it is ready to assist with benefits and childcare options, because we know that many of these people will want to work and the jobs are actually there?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has been working incredibly energetically with her team to provide the basis for such support.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement, and we are grateful to Lord Harrington for having already agreed to appear before the Home Affairs Committee on Wednesday to answer questions.

How assured is the Secretary of State about the visa requirement that is still in place for Ukrainians coming to this country? As the Home Secretary said, 90% of Ukrainians do not have a passport and will therefore have to go to the visa application centres, which have been beset with problems—not opening as often as we want them to, online systems going down, and many other problems. They have struggled to deal with the family visa system for Ukrainian people. How assured is the Secretary of State that this will work, and will be up and running soon?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee. Lord Harrington and I have been seeking to assure ourselves, with our Home Office colleagues, that the system that will go live from tomorrow and will enable passport holders—although, as the right hon. Lady pointed out, that is not every Ukrainian—to secure rapidly, online, the PDF form to which I referred earlier, will allow them ease of access. It is true that, as the right hon. Lady rightly observed, there have been challenges—I will not go into all the reasons now; she knows them very well—with the operation of our visa application centres, but, as well as setting up the new centre in Arras in northern France to which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred last week, we have expanded opening hours in many other centres. In particular, Warsaw and Rzeszów in Poland, which were previously not open at the weekend because of complicated Polish labour laws, are now fully open. We will update the House continually on the speed and the effectiveness with which the centres are processing applications.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I welcome this important announcement. My constituents in the Scottish Borders are desperate to help. There is a slightly different system in Scotland, with the Scottish Government taking on a super sponsor position. Can the Secretary of State reassure me that his officials and the Department will work with Scottish Borders Council and the Scottish Government to ensure that the system is seamless, that those people wanting to help are able to do so, and that families coming to this country are supported in every way possible?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. We are of course working with the Scottish Government, and the scheme that will go live this week will allow individuals anywhere in the

United Kingdom to offer to act as sponsors. We have explained to the Scottish Government that we just want to crack on.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Britain and Ireland are both surrounded by water, and neither is part of Schengen, yet Ireland has taken three times as many Ukrainian refugees as Britain despite having a population 13 times smaller. Why?

**Michael Gove:** I will never criticise the Irish Government.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): The big society is back, and it is welcome, as are the expansion of the family scheme and the new sponsorship scheme which, as my right hon. Friend will know, I was very impatient to see last week. Certainly the 1,700 of us who stood together in Winchester cathedral on Saturday with our prayers for Ukraine are very appreciative.

The phased response is sensible. We cannot allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good; we have to get this up and running. Is my right hon. Friend working to a trigger or a timeline for when the charities and the church groups can become involved?

**Michael Gove:** That will happen as quickly as possible, not least because of the impassioned advocacy of my hon. Friend.

**Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Many of my constituents have expressed to me their concern that the UK is simply not doing enough to help Ukrainian refugees. This Tory Government, of course, have form. Whether we are talking about refugees from Syria, Afghanistan or Ukraine, they have a tendency to introduce red tape and shy away from their moral duty.

In his answers today, the Secretary of State has repeatedly referred to a “warm welcome”—which was, of course, the name given to the scheme designed to help Afghans. We know that that scheme is not running as smoothly as it should be, and it is not necessarily a “warm welcome”. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give us that these are not empty words, and that those who are fleeing conflict will be genuinely welcomed?

**Michael Gove:** The good news is that the hon. Lady's predecessor as Member of Parliament for Airdrie and Shotts—one of north Lanarkshire's finest—is now the Minister in the Scottish Government responsible for this. I look forward to working with Neil Gray, a great man.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his hard work to operationalise this system. It will provide a stable place of refuge rather than leaving people in hotels for too long, and I know that the people of Rutland and Melton will join me in opening their hearts and their homes. My ask is that we do all that we can to ensure that the most vulnerable people come here, because they will not always have contacts in the UK and they are the most likely to be trapped in the east. Can he reassure me that we will focus our efforts on those most in need?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes some good points. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) said that we must not make the perfect the

enemy of the good, and this scheme is not perfect, but we are trying to ensure that we can move as rapidly as possible. That is why named sponsors are being deployed; it means that we can get people into homes. Again, we know that there is pressure on other accommodation. We will be seeing and doing more in every day that comes.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I also welcome this scheme, and my constituents have been contacting me about what they can do to provide such accommodation, but can I gently remind the Secretary of State that there are still thousands of women, activists, prosecutors, judges and others in Afghanistan who are still waiting to hear from the Afghan resettlement scheme? Will this type of scheme include those people in a further roll-out?

**Michael Gove:** I appreciate that there is pressure on the Afghan resettlement scheme. When it was set up, it was going to involve 20,000 people this year and then be extended. We are working with our partners, and part of Lord Harrington's new responsibilities will include ensuring not only that we get those who are currently in hotel accommodation into more settled accommodation but that we live up to our obligation to others.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Can I ask my right hon. Friend whether any consideration has been given to establishing an advance office on the Ukraine-Polish border? People could go to such an office to get advice and some help to get to the UK, possibly in combination with those extremely good non-governmental organisations, particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Putting them all together right on the border would really help people coming through who do not know what to do.

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend has a distinguished record when it comes to helping people in conflict areas. I will work with the Home Secretary to ensure that our resources on the ground are positioned appropriately.

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): I have spoken to senior councillors in Dundee over the last week, and the city council remains open and willing to take and accommodate Ukrainian refugees. I also heard what the Minister said about working closely with the devolved Administrations who wish to become super-sponsors. Given that the Governments of Scotland and Wales know far more than I or the Minister do about their capacity and the capacity of their local governments, why does he not simply allocate substantial numbers of Ukrainian refugees to Scotland and Wales and let them get on with the job of providing sanctuary?

**Michael Gove:** That is what we want to do.

**Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for today's announcement. Can he confirm that, if households are taking on a family or individual registered with a community support charity—such as the Pickwell Foundation in North Devon, which has a proven track record of providing a warm, safe and sustainable welcome to refugees—they will still receive the £350 a month?

**Michael Gove:** Yes, the individuals will.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Both my local boroughs, Lambeth and Southwark, stand ready and willing to welcome refugees from Ukraine, as they have welcomed refugees from many other parts of the world in the past, but it is really hard for them to do so if they are not formally a part of the Government's scheme. They will inevitably be playing catch-up on who is arriving in their area and what their support needs are. Local authorities know their communities best, and by cutting them out of a formal role in the scheme, the Government will create avoidable problems and inefficiencies. Will Secretary of State think again about the vital role that local authorities have to play in making sure that refugees have the fullest possible welcome in all our communities across the UK?

**Michael Gove:** I do not believe that we have cut local government out of the scheme, but of course I am committed to working with Lambeth, Southwark and other local authorities to ensure that individuals who are placed with sponsors are provided with all the support that local government is capable of providing and that local government gets the resource needed from central Government.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): Many older people, particularly the widowed, who live alone in larger homes with plenty of spare rooms will be keen to offer refuge to Ukrainian refugees. However, quite reasonably, they will need to be assured that it is entirely safe to do so. My right hon. Friend says the Government are streamlining the processes to security assess the status of Ukrainians arriving here. Could he give more details on those processes, please?

**Michael Gove:** As I mentioned earlier, in the context of the Home Secretary's announcement last week, we want to make sure that anyone who applies, either using a Ukrainian passport or through a visa application centre, goes through basic security checks. As we know, it is a hard and difficult fact that there are malign actors in that part of eastern Europe who may wish to abuse the scheme, so we have to balance security against other considerations. The speed with which we can now turn around applications is a sign that we are prioritising compassion.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Secretary of State says he hopes that many people will be ready to open their home, but it seems that, due to Home Office guidance, none of the 3,000-plus spare rooms offered to Afghan refugees by hosts across the UK has been used. That does not inspire confidence in the Ukrainian scheme, so what steps will he take to ensure that the Ukraine sponsorship scheme is more successful than the Afghan scheme and that Home Office guidance facilitates rather than blocks Ukrainian refugees from settling here in the UK?

**Michael Gove:** The Home Secretary and I will do everything possible to improve the operation of the scheme, in line with the hon. Lady's points.

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for the urgency he has brought to this issue, but may I press him to go faster still? Hay, Brecon and Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees in my

constituency has already done a phenomenal amount of work, and it stands ready to offer homes to people in Ukraine who do not know anyone in this country, as do my many tourism and hospitality businesses. Will he direct his officials to go even faster on phase 2 of the scheme so that we get this rolled out as quickly as possible?

**Michael Gove:** We absolutely will, and I recognise that individuals are already making offers. I had conversations with NGOs and others today, and they will be doing their very best for anyone who is willing to allow a match to be made. It is striking how charities and civil society organisations can be much faster and nimbler than even the best Government Department in bringing people together.

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): Following a really successful rally yesterday in which the people of Newport West and surrounding areas demonstrated their wish to help to house Ukrainian refugees, will the Secretary of State confirm that data on arrivals via this new route will be shared with councils? After all, having access to this data would help to ensure that children's health and education needs are met quickly.

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Lady makes a very important point. It is critical that we ensure data is shared in a timely fashion.

**Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. We all recognise that, in time, people will be able to register for NHS services. However, some people will need urgent medical treatment. Will he kindly liaise with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ensure that those who need urgent healthcare get it, even though they might not have an NHS number?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care moved with amazing speed to provide support to some of the most vulnerable, and he spoke to the Ukrainian ambassador earlier today about what more the NHS might be able to do. We will absolutely act in that spirit.

**Allan Dorans** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): Have the United Kingdom Government set a cap, either actual or notional, on how many refugees we will take from Ukraine? If so, how was it, or will it be, decided?

**Michael Gove:** We will do everything possible to make sure the Scottish Government are satisfied.

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement. On the safeguarding of vulnerable refugees, I listened very carefully to what he said about historical and ongoing safety checks. Who will do the ongoing checks on refugee safety?

**Michael Gove:** Local government, who are experts in safeguarding.

**Beth Winter** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): The First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, said at the weekend that visas should not be necessary "as they are not necessary in the European Union".

Along with his Scottish counterpart, he has called on the UK Government to waive visa requirements. This morning, the chief executive of the Welsh Refugee

Council said that the scheme is not a humanitarian response, particularly in comparison with other European countries that have accepted hundreds of thousands of people. She described the scheme as

“quite disheartening...quite shocking, frankly.”

Will the Secretary of State look again at the heartless visa requirement scheme, which is so out of touch with the people of Britain and indeed the devolved nations? Will he please put people first instead?

**Michael Gove:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady feels as she does. I should say that, when I was talking to representatives of the Refugee Council, one of them said as we unveiled the scheme that they took their hat off to the Government because they were so pleased with what we have done. They want us to go further and, as I acknowledged earlier, the scheme is not perfect, but we have to balance speed with breadth, comprehensiveness, safety, security and other considerations.

I am grateful for the hon. Lady's question, because I can update the House that, since the website went live less than an hour ago, 1,500 people have already registered through the scheme in order to provide support.

**Simon Jupp** (East Devon) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend on behalf of East Devon for the Homes for Ukraine scheme. I have already received countless offers of accommodation from our generous towns and villages in East Devon. Could he outline the safeguarding measures in place, both for sponsors and for refugees?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is right. First, we need a light-touch approach that means that, when individuals come forward, we can be certain that they do not have any record of criminality. Subsequently, local government, including the excellent council in East Devon, can visit to ensure that accommodation is right. The checks that we are placing on people coming into the country, as we touched on earlier, are there to ensure that the tiny minority of bad actors, some of whom can be particularly exploitative and malignant, are kept out so that the scheme works for those who genuinely need it.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): May I press the Secretary of State again on the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans) asked: will there be a cap on the number of Ukrainians allowed into the UK? If my constituents register today for the scheme, how quickly can they expect to have Ukrainians in their house?

**Michael Gove:** First, there is no cap overall on the number of people who can benefit. Secondly, as I mentioned, the Scottish Government have suggested that they could act as a super-sponsor for 3,000, and we are working with them.

On the hon. Lady's particular point, if one of her constituents registers today, that means that they can be updated. Come this Friday, they and a named Ukrainian could complete the form. As soon as the form is completed, there will be a turnaround to ensure that the security checks on both sides are safely done. That should mean, God willing, that there can be Ukrainians coming to Glasgow in just over a week's time.

**Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): Luton welcomes refugees. We stepped up to welcome any Afghan refugees, and our community is now stepping up to support our Ukrainian residents and refugees. However, far too many families of Afghan refugees are still in hotels in Luton, and there is a great deal of pressure on our housing system. What plans and measures are in place to support families moving into longer-term housing? Will the £350-a-month scheme be considered for other refugees, which might be more culturally appropriate?

**Michael Gove:** There are at least two very important points there. First, of course we need to move faster to move people from hotel accommodation into more suitable long-term accommodation, but there are constraints. I am not criticising anyone; it is just that there are constraints in Luton and elsewhere. That is why we need to think about how we can find, and indeed secure, more suitable accommodation. We have done amazing work—the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), has done amazing work—in making sure that homeless people, some of whom were originally from eastern Europe, are off the streets and in secure and safe accommodation, but more must be done.

The £350 payment has been designed to support people who are offering up their own homes, but let us see how it goes and see what more we can do in future.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Bryce Cunningham of Mossgiel farm in my constituency has already done a fantastic job of organising getting aid out to a Polish charity. He is interested in being a sponsor and providing employment for Ukrainian refugees, but he does not have the physical accommodation in which to put them up. Would he be able to use the £350 a month housing allowance to, say, come to a rental agreement with the local authority? Would the Secretary of State reconsider allowing local authorities and community bodies to access that £350 a month so that we can provide as much help as possible for as many refugees as possible?

**Michael Gove:** Although I do not know all the details of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, it seems to me that what he wants to do is wholly admirable and something that we should facilitate. I will ask my team to be in touch with the hon. Gentleman and East Ayrshire Council to make sure that they can deliver in the way required.

**Stephen Farry** (North Down) (Alliance): May I press the Secretary of State further on the situation in respect of Northern Ireland? Will he clarify whether the registration works at the UK level or the local level? Will the matching and the vetting be done at the UK level? How will Northern Ireland Departments access resources—will there be a Barnett consequential or will they apply for a grant from the UK Government?

**Michael Gove:** On the first point, I believe that, unless told otherwise and unless there is any barrier—by which I mean a technical barrier, not a legal barrier—any UK citizen anywhere in the United Kingdom can act as a sponsor. On the second point, we are discussing with the devolved Administrations how we can provide additional support, because if we were to restrict it simply to a

[Michael Gove]

Barnett consequential and then found that, as it happened, there were many more sponsors in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales than in other parts of the United Kingdom, that would not be fair on those individuals. We want to take a flexible approach.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I thank the Secretary of State for thoroughly answering a large number of important questions.

## DISSOLUTION AND CALLING OF PARLIAMENT BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 6 July 2021 (Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill (Programme)):

### *Consideration of Lords Amendments*

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

### *Subsequent stages*

(2) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(3) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(Andrea Jenkyns.)

*Question agreed to.*

## Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill

### *Consideration of Lords amendments*

### Clause 2

REVIVAL OF PREROGATIVE POWERS TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT AND TO CALL A NEW PARLIAMENT

5.17 pm

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Michael Ellis):** I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

The Bill passed through the other place, where it was carefully scrutinised and amended in only one respect: to seek to retain a role for this honourable House in respect of Dissolution. The Lords amendment provided that the Prime Minister could request the sovereign exercise—the revived prerogative powers to dissolve and call Parliament—only when this House agreed the motion “that this present Parliament will be dissolved.”

That would create an untested, hybrid system by imposing statutory arrangements on top of the prerogative system that existed prior to the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. Such statutory constraints would undermine the flexibility that for generations characterised the pre-2011 arrangements that the Government want to reinstate. With respect, the Government therefore firmly disagree with the Lords amendment.

In fact, the Government and the Opposition both committed—in their manifestos, no less—to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. The Lords amendment would repeal that Act only to retain one of its fundamental flaws. That is not our wish or our intention and it does not meet the commitment that we made to the electorate.

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** I am hugely relieved to hear the Minister say that. I have stood in every election since 1997. Only when we saw the chaos caused by a Government who did not want to continue and an Opposition who did not want the chance to face an election could we see how dreadful that old system was. We need to get rid of it, bag and baggage.

**Michael Ellis:** I agree with my right hon. Friend; there is of course a good reason why the 2017 to 2019 Parliament is referred to as the zombie Parliament.

I remind the House of the commitments that both parties made in 2019. The Conservatives committed to repealing the Fixed-term Parliaments Act.

**John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):** Will the Minister confirm that, if we dismiss Lords amendment 1 today, the courts will not have a role in fixing the dates for elections, because, surely, that is matter for us, answerable to the electors?

**Michael Ellis:** My right hon. Friend is quite right that it is not productive, and, in fact, it would not be in the interests of the judiciary themselves, for the courts to have such a role.

We committed to repealing the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, as it had led to paralysis at a time when the country needed decisive action. In a similar vein, the Labour manifesto said that the 2011 Act

“stifled democracy and propped up weak governments.”

A vote in the Commons could create paralysis in a number of contexts, including minority Governments, coalition Governments, or where our parties, Parliament or even the nation, at some point in the future, were divided.

As a majority on the Joint Committee on the Fixed-term Parliaments Act noted, a Commons vote would have a practical effect only where Parliament were gridlocked. The problem is that if the Government of the day had a comfortable majority, a vote would be unlikely to make any difference; it would have no meaningful effect, beyond causing unnecessary delay and expense. However, when Parliament is gridlocked, a vote could mean denying an election to a Government who were unable to function effectively. We witnessed the consequences of such a vote painfully in 2019, so let us not repeat that mistake by devising a system where those events could happen again. Lords amendment 1 is, therefore, with the greatest possible respect, without merit.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has mentioned what happens in the event of a minority Government. What would happen where the Prime Minister of a minority Government wished to call a general election, but there was the possibility of an alternative Government being formed? Would that Prime Minister be able to dissolve Parliament by prerogative in those circumstances, or would another person be given an opportunity to form a Government and a majority in the House of Commons?

**Michael Ellis:** I do not want to get into hypotheticals, but what I will say is that the pre-2011 position worked extremely well. There is a reason why it worked well and it was proven to have functioned correctly. We seek to go back to a proven, tried and tested system, which works in a whole variety of different circumstances, not every one of which can be easily expostulated.

**Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend share my disbelief at some of the opposition to the current position, especially as we recall the chaos that led to the last general election and the frustration among the public when Parliament, in many people's eyes, seemed to lose the respect of the population?

**Michael Ellis:** Good constitutional practice involves protecting the integrity of the legislature, the Executive and the judiciary and, in our view, the proposals do that and this amendment would not, so I agree with what my right hon. Friend says.

**Jackie Doyle-Price** (Thurrock) (Con): I sat on the Joint Committee that reviewed the 2011 Act and we spent long, productive and interesting hours looking at it. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is really unproductive to look at our future arrangements in the context of what happened in 2019, just as it is to look at them in the context of what happened in 2010? The beauty of our system must be that the constitution can flex. Those were particularly unique circumstances in 2019, and we should not let them affect what happens going forward.

**Michael Ellis:** My hon. Friend is completely right. In fact, it is difficult to expostulate all the different scenarios that may occur in future, so it is best to avoid that, but we know what worked well—the status quo ante the 2011 Act.

As I say, we have experienced the consequences of a statutory scheme and we know what happened in 2019, but the amendment is also dangerously silent on critical questions of implementation and is likely to have undesirable consequences for our constitutional system. For example, it is likely to have negative consequences for the fundamental conventions on confidence. The privilege to request that the sovereign exercise the Dissolution prerogative is an Executive function enjoyed by virtue of the ability of the Government to command the confidence of the Commons. That is the alpha and omega of everything, and should not unduly constrained by any sort of prescriptive parliamentary process that would be disruptive and unhelpful when expediency is essential.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): The Minister responded to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) by saying that he fully agreed with her excellent statement, but he is in essence doing the exact opposite. Why this paradoxical situation?

**Michael Ellis:** I am obviously not doing that. We are able to see where mistakes have been made and where things have gone well in the past, and we see that in the pre-2011 position—the position we are seeking to achieve and that Labour sought to achieve in its manifesto, as did my party. That tried and tested system worked well, and worked well for generations.

**Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): May I refer my right hon. and learned Friend to “The Crown”, of which I am sure he was an avid viewer? In answer to the intervention by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), is my right hon. and learned Friend familiar with the Lascelles principles, as written to *The Times* under the pseudonym “Senex”, and can he update the House on whether they now form part of the Cabinet manual?

**Michael Ellis:** The Lascelles principles are something we still respect. One of the fundamental tenets of Sir Alan Lascelles' letter was the fact that we wished to avoid any suggestion that the sovereign be involved in politics.

The amendment, as I was saying, is silent on the issue of the negative consequences. The privilege to request that the sovereign exercise the Dissolution prerogative is an executive function that is enjoyed by virtue of the ability to command the confidence of the Commons.

We must also question how the amendment would work in practice. For example, how would the parliamentary process be sequenced and when would it apply? Would the Prime Minister be required to confirm the support of the House only when they intend to request that Parliament be dissolved before the maximum five-year term, or would it apply following a loss of confidence? There are myriad questions that the amendment would leave unanswered; as we can see, it adds undesired complexity to what is a simple proposition—a return to the status quo ante.

The Bill intends to return us to that status quo, reviving the prerogative powers for the Dissolution and the calling of Parliament and preserving the long-standing position on the non-justiciability of those powers. The amendment would undermine the entire rationale for the Bill. If it is amended as proposed, we would be entering into precisely the kind of ill-thought-through constitutional innovation that we are seeking to repeal.

[*Michael Ellis*]

The simplest and most effective route is to make express provision to revive the prerogative powers for the Dissolution and calling of Parliament, returning our country to tried and tested constitutional arrangements offering certainty around the calling of elections. The prerogative power to dissolve Parliament is the ultimate expression of humility on the part of the Executive, placing the future and power into the hands of the people.

Finally, with all due respect for the undoubted expertise and value of the House of Lords, I suggest it is not appropriate for the revising Chamber to ask the elected House to revisit questions, not least when they relate to the process and role of this House, on which this House has already definitively decided. I thank their lordships, but I hope that they will now take note of this House's clear view. Therefore, I would welcome this House's sending a clear signal and I urge it to vote against the amendment.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak for the Opposition in this debate.

I listened very carefully to the case that the Minister made for his motion to remove Lords amendment 1 to clause 2. I was sad to hear it, and I think we could do better. He is right that Labour, both in our manifesto and in the two years since, has supported the principle of the repeal of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, which was an ill-thought-out and poorly executed piece of legislation. I gently say, though, given how strongly the Minister stressed that, that it was this Government's piece of legislation, not ours. He cautions us against novations in this space, but that was actually a lesson for themselves, and it is not quite fair to point it in our direction.

5.30 pm

Our support for the repeal of the Act does not mean that we cannot put better arrangements in its place. Those two processes are very much related. It was not clear from the Minister's opening remarks whether he thought that the events of September 2019 were pertinent. For the first six minutes of his speech, they were, and then, in addressing the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), they were not. We think that they demonstrated that the previous arrangements were not fit for purpose and that many of the arrangements prior to the Act were better, especially in a time of parliamentary balance.

We have been supportive thus far, but the issue at stake today is that the Government have learned the wrong lesson from that debacle—that rather than bringing Parliament with them, it is instead preferable to exclude Parliament, the courts, as we have seen, and the civic space. They say that their actions two and half years ago were the right ones but there were too many safeguards preventing them from getting their way. In reality—I do not look back with any fondness on that period, but having been an Opposition Whip during it, I remember it very well—that is the opposite of what happened, and the Government ought to have taken a different lesson from it. I am surprised that they do not want to take this opportunity to, of course, remove the old arrangements,

but also to modernise what was in place previously to strengthen the role of this legislature and to protect parliamentary sovereignty rather than just going back to a situation where a Prime Minister gets an election whenever they want one. What a waste!

This is about one Lords amendment to one piece of legislation, but it is also a continuance of a pattern of behaviour by this Government in strengthening an overbearing Executive. There is this Bill, the Elections Bill and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, and previously we had the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 and the Trade Union Act 2016. All these have sought to strengthen the Executive at the expense of the legislature, the courts or the shrinking civic space.

**Kevin Brennan:** Does my hon. Friend think there is any possibility that a future Government, or this Government given their past record, might abuse the power to dissolve Parliament in the way that they abused the power to prorogue Parliament during that period through a disgraceful hoodwinking of Her Majesty the Queen?

**Alex Norris:** I am grateful for that intervention. I strongly believe in the maxim that how you do one thing is how you do everything, and I believe that the same cast of characters will broadly act in the same way at every opportunity. That tends to be, as with all the pieces of legislation that I listed, that the Government see things through a very narrow political prism, and that is what we are seeing today.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** How is it an abuse of power and a strengthening of the Executive for the Executive to say, “We want to go to the people and let the people decide whether we should be allowed to continue in government or be chucked out”?

**Alex Norris:** The Lords amendment is a very modest safeguard to that in saying, “At least demonstrate that a majority of the legislature agrees with you.” It is not unreasonable to say that Parliament could be involved in the Dissolution process in the way that noble Lords have said. It is a modest hurdle. All it asks is that the Prime Minister of the day be able to command a majority, and in different scenarios.

I know that the Minister is keen to avoid hypotheticals, but we do have to think about how these powers may apply in future. In a balanced Parliament like the previous one, the amendment might mean that the Government work a little bit more broadly to secure the election. The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) referred to the dreadful election of 2019. I would argue that it was the Government between 2017 and 2019 who were dreadful rather than the election itself, being a passive process. Indeed, the Minister characterised it as a zombie Government. Given that he served in that Government, I think he does himself a disservice in characterising himself in that way.

**Dr Lewis:** I do not think it was a dreadful election—it was a brilliant election. What was dreadful was the fact that it was in the power of the Opposition to stop that election happening and to not allow the people to have their say.

**Alex Norris:** I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The idea that it was dreadful that a Government who did not command a majority of this House could not just always get their way—that is how the system is supposed to work, I gently suggest.

Where a Government have a clear working majority, as we have today, the amendment would insure against a capricious Prime Minister—perhaps one losing the confidence of their own Benches in the light of, in a hypothetical, significant issues of judgment or personal character—just going and throwing everything up in the air in their own interest. Indeed, there is the scenario, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) said, where someone else might be able to form a Government, but the individual who would be most harmed could just call an election without that being explored.

**John Redwood:** The point is this: why should an Opposition, when facing a minority Government who want to resolve things via an election, be able to stop an election? They either have to form a coalition of their majority and govern, which is one option, or allow the public to decide. It was outrageous that the Opposition did not allow the public to have a Government.

**Alex Norris:** I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman, because the reality is that before those parties could even come together to form that possible alternative Government, the Prime Minister could be in the car and on the way to call the election, and that process would be rendered moot. I cannot support that.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Many Members may find it rather difficult to think of a scenario when we would not need to have such a vote, but if other Members have watched “The Crown”, we have seen the example—a very fictitious one—where the scriptwriters wrote the moment when the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was losing the confidence of her parliamentary party and had that fictitious meeting with the Queen. In building legislation that will last, we need to ensure that we have sufficient, adequate checks so that any Prime Minister will not abuse their position. Is the truth of the matter not that we are going back to the status quo ante? Indeed, the existence of the ouster clause that excludes the courts means that the Government are going further than that.

**Alex Norris:** It is definitely fair to say that there are new arrangements. That is why the Minister said the amendment would be inappropriate, but I do not think it would be. By the way, I have not seen “The Crown”; my wife and I are working our way through “Flip or Flop”, and there are 160 episodes of it, so it may take some time. In the scenario that the hon. Lady talks about, we have seen in recent history Prime Ministers who are losing the confidence of their party talking in terms of “Back me or sack me”. The reality is that the Bill, without this minor safeguard, would mean that a “Back me or sack me” moment, rather than it being won as a parliamentary process with a party’s Back Benchers, would instead play out as a party psychodrama with the general electorate. I think that would be a bad thing.

I will finish with three further quick arguments against giving the Government the power they seek, or at least not without this minor fettering suggested by the Lords.

First, it comes back to a question of electoral advantage and ensuring that elections are fair. It is an age-old argument, and an issue that has launched a thousand dissertations—it was one of the major reasons for the 2011 Act—but it has become only more salient since then. Over the past 12 years, we have seen increasing restrictions on party and non-party activity, and the Elections Bill will put more in. These provisions are backdated, and that provides a significant advantage for candidates of the current governing party during the short campaign period, but the advantage grows further for parties, as the regulated period for political parties is now 365 days prior to election day. It is a heck of an advantage to know that start. The amendment would not completely get rid of that, but it would even the scales, and that is another good reason to support it.

Secondly—others colleagues have brought this up, and if I stray out of order, I know I will be told off, so I will be very quick—surely the real lesson to take from that 2019 episode is that by including a parliamentary rubber stamp on Dissolution, we remove any risk of dragging the Crown into such a decision. I think all right hon. and hon. Members would seek to avoid that, because it was an unedifying moment.

Hon. Members have mentioned the courts and the justiciability of the decisions. The Lords amendment would settle that for certain because a vote in this House would be a definitive answer. I know that the Government think that the Bill’s ouster clause will resolve all matters relating to the courts, but I say to them that we will see; I do not think it is as definitive as they say.

I urge the House to support the Lords amendment. The Minister has made a passionate exposition of his case. I gently say to Conservative Back Benchers that the Bill is obviously targeted at restricting the activities of the Opposition, but that means them too. I see some mischievous faces, including the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), who is an independent figure. They mean to fetter their own—[*Interruption.*] The Minister says otherwise, but I gently say to him that the last time that was tested with the Government, which was the first week of September 2019, 21 of your colleagues lost the Whip—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Not of my colleagues.

**Alex Norris:** Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker: 21 of the Minister’s colleagues. Of course, they were rare circumstances, but it has happened again in this Parliament that when the Government face opposition from outside, they seek to shut us out, and when they find opposition inside, they seek to lock yourselves out as well.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Themselves.

**Alex Norris:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I say to the Government that it is not a one-way street and we think that having some checks and balances in our democracy is a good thing. In that spirit, I hope that hon. Members will vote in support of the Lords amendment.

**Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con):** I thank the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) for the introduction where he described me as being

[Mr William Wragg]

cheeky faced. It will stun the Opposition and surprise the Government that I will be voting enthusiastically with the Government in the Lobby later, so clearly my re-education is having the desired effect.

I rise to speak against the Lords amendment and in favour of the Government's motion to disagree. I view the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 not through rose-tinted spectacles as a great beacon of constitutional progress, but as a politically expedient measure that helped to secure a coalition in which the junior partner feared being unceremoniously dumped part way through an electoral term.

The lesson of the passage of this Bill thus far, and indeed of the work of the Joint Committee and of my Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, is that the genie cannot simply be put back in the bottle. I slightly disagree with the Minister, because by removing a prerogative power, the 2011 Act made it impossible to return completely to the status quo ante, hence the need for the Bill where we are codifying Dissolution for the first time. That cannot easily be argued against.

At the heart of the Lords amendment is whether the House should maintain a veto on Dissolution and the calling of an election, and I believe that it should not. It is for the monarch to dissolve the House following a request—I emphasise “a request”, unlike the early drafting of the Bill, which suggested that Her Majesty be advised to dissolve—from Her Majesty's Government.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Why is it good enough for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly to operate on fixed terms but not this place?

**Mr Wragg:** The hon. Gentleman invites me to be intemperate about the difference between this House and the other Parliaments of the United Kingdom, which I will resist entirely. Places evolve through their own conventions and those Parliaments are doing exactly that. There is no need for universality; surely he would argue that the beauty of devolution is that it allows for difference. If he wanted uniformity, however, he would essentially support the United Kingdom.

The impetus for the Bill came from the logjam of the previous Parliament. It is important to note where the impetus came for this Lords amendment, because it is a symptom of the mistrust that followed the Prorogation that never was, in 2019.

5.45 pm

There is a need for a constitutional release valve, which I would say is a general election, but the country was denied that because the Government did not have a majority. That was problematic as it undermined our constitutional settlement, if I can be so bold, in that we have parliamentary government rather than government by Parliament. The Government were kept on life support when they could no longer govern or get their main business through. The only solution to that was a general election, hence why requiring an affirmative vote by this House, as demanded by their lordships, would leave us at risk of exactly the same problem again.

I end by calming some concerns that there may be about threats of early general elections. Of course, that is an entirely hypothetical possibility brought to the House's attention by the Opposition spokesperson. I could not imagine what circumstances would bring that about. There is always a danger of a Prime Minister capriciously seeking early electoral advantage. However, that tends to backfire, as it did in February 1974, when the question was asked, “Who governs Britain?”—from the outcome, that was clearly not the Prime Minister—and indeed as recently as 2017.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I rise to speak in favour of the Lords amendment, which would require any Government seeking to dissolve this House early and call a general election to first seek and receive the support of a simple majority of the Members of this House.

Last year, when the Bill was first introduced by the Government, it was presented as a non-controversial resetting of a mistake that David Cameron made in his attempts to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. We were told that Cameron had made a bit of a mess of things, that this Bill would simply take us back to exactly where we were prior to 2010, and that we could almost pretend that it never really happened. However, as we have heard in this place and in the Lords, that is not the case. The Bill is not about reinstating what was in place prior to the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, but rather creates a situation whereby the Executive have even greater powers and the monarch, who hitherto had prerogative powers, merely enacts the Executive's will to dissolve Parliament.

This Lords amendment seeks to place a very minimal check on the Executive's power by making any Dissolution of Parliament a decision that has to have the support of the majority of this House. I do not think that our constituents would think that it is too much to ask for those who have been elected to this place, and who serve their constituents in this place, to have some say if a Parliament is to be dissolved early and a general election called.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, which is typically gracious of him. He calls it a “minimal check,” but the reality is that it is an absolute veto. If a Government do not have a majority in the House and if the Opposition sense that a Government might well win a majority if they went to the people, the Opposition are basically saying, “We are not going to allow the Government to get a mandate from the people.” That is precisely what would have happened in 2019 if Labour had not, for some reason, given way in the end.

**Brendan O'Hara:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but that is a decision for this Parliament to take. We are elected to take decisions, and to abdicate that responsibility to the Executive is a dangerous route to go down; we should not do that. He says that it is the people, but we in this Parliament are the voice of the people, and there has to be a check on the powers of the Executive.

**Patrick Grady:** What we are hearing, especially from Government Members, is continued Westminster exceptionalism: that this place, particularly the Executive,

once elected, knows what is best. That is why I raised the comparison with the devolved institutions, which operate to strict fixed terms. If they are to devolve early, that has to be a decision taken by the legislature as a whole.

**Brendan O'Hara:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and he is right. What we are seeing is, as he describes it so eloquently, Westminster exceptionalism, because this does not go nearly far enough. It is the absolute minimum that one would expect.

As Tom Fleming of University College London and his colleague Meg Russell, the director of the constitution unit there, said of this Lords amendment:

“Requiring prior Commons approval for an early general election places some check on the executive, while reducing the likelihood of either the monarch or the courts being embroiled in damaging political disputes.”

They are right, but the problem for Tom Fleming and Meg Russell is in believing or hoping that that this Executive would welcome having checks being placed on their power, be they parliamentary or judicial, because they simply do not.

**John Redwood:** Can the hon. Member explain why Opposition parties in this House are so keen to prevent there being an early election? I thought Oppositions welcomed early elections.

**Brendan O'Hara:** It is very witty to frame this debate in those terms, but I think the right hon. Gentleman is missing the point. This is not about the power to hold a general election; this is about the power being ceded from this place to the Executive and what the Executive choose to do with that power when they get it. I will come on to what their powers could if that happens.

By opposing this Lords amendment, the Government are saying that the decision to dissolve this Parliament and call an election would rest entirely with the Prime Minister, and that that could be done without any parliamentary scrutiny whatsoever and in the absence of any judicial oversight. I suspect that many people watching our proceedings will be surprised to see that the Government are so opposed to the Lords amendment given that it is so limited and that all it seeks is a simple majority in this House.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Is it not strange that Conservative Members who we have had to listen to banging on and on for years about Parliament being sovereign and Parliament having control are now willing to cede that control to the Executive for cheap political gain?

**Brendan O'Hara:** I thank my hon. Friend, and I suspect he may have been reading my speech earlier, because I will come to that issue shortly.

This Government are determined that the Prime Minister, without consultation with or approval from this House and free of the threat of legal challenge, can call a snap general election when it is politically expedient for him so to do. Regardless of what is happening at home or abroad, basically, electoral calculus and the position of the governing party at the time will decide when we have a general election. It is wrong, and I believe it is unacceptable in a modern democracy.

Of course, as my hon. Friend says, a great irony here is that the very limited check that the Government will vote down this evening will be voted down by people who were elected on a promise that this House would take back control. Well, they should realise that they are not taking back control; they are surrendering control. The collective outrage displayed at the general election of 2019 about the perceived emasculation of this Parliament by Brussels and the European Union—they were absolutely determined to restore the sovereignty of what they like to call the mother of Parliaments—is going to look rather hollow when, at the first time of asking, they vote to take powers away from this legislature and hand them over to the Executive. I hope that when they go through the Lobby tonight, they understand that this is not taking back control. Voting with the Government this evening is about this House handing control to the Executive and about abdicating responsibility to the Executive.

At the risk of adding a note of discord, let us have a look at who we will be handing those increased executive powers to. They will be given to a Prime Minister who has illegally prorogued Parliament, who sought to purge his party of all but his most loyal followers, and who had to remove the Whip from a long-standing and highly respected Member simply for being chosen to head a Committee over his preferred candidate. We will be giving greater executive power to a Prime Minister who, in defiance of the security services, ennobled the son of a former KGB officer turned billionaire Russian oligarch, a Prime Minister whose career three weeks ago was hanging by a thread and who has been revealed to be up to his neck in dirty Russian money, and a Prime Minister who is currently under investigation by the Metropolitan police.

If Conservative Members vote to defeat this Lords amendment tonight, that is the character of the man to whom this House will be handing even greater executive power. I advise them to think very carefully about their decision, because this Lords amendment is there to protect the role of the House of Commons, to avoid executive overreach and, ultimately, to protect democracy.

**John Redwood:** Opposition parties are struggling a bit with this idea of democracy, are they not? Taking back control was to have control by the people and for the people, and offering the people an early general election so that they could choose an effective Government when a Parliament was logjammed, hopeless and not prepared to govern with clarity and passion was the right thing to do. I just cannot understand why Labour and the SNP are still queuing up to defend the indefensible, and to say that because they may well be faced again with a situation in which they do not dare face the electors, they need some kind of legal rigmarole and manipulation of votes in a balanced or damaged Parliament to thwart the popular will yet again. “Never let the people make the decision,” they say: it must be contained within Parliament, even when a Parliament has obviously failed, as it did when it could not implement the wishes of the British people over the great Brexit referendum.

I want assurances from the Minister that this new policy will protect the Crown—the Queen—from the difficult business of politics. I think the Minister's version of it is better than the version from the other place. Of course, it must keep the courts out. There is nothing more political than the decision about when we go to an

[John Redwood]

election and when we give the people their power back and the right to make that fundamental choice. It is a choice that now can mean something, because we do not have to keep on accepting a whole load of European laws that we have no great role in making. Again, we need that absolute guarantee that we will have this freedom so that that can happen.

Those who say that they do not want the Prime Minister to have this much power have surely been in the House long enough to know that, while the Prime Minister has considerable power from his or her office, they are also buffeted and challenged every day by a whole series of pressures in this place and outside. If a leader of a party with a majority wanted an early election that their supporters did not want, I suspect that that would get sorted out without an early election. So we are only talking about what happens when a Government have lost their majority and the Prime Minister is doing his or her best to govern as a minority. We get the extraordinary position we got when the whole Opposition wanted to gang up to thwart the public making a choice, but did not want to govern. That was totally unacceptable, and the Opposition should hear the message from the doorsteps in the 2019 election. The public wanted a Parliament with a Government who could govern, so they decided to choose one. Those who sought to block it made themselves more unpopular, and they showed that they do not understand the fundamental point of democracy that, when Parliament lets the people down, the people must be able to choose a new and more effective Parliament.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): I apologise to the House that, because I have been in Committee Room 10 launching the call for evidence on setting up a national strategy for acquired brain injury, I am afraid I was not able to hear the wonderful speeches that doubtless came from those on the Front Bench—well, on the Opposition side anyway.

I completely agree with what the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) has just said. Yes, I think the people of this country are crying out for a Government who can actually govern. They still were after the general election, and they certainly are at the moment. Yes, of course, the Prime Minister is buffeted, and I think the Prime Minister should be buffeted a bit more, to be honest. What I do not understand is that this is the tiniest, most minimalist check on government that one could imagine. It simply means that a Government, which by definition already has a majority of Members of the House of Commons, should be required to come to the House of Commons to get a vote through to have a general election. It is absolutely minimal.

6 pm

In nearly every instance, the Opposition will, of course, vote in favour of having a general election, for the obvious reason that we want to replace the Government. It would be a very cowardly Opposition who would vote against an early general election. Personally, I think five years is far too long. Our five-year rule is about the longest anywhere in the world, and I think it should be four years. In many countries in the world it is three years. I am in favour of having general elections more frequently, and in nearly every instance, the Opposition will want an early general election. However, the problem

with the way the Government have constructed this provision—and this was a problem in the past—is the “good chaps” theory that presumes that everybody will be a good chap. Historically, it would have been a chap, but it would be a good person.

If Edward VIII had remained as monarch through the second world war and thereafter, and was working with Neville Chamberlain, I can perfectly well imagine that they might have come to very different sets of decisions about whether there should or should not be general elections, because I do not think that they were good chaps. I can easily imagine a time when a Prime Minister would lie to the monarch about why they wanted a dissolution of Parliament. The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) who chairs the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, said that the electorate can always deal with that and can see through a politician doing something surreptitious, but I am not sure that is always true. Indeed, I can imagine plenty of nefarious reasons for holding an early general election, either because a Government know of something coming up that the public do not know about, or a set of events that is likely to come round the corner that the Government want to keep hidden from others. That is why I believe we cannot simply have a law that presumes that everybody will always be a good chap in the future.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Is it equally the case that including this vote in the Bill would not mitigate people not being good chaps? If a Prime Minister has a majority and they could get that vote through—who knows what their reasons are—when they see things coming over the horizon that might give them some advantage, it makes it difficult for the monarch to say “no” under the Bill. Is it better to preserve what was best about our constitution before 2010, which relies on the Prime Minister and the monarch being responsible, and the good behaviour that should follow?

**Chris Bryant:** I think the danger is precisely the opposite. The arrangements that the hon. Lady would like us to have are ones that put the monarch in a regular position of making a decision, and brings them closely into not only party politics, but sometimes into partisan politics within a political party. It is perfectly possible that a Prime Minister might have lost, or be about to lose, the confidence of their political party, but that political party might still want to govern and carry on under a different leader. In other words, there may be within the House an alternative Government who would be better for the nation.

My other problem is that there seems to be a very high theological understanding of the role of the Executive. I think the former Leader of the House set that going with his rather Stuart early-17th-century understanding of the constitution, which is that basically, as long as the Prime Minister has the confidence of the House of Commons, he or she should be allowed to do pretty much anything and, frankly, parliamentary democracy is a little bit of an irritant. It is worth always bearing in mind that the Executive today is the only body who can ensure that business and legislation are considered, and the only body who decide when Parliament sits, when it will go into recess, and how long it will go into recess for. If we had the same rules today as we had in 1939, nobody would have been able to table an amendment to

the recess debate that led to the big row before the beginning of the second world war. Today we have an Executive who are more powerful than they have been at any stage since the early 17th century, and it is time, occasionally, that the House of Commons said, “You know what? We’re a parliamentary democracy. Let’s take just a tiny bit of power into our own hands.”

**Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): I will be brief as I gather I have only a few minutes to speak. The Lords amendment would require the House of Commons to give prior approval to a dissolution of Parliament, and that would be done by simple majority rather than the two-thirds majority required by the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011. On the face of it, that would be an improvement to the existing position, but it is still something of a half-way house that causes confusion. In the event that a Government lose their ability to command a majority in the House of Commons, it does not automatically follow that the House would vote to approve an election.

For example, it may suit Opposition parties to keep a lame-duck Government in place, so that they can inflict parliamentary defeat after parliamentary defeat, as a means of further undermining confidence in the Government. But in whose interests would that be? Certainly not the interests of the country. As hon. Members have said, we very much saw that in the “zombie” Parliament of 2017-19, when Parliament initially refused to allow an election to take place. The country became ungovernable, and contempt for Parliament rose dramatically—I speak as somebody who was outside Parliament at that time, and who shared in that contempt. I submit that that is not in anyone’s best interests.

We recently heard some confused interventions on this matter from the other place. For example, a Liberal Democrat peer asked:

“But why should a Prime Minister who cannot get a majority of the House of Commons for an election be entitled to a Dissolution?”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 February 2022; Vol. 818, c. 1590.]

I am still not sure whether that was a rhetorical question or whether the Lord in question was trying to figure it out for himself. Either way, it is non-sequitur reasoning because in the example he gave, a Government would not seek to dissolve Parliament unless they found it impossible to gain simple majorities in the first place. In my opinion, a rather better, and frankly rather more honest question would be: why would Parliament want to avoid an election, unless it feared that the result would go against its own wishes? That is the real question that those who support the Lords amendment must ask themselves.

There is concern in certain quarters that going to the electorate to seek a new mandate would allow an opportunistic Government to call an election at a convenient time to increase their majority. It is true that the power to call an election gives an advantage to a sitting Government, but that ability is a double-edged sword and can seriously backfire against a Prime Minister seeking to exploit a perceived opportunity. Post-war history is replete with examples of an incumbent Government misreading the political situation, and calling an election that fails to deliver the result they wished for. Harold Wilson’s Labour Government in 1970 and Ted Heath’s Conservative Government in February 1974 are obvious examples of that. Similarly, a failure to call an election

can damage an incumbent Government. The obvious recent example would be from 2007 when Gordon Brown publicly flirted with calling an election, only to back off at the last moment and cause irreparable damage to his public image as a result. The power to call an election—or not—does not automatically confer an insuperable advantage on the incumbent Government. The Lords amendment is therefore completely unnecessary, and I will continue to support the Bill as it stands.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Members across the House want the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, but in its defence, it was a creature of its time and it delivered stable government for five years. Let us not reinvent history regarding why it was introduced in the first place. It disappoints me that so much of this debate has been seen through the prism of 2019. That was a unique political position where we were divided by an issue that crossed party and electoral politics. We risk making very bad law on the basis of what happened in that history.

Call me old-fashioned, but I am a romantic when it comes to our constitution. We have an unwritten constitution, and the less of it that is written, the more likely it is to flex to meet those challenges. On that basis I am opposed to the Lords amendment. However, equally, while the Government’s stated ambition is to go back to the status quo ante, the existence of the ouster clause goes beyond that, and the amendment is an alternative to that ouster clause—it is another way of ousting the courts from deliberation on our proceedings—so the ouster clause’s existence makes a strong argument for it as an option.

I regret that we are having this debate. As Conservatives, we ought to stick to the more romantic view of our constitution and be able to expect Prime Ministers to behave well and honourably in their deliberation with monarchs so that monarchs are never put in that difficult position. However, we have the Lascelles principles, which articulate the occasions where the monarch can be empowered to involve themselves in politics, and that should be enough. I recognise that the argument is lost—it was probably lost in 2011 when the Fixed-term Parliaments Act was passed, and it certainly was when we came to the sad events of 2019—but I hope that we can go back to normal.

**Patrick Grady:** It is not really for the Scottish National party to defend the Westminster interpretation of democracy, but the Bill, and rejecting the Lords amendment, is such a retrograde step that we must put that on the record and see it as part of a bigger picture. This is not control being taken back by Parliament but control being taken from Parliament by the Executive and, as a number of other hon. Members have said, consolidating power as part of a package of measures—not least the Elections Bill.

The effect of all that is that the next election campaign starts today. Everyone in the Chamber must therefore be aware of what they are doing when they cast their vote on the amendment. The campaigning starts today. The power will end up with the Prime Minister and he alone, without the check of his Cabinet or of this House. That is a significant power grab that will further undermine confidence among the public in the institutions of this place. Again, I say to Government Members that, from an SNP point of view, that is fine in a way.

[Patrick Grady]

The Bill and the rest of their package of reform is not strengthening the Union. As I said in my interventions, we can look at the systems in place to protect the devolved institutions' democracies and see how they can dissolve only with the permission of the legislature or must operate to a fixed term that everyone knows in advance, but the Bill is taking this place backwards. It is increasing the divergence on these islands. Once again, from where I am standing, that is fine, but perhaps Government Members ought to think twice about it.

**Michael Ellis:** First, may I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) that I, too, am a romantic—that may come as a surprise to the House—especially when it comes to the constitution? I agree that flex is required and that it is highly desirable to have an unwritten constitution that gives us that flex and ability to change things as needed while accepting the conventions of our constitution.

The Lords amendment before the House is not a small amendment; in fact, it is a wrecking amendment as it would convert the whole purpose of the Bill. I can hardly think of anything more democratic than saying: a Government of any particular day might have lost of the confidence of the elected House and will therefore go to the country and ask the people for their view.

I know that the Opposition would not want to go back to 2019 and, as happened then, block a general election three times. That is no doubt why they agreed in their manifesto that the 2011 Act had to go. Let us not allow that to happen again. Let us hand power to the people, let us protect the sovereign from involvement in politics and let us disagree with the Lords amendment.

*Question put,* That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

*The House divided:* Ayes 292, Noes 217.

**Division No. 210]**

**[6.14 pm**

#### AYES

|                      |                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Aiken, Nickie        | Bridgen, Andrew         |
| Aldous, Peter        | Brine, Steve            |
| Allan, Lucy          | Bristow, Paul           |
| Anderson, Lee        | Britcliffe, Sara        |
| Anderson, Stuart     | Browne, Anthony         |
| Andrew, rh Stuart    | Bruce, Fiona            |
| Argar, Edward        | Buchan, Felicity        |
| Atherton, Sarah      | Buckland, rh Sir Robert |
| Bacon, Gareth        | Burghart, Alex          |
| Bacon, Mr Richard    | Butler, Rob             |
| Badenoch, Kemi       | Cairns, rh Alun         |
| Baillie, Siobhan     | Campbell, Mr Gregory    |
| Baker, Duncan        | Carter, Andy            |
| Baker, Mr Steve      | Cartledge, James        |
| Baron, Mr John       | Cash, Sir William       |
| Baynes, Simon        | Cates, Miriam           |
| Bell, Aaron          | Caulfield, Maria        |
| Benton, Scott        | Chalk, Alex             |
| Blackman, Bob        | Chishti, Rehman         |
| Blunt, Crispin       | Churchill, Jo           |
| Bowie, Andrew        | Clark, rh Greg          |
| Bradley, Ben         | Clarke, rh Mr Simon     |
| Bradley, rh Karen    | Clarke, Theo            |
| Brady, Sir Graham    | Clarke-Smith, Brendan   |
| Braverman, rh Suella | Clarkson, Chris         |
| Brereton, Jack       | Cleverly, rh James      |

|                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey | Henderson, Gordon        |
| Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse       | Henry, Darren            |
| Colburn, Elliot             | Higginbotham, Antony     |
| Collins, Damian             | Hinds, rh Damian         |
| Costa, Alberto              | Hoare, Simon             |
| Courts, Robert              | Hollinrake, Kevin        |
| Coutinho, Claire            | Hollobone, Mr Philip     |
| Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey        | Holloway, Adam           |
| Crosbie, Virginia           | Holmes, Paul             |
| Crouch, Tracey              | Huddleston, Nigel        |
| Daly, James                 | Hudson, Dr Neil          |
| Davies, David T. C.         | Hughes, Eddie            |
| Davies, Gareth              | Hunt, Jane               |
| Davies, Dr James            | Hunt, rh Jeremy          |
| Davison, Dehenna            | Hunt, Tom                |
| Dines, Miss Sarah           | Jack, rh Mr Alister      |
| Djanogly, Mr Jonathan       | Javid, rh Sajid          |
| Docherty, Leo               | Jayawardena, Mr Ranil    |
| Donelan, rh Michelle        | Jenkin, Sir Bernard      |
| Double, Steve               | Jenkinson, Mark          |
| Dowden, rh Oliver           | Jenkyns, Andrea          |
| Drax, Richard               | Jenrick, rh Robert       |
| Drummond, Mrs Flick         | Jones, rh Mr David       |
| Duddridge, James            | Jones, Fay               |
| Duguid, David               | Jones, Mr Marcus         |
| Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain   | Jupp, Simon              |
| Eastwood, Mark              | Kawczynski, Daniel       |
| Edwards, Ruth               | Kearns, Alicia           |
| Ellis, rh Michael           | Keegan, Gillian          |
| Elphicke, Mrs Natalie       | Knight, rh Sir Greg      |
| Eustice, rh George          | Knight, Julian           |
| Evans, Dr Luke              | Kruger, Danny            |
| Evennett, rh Sir David      | Kwarteng, rh Kwasi       |
| Everitt, Ben                | Lamont, John             |
| Fabricant, Michael          | Largan, Robert           |
| Farris, Laura               | Latham, Mrs Pauline      |
| Fell, Simon                 | Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  |
| Firth, Anna                 | Leigh, rh Sir Edward     |
| Fletcher, Katherine         | Levy, Ian                |
| Fletcher, Mark              | Lewer, Andrew            |
| Fletcher, Nick              | Lewis, rh Dr Julian      |
| Foster, Kevin               | Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian |
| Fox, rh Dr Liam             | Lockhart, Carla          |
| Francois, rh Mr Mark        | Loder, Chris             |
| Frazer, rh Lucy             | Logan, Mark              |
| Freer, Mike                 | Longhi, Marco            |
| French, Mr Louie            | Lopez, Julia             |
| Fuller, Richard             | Lopresti, Jack           |
| Gale, rh Sir Roger          | Lord, Mr Jonathan        |
| Ghani, Ms Nusrat            | Loughton, Tim            |
| Gibb, rh Nick               | Mackinlay, Craig         |
| Gibson, Peter               | Mackrory, Cheryllyn      |
| Gideon, Jo                  | Maclean, Rachel          |
| Glen, John                  | Mak, Alan                |
| Gove, rh Michael            | Mann, Scott              |
| Gray, James                 | Marson, Julie            |
| Green, Chris                | May, rh Mrs Theresa      |
| Green, rh Damian            | Maynard, Paul            |
| Griffith, Andrew            | McCartney, Jason         |
| Griffiths, Kate             | McCartney, Karl          |
| Grundy, James               | McPartland, Stephen      |
| Gullis, Jonathan            | McVey, rh Esther         |
| Halfon, rh Robert           | Menzies, Mark            |
| Hancock, rh Matt            | Merriman, Huw            |
| Hands, rh Greg              | Metcalfe, Stephen        |
| Harper, rh Mr Mark          | Miller, rh Mrs Maria     |
| Harris, Rebecca             | Milling, rh Amanda       |
| Harrison, Trudy             | Mills, Nigel             |
| Hart, Sally-Ann             | Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew   |
| Hart, rh Simon              | Mohindra, Mr Gagan       |
| Hayes, rh Sir John          | Moore, Damien            |
| Heaton-Harris, rh Chris     | Moore, Robbie            |

Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Morton, Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Randall, Tom  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Rutley, David  
Sambrook, Gary  
Saxby, Selaine  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simmonds, David

Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Solloway, Amanda  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stewart, rh Bob  
Stewart, Iain  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stuart, Graham  
Sturdy, Julian  
Sunak, rh Rishi  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Timpson, Edward  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tracey, Craig  
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Vara, Shailesh  
Vickers, Matt  
Walker, Sir Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Wallis, Dr Jamie  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
Webb, Suzanne  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wragg, Mr William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Gareth Johnson and**  
**Michael Tomlinson**

### NOES

Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
Barker, Paula  
Begum, Apsana  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blake, Olivia  
Blomfield, Paul  
Bonnar, Steven  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burgon, Richard  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Carden, Dan  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Cherry, Joanna  
Clark, Feryal  
Cooper, Daisy  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Crawley, Angela

Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John  
Cummins, Judith  
Daby, Janet  
Davey, rh Ed  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Geraint  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
Day, Martyn  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Debbonaire, Thangam  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Doogan, Dave  
Dorans, Allan  
Dowd, Peter  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Elmore, Chris  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Fellows, Marion  
Ferrier, Margaret  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flynn, Stephen  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Foy, Mary Kelly  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Green, Kate  
Green, Sarah  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hendry, Drew  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hosie, rh Stewart  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Ruth  
Jones, Sarah  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara

Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast  
by Pat McFadden*)  
Khan, Afzal  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Lake, Ben  
Lavery, Ian  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Lewis, Clive  
Linden, David  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
MacAskill, Kenny  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Maskell, Rachael  
Mc Nally, John  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonald, Stuart C.  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGinn, Conor  
McGovern, Alison  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McLaughlin, Anne  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorrin, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Mishra, Navendu  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moran, Layla  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Helen  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Murray, Ian  
Murray, James  
Nandy, Lisa  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Norris, Alex  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Olney, Sarah  
Onwurah, Chi  
Oppong-Asare, Abena  
Osamor, Kate  
Osborne, Kate  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Owatemi, Taiwo  
Peacock, Stephanie  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Powell, Lucy  
Qaisar, Ms Anum  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, rh Angela  
Reed, Steve  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, Ellie  
Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
Rimmer, Ms Marie  
Rodda, Matt  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shah, Naz

Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, Alyn  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Jeff  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh John  
Starmer, rh Keir  
Stephens, Chris  
Stevens, Jo  
Stone, Jamie  
Streeter, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thewliss, Alison  
Thompson, Owen  
Thomson, Richard

Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Wakeford, Christian  
West, Catherine  
Western, Matt  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Wilson, Munira  
Winter, Beth  
Wishart, Pete  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

#### Tellers for the Noes:

Liz Twist and  
Mary Glindon

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H(2)), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment 1;*

That Michael Ellis, Michael Tomlinson, Jane Hunt, Ian Levy, Alex Norris, Jessica Morden and Brendan O'Hara be members of the Committee;

That Michael Ellis be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—  
(David T.C. Davies.)

*Question agreed to.*

*Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.*

### PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

*Ordered,*

That the Order of 15 December 2021 (Professional Qualifications Bill [Lords] (Programme)) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—  
(David T.C. Davies.)

### Professional Qualifications Bill [Lords]

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

#### New Clause 1

##### CONSULTATION WITH DEVOLVED AUTHORITIES

“(1) Before making regulations under this Act, the Secretary of State or the Lord Chancellor must consult—

- (a) the Welsh Ministers, to the extent that the regulations contain provision which could also be made by the Welsh Ministers by virtue of section 16(2) (ignoring any requirement for the consent of a Minister of the Crown under section 16(5));
- (b) the Scottish Ministers, to the extent that the regulations contain provision which could also be made by the Scottish Ministers by virtue of section 16(3);
- (c) a Northern Ireland department, to the extent that the regulations contain provision which could also be made by a Northern Ireland department by virtue of section 16(4).

(2) The Northern Ireland department which is to be consulted in accordance with subsection (1)(c) is such Northern Ireland department as the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Lord Chancellor considers appropriate having regard to the provision which is to be contained in the regulations concerned.

(3) Before making regulations under this Act in relation to which the Secretary of State or the Lord Chancellor has consulted a devolved authority (or more than one devolved authority) in accordance with subsection (1), the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Lord Chancellor must publish a report on the consultation.

(4) But the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Lord Chancellor may not publish the report unless either—

- (a) the devolved authority concerned (or, if more than one, each of them) has agreed to the description included in the report for the purposes of subsection (5)(a), or
- (b) there is no such agreement but the period of 30 days, beginning with the day on which a draft of the report was first sent to the devolved authority concerned (or, if more than one, the last of them), has expired.

(5) The report on the consultation must include—

- (a) a description of—
  - (i) the process undertaken in order to comply with subsection (1), and
  - (ii) any agreement, objection or other views expressed as part of that process by the devolved authority (or devolved authorities) concerned, and
- (b) an explanation of whether and how such views have been taken into account in the regulations (including, in a case where the Secretary of State or (as the case may be) the Lord Chancellor proposes to make the regulations despite an objection, an explanation of the reasons for doing so).

(6) The duty to consult in subsection (1) does not apply in relation to any revision of the regulations which arises from the consultation; and, for the purposes of subsection (4)(b), the draft report need not be identical to the published report for the period of 30 days to begin.

(7) In this section ‘devolved authority’ means the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers or a Northern Ireland department.”—  
(Paul Scully.)

*This new clause requires the Secretary of State or Lord Chancellor to consult the devolved authorities before making regulations under the Bill that contain provision which could be made under the Bill by the devolved authorities themselves and to publish a report on the consultation.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

6.31 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Authority by whom regulations may be made (No. 2)*—

“(1) In this Act ‘appropriate national authority’ means as follows.

(2) Where the regulations—

- (a) contain provision relating to England only,
- (b) apply to the United Kingdom as a whole, or
- (c) contain provision which is not within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru, the Scottish Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly,

the Secretary of State or the Lord Chancellor is the appropriate national authority.

(3) The Welsh Ministers are the appropriate national authority in relation to regulations under this Act which contain only provision which would be within the legislative competence of Senedd Cymru if contained in an Act of the Senedd (ignoring any requirement for the consent of a Minister of the Crown).

(4) The Scottish Ministers are the appropriate national authority in relation to regulations under this Act which contain only provision which would be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament if contained in an Act of that Parliament.

(5) A Northern Ireland department is the appropriate national authority in relation to regulations under this Act which contain only provision which, if contained in an Act of the Northern Ireland Assembly—

- (a) would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly, and
- (b) would not require the consent of the Secretary of State.

(6) The consent of a Minister of the Crown is required before any provision is made by the Welsh Ministers in regulations under this Act so far as that provision, if contained in an Act of Senedd Cymru, would require the consent of a Minister of the Crown.

(7) In this section ‘Minister of the Crown’ has the same meaning as in the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975.”

*This new clause is intended to replace the current Clause 16. It would mean that the Secretary of State would only make regulations under this Act if they relate to England or the whole of the UK, or are outside the legislative competencies of the Devolved Administrations.*

New clause 3—*List of regulators and regulated professions*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish a list of all regulators of regulated professions and the associated professions.

(2) The list must be updated on a regular basis.”

New clause 4—*Guidance and assistance concerning mutual recognition*—

“Upon the request of a regulator, the Secretary of State must provide guidance and all reasonable assistance on how to make the most of the provisions in the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement.”

New clause 5—*Consent of the devolved authorities*—

“(1) Before making regulations under this Act, the Secretary of State or the Lord Chancellor must obtain the consent of—

- (a) the Senedd, to the extent that the regulations contain provision which could also be made by the Welsh Ministers by virtue of section 16(2) (ignoring any requirement for the consent of a Minister of the Crown under section 16(5));
- (b) the Scottish Parliament, to the extent that the regulations contain provision which could also be made by the Scottish Ministers by virtue of section 16(3);

(c) the Northern Ireland executive, to the extent that the regulations contain provision which could also be made by a Northern Ireland department by virtue of section 16(4).”

Amendment 2, in clause 7, page 5, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) Before making the arrangements, the Secretary of State must consult the devolved authorities on the functions and operations of the assistance centre.”

*This amendment would require the Secretary of State to undertake consultation with the Devolved Authorities on the functions and operations of the Assistance Centre before it comes into being.*

Amendment 3, page 5, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) Before making the arrangements, the Secretary of State must ensure there are representatives from each of the devolved nations on the board of the assistance centre.”

*This amendment would require the Secretary of State to ensure there are representatives for each of the devolved nations on the board of the Assistance Centre.*

Amendment 4, page 11, line 28, leave out clause 16.

Government amendment 1.

**Paul Scully:** I am today proposing two amendments in relation to the devolved Administrations. New clause 1 would place a duty on the Secretary of State or Lord Chancellor to consult the devolved Administrations before making regulations under the Bill that contain provisions that could be made under the Bill by the devolved authorities themselves. The new clause would also require the Government to publish a report on the consultation. Amendment 1 seeks to amend the Government of Wales Act 2006 so that a Minister of the Crown’s consent is not needed for Senedd Cymru to remove the Secretary of State’s and the Lord Chancellor’s ability to make regulations under the Bill that are within the Senedd’s legislative competence.

I know that hon. Members across the House have shown strong interest in the issue of concurrent powers and devolved competence. To underline the Government’s commitment to a collaborative approach on this issue, I am introducing into the Bill, through the new clause, a new duty to consult devolved Administrations. The duty includes a requirement to publish a report in advance of any regulations being made by the UK Government that would be within devolved legislative competence. That report should set out the consultation process, and whether and how the representations made by the devolved Administrations during the consultation have been taken into account.

My officials and I have engaged extensively with the devolved Administrations during the passage of the Bill and, although we strained every sinew to reach agreement on securing legislative consent, it is a great regret that, unfortunately, we have exhausted all available avenues. Lord Grimstone and I have held eight meetings with our devolved Administrations’ ministerial counterparts. Baroness Bloomfield and Lord Grimstone have held nine industry roundtables, including two specifically for devolved regulators. There have also been weekly official-level meetings during the Bill’s passage and numerous exchanges of letters.

The amendments were originally offered to the devolved Administrations in December 2021, in exchange for support for legislative consent motions from their respective legislatures, but that offer was rejected. But the UK Government are committed to delivering effective policies that work for the whole of the UK, so, to underline that

[Paul Scully]

commitment, I am now introducing those amendments without any conditions attached. I strongly believe that, if both Government amendments are accepted, the Bill represents the best outcome for both the UK Government and the devolved Administrations, without impinging on the UK's ability to act where necessary.

The regulation of professions often falls within devolved legislative competence. For that reason, the Bill gives powers to both UK Government Ministers and devolved Administration Ministers. Some of the powers may be exercised concurrently to allow UK Government Ministers to make UK-wide regulations where appropriate. The most likely use of concurrent powers would be to implement international agreements on professional qualifications that are negotiated on a UK-wide basis. It is vital that the UK Government are able to implement such agreements across the UK in a timely and consistent manner, as failure to do so could jeopardise the UK Government's credibility and ability to secure ambitious provisions to support UK services exports with global trade partners.

Amendment 1 would allow for an Act of the Senedd to remove UK Ministers' ability to use powers in the Bill to make regulations that would be within Welsh devolved legislative competence, without the need to first obtain the consent of a Minister of the Crown. The Welsh Government would still be required to consult the UK Government on the removal of powers. That was a key ask from the Welsh Government. It is in line with similar approaches taken by the Government on the Environment Act 2021, the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Agriculture Act 2020.

In introducing those amendments, I hope that Members can see the UK Government's determination to work collaboratively and transparently with all devolved Administrations and devolved regulators on the provisions of the Bill and on wider regulated professions policy.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Does the shadow Minister want to come in straightaway or shall I go to somebody else?

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Go to somebody else.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I call Ben Lake.

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): I do not intend to detain the House for long, but it is a pleasure to rise to speak in support of Plaid Cymru's new clause 5, which would require the Secretary of State or the Lord Chancellor to obtain the consent of the devolved Governments when acting in areas of devolved competence. Although I will not be seeking to divide the House on that, I hope that the new clause, alongside the repeated interventions of the devolved nations, will encourage the Government to reconsider their approach.

In its current form, the Bill represents an example of the Government legislating in devolved matters without having first secured the consent of Wales's Parliament or, indeed, consent from any of the devolved nations. It betrays a blatant disregard for the constitutional framework of the UK, and further obscures the regulatory regime for workers, businesses and professional qualification providers.

Hon. Members should not mistake these concerns as mere trivial matters; they speak to the growing chasm of distrust between the Governments of the British Isles. Indeed, just last week, the Welsh Labour Education Minister accused the UK Government of acting in a manner that breaches the Sewel convention. Let us consider, for a moment, the implications of that statement: a Government Minister from one nation is accusing the Government of another of tearing up the constitutional convention that has been so instrumental in ensuring good governance and positive intergovernmental collaboration across our isles. That is what this Government and this Prime Minister are doing to the UK and that is why this Bill needs to be amended to respect the devolution settlement.

As I said, I will not be pushing our new clause to a vote tonight, but we will be supporting amendment 3 if it is put to a Division. I hope that Opposition Members as well as Government Members will acknowledge the seriousness of these constitutional concerns and accept the amendment as a first step towards government by consent, rather than imposition.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): I rise to speak to amendment 3, which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain). I am sorry to say that she is ill with covid, so I am here in her place.

The Bill allows UK Government Ministers to legislate on areas that would normally be under the authority of devolved Administrations. As it stands, there is no protection in place to allow the Scottish or Welsh Governments to revoke or amend these measures if needed. The entire reason we have devolved powers is to allow Ministers to make bespoke decisions that better reflect the needs of the local people and local economies.

The Minister's statement that the purpose of the Bill is to ensure qualified professionals within the UK can work anywhere within the four nations clearly undermines the devolution settlement. We saw that with the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and we see it again here. Without the appropriate safeguards, the Bill further erodes both the powers we have in place in Scotland and in Wales, and the trust between our Governments. On many issues, the UK has subsumed EU law into UK law with a view to gradual divergence over time. We are concerned that this Bill takes a clean slate approach and may put the UK at a disadvantage when trying to fill vacancies at a time of acute shortages in some sectors. The Bill provides inadequate detail regarding its full intentions and scope, leaving provision open to interpretation. The Government must commit to ensuring the highest standards of professional qualifications are maintained and are not bartered away as part of any trade agreement.

Clause 7 would mandate the Secretary of State to set up an assistance centre for people looking to enter a qualified profession in the UK or people with UK qualifications looking to practise overseas. Regulators would be required to provide information to the assistance centre to allow it to carry out its functions. We welcome the provisions relating to a centre to provide advice on and assistance with entry requirements for those seeking to practise a profession in the UK, or those with UK qualifications seeking to practise overseas. The obligation to make arrangements for the assistance centre lies with

the Secretary of State. Amendment 3, which we will be pressing to a vote, would require the Secretary of State to ensure that there are representatives for each of the devolved nations on the centre's board.

The Law Society of Scotland has urged the Government to seek the consent of the devolved Administrations when setting up the assistance centre. We therefore think it imperative—this reflects the acknowledgement of the role of the devolved Administrations in earlier clauses in the Bill—for them to be consulted on the arrangements for its creation, and to be represented on its board.

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker—rather more swiftly than I expected.

It seems as though, week in week out, Members on this side of the Chamber in particular are shouting into the wind. Whatever legislation is put before us, we suggest amendments in good faith, only to have to rinse and repeat our previous arguments when the legislation returns to us with none of our proposed changes taken into account. We are therefore used to this Government doing hee-haw, but in this case they have actually made the Bill worse than it was before, disrespecting the devolved Governments and undermining the constitution over something that should not have been controversial.

The Scottish National party fully welcomes the principles behind the Bill, which will facilitate cross-border recognition and regulation of professional qualifications. Building an integrated system of transfer of professionals from abroad is particularly significant to smaller countries such as Scotland which seek to attract the skills and expertise of their neighbours. For example, the world-leading Scottish food and drink industry, and indeed that of the whole UK, has traditionally relied heavily on the services of vets qualified in the EU. Those vets were then able to bring their skills to Scotland under the terms of the EU's rules on mutual recognition of professional qualifications. We are all for the idea of recognising consistency in qualifications; it is not controversial. However, the Government have managed to make it controversial: in fact, they have managed to create a constitutional stooshie out of thin air.

When I last spoke on the Bill, I raised concerns about its impact on devolution. The whole Bill obviously applies to Scotland, although certain professions and qualifications are reserved to this place.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): The hon. Member is right to say that it is correct for professional qualifications to be transferable across the United Kingdom, but in the past the Scottish Government would have had no say in any of this because it all fell under the European Union. There was no concern about devolution rights in that case. Why the sudden concern about devolution rights now that it rests with this Parliament?

**Owen Thompson:** The right hon. Member tempts me, but, as I was about to explain, we have a number of qualification areas in which these are devolved matters and not reserved to this place. Under the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, the UK Government are now overruling devolved competences that were formerly in place.

The Bill does not make separate provision for devolved and reserved professions, so it applies to all regulated professions active in Scotland, whether reserved or devolved. It follows from this that, for those aspects of the Bill that affect the devolved nations' areas of competence, special provisions should have been made to require devolved consent, which was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). It was the case then and it is still the case now.

Clause 16 ensures that any power conferred on the appropriate national authority in devolved areas can be exercised by UK Ministers. There is no requirement for UK Ministers to seek the Scottish Government's consent when exercising such powers. A Secretary of State making regulations under those powers would therefore be subject to procedure in this place rather than the Scottish Parliament, or any of the devolved Parliaments. Here we have a Bill that alters the executive competence of Scottish Ministers by enabling the Secretary of State to act in devolved areas without having consent to do so. That is entirely unnecessary, and undermines the good faith agreement between the Scottish and UK Governments on the principles of the Bill.

I listened to the Minister, and I welcome the fact that so much engagement took place, but it is clear that, despite all that engagement, there was still a lack of any willingness to shift in any way to take account of the positions of the devolved Governments. That is why I suggested that the Government take up the Scottish Government's proposal to introduce an amendment to clause 16 to require devolved consent before UK Ministers dabbled in devolved areas. Not only have the Government rejected that perfectly reasonable proposal; they have fabricated a convenient reason to do so, arguing that the devolved Governments

“might undermine the implementation of provisions in international agreements on recognition of professional qualifications.”

6.45 pm

That is utter havers. Scottish Ministers have to comply with international agreements: it is in the ministerial code. I know that in this place that does not always mean very much, but it is a big deal north of the border. On top of that, the Scotland Act 1998 gives UK Ministers powers to ensure that Scottish Ministers comply with treaty obligations. So the Government's stance is essentially that they cannot let the devolved nations govern in devolved areas because they might do something that they literally could not do if they tried. It is absolutely nonsensical, but that is where we are.

We should be finding areas of agreement in this Bill, but instead the Government are fabricating excuses to legislate without devolved consent. Under the Sewel convention, this Parliament will not normally legislate in devolved areas without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. The key word here is “normally”. What is abnormal about this Bill that justifies overriding the Sewel convention?

**Sammy Wilson:** I am not quite clear about the hon. Member's logic. If he is saying that the Scottish Government would feel obliged to abide by any international agreements, there would not be any leeway for them to act independently anyway. What point is he trying to make? What independence is he seeking for the Scottish Government, or the Northern Ireland Assembly, or the Welsh Government?

**Owen Thompson:** I think the key word in that intervention is “agreements”. The Scottish Government, or within the European set-up the UK Government, would agree these frameworks with Europe. In this situation, the Scottish Government, and the Governments of Northern Ireland and Wales, have no say in what is imposed by this Westminster Government.

The truth is that there is nothing exceptional or even particularly noteworthy about a requirement for UK Ministers to seek such consent. It has been requested by the relevant Committees of the Scottish Parliament, confirmed by a vote of the Parliament as a whole, and raised multiple times in this place. It is not worth overriding the Sewel convention—something extremely serious which has happened on only four occasions, all of them directly related to major EU exit legislation. That makes one wonder if the Government are content to undermine the Sewel convention to the point at which it is no longer even a convention. Seeking consent would constitute little more than recognising devolved responsibilities and respecting the UK constitution, so the Government have some serious explaining to do to the Scottish Parliament if they go ahead with overriding Sewel yet again.

This farce has brought the Scottish Government to a point at which they simply could not recommend that the Scottish Parliament give the Bill its consent, and that should not be taken lightly. That said, I am heartened that we have a new clause before us—tabled by the hon. Member for Ceredigion, albeit not to be pressed to a Division—that could deal with the issue. It changes the consultation requirement to a consent requirement, and removes the procedure by which the Government could ignore devolved views and simply report to the House on why they did so. I sincerely hope that the Government will look at the new clause seriously. This is not political point-scoring; it is about protecting the constitution as it currently exists. That is evidenced by the fact that the Law Society of Scotland supports the argument that I am advancing today. The Government have assured us time and again that they have no intention of overriding devolution, so why not put it in writing instead of relying on a pinkie promise?

The Bill falls into a pattern of power grabs and disdain for consent, from Brexit to the United Kingdom Internal Market Act, and little wonder, because it comes from a Government led by a man who called devolution a disaster. This disdainful attitude to UK-Scottish relations damages the UK Government’s claims that they welcome early engagement on the Bill. It also severely undermines their commitments to recently agreed intergovernmental arrangements. I hope that the Minister will reflect seriously on the unnecessary damage that the Bill will do to devolution in its current form.

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): On the point about the damage that the Bill could do, is there not a point of principle at stake? This Government appear to be putting administrative utility ahead of devolved democratic considerations enshrined in various bits of Scotland Act legislation that should not be overridden lightly, particularly on matters such as professional qualifications.

**Owen Thompson:** My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I absolutely agree. Of all the things to pick an argument over, why create this situation over

something on which we broadly agree and are actually on the same page? It is not too late. My right hon. Friend is not pressing his amendment to a vote, but the Government could still accept new clause 5 so that we could fix this situation and deal with it. I sincerely hope that the Minister will prove my concerns wrong.

**Bill Esterson:** I will speak to new clauses 3 and 4 tabled in my name, then briefly come back to the Government amendment and to amendment 3. During the progress of this Bill through the Lords, it became clear that it had been thrown together in a completely unsatisfactory way. The *Financial Times* described the way in which the Government introduced it as a “chaotic handling of a post-Brexit regime for recognising the qualifications of foreign professionals”.

Remarkably, the Government admitted introducing the Bill to Parliament without knowing which professions were in scope. We argued in the Lords that we had to know who and what was in the scope of the Bill. It stands to reason that the relevant regulators and professions need to be aware of these changes. Having initially listed 160 professions and 50 regulators that would be affected by the legislation, the Government twice published a revised list, ultimately increasing the numbers to 205 professions and 80 regulators. Due to the increased number of regulators in scope, the Government also had to publish an updated impact assessment, with the total cost to regulators increasing by almost £2 million. That is hardly the way to inspire confidence that the legislation will help businesses or skilled workers.

The Government were criticised from all sides in the Lords, including by those on their own Benches. Baroness Noakes said that the legislation had

“all the hallmarks of being a Bill conceived and executed by officials with little or no ministerial policy direction or oversight...we learn that the Bill was drafted with a far-from-perfect understanding of the territory that it purports to cover. This is no way to legislate.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 June 2021; Vol. 813, c. 149.]

How can regulators and regulated professionals know where they stand when the Ministers responsible for the Bill do not even know themselves? When I raised this in Committee, the Minister responded that he had

“reservations about enshrining a list in the Bill.”

This was because of concerns about not knowing which professions were ultimately covered. He went on to say that the Government had committed to

“maintaining a list of regulated professions and regulators to which they consider the Bill applies, and to keep that list readily accessible and in the public domain.”—[*Official Report, Professional Qualifications Public Bill Committee*, 18 January 2022; c. 30.]

It is of course encouraging that the Minister has made such a commitment to maintaining a list. I am not asking Ministers to place a list of regulators on the face of the Bill, but for the certainty that regulators and professionals need to be able to operate with confidence, it is important that they now know whether they are within the scope or not, and that means maintaining the list that Ministers have agreed to keep in the public domain. Web pages can be deleted, links can be lost, and without an amendment requiring the maintenance of a list, there will be no legal duty on Ministers to do so. Indeed, if they decided on the day following the granting of Royal Assent to this Bill that they no longer wanted to publish the list on the gov.uk website, they

could remove it. This amendment, which I will not be pressing to a vote, is a reminder that the Secretary of State and the Minister need to maintain the list in the public domain, as promised, for the benefit of the professions and professionals who need certainty. This should not be a controversial point, and I hope the Minister will confirm that that is indeed what will happen.

Turning to new clause 4, the Bill provides a framework to allow mutual recognition of professional qualifications between regulators and professional bodies in the UK and the equivalent organisations overseas. The provisions in clauses 3 and 4 will allow for the implementation of regulator-to-regulator mutual recognition agreements and of the recognition arrangements in new international trade agreements. As the Law Society tells us, the Bill will enable the mutual recognition agreement provisions in the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement to be implemented. However, the Law Society also says that the provisions for mutual recognition agreements in the TCA are largely based on the EU-Canada comprehensive economic and trade agreement—CETA—but that in fact no mutual recognition agreements have been signed between the EU and Canada using the provisions in CETA in the three years since CETA came into force. The failure to use the provisions on which the Government are relying raises the concern that the provisions are not sufficient. To remind ourselves, this legislation, if applied effectively, might well help to address shortages in a multitude of professions, including the chronic shortage of nurses and vets.

In Committee, I asked the Minister how his Department would put in place the additional support, co-ordination and guidance needed to make the most of the provisions in the trade and co-operation agreement, especially if they are to form the benchmark for future free trade agreements. There is real concern that the model on which the provisions in the legislation are based will not deliver results. That is why I tabled new clause 4, which would oblige the Secretary of State to provide guidance to regulators on how to make the most of the provisions in the TCA.

The Minister has written to me since the Committee stage to say that BEIS has engaged with 20 regulators of professional bodies. It will be important to see that such engagement leads to the delivery of mutual recognition agreements using the template on which the Government are relying. The Minister referred in Committee to a limited pilot recognition arrangement programme. I would be grateful if he could explain how effective that pilot has been so far, and how he foresees its leading to the successful implementation of new regulations.

I shall turn now to what the Minister said about new clause 1. In Committee we tabled two amendments to address the concerns raised by the devolved Administrations. We asked for consistency from the Government in the way they approach this Bill. The consistency we asked for in one of the amendments involved a similar amendment to that included in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. I see from new clause 1, having read it a number of times, that it is consistent with what is in the internal market Act and I thank the Minister for listening to the concerns that we raised, even though the Government voted against our amendments in Committee.

The Minister has addressed the concerns about those matters on which the devolved Administrations can

make recommendations. That is an improvement on the more “flexible” approach to consultation that he talked about in Committee. That informal approach would have left no formal consultation mechanism. We have heard reservations expressed by a number of hon. Members on that, and I trust that the Government will still seek consent, in the spirit of new clause 1, when applying the regulations that are relevant to the devolved Administrations.

Briefly, I can tell the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) that we will be supporting amendment 3. Representation of the devolved Administrations on the board is an important principle, and something that we return to again and again in legislation. We believe that, in the interests of the devolution settlement, that is entirely appropriate.

**Paul Scully:** I thank the hon. Members who have taken part in this important debate. I will whip through each amendment in turn, starting with new clause 2.

I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for tabling new clause 2, and I wish her well as she recovers from covid. I thank the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) for speaking to the amendment. I remind the House that clause 16 sets out the definition of an appropriate national authority for the purposes of the Bill. It also sets out the concurrent powers for making regulations in areas of devolved competence.

These powers could be used by the Secretary of State or the Lord Chancellor if, for example, a profession falls within devolved competence but is regulated at UK level. I understand the strength of feeling about the concurrent powers in the Bill, but I have been clear that any regulation made by the UK Government that falls within devolved legislative competence will be limited in scope and will always be made in consultation with appropriate Ministers from the devolved Administrations. The Government listened carefully to the concerns raised in both Houses, undertook extensive engagement with the devolved Administrations and negotiated in good faith in relation to those concerns. I am grateful for the devolved Administrations’ constructive and well-spirited engagement.

7 pm

Rather than causing a stooshie, as the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) said, the Sewel convention envisages situations in which the UK Parliament might need to legislate without consent, and those situations are clearly exceptional. We will always seek legislative consent from the devolved legislatures when introducing Bills at Westminster that legislate within areas of devolved competence.

The constructive approach we have shown is underlined by the Government’s amendments, which offer an enhanced statutory consultation duty for all devolved Administrations and, for Wales only, an amendment to carve out the Bill from the requirements of schedule 7B to the Government of Wales Act 2006.

Taken together, this package ensures that the Bill can operate effectively in all parts of the UK and that those professions that fall within devolved competence but are regulated on a UK-wide basis can be dealt with appropriately and efficiently by the relevant national authority.

The related amendment 4 would remove clause 16, which could limit the Secretary of State's ability to use concurrent powers to deal effectively and efficiently with those professions. I emphasise that it is crucial that the Bill can operate effectively across the United Kingdom, which can be best delivered through the Government amendments.

I thank the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) for tabling new clause 3, which at its heart is about the need for clarity on who meets the definition set out in the Bill. I appreciate that, and I assure him the Government have worked extensively to provide that clarity. Last year, BEIS officials carried out a comprehensive exercise across Government, and with the devolved Administrations and regulators, to determine to whom the Bill applies. A list of regulators and professions affected by the Bill was published on gov.uk on 14 October 2021. That list, which is in the public domain, will be maintained and updated as necessary, so we have already met the commitment to publish a list of regulated professions and the associated regulators. A new legislative requirement is therefore not required. As I outlined in Committee, the Government have committed to keeping the list up to date and readily available in the public domain.

On new clause 4, since the end of the transition period EU member states are no longer obligated to offer routes to recognition for UK-qualified professionals. Professionals with UK qualifications are now subject to the relevant rules in individual EU member states. Article 158 of the TCA provides a framework for the UK and the EU to agree arrangements to facilitate the recognition of professional qualifications. Under that framework, UK and EU regulators and professional bodies can provide joint recommendations for potential recognition agreements to be developed and adopted under annex 24 of the TCA, which contains guidelines that will help to do this. We have had discussions with the European Commission to agree a detailed process for delivering recognition agreements through that framework.

Last year, BEIS established a dedicated recognition agreements team to provide guidance and support to regulators and professional bodies seeking to agree such arrangements. That includes arrangements agreed using the TCA process and those outside the TCA process. We have provided limited, targeted financial support to regulators seeking to achieve recognition agreements. The team has already provided guidance and support to regulators and professional bodies, both proactively and at their request, and it has published technical guidance on gov.uk on how regulators and professional bodies may seek recognition agreements, including through the TCA framework, and it will update the guidance to reflect the detailed process for the framework agreed with the Commission. I hope the hon. Member for Sefton Central is assured that we share the priority highlighted by new clause 4.

Although the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) is not pressing new clause 5, I will answer his points. New clause 5 would require the Government to seek the consent of the devolved Administrations when making regulations under the Bill that are in devolved legislative competence. As I said, the most likely use of concurrent powers would be to implement international agreements on professional qualifications, including relevant parts

of trade deals that are negotiated on a UK-wide basis. This amendment could limit the UK Government's ability to implement provisions promptly and consistently on the recognition of professional qualifications in international agreements, which could jeopardise the Government's credibility in seeking to secure ambitious agreements with global partners to support UK service exports.

I know there is no intention to diverge but, none the less, it is important that we keep to our international obligations in our timing and approach. We do not want to fall foul of those obligations inadvertently. Our approach is proportionate in addressing the devolved Administrations' concerns and demonstrates the Government's commitment to consultation and transparency.

Finally, on amendments 2 and 3, the assistance centre must work for the whole UK. The current service, the UK Centre for Professional Qualifications, has been successfully provided by a third-party supplier and offers support on a UK-wide basis. The devolved Administrations have never raised concerns about the service. The existing contract for the centre comes to an end in 2022, and we will work closely with our counterparts in the devolved Administrations as we consider provisions for a future service.

It is important to recognise that the service may continue to be provided by a third party, but legislating for the structure and make-up of the board of any future service would represent a degree of overreach. I do not believe there is a need to have such requirements in legislation. In fact, a statutory requirement could add unnecessary delays to the process of making provision for a future assistance centre, including any potential commercial process to tender for a future service at the expiry of the current contract. I hope the hon. Member for Richmond Park will accept my assurances on the Government's intentions and approach and will not press the amendments.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*New clause 1 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

## Clause 7

### ASSISTANCE CENTRE

*Amendment proposed:* 3, page 5, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) Before making the arrangements, the Secretary of State must ensure there are representatives from each of the devolved nations on the board of the assistance centre.”—(*Sarah Olney.*)

*This amendment would require the Secretary of State to ensure there are representatives for each of the devolved nations on the board of the Assistance Centre.*

*The House divided:* Ayes 210, Noes 296.

**Division No. 211]**

**[7.7 pm**

### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Fleur  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan

Barker, Paula  
Begum, Apsana  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blake, Olivia  
Blomfield, Paul

Bonnar, Steven  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Carden, Dan  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Daby, Janet  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doogan, Dave  
 Dorans, Allan  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farry, Stephen  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flynn, Stephen  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glendon, Mary  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Green, Kate  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hillier, Dame Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hosie, rh Stewart  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast  
 by Pat McFadden*)  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 MacAskill, Kenny  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMahon, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, James  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Oppong-Asare, Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Peacock, Stephanie

Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qaisar, Ms Anum  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reed, Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Alyn  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes

Adams, rh Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aiken, Nickie  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Kemi  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Baynes, Simon  
 Bell, Aaron  
 Benton, Scott  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bristow, Paul  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex

Stringer, Graham  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Richard  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Winter, Beth  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Tim Farron and  
 Helen Morgan**

**NOES**

Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
 Clarke, Theo  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Cleverly, rh James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Donelan, rh Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, rh Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Eastwood, Mark  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Farris, Laura  
 Fell, Simon  
 Firth, Anna  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gibson, Peter  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Glen, John  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Gray, James  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Griffiths, Kate  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkinson, Mark  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Largan, Robert  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Loder, Chris  
 Logan, Mark  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackrory, Cherylyn  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, rh Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mumby-Croft, Holly  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Pow, Rebecca

Prentis, Victoria  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stewart, rh Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syme, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Shailesh  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim  
**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Gareth Johnson and**  
**Michael Tomlinson**

*Question accordingly negated.*

### Clause 16

AUTHORITY BY WHOM REGULATIONS MAY BE MADE

*Amendment made:* 1, page 12, line 7, at end insert—

“(7) In Schedule 7B to the Government of Wales Act 2006 (general restrictions on legislative competence of Senedd Cymru) in paragraph 11(6)(b) (exceptions to restrictions relating to Ministers of the Crown)—

(a) omit the ‘or’ at the end of paragraph (vi), and

(b) after paragraph (vii) insert ‘; or

(viii) the Professional Qualifications Act 2022’.”—  
*(Paul Scully.)*

*This amendment means that the Secretary of State’s consent is not needed for Senedd Cymru to be able to remove the powers that the Secretary of State and the Lord Chancellor have under the Bill to make regulations that are within the legislative competence of the Senedd.*

### Third Reading

7.21 pm

**Paul Scully:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This Bill is an important piece of legislation that will change our approach to recognising professional qualifications in a way that works best for UK professions and supports our status as an independent trading nation.

It is disappointing that, despite the UK Government’s best efforts, the devolved Administrations have not felt able to recommend the granting of legislative consent to their respective legislatures. However, the UK Government remain committed to the devolution settlements, and I

trust that the amendment made to require the Government to consult the devolved Administrations before they regulate in areas of devolved legislative competence underlines that commitment. The Government will continue to work closely with the devolved Administrations on this and future legislation.

It gives me great pleasure to thank everybody who has supported the Bill's progress. I recognise the good work of Members from all parts of the House, as well as in the other place, who have engaged closely with the Bill, and the constructive way in which the Opposition have engaged with the Bill. I pay tribute to my private office, my officials and, in particular, the Bill team for their work over the past few months—I thank Matt Leech, Jamie Wasley, Jen Pattison, James Banfield, Monique Sidhu, Haddeka Taj, Jack Palmer, Nick French, Raegan Hiles, Tom Corker, Alpa Palmar, Hannah Marshall, Ben Clifford, Funmi Olasoju, Aneesa Ahmed and Tim Courtney.

I recognise the commendable work of parliamentary counsel, the House authorities, parliamentary staff, Clerks and Doorkeepers. I thank the members of the Public Bill Committee, under the excellent chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), for their swift but in no way less thorough scrutiny of the Bill, which I commend to the House.

7.23 pm

**Bill Esterson:** The Bill is much improved following its passage through the Lords and the scrutiny carried out in this House, not least by the addition of new clause 1, which was tabled by the Secretary of State on Report and addressed at least some of the concerns expressed about the devolution settlement.

It is vital that there is a robust regime so that our professionals can operate effectively here and overseas and we can to address shortages in many of the occupations covered by the legislation, including those of nurses and vets, as we have discussed many times throughout the Bill's passage. I plead with the Government to give the guidance to the regulators, the professional bodies and the professionals, so that the system that the Bill sets up is effective in creating mutual recognition agreements that will make a difference to the professions, with the resultant impact on the economy. The legislation will affect 205 professions and 80 regulators. It is vital that there is certainty as to who is included and that the list of who is covered is up to date, to the benefit of professionals and the economy.

I associate myself with the Minister's remarks about the role of all those involved in getting the Bill through both Houses. My thanks go to the Clerks and my office for their help in the construction and tabling of amendments and support in respect of my speaking notes. With that, I thank all who have taken part in our debates.

7.25 pm

**Owen Thompson:** I will be brief. The comments that I made earlier still stand. We have not seen any movement at all to recognise the genuine concerns of the devolved Parliaments of these nations, without which we cannot support the Bill as it stands. Pinky promises and "We might not do this" or "We wouldn't intend that to happen" simply are not enough. That completely undermines the devolution we have, and on that basis we will oppose the Bill.

*Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 39.*

**Division No. 212]**

**[7.26 pm**

# **AYES**

Adams, rh Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Baron, Mr John  
Baynes, Simon  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke, Theo  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Coutinho, Claire  
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James

Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, John  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Gray, James  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Griffiths, Kate  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian

Hoare, Simon  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kruger, Danny  
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Largan, Robert  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lockhart, Carla  
Loder, Chris  
Logan, Mark  
Longhi, Marco  
Lopez, Julia  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackrory, Cheryl  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalf, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mills, Nigel

Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrissey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Morton, Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Randall, Tom  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Rutley, David  
Sambrook, Gary  
Saxby, Selaine  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simmonds, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Solloway, Amanda  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander

Stephenson, Andrew  
Stewart, rh Bob  
Stewart, Iain  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stuart, Graham  
Sturdy, Julian  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Timpson, Edward  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tracey, Craig  
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Vickers, Matt  
Walker, Sir Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin

Wallis, Dr Jamie  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
Webb, Suzanne  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wragg, Mr William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Gareth Johnson and**  
**Michael Tomlinson**

### NOES

Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Bonnar, Steven  
Brock, Deidre  
Brown, Alan  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Chapman, Douglas  
Cherry, Joanna  
Crawley, Angela  
Day, Martyn  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Doogan, Dave  
Dorans, Allan  
Fellows, Marion  
Ferrier, Margaret  
Flynn, Stephen  
Gibson, Patricia  
Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Hendry, Drew  
Hosie, rh Stewart

Lake, Ben  
Linden, David  
MacAskill, Kenny  
Mc Nally, John  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonald, Stuart C.  
McLaughlin, Anne  
Monaghan, Carol  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Smith, Alyn  
Stephens, Chris  
Thewliss, Alison  
Thompson, Owen  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Wishart, Pete

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Richard Thomson and**  
**Ms Anum Qaisar**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time and passed, with amendments.*

### ANIMAL WELFARE (SENTIENCE) BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

*Ordered,*

That the Order of 18 January 2022 (Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill [Lords] (Programme)) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—  
(*Jo Churchill.*)

**Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill [Lords]**

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

**New Clause 1****DUTY TO PREPARE AN ANIMAL SENTIENCE STRATEGY**

“(1) The Secretary of State must prepare an Animal Sentience Strategy.

(2) The Strategy under paragraph (1) must set out how Her Majesty’s Government plans to have regard to animal sentience including plans to—

- (a) respond to Animal Sentience Committee reports,
- (b) require animal welfare impact assessments, and
- (c) commission independent research.

(3) The Strategy must set out policies that the Secretary of State may invite the Animal Sentience Committee to review.

(4) The Secretary of State must publish an annual statement on progress on the Animal Sentience Strategy.

(5) An annual statement under subsection (4) must include a summary of changes in policy or implementation that have occurred in response to an Animal Sentience Committee report over the last 12 months.

(6) A Minister of the Crown must make a motion in each House of Parliament in relation to the annual statement.

(7) The Secretary of State must publish an updated Animal Sentience Strategy at the start of each parliament.”—(*Jim McMahon.*)

*This new clause would place a duty on the Secretary of State to produce an animal sentience strategy, and to provide an annual update to Parliament on progress against it.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

7.39 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

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

**New clause 2—Report on the use of sentient animals in Ministry of Defence exercises—**

“(1) The Animal Sentience Committee shall produce a report under section 2 on the adverse effects on the welfare of animals of their use by the Ministry of Defence.

(2) The report shall cover use of animals as defined by this Act in section 5(1).

(3) The report shall cover use of animals by the Ministry of Defence in—

- (a) military exercises,
- (b) military engagements, and
- (c) experiments by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

(4) This report shall include recommendations for future government action under section 2(3) and (4).”

*This new clause requires the Animal Sentience Committee to produce a report on the use of sentient animals in scientific experiments and military exercises by the Ministry of Defence and its executive agency the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.*

**New clause 3—Report on the use of sentient animals in animal experimentation in government policy—**

“(1) The Animal Sentience Committee shall produce a report under section 2 on the adverse effects on the welfare of animals of government policy on experimentation on animals.

(2) The report shall cover both animal experimentation where alternative (non-animal based) methods of testing exist, and where no alternative exists.

(3) The report shall cover—

- (a) medical testing,
- (b) cosmetics testing, and
- (c) weapons testing.

(4) This report shall include recommendations for future government action under section 2 (3) and (4).”

**New clause 4—Animal Welfare Strategy—**

“(1) The Animal Sentience Committee must publish and lay before Parliament an animal welfare strategy within 12 months of the passing of this Act.

(2) The animal welfare strategy must set out the process by which government departments and Ministers are to ensure that in the formulation or implementation of policy all due regard has been had to any adverse welfare consequences for the welfare of animals as sentient beings.

(3) Each department must notify the Committee of any policy under consideration where there is a reasonable likelihood that it would have an adverse impact on the welfare of animals.

(4) Where the Committee is of the view that in the process of formulating or implementing policy a department has not complied, or is not complying, with the process set out in the strategy and therefore may not be having, or has not had, all due regard to animal welfare, the Committee can make recommendations to that department or request an explanation from the relevant minister. Any recommendations or explanation must be made in writing and published.

(5) Recommendations and explanations need not be published if they concern a matter of national security or commercially sensitive information.

(6) Failure to comply with the process set out in the strategy, will not automatically be taken as a failure to have had all due regard to animal welfare, if the Minister can demonstrate that they have met the objective of having had all due regard by other means.

(7) Ministers and departments must provide the Committee with any information the Committee reasonably requests to enable it to carry out its function.”

*This new clause would ensure that there is a clear strategy setting out how the animal welfare implications of policies in formulation or implementation are to be incorporated in the process of developing, deciding and implementing those policies. This would ensure that the same process applied across all departments.*

**New clause 5—Report on the impact of government policy on river pollution on sentient animals—**

“The Animal Sentience Committee shall produce a report on the impact of government policy on river pollution on sentient animals.

(1) The annual report must include—

- (a) the number of sentient animals killed or injured as a result of polluted rivers.
- (b) a description of the actions of water companies to guarantee the protection of sentient animals.
- (c) an assessment of the effect of government policy on (a) and (b).

(2) The first annual report on the impact of polluted rivers on sentient animals may relate to any 12 month period that includes the day on which this section comes into force.

(3) The annual report must be published and laid before Parliament within 4 months of the last day of the period to which the report relates.”

*This new clause would require the Animal Sentience Committee to produce a report on the impact of polluted rivers on sentient animals.*

**New clause 6—Report on the impact of trade agreements on sentient animals—**

“The Animal Sentience Committee must produce an annual report on the adverse effects on the welfare of animals of UK trade agreements.”

(1) The annual report must cover how the UK government has taken the sentience of animals into account when establishing new trade deals.

(2) The first annual report on the impact of trade agreements on sentient animals may relate to any 12 month period that includes the day on which this section comes into force.

(3) The annual report must be published and laid before Parliament within 4 months of the last day of the period to which the report relates.”

*This new clause would require the Animal Sentience Committee to produce a report on the impact of UK trade agreements on sentient animals.*

Amendment 8, in clause 1, page 1, line 3, after “must” insert “by regulations”.

*This amendment would require the Animal Sentience Committee to be established by regulations.*

Amendment 3, page 1, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) The function of the Committee is to determine whether, in the process of formulating policy, it is satisfied the Government is having, or has had, all due regard to the ways in which the policy might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals as sentient beings.

(1B) It is not the function of the Committee to—

- (a) comment on the policy decisions of Ministers or to recommend future policy or changes to existing policy, or
- (b) consider other considerations of public interest, including economic, cultural and religious considerations, or impacts on different species, in the formulation and implementation of any policy.

(1C) Schedule 1 makes provision for the Committee’s membership and powers; and other aspects of the Committee’s work.”

*This amendment clarifies the Committee’s role and makes clear the Committee is limited to commenting on process. It makes explicit that Ministers should take into account any other public interest considerations. It also gives effect to NSI, which sets out the structure, membership criteria and operation of the Committee.*

Amendment 9, page 1, line 5, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—“(2) The regulations must set out—

- (a) details of how the Animal Sentience Committee is to be composed, and
- (b) its terms of reference.

(3) Regulations under this section must be made by statutory instrument.

(4) Regulations under this section may not be made unless a draft statutory instrument has been laid before, and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.”

*This would require the Animal Sentience Committee to be established by regulations, which must set out its composition and terms of reference, ensuring Parliament has the opportunity to approve the final form of the Committee.*

Amendment 4, page 1, line 5, leave out subsection (2).

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 3.*

Amendment 5, page 1, line 6, leave out subsection (3).

*This amendment is consequential on NSI.*

Amendment 6, page 1, line 7, at end insert—

“(4) No person may be appointed as a member of the Committee unless they have confirmed that they—

- (a) are not a member of, or affiliated to an organisation promoting animal rights;
- (b) are not employed and have never been employed by or been a consultant of an organisation promoting animal rights; and

- (c) are not in receipt of, nor have ever been in receipt of, direct or indirect payments or funding, from an organisation promoting animal rights.”

*The amendment would ensure that a person may not be appointed a member of the Committee without confirming that they are not and have never been a member of or affiliated to an organisation promoting animal rights, nor are or have been in receipt of funding from such an organisation.*

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

“(1A) In appointing members, the Secretary of State shall have all due regard to the need for the Committee to possess appropriate expertise and experience, to include animal behaviour, animal welfare, neurophysiology, veterinary science, law, and public administration. The Secretary of State may not appoint a person as a member of the Committee if the person is—

- (a) a member of the House of Commons,
- (b) a member of the House of Lords,
- (c) a member of the Scottish Parliament,
- (d) a member of Senedd Cymru,
- (e) a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly,
- (f) a councillor of a local authority.
- (g) is an employee, former employee, or is a consultant or former consultant to, a charity or campaigning organisation concerned with animal welfare or animal rights, or is or has been in receipt of any payments or funding from such a charity or organisation, whether directly or indirectly.

(1B) Appointments shall be subject to regulation by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.”

*This amendment would clarify the range of expertise of the membership of the Committee and preclude certain categories of person. This is an alternative to Amendment 6 and uses the same wording as that found in NSI.*

Amendment 21, page 1, line 8, leave out clause 2 and insert—

“Reports of the Committee

(1) The Committee must lay before Parliament an annual report setting out whether it is satisfied that all due regard has been had to animal welfare, in accordance with the Animal Welfare Strategy. The report is to be published and laid before Parliament.

(2) The report must state in the affirmative or negative whether it is satisfied that each department of state has complied with the Animal Welfare Strategy.

(3) The Committee may produce interim reports relating to individual departments and policy areas under consideration, at any time, including making recommendations, where it considers it is necessary to ensure compliance with the animal welfare strategy for the purpose set out in section 1(2).”

*This amendment largely replicates the existing Bill but takes account of the Animal Welfare Strategy, while still allowing the Committee to play a role where it feels that there has been a failure of process in compliance with the Strategy at a stage before a policy decision has been made.*

Amendment 10, in clause 2, page 1, line 9, leave out “or has been”.

*This amendment would ensure the Animal Sentience Committee looked at policies under consideration, or proposed, not policies that have already been decided.*

Amendment 12, page 1, line 9, leave out “or implemented”.

*This amendment would ensure that the Committee is focused on the process of deciding policy and not the implementation of that policy. It would also ensure the Committee did not look at past policy decisions being implemented.*

Amendment 13, page 1, line 10, leave out “may” and insert “must”.

*This amendment would require the Animal Sentience Committee to report on all government policy across departments.*

Amendment 11, page 1, line 12, leave out “or has had”.

*See the explanatory statement for Amendment 10.*

Amendment 14, page 1, line 14, at end insert—

“(2A) The report must state whether in the view of the Committee the question in subsection (2) has been answered in the affirmative or in the negative.”

*This amendment would require the Committee to state clearly whether in deciding any policy the minister had, or had not, had full regard to the implications of that policy on animal welfare.*

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

“(4A) Recommendations made by the Committee must respect legislative or administrative provisions and customs relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage.”

*This amendment seeks to place a duty on the Committee to have regard to the balancing factors included in the Lisbon Treaty, Article 13 of Title II, to which the UK was a party before Brexit.*

Amendment 16, page 2, line 17, at end insert—

“(8) In producing a report under this section, the Animal Sentience Committee must consult the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ Animal Welfare Committee and publish a note in the report of the Animal Welfare Committee’s opinion and advice on the recommendations contained in the report.”

*This amendment requires the Committee to consult the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ Animal Welfare Committee on its reports and include a report of its opinions and advice.*

Amendment 22, page 2, line 18, leave out clause 3 and insert—

“Response to reports

(1) The relevant Minister must lay before Parliament a response to the report, where a failure to comply with the Animal Welfare Strategy has been identified.

(2) The response must be laid before Parliament within a period of three months from the day on which the Committee’s report is published.”

*This amendment is consequential on NC4 and ensures that ministers must explain to Parliament any failure to comply with the Animal Welfare Strategy identified by the Committee.*

Amendment 15, in clause 3, page 2, line 19, after “2,” insert

“where the committee has found the question in section 2(2) to have been answered in the negative.”

*This amendment would require the Minister to respond only where the Committee has found that the minister has not had all due regard to the ways in which the policy might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals as sentient beings.*

Amendment 17, page 2, line 23, at end insert—

“(2A) The response must contain the views of other expert committees, such as the Animal Welfare Committee, and, where they disagree with the views of the Animal Sentience Committee, the Secretary of State must state which view the Government supports and the reasons for making that decision.”

*This amendment would ensure that the Secretary of State’s response to the Animal Sentience Committee report includes the views of other expert committees, and, if in conflict, the Secretary of State must state with which committee’s view the Government agrees and give the reasons.*

Amendment 1, page 2, line 29, at end insert—

“(4) A Minister of the Crown must make a motion in each House of Parliament in relation to each response to a report from the Animal Sentience Committee laid before Parliament under paragraph (1).”

*This amendment would require the Minister to give an oral response to Animal Sentience Committee reports, creating an opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny of report recommendations and the Government’s response.*

Amendment 18, in clause 5, page 3, line 1, at end insert—

“‘Policy’ means any proposal or decided course of action by or on behalf of a minister in the exercise of their statutory or common law powers. Policy does not include the decisions of ministers not to act, including changing an existing policy or law.”

*This amendment provides a definition of policy for the purposes of the Animal Sentience Committee.*

Amendment 19, page 3, line 1, at end insert—

“(1A) Nothing in this Act applies to an animal while it is in its foetal or embryonic form, except in relation to an animal to which sections 1 (protected animals) and 2 (regulated procedures) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 as amended apply.”

*This amendment ensures consistency with existing legislation.*

Amendment 20, page 3, line 4, at end insert—

“(2A) The power under subsection (2) may only be exercised if the Secretary of State is satisfied, on the basis of scientific evidence, that animals of the kind concerned are sentient, and the Secretary of State lays a report before Parliament setting out the scientific basis for determining that the species concerned is sentient.”

*This amendment, as in the Animal Welfare Act 2006, seeks to ensure the power to extend the scope of sentience is based on scientific evidence and does not result from a political motivation or personal preference.*

New schedule 1—*The Animal Sentience Committee—*

#### *Membership*

1 (1) The Animal Sentience Committee is to consist of—

(a) a member appointed by the Secretary of State to chair the Committee, and

(b) at least 8 but no more than 11 other members appointed by the Secretary of State.

(2) In appointing members, the Secretary of State shall have all due regard to the need for the Committee to possess appropriate expertise and experience, to include animal behaviour, animal welfare, neurophysiology, veterinary science, law, and public administration.

(3) A member is appointed for such period not exceeding 4 years as the Secretary of State determines.

(4) The Secretary of State may reappoint as a member of the Committee a person who is, or has been, a member. A member shall not normally be reappointed consecutively for more than two terms of office.

(5) The Secretary of State may not appoint a person as a member of the Committee if the person is—

(a) a member of the House of Commons,

(b) a member of the House of Lords,

(c) a member of the Scottish Parliament,

(d) a member of Senedd Cymru,

(e) a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly,

(f) a councillor of a local authority,

(g) an employee or former employee, or a consultant or former consultant to a charity or campaigning organisation concerned with animal welfare or animal rights, and

(h) a person in receipt of, or previously in receipt of, any direct or indirect payments or funding from a charity or campaigning organisation concerned with animal welfare or animal rights.

#### *General Powers*

2 (1) The Committee may do anything which appears to it to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of, or in connection with, the performance of its function as defined in section 1(2).

(2) The foregoing includes, but is not limited to, requesting from the government such information and material as it considers necessary.

(3) So far as is reasonable and practicable, the government shall comply with any request from the Committee under paragraph 2(2). If the government declines such a request it shall provide to the Committee its reasons for doing so in writing.

(4) In the event that the Committee considers the government has failed to meet the duty in paragraph 2(3) it may make reference to this in any report produced in accordance with section 2 of this Act.

(5) It shall be for the Committee to identify those policies which in its view might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals as sentient beings.

(6) Without prejudice to the foregoing, the government shall take reasonable steps to advise the Committee of its intention to formulate or implement any policy which might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals as sentient beings.

(7) If in producing a report under section 2 of this Act the Committee considers it to be desirable that the government receives further guidance on how animal welfare might be improved in relation to the relevant policy, it may refer the matter to an appropriate committee established for the purpose of providing such advice to ministers.

(8) The Committee may invite to attend its meetings on either a permanent or temporary basis any person appointed to chair a body established by the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government or the Northern Ireland Executive to provide advice on the welfare or protection of animals in relation to the process of the formulation and implementation of policy. Persons attending in such an ex officio capacity shall not participate in any decisions of the Committee.

(9) The Committee shall publish the name and qualifications of any person invited to provide advice to the Committee and shall publish any advice given.

#### *Independence and transparency*

3 (1) The Committee shall be independent and autonomous of any other body.

(2) Within six months of its establishment, the Committee shall publish a memorandum setting out how it intends to carry out its function. The memorandum is to be kept under review and may be amended from time to time as the Committee considers appropriate.

(3) The memorandum shall include guidance as to how it expects ministers to demonstrate they have had all due regard to the ways in which a policy might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals as sentient beings.

(4) Within 12 months of being established, and thereafter as soon as practicable after the end of each calendar year, the Committee shall prepare and publish a report on the exercise of its functions during that year.

(5) The Committee's reports shall be laid before Parliament.

(6) The Committee will determine the form and content of each of its reports.

#### *Expenses and resources*

4 (1) Members of the Committee, and any members of sub-committees established under paragraph 6, who are not members of the Committee, are entitled to such expenses as the Secretary of State may determine.

(2) The government is to provide the Committee with such staff and other resources as the Committee requires to carry out its function.

(3) Staff serving the Committee shall be based in the Cabinet Office and independent of any other Department of State.

#### *Early termination of membership*

5 (1) A member of the Committee may resign by giving notice in writing to the Secretary of State.

(2) The Secretary of State may, by giving notice to the member in writing, remove a member of the Committee if the Secretary of State considers that the member is—

- (a) unable to perform the functions of a member, or
- (b) unsuitable to continue as a member.

(3) A person's membership of the Committee ends if the person becomes—

- (a) a member of the House of Commons,
- (b) a member of the House of Lords,
- (c) a member of the Scottish Parliament,
- (d) a member of Senedd Cymru,
- (e) a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly,
- (f) a councillor of a local authority, and
- (g) an employee of or a consultant to a charity or campaigning organisation concerned with animal welfare or animal rights, or receives any direct or indirect payment or funding from such a charity or organisation.

#### *Sub-Committees*

6 (1) The Committee may establish sub-committees.

(2) The membership of a sub-committee may include persons who are not members of the Committee but those persons are not entitled to vote at meetings of the sub-committee.

(3) The Committee must publish a list of the membership of any sub-committee where it includes persons who are not members of the main Committee.

#### *Regulation of procedure*

7 The Committee may regulate its own procedure (including quorum) and that of any sub-committees.

#### *Validity of things done*

8 The validity of anything done by the Committee or its sub-committees is not affected by—

- (a) a vacancy in membership,
- (b) a defect in the appointment of a member, and
- (c) the disqualification of a person as a member after appointment."

*This new schedule is consequential on Amendments 3, 4 and 5. It sets out a structure for the Committee, criteria for appointments and how it is to operate.*

**Jim McMahon:** At long last, this legislation has finally found its way through Parliament. The Government could have dealt with this years ago had they not opposed the recognition of animal sentience and had they included it in other laws that carried over in the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

The Conservatives have a track record of umming and ahing, and they cannot seem to decide whether animal welfare is important. The truth is that, despite their warm words, the action never quite lives up to the promise. There were rumours that, due to unforeseen political concerns, the Government planned to let animal welfare legislation simply fall away at the end of the Session, for no other reason than managing internal party tensions.

It is quite clear that this issue continues to paralyse the Government Benches. That is why we have little bits of animal welfare Bills floating around here, there and everywhere, each intended to narrow the scope and avoid having to address issues such as blood sports, hunting and shooting, and each in the end destined to fall.

We should be discussing a comprehensive animal welfare Bill. That is what the country wants, and it is what the Government promised. Nevertheless, the Minister could clarify that any outstanding Bills relating to animal welfare will either be completed in this Session or, if not, carried over into the next.

Turning to this Bill, my Labour colleagues and I support enshrining animal sentience in law. My party has been saying for a number of years that that is desperately needed. We support the Bill, in the sense that it is better

than doing nothing, but it feels as though the Government are more interested in using this as a photo opportunity than in seizing the moment and ensuring that we have a long-term strategy on animal welfare.

That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) tabled this new clause and amendment 1. Labour's new clause 1 places a direct legal obligation on the Secretary of State to produce an animal sentience strategy, requiring annual updates to Parliament on its progress. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) rightly stated at Committee Stage, the Bill in its current form,

"places indirect responsibilities on Ministers",

in that,

"they must simply establish and maintain a committee and lay written responses, rather than assuming direct responsibilities on these matters, which is what we would like to see."—[*Official Report, Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill [Lords] Public Bill Committee*, 10 February 2022; c. 27.]

This new clause would not only bring us into line with neighbouring countries, but significantly strengthen the responsibilities of the Animal Sentience Committee and ensures that the work is about more than just words and symbolism. For the same reasons, we wanted the Minister to give an oral update on the Floor of the House on the Animal Sentience Committee reports, providing a platform for parliamentary scrutiny of the report's recommendations and the Government's response.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge also said at Committee Stage, for the Animal Sentience Committee to have any heft at all, the Government cannot be allowed to simply shrug off the recommendations in its reports, especially if they are politically inconvenient or cause Back-Bench stirs on the Government Benches.

The new clause would require a Minister to make a motion in both Houses of Parliament, which would provide a genuine opportunity to properly scrutinise the reports and the Government's response. Without that, the Committee's findings will simply not be given the attention they deserve, and we will not have the right scrutiny on the critical issue of animal welfare.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West has said, as it stands the Animal Sentience Committee risks becoming just another toothless talking shop—a Whitehall committee where, in the end, the reports gather dust, while critical issues of animal welfare within policy making go unaddressed.

Opposition Members care deeply about animal welfare. In Government, the Labour party brought forward landmark legislation in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Hunting Act 2004. We are the party of animal welfare, so we cannot help but feel that this piecemeal piece of legislation will not address the long-standing concerns on animal welfare.

The Opposition are clear that all animals deserve protection, whether they are pets, wild animals, ocean animals or farm animals. It is hard to believe that this Government are serious about animal welfare, given that they are still resisting banning foie gras and fur imports, both of which are horrifically cruel and completely unnecessary. In last year's Queen's Speech, the Government committed to ending the export of live animals for fattening and slaughter and taking further steps to limit the foie gras trade. So where is that promise? The Secretary

of State could have included that piece of legislation right here, right now but, as is typical with a Conservative Government, they are big on promises and small on delivery.

7.45 pm

It is not right to promise tougher laws in a manifesto, only to fail to see that through, and frankly it is disrespectful to Her Majesty to include in the Queen's Speech the promise of legislation that does not arrive—especially in this, her platinum jubilee year. Will the Government confirm that reports over the weekend of their dropping legislation on trophy hunting imports are correct, or will the Secretary of State commit to addressing those imports?

Britain is a nation of animal welfare lovers. We want to lead the world on animal welfare and animal protection, but it is clear that that ambition is not matched by the Government, who, faced with minor difficulties, do not have the courage to see that through. Worse still, while we are expecting far more of British farmers and producers, the Government are signing trade deals with countries around the world with far lesser animal welfare standards than ours in the UK.

The Government could have used this Bill as an opportunity to address the animal welfare concerns in relation to those trade deals and standards—concerns raised not only by the Opposition, but by the National Farmers Union, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the British Veterinary Association and others. I have asked the Secretary of State this before, and I will repeat the question again for the benefit of the House: will he bring forward provisions guaranteeing equivalence of standards for all imported products coming into the UK?

While we will vote for the Bill, it feels like a missed opportunity. It is clear that, while the Government talk a lot about the great work they say they are doing on animal welfare, the reality is they need to be more comprehensive, and they need to go much further and much faster. This Bill may well be a start, but it cannot be the end.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): I will speak to amendment 2, in my name and those of 30-odd colleagues.

The problem with the Bill is that it goes beyond the commitment made by Ministers to recognise animal sentience in British law in the same way that it is recognised in European Union law. My amendment is designed to ensure that the safeguards of the EU law are duplicated in British law. Currently, those safeguards are not in the Bill, as was the original ask of the animal welfare lobby.

It seems to me that we should have a bit of equivalence here. If this committee is set up by statute, its remit should also be defined by statute. I therefore ask the Government seriously to consider accepting my amendment as a sensible, fairly minor, but nevertheless important amendment to the remit of the committee, which recognises local customs,

"religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage".

That seems to me a perfectly reasonable thing to do. With these few words, I strongly urge my hon. Friend the Minister to see whether she cannot, on behalf of the Government, accept my amendment.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I will speak in favour of new clause 5, which would ensure an annual report including,

“the number of sentient animals killed or injured”,

as a result of pollution, a description of water companies’ actions to protect animals and an assessment of the impact of Government policy on those two things. I will also speak briefly in favour of new clause 6, which we do not intend to push to a vote, which would establish an annual report into the ways the Government have taken into account animal sentience when establishing new trade deals.

Turning to new clause 5, Cumbria contains two national parks, the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District, the latter being a world heritage site. The richness of our biodiversity throughout Cumbria is of great importance, not least in our rivers and lakes, whose ecology is of global significance as home to countless species. Yet Government policy threatens that diversity and damages animal welfare. In 2020, across the United Kingdom, water companies were permitted to dump raw sewage into our waterways on 400,000 occasions for a total of 3.1 million hours, at enormous cost to the lives of aquatic and semi-aquatic sentient animals. At the River Lune near Sedburgh, we saw the longest discharge in the country lasting for 8,490 hours. At Derwentwater, a discharge of 8,275 hours took place. Is it any wonder that only 14 % of Britain’s rivers are classed as being in a “good” state?

The Government’s Environment Act 2021 acknowledges the problem and sets an ambition to reduce the pollution in our rivers caused by the dumping of raw sewage. Of course, as we all know, the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming by Opposition Members, their own Back Benchers and members of another place to even do that.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Is the hon. Member aware that today’s papers have indicated that while some of the beaches in the UK have the blue flag designation that shows that the water should, in theory, be acceptable, that designation is sometimes not acceptable either?

**Tim Farron:** Yes. Often rivers can meet an acceptable standard but in reality not be healthy places, particularly as regards biodiversity and wildlife. The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point and makes the case as to why the increased scrutiny that the new clause would bring about is that much more important.

The ambition of the Environment Act, which was given Royal Assent last year, is open-ended. There are no meaningful targets or timescales to prevent water companies from dumping raw sewage into our rivers, harming fish and other animals. In 2020, water companies made £2.2 billion in profits. At the same time, as I said, they were dumping sewage in our waterways on 400,000 separate occasions. What kind of accountability is that? What kind of justice is that? What kind of impact is that having on our wildlife? The new clause would expose that.

Between 2018 and 2021, there were only 11 prosecutions of water companies for dumping sewage in our lakes and rivers. United Utilities, which serves Cumbria and the rest of the north-west, was responsible for seven out of the 10 longest sewage leaks in 2020, but, outrageously,

was not fined even once. Despite the damage done to the ecology and animal life in rivers such as the Leven, Crake, Brathay, Kent, Lune, Sprint, Mint and Gowan, discharges are permitted either because Government will not stop them or because hardly any of the offenders are ever meaningfully prosecuted. The meres, tarns, waters and lakes of our lake district are all fed by rivers into which raw sewage can be legally dumped. I am particularly concerned about the ecology of Windermere and the failure to take sufficient action to protect the animal and plant life that is so dependent on England’s largest and most popular lake. The new clause would hold Government and water companies to account so that our wildlife and our biodiversity is protected.

New clause 6 addresses the impact of trade deals on the welfare of sentient animals. This country has concluded trade deals with Australia and New Zealand, and any scrutiny of those deals is now effectively meaningless because the Government have already signed them. Yet the impact on sentient animals will be enormous. Free trade is vital to liberty, prosperity and peace, but trade that is not fair is not free at all. These trade deals are not fair on animals and not fair on the British farmers who care for our animals. In Australia, for example, huge-scale ranch farming means the loss of many times more animals than in the UK because of the absence of the close husbandry that we find on British family farms. Some 40% of beef in Australia involves the use of hormones that are not allowed in the United Kingdom. Cattle can be transported in Australia for up to 48 hours in the heat without food or water. These are clearly lower animal welfare standards. By signing these deals without real scrutiny, the Government have endorsed that cruelty and enabled it to prosper at our farmers’ expense. Lower standards are cheaper, so these deals give a competitive advantage to imported animal products that have reached market with poorer animal welfare, thus undermining British farmers who practise higher animal welfare standards. That is why the new clause is important—because it seeks to hold Ministers to account and to limit how much they can get away with sacrificing the welfare of sentient animals at home and abroad in order to achieve a politically useful deal.

Despite this, this Bill has much to commend it. However, the new clauses would allow the Government to look the British people in the eye and say that they were prepared to take on powerful vested interests in order to protect animals and our wider environment. In seeking to press new clause 5 to a vote, I urge Members in all parts of the House not to take the side of the most powerful against those creatures that are the most defenceless.

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): I rise to speak in favour of amendment 2, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), and new clause 4, amendments 3 to 22, and new schedule 1, which are in my name.

From the outset, and for the avoidance of all doubt, I am not, through any of these amendments, arguing against animals being sentient or being able to feel pain. After all, the sentience of animals has long been recognised in UK law, as evidenced by animal welfare legislation passed over the course of nearly 200 years. The purpose of amendment 2 and the other amendments in my name is to help the Government to avoid the main dangers and unforeseen consequences posed by the undefined

aspects of the creation of the new Animal Sentience Committee. Crucially, under the unamended version of the Bill, it remains unclear who will be on this committee and what direct powers it will have. The unamended Bill's draft terms of reference seem to suggest that the committee could have a role in scrutinising the substance of policies and not just the processes that led to those decisions being made. The Secretary of State will have the final sign-off on the committee's composition, but what mechanisms will be in place to ensure that it is made up of dispassionate and genuine scientific animal experts and not ideologically driven animal rights activists with political agendas?

The amendments would protect against the Bill clumsily becoming a Trojan horse for what I would consider an extreme agenda that the Government could live to regret in years to come. Indeed, passionate supporters of the committee's creation have already talked publicly of its not excluding animal rights extremist groups such as PETA. My amendments, especially amendments 3, 10, 11, 12, 18 and 21, new clause 4 and new schedule 1, suggest some statutory structure for the committee, how appointments to it are to be made, and how it might operate. The amendments would clarify that the committee is concerned with the process by which current policy is being formulated and not with policy decisions taken or suggesting policy changes, whether proposing new policy or changes to existing policy.

The amendments would also help to address the question of the Bill's retrospective effect. The current drafting, confirmed by the draft terms of reference, would allow the committee to report on past policy decisions. Without my amendments, there will be no limit to how far back the committee can look, which would, in practice, allow it to draw attention to policies that have already been decided and implemented, or are being implemented. I fear that in doing so, it could start to drive a policy agenda of its own. Far from ensuring that in the process of policy making all due regard is had to animal welfare, it could raise policy issues that are not under current consideration or have already been decided, or decisions made before Ministers were expected to take account of animal sentience. The current draft terms provide little clarity, and there is little if anything binding on Ministers, whether current or future. To rely on terms of reference to provide detail in these areas is not desirable for a statutory body, as they are non-binding and can be changed at will without any parliamentary oversight.

8 pm

The terms of reference state that, once established, it will be for the committee to formally ratify its objectives and responsibilities. As a committee established by statute, the committee's objectives and responsibilities should be found in the establishing Act of Parliament. It should not be for the committee to ratify its own objectives and responsibilities. My amendments and new schedule 1 would give some clarity and certainty on that point.

There is also currently no requirement for Departments to co-operate with the Animal Sentience Committee. We are merely told that DEFRA "expects" Departments to do so. A Department that fails to co-operate will simply be reported as having not co-operated. What use would such a report serve in advancing animal welfare? New schedule 1 would address that situation.

The amendments also seek to clarify that it remains for Ministers to undertake the balancing exercise between animal welfare and other public interest considerations. That would limit the likelihood of ministerial decisions being challenged in the courts. New schedule 1, which is given effect by my amendments, simply suggests some statutory structure for the committee, how appointments to the committee are to be made and how it might operate. It is worth noting that the contents of the schedule, with some relatively minor changes, are substantially those proposed by Professor Mike Radford, reader in animal welfare law and UK constitutional law at the University of Aberdeen, as part of his evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. It follows similar models for other statutory committees. While its drafting may not be perfect, the Government will I hope think carefully about clarifying the powers of the committee and ensuring that, as a statutory committee, it has a statutory framework that safeguards the committee from being misused in the future or being able to transform its role and function into something other than what Ministers intend.

Incorporated in new schedule 1, alongside amendments 6, 7 and 9, is a desire to fix some of the concerns expressed repeatedly as the Bill has made progress, including the lack of clarity about how committee members will be appointed. Despite being a statutory body, the proposed Animal Sentience Committee is entirely in the control of DEFRA, being dependent financially on DEFRA, having its secretariat in DEFRA and with the Secretary of State having control of appointment and dismissal. Under this Government, I have every confidence in the integrity of the appointments process, but it would be all too easy for it to be manipulated to support the particular agenda of any future Government of the day. If the purpose of the Bill is to ensure animal welfare is properly considered in policy making and implementation across Government, the committee would ideally be independent of any particular Department. New schedule 1 would at least help to ensure that greater independence for the committee.

New schedule 1, as well as amendment 7, would also set certain criteria for appointments to the committee to ensure the necessary expertise and exclude persons who may have other agendas—those seeking to offer not dispassionate advice, but partisan and ideological musings. At the moment, the Bill simply allows my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or whoever holds that job in the future to appoint whoever they like. The terms of reference make it clear that appointments are not regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, only that the Secretary of State will

"generally adhere to its guidelines on best practice. The Secretary of State will seek to appoint experts with appropriate experience relating to policy decision-making and/or the welfare of animals." There is little in the terms of reference that is binding, either on Ministers or the committee. It is expressed almost exclusively in terms of "may", "could" or is "expected to". That is concerning for a committee established by statute that could play an important role in the process of any Government formulating policy. With new schedule 1 and amendments 6 and 7, the potential for highly politically motivated committee members would be straightforwardly taken away.

To conclude, my concern about the committee comes not from its likely composition and activity under the current Government, but from how it may be used by a

future Government hostile to rural interests. They must recognise the long-term risks legislation such as this could have and how it could be weaponised against the interests of our hard-working farming community, those who undertake countryside management, including pest control to protect livestock, as well as the British public in the long term. That is what my amendments seek to protect against and I commend them to the House.

I very much hope that the Government will adopt my amendments and that of my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). If they do adopt at least his amendment, I will not seek to press mine to Divisions, but we do have to make some significant progress to put in the protections that many of us, certainly on the Government Benches, are concerned about.

**Alex Davies-Jones** (Pontypridd) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today on new clause 1 and an issue that is very close to my own heart, as hon. Friends will know, as well as those of many of our constituents up and down the country. Indeed, it was a privilege to secure a Westminster Hall debate last year on covid-19's impact on animal welfare. That debate took place almost a year ago to the day and I am pleased that we are now in a very different place when it comes to legislating to protect the most vulnerable.

As has already been said by the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), this Bill has been a long time coming. We have only now reached this point thanks to the hard work of Members in this place and the other place, who have campaigned ferociously on these issues for many years. They include my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), as well as the former Member for Redcar, Anna Turley, who, were she still in this place, would be speaking passionately on this issue today.

I welcome the general thrust of this Bill to ban live exports and introduce animal sentience on to the statute book for the first time. It is also encouraging to see that animal welfare organisations such as the Better Deal for Animals coalition and Compassion in World Farming, and other charities including Hope Rescue, which is based near me in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), have cautiously welcomed the Bill, too.

I rise none the less to express concerns shared by several other Members that the Bill in its current form lacks scope and ambition. By making a specific provision that will allow our understanding of animal sentience to evolve as scientific research progresses, the Bill represents a brilliant opportunity to reinforce animal welfare legislation. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by.

As the Bill progressed through the other place, some sought to argue that existing laws, such as the 200-year-old Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act 1822, were sufficient to legally enshrine animal sentience, but that simply is not true. To rely on legislation from 200 years ago without seeing the need for modernisation would have been a kick in the teeth for animal lovers and activists across the country and fundamentally would have been a wasted opportunity. Our withdrawal from the treaty of Lisbon, which colleagues will be aware acknowledges animal sentience in article 13, renders those arguments

completely defunct. We are now seeing the effects of how the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 failed to transfer these principles.

Contrary to those remarks in the other place, there is a gaping hole in British law regarding the welfare of animals, and it is our responsibility to make those wrongs right. The Bill will go a long way to addressing that hole by again recognising the ability of animals to feel pain, excitement, joy and comfort, but the decision by the Government to not include a proactive animal sentience strategy, which Labour calls for in new clause 1, was incredibly disappointing. Compelling the Government to publish an animal sentience strategy would ensure that the Bill did not fall short of its aim to properly underpin animal welfare. Without it, the Bill in its current form risks being weaker than the European legislation it seeks to replace.

Let me be clear: animal welfare should be a priority for us all. I am pleased to say that, in Wales, the fantastic Welsh Labour Government are again ahead of the curve. The Welsh Government published their own animal welfare plan in November last year, and again it is disappointing to see the UK Government refuse to adopt their own in the Bill. After all, let us not forget that it was a Labour Government who introduced the Animal Welfare Act 2006. That is because we recognised that issues relating to animal welfare are issues that we must all be concerned by. Hope Rescue, to which I referred earlier, is one such charity that has been leading the way on animal welfare issues for some years and its sheer dedication to improving the lives of abandoned dogs is to be applauded. In partnership with other groups, such as Justice for Reggie, campaigning groups are plugging the gaps where UK Government legislation has failed.

Animal welfare is a complex, emotive issue that spans many policy areas. I am pleased to see this legislation reach its final stages in this place, but I urge the Government to be more ambitious in their approach to animal welfare more widely. I will continue to push that point wherever possible, particularly in my capacity as a shadow Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Minister.

As the Government seek to finally tighten up the online space, my final plea to the Minister is to work with her colleagues across Departments on animal welfare issues specific to digital spaces, such as the sale of pets online. Now is the time to get that right. Only by working collaboratively can we truly tackle the root cause of those issues once and for all.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in the debate. It has been interesting to listen to hon. Members on both sides. I would argue that the Government have probably got the Bill about right, for the simple reason that Opposition Members are saying that it does not go far enough and Conservative Members are perhaps saying that it goes plenty far enough.

This legislation is better than the previous version because it will not be taken to judicial review. In about 2018, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee looked at the Bill as it was then and rightly decided, having taken legal advice and advice from others, that many of the actions that could take place could be judicial-reviewed and land up in the courts. There could have been a situation where much of our animal welfare was judged in the courts, rather than here in Parliament.

Instead, it creates a committee that is put in place by the Secretary of State and then has to present a report to them. He or she will then make a decision about which route the Government will take on animal welfare. I believe that that is the right situation.

I support the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). We have argued many times in this Chamber, and I even argued in the European Parliament, that European legislation often had no flexibility about it. On this occasion, of course, it did have flexibility when bringing animal welfare legislation forward. As we brought legislation over as a result of Brexit, however, we did not include those clauses, which is why we are in this predicament. I have real sympathy for the Minister because she is dealing with an interesting situation: she is trying to balance the needs of animal welfare with the perceived needs of animal rights. That is the issue.

It is interesting that, in tonight's debate, we have talked all about DEFRA. Much of it is about DEFRA, but we must remember that the Animal Sentience Committee will deal with the whole of Government. So when someone is building a bypass or building houses, the effect of all those issues on sentience will be considered. I admit that I am still interested to know how the committee will deal with all that. How will the Secretary of State for Transport or the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities deal with it? It will have a big job to do.

If the committee is set up in the right way with the right people on it, so that they can make a judgment about what is right in practical terms for animal welfare, it can work, but it is very much about how it is set up, who the chair is and who the members are. We must ensure that we have a balance of opinions so that, with the right methods of building, we can build our roads and our homes and we can carry on farming in our traditional ways.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** To the point that my hon. Friend has rightly made about the cross-cutting nature of the Bill across Government Departments, I quite like that. For example, the Department for Education might educate people on how to look after pets properly. There are many useful areas where the Bill could have a role.

8.15 pm

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. We now have charities that take dogs into schools to ensure that people can look after a dog or their pets properly. Most families do so, but unfortunately there are families who do not. That is where it is absolutely necessary and that is why I am not negative about the Bill. I do not think we ever needed to get to this place, but, as they say, we are where we are. That is why we have this Bill. A lot relies on the Secretary of State to get it right. I believe that it can be made to work across Government, but I am still intrigued as to how all those Departments will take notice of this powerful Animal Sentience Committee.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): At the opening of my hon. Friend's remarks, he indicated that he thought the Bill was pretty good as it was and that he feels, as I do, that if the Opposition are criticising it and some Conservative Back Benchers are criticising it, it is

probably about right. Does he agree that there is not a single amendment tabled by the Opposition or Conservative Back Benchers that would improve the Bill one iota? We ought to leave it exactly as it is.

**Neil Parish:** I would probably make an exception for amendment 2, but my hon. Friend makes a good point that amending legislation sometimes does not work in exactly the way we want it to work. I do not often give much praise to the Government, but on this occasion they have probably worked hard on the Bill to get it where it is. It is in a much better place than it was.

I will also talk briefly about new clause 5, which is an interesting amendment about water companies and pollution. The key to the water companies and pollution in our rivers is that we are about to have a new chair of Ofwat. The Secretary of State is looking at candidates and the EFRA Committee is about to look at whoever he or she might be. The new chair has a very big job to do, because—let us be blunt—the water companies have paid their shareholders and directors too much and have not put enough into infrastructure.

At one time, a previous Secretary of State was keen to bring forward legislation to ensure that more pressure was put on the water companies to deliver, because it is not just about putting up bills to get more infrastructure to stop pollution; it is about ensuring that water companies invest in building the infrastructure. I would not go as far as the Opposition parties want and nationalise the water companies, but I would apply some thumbscrews to them—only metaphorically—so that they really make a difference on the investment that they make. Hon. Members on both sides of the House know well that water companies should not be discharging into rivers when there is an overflow from treatment plants, many of which have not had the investment that they should have done over the years.

In fairness to the water companies—I do not like being fair to them—we should remember that, after going through education, health and all the other sectors, when they were nationalised they had not necessarily had the amount of investment that they had needed over the years. Since they were privatised, therefore, there has been a lot of investment by those companies, but it has not been enough, which is why we now have an opportunity to get it right. I am not sure, however, that the Bill is the right place for such a provision. I think we should be beefing up Ofwat and taking on the water companies directly.

The Opposition are saying that we are not creating greater biodiversity, but I do not accept that. I believe that we are and that all our policies are destined to do that, but we have to get the balance right. We see Putin and his dreadful regime inflicting this horrendous situation in Ukraine, murdering innocent people. Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe and, in many respects, of the world. Therefore, as we move towards greater biodiversity, we must also ensure that we have good food production, with enough food being produced. We have to get that balance right.

I may have journeyed slightly away from the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, but we have to be concerned about getting enough food. Food and energy security—these basics of life—are so important to us now. Let us get the Bill through and ensure that we set up the right committee, with the right chair, to ensure that proper

*[Neil Parish]*

animal welfare is considered, that there are practical ways of dealing with this issue across Government, so that it does not end up in the courts, and that the committee makes sensible decisions that are passed to Parliament, through the Secretary of State, to make sure that the Bill works in practice.

I support amendment 2 and I will support the Bill, but I think we have probably made very heavy work of getting here.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): The Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), is quite right that we have made heavy work of getting here. We have probably at times shared the view that we would not get here, so I welcome the fact that we have done so. I am not sure why some Government Back Benchers are so upset about the Bill, because it is pretty weak, although the test will be who is on the animal sentence committee once it is up and running, and what decisions they make and are allowed to make, so we reserve judgment on that.

I will speak briefly in support of new clause 1. It was rejected by the Government in Committee, although I am not sure why. It would require the preparation of an animal sentence strategy and annual statements on progress towards that. That would lead to a more proactive approach to sentence from Ministers. One of the amendments I tabled in Committee would have removed the word “adverse.” The new animal sentence committee’s job is to look at the “adverse effects” of policy. The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) said that it would be able to look at kids learning in school about how to be nice to pets, but that is not the purpose of this committee. Its purpose is to look at negative things, but I think it would help if it could also look at the positive side of things.

Having an animal sentence strategy in place would force the Government to set out how they would respond to relevant reports, assessments and research, and it would be more proactive. Improving animal welfare should not just be about protecting where we are; it ought to be a constant, iterative process, because where we are simply is not good enough, whether because the laws are not strong enough or because enforcement does not happen.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she agree with me that although the Bill is a step forward, it is unusual to have a committee of this type without its having a strategy? As Government Members have pointed out, the committee needs to be making sensible decisions and recommendations. How can it do that without a strategy? I am sure the public would expect it to have a strategy, because the public expect us to be focused on animal welfare.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, particularly as we have a Government who cannot be trusted to keep their promises, as we have seen recently on imports of hunting trophies, fur and foie gras, for example. We need a mechanism that keeps the Government on track and creates that forward momentum, and new clause 1 would provide that.

It is clear from the Government rowing back on their promises to legislate on those imports that the Government are scared of some of their more unreconstructed Back Benchers—actually, some of the current Cabinet are pretty unreconstructed too, if the press are to be believed. On Second Reading it was noticeable how many Conservative Back Benchers stood up to criticise the Bill. The lack of enthusiasm for it—even the fear of it—was palpable, and we have read about efforts behind the scenes to neuter it, and I think that is what amendment 7 is about.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) wrote a rather amusing article for *ConservativeHome* recently, saying that he had rumbled my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and me and sussed us out—I paraphrase. After close scrutiny of our comments in Committee, he had worked out that we had a hidden agenda: we were against fox hunting. That was remarkably clever of him; it was like when Scooby Doo suddenly unmasks the villains at the end. If there is anyone with a hidden agenda, it is he and the hon. Member for The Cotswolds, and I think he ought to be clear as to what amendments 6 and 7 are about.

Why would we want to exclude anyone with past or present commitment to animal welfare issues from serving on the animal sentence committee? Amendment 7 says that anyone who is an

“employee, former employee, or is a consultant or former consultant to, a charity”—

that could be the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, which are pretty benign organisations—

“or campaigning organisation concerned with animal welfare or animal rights, or is or has been in receipt of any payments or funding from such a charity or organisation, whether directly or indirectly”

should not be allowed to serve on the animal sentence committee. I do not understand why we would want to exclude people who have shown commitment, interest, knowledge or expertise in animal welfare from the animal sentence committee, unless the aim was to try to ensure that it was as weak on welfare and soft on sentence as possible.

**Sir Roger Gale:** According to the hon. Lady’s analysis, would that also mean that any member of the Countryside Alliance would have to be excluded?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I was actually just coming to that point. I was going to say that if the hon. Member for Buckingham thinks that nobody who has aligned themselves to a particular cause can be impartial, then that also ought to cover his friends in the Countryside Alliance and the rest of the hunting and shooting lobby. When he refers to extremists, I would say, certainly having been on the receiving end of it, that there are extremists on that side too. For example, Chris Packham has been subjected to a huge amount of abuse just for speaking out about the persecution of hen harriers, so there are clearly unpalatable elements on that side as well.

Amendment 7 would mean that someone such as the eminent zoologist Michael Balls CBE—father of Ed—who served as an adviser to the Government on the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and was a founding member of the Animal Procedures Committee, which advised the Home Secretary on all matters related to animal experimentation, would not be allowed to serve on the animal sentence committee, despite that expertise,

because he had been a trustee of FRAME—the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments. He also, alongside the Prime Minister’s own father, came to Parliament to campaign against a huge new puppy farm in Yorkshire, where beagles were being bred specifically for purposes of animal experimentation. He is now an emeritus professor and might no longer wish to serve on Government committees, but surely someone with that sort of background would be absolutely perfect for this committee. That is not to say that we cannot also have a balance, with people who have other views. I think it is nonsense to suggest that such experts, who are drawn to campaign on animal welfare precisely because of their in-depth understanding of the science behind animal sentience—it is because of their expertise that they are concerned about animal sentience and animal welfare—should not be allowed to serve.

Finally, turning to amendment 2, I think the same thing is actually going on. The hon. Member for The Cotswolds was very brief in speaking to his amendment, but he happens to be chair of the all-party parliamentary group on shooting and conservation. It is somewhat ironic that some of those who were so vocally supportive of leaving the EU, apparently to take advantage of new freedoms, are now arguing that they want to carry over the Lisbon treaty wording, chapter and verse. I think one of the reasons why this provision was in the Lisbon treaty was to protect things such as bull fighting, which I would hope we all think should not be protected in the name of culture and tradition.

I do not have a huge problem with the amendment being made to the Bill, because I have argued from the start, going back to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill debates, that the Lisbon treaty provision should be carried over. However, having heard what the hon. Member said on Second Reading, I think what he is really trying to do, by the back door, is to turn back the clock on the hunting ban or to create legal uncertainty around its enforcement by saying—this was the old argument we had when the Labour Government banned hunting—that it is all part of our tradition and of rural culture. The fact is that, for most people, as polling shows, it is a tradition they want confined to the history books, along with bear baiting, cock fighting, sending children up chimneys and so on. The hon. Member has to accept that times have changed, and that there is no place for fox hunting in a civilised world.

8.30 pm

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I rise in support of this Bill, and I declare a strong personal and professional interest in animal health, welfare and sentience as a veterinary surgeon. I welcome the Bill, and I think it is so important that we recognise sentience in legislation, and I welcome the inclusion of cephalopod molluscs and decapod crustaceans.

As I said on Second Reading, I still think we need to be clearer on the specifics of the Bill, albeit that it is a brief and general Bill. I am disappointed, coming back from Committee, that the recommendations to put a definition of sentience into the Bill were cast aside. I draw attention to the definition put forward by the Global Animal Law Project, as adopted also by the British Veterinary Association:

“Sentience shall be understood to mean the capacity to have feelings, including pain and pleasure, and implies a level of conscious awareness.”

I do understand the reservations about putting this into primary legislation, but as I have said before, I think this could be tackled by putting it into secondary legislation. I am aware that the science will evolve and definitions may evolve, and that could be tackled in secondary legislation.

I welcome the formation of the future Animal Sentience Committee. It must have the right breadth of expertise and talent, but I want it to have some teeth and power. As has been mentioned, it has the ability to roam across Departments, and I welcome that. Clause 2 talks about how, in relation to reports from the committee, the Government will have

“all due regard to the ways in which the policy might have an adverse effect on the welfare of animals as sentient beings.”

I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) that it is a shame the Bill still talks purely about the adverse effects. If we could put in the positive effects, that would go along with the United Kingdom being a beacon of standards on animal health and welfare. We could still consider putting that forward.

I firmly believe that animal welfare needs to be joined up across Government, and I think this Bill actually starts to do that. We need to look at Government policy across different Departments, and the Bill can reinforce that. However, there are some things that I firmly believe that we, as a Parliament and as a Government, need to act on quickly. I again urge Ministers to keep doing that, and I will quickly whip through some of the things that I think we really need to crack on with.

On pet theft, we are bringing it into law, but I want it very much expanded from dogs to include cats, but also horses and farm animals, which are being stolen as we speak. We still need to close the loophole in the Government buying standards for domestic food procurement. The loophole allows public sector bodies to buy things at lower animal welfare standards on the ground of cost, and I think that loophole needs closing now.

International trade has been mentioned, and we need to show the rest of the world that we are a beacon on animal health and welfare. Again, putting sentience into legislation confirms that, but I firmly believe we have missed an opportunity by not placing core standards into the trade deals with Australia and New Zealand. We should just draw a line, and say there are certain red line products that we find unacceptable in this country and that we will not accept them. We should say firmly that we will not undermine our fantastic British farmers, who farm to the highest animal health and welfare standards. In my constituency of Penrith and The Border, the Cumbrian farmers are right up there among the best of our British farmers, and we must not undermine those farmers in these trade deals. The Bill will help with that, and we need to put pressure on the Department for International Trade in future trade deals, as well as with the current trade deals that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the International Trade Committees are scrutinising.

**Sir Roger Gale:** Does my hon. Friend recall that when we left the European Union, one of the advantages that we were told would arise from that was that we would be able to maintain our own high animal welfare standards, and not import goods that were produced to a lower standard?

**Dr Hudson:** My right hon. Friend makes a good point, and it is important that we have the highest standards. I note there is an animal welfare chapter in the Australian trade deal, which I welcome, but in that chapter there are non-regression clauses, and all those do is say that neither partner will get worse. I think we can do better than that. I believe we must uphold our own animal welfare standards, and drive up animal health and welfare standards around the world.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has been looking at the movement of animals. The Government have looked at some of our recommendations, but the standard response, again, is that they are “consulting” or “will consult.” Let us stop consulting on a lot of these matters, and just crack on with it. On puppy smuggling, let us raise the age of the dogs coming in to a minimum of six months. Let us ban heavily pregnant dogs and cats from being moved into the country. Let us ban the import of cropped-eared dogs.

**Alex Davies-Jones:** The hon. Gentleman is a vociferous campaigner on animal welfare and he makes some excellent points. On that final point, does he share my concern that at Crufts this weekend, the “best in breed” was a British bulldog? There is concern about the breeding of those brachycephalic dogs and the impact it has on them. Does he share my concern that the Government need to do more to protect them, as well as concerns about puppy smuggling and puppy breeding of such dogs in the future?

**Dr Hudson:** The hon. Lady makes a valid point. She is a proud champion for animal welfare on the Labour Benches. We must look at that issue closely. Brachycephalic dogs, and dogs that have had horrific mutilations—I touched on the point about cropped ears—are being popularised in culture, with celebrities having those dogs, unwittingly endorsing such procedures. We must be careful about publicly endorsing dogs and animals that have had some of those procedures, as well as some of the breeding procedures that make those animals struggle in later life. Owners take on some of these dogs in good faith, and have no idea of some of the unintended consequences of such breeding patterns.

I mentioned ear cropping in dogs. The RSPCA has reported that in the past year, the incidence and reports of such dogs has gone up by about 86%. We do not need to wait for a law to come in or for primary legislation; we can crack on with secondary legislation and ban the import of dogs that have had their ears cropped, and potentially of cats that have had their claws removed. Instead of consulting, with secondary legislation we can crack on with some of the important health checks. If animals are being moved into this country, we should be doing checks on those dogs for things such as brucella canis. We should be reinstituting the rabies titer checks. We can reverse the change that the European Union made when it removed the need for mandatory tick treatment for small animals coming into this country. We can reverse that in secondary legislation to protect the health and welfare of those dogs and animals being brought into the country and, importantly, to protect the health and welfare of animals in this country. This is about biosecurity, and health and welfare needs to be thought about in the round.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has had some thoughts and comments for the Government about sorting out the digital identification of horses. Again, I welcome that the Government are consulting on that, but we need to crack on. If we can identify those animals, we will stamp out the illegal movement of animals to the European Union for slaughter.

**Neil Parish:** We have a system up and running with which we can electronically identify the horses. We have to roll that out here and get it recognised by the European Union. There is a good animal welfare reason, as well as a good movement reason for it, and I urge DEFRA Ministers to move—dare I say it?—a little faster.

**Dr Hudson:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I urge Ministers to move quickly on this. We must identify horses so that we know why they are moving and can stamp out the illegal movement of hundreds, potentially thousands, of those animals that are moved for slaughter. That is important. Much as I am keen on making decisions from an evidence base, there comes a time when we do not need to keep consulting. The evidence is out there. Let us act; let us do it now.

I have raised this point with Ministers many times, as have Government and Opposition Members: if we are bringing in animal sentience legislation, let us have joined-up animal health and welfare legislation in practice now. For instance, as we speak, pig farms in the United Kingdom are still in crisis with more than 40,000 pigs having been culled on farms and not gone into the food supply chain. That is horrific. It is incredibly upsetting for the farmers, the vets, the slaughter workers and everyone concerned. It is an awful thing to do. Again, I firmly push the Government on that. I know that the Minister has been convening summits and working well with the sector, but we need action to put pressure on the food processors as well as work with the Home Office to sort out the visa situation to mitigate the crisis.

Many of those are workforce issues that have been exacerbated by Brexit and covid, but they are now having implications for our food security, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). They may also become an animal health and welfare problem. Let me give an example from the veterinary sector from a professional viewpoint. Since Brexit, the number of EU vets registering in the United Kingdom has reduced by a factor of about two thirds, and about 90% to 95% of vets working in the meat hygiene sector come from the European Union, so that reduction is producing a real crisis. We are short of not just workers but vets in the slaughter sector. In parallel, in the veterinary sector there is a huge increase in the time and demands on veterinary surgeons. Throughout lockdown, people have been taking in pets—we had the puppy boom—so the pressure on small animal veterinarians has gone through the roof, and, with Brexit, the pressures from export and import certification have also gone up. We therefore have a real crisis in the sector; it is a perfect storm that we really need to address.

On the EFRA Committee, we have made recommendations about keeping an eye on veterinary workforce issues and, again, that goes cross-departmental. For instance, I have been calling for an EU-UK veterinary, sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, which would

smooth the movement of animal and plant produce between the UK and the EU. That would help with trade and help solve many of the issues we face between GB and Northern Ireland. I ask the Government to work across Government and with our European colleagues, because, if we could secure such agreements, that would take pressure off some of our workforce issues. That would also be of huge benefit to the country's biosecurity.

Finally, I urge the Government not to lose their nerve on some of the welfare promises we made in our manifesto and in policy. I sincerely hope that media reports about the Government potentially dropping the ban on imports of farmed fur and foie gras are false and that they will keep going with what they promised. Some in my party have been reported in the media as saying that it is a matter of frippery or of personal choice—they should tell that to the animals farmed for their fur and to the birds with a tube rammed down their throat who are force-fed to make their livers pathologically fatty for some culinary delicacy. I firmly believe that we should hold our nerve in the Chamber and in the Conservative party and forge ahead with our promises, because that is the right and proper thing to do.

**Kerry McCarthy:** The hon. Member is making an excellent speech. I entirely agree with him on the iniquities of fur and foie gras. Is it not that we deem it cruel enough to have banned its production in this country, so all that we are squabbling about is whether we will outsource that cruelty and allow imports? I think it was the chair of the 1922 committee, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady), who talked about having to smuggle foie gras into the country on Eurostar. Surely there is hypocrisy at the heart of it as well.

**Dr Hudson:** The hon. Member makes a valid point. Those practices and procedures are rightly banned in this country. I firmly believe that we should not import things that we believe are wrong in this country. There has been a lot of discussion about trade deals, hormone-treated beef and chlorine-washed chicken. Rightly, those practices are banned in this country. That is one area where I do actually take the Government at their word. They are still banned, so those products will not be imported. I firmly believe we should keep our promises. If we make a promise, we should keep it.

8.45 pm

In summary, I broadly welcome the Bill. Bringing animal sentience into the centre of UK legislation is to be welcomed. However, I want to see more signs of that being put into practice across Government Departments, so that they work together to promote the health and welfare of the animals in our care, which we fundamentally understand as sentient beings.

**Jim Shannon:** It is a joy to follow the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson). He set out comprehensively what he hopes the Bill will achieve. He also outlined some things that need to be done, but on which we are perhaps not there yet. I put that on the record. I am pleased, as I always am, to see the Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) in her place. I know that both she and the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) will respond to our concerns.

The Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food has responded to a number of debates I have attended on puppy smuggling, an issue I feel incredibly strongly about. The steps the Government are taking tonight will be very helpful in tackling that issue. The intention is clearly to tighten the requirements of the pet travel scheme to tackle this very cruel trade. The hon. Gentleman and others referred to increasing the age at which a puppy can enter the country, as well as banning the importation of dogs with cropped ears and heavily pregnant dogs. Those measures are vital. However, I am aware that the Dogs Trust is calling on the Government and the Minister to introduce visual checks to ensure that that good work will not be in vain, and to put a stop to puppy smuggling once and for all. I seek reassurance from the Minister that the Bill will achieve that. I hope we can achieve that, but if we cannot, what will be done to ensure that it can be stopped and to ensure that the Bill contains the correct protocol for carrying out the law?

In conversations I have had with the Minister, through debates in Westminster Hall and in this Chamber, one of my concerns has been about working alongside the Republic of Ireland and its legislation. Northern Ireland, of course, has a border with the Republic of Ireland, so it is important to get that right in relation to puppy smuggling. In the past, the Minister has reassured me on that point. Perhaps she could confirm that on the record.

Northern Ireland has led the way on microchipping dogs and cats. Indeed, in Northern Ireland we are doing many things on animal sentience. Dogs are more than a cosmetic piece for show, whenever you go somewhere. Dogs have always been incredibly important to me—all my life, I have always had a dog. I see dogs mostly as hunting dogs. I am very pleased to be a fully involved member of the sporting community, as are many Conservative Members. In particular, I commend the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) for the hard work he has done with the Minister to deal with some of tonight's issues. It is good to see that in place.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I use this intervention to inform the House that my constituent has brought 55 different databases to produce one horse database, with all the biological markings of horses on it. He is working—and I am working with him—with senior civil servants in DEFRA to produce a similar database for dogs and cats. As a further refinement, there are some rogues out there who remove microchips from dogs and put in a substitute microchip. I am working with the police to put the DNA that forces like my own collect into the database so that we can see when microchips have been removed and replaced.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and he is right in what he says. A lot of dogs have been stolen during the covid period and having microchips in place was one method of trying to find out where they had ended up. He has referred to one methodology to make sure we can improve the system, which is what he is committed to. I hope that tonight we can see more of that improvement happening.

*[Jim Shannon]*

This legislation is mostly UK-based and England-based. Like the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), and indeed the Minister, I am keen to see steps in the right direction on water quality. I very much welcome the stance we have taken in this House on fur and foie gras. Like others, I seek the Minister's assurance that we have a duty to prevent the importation of fur and foie gras. Will she confirm whether that is something that could rightly be achieved in this Bill? If it is not, what forthcoming legislation could address it? I, for one, agree with the comments on this of the hon. Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), among others. I am probably a plain eater, but the general public out there are probably very much opposed to those two things.

The hon. Member for Penrith and The Border referred to the issue of food quality, and it is important to have that in place.

**Carla Lockhart** (Upper Bann) (DUP): The hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) made a powerful point on the standards that we adopt here in the UK. My hon. Friend will know that our Northern Ireland farmers lead the way on animal welfare standards. Does he agree that it is vital that this Government ensure in any future trade deals that our markets are not flooded with cheap, substandard products that do not adhere to the high welfare standards that we have in this country?

**Jim Shannon:** I certainly do, and I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I know that the Minister agrees with it, and I know that what we have tonight is a commitment to ensure that Northern Ireland can retain its standards, and that the deals with Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere will not have an adverse impact on the great sector we have in Northern Ireland and indeed in the whole UK. For us in Northern Ireland it is so important to have these standards in place, because we export 80% of our product.

I have one more point to make, and I make it as an animal lover. It relates to the protection of our pets and animals, which is a passion of mine. Since I was a wee boy in Ballywalter, which was not yesterday but back in the 1960s, I have always had a dog. After I met my wife, we always seemed to have a cat. My mailbag has been replicated throughout the whole constituency of Strangford, and again I seek some reassurance that we are in the last stages of getting this right. We are making vast steps in the right direction, but there is a balance between animal welfare and our obligations to the farming community. I declare an interest, as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, which is the sister body of the National Farmers Union here on the mainland. This delicate balance must be kept, even in these last stages of amending and pushing through this legislation. Again, I am pleased to work with and support the Government on what they are bringing forward. Others have also made magnificent contributions to help get the legislation to where we want it to be.

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): We heard again, in the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), that ours is a nation of animal-lovers,

and that view has been reflected in contributions from Members on both sides of the House tonight. I have considerable sympathy with the observation made by many—particularly the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones)—that if we are to remain a nation which fulfils that ambition, we must update our legislation from time to time. The UK is a country known throughout the world for what is often a very good process for identifying effective and proportionate regulation. That is reflected in the Bill, which is why I support it so strongly.

My constituency is unashamedly suburban in character. Given that past debates of this kind have been characterised as pitting town against country, it is enormously helpful for me to be here as the representative of a constituency where there are more than 80 farms and where fishing and fishing-associated businesses are very much present, but which also contains a significant number of members of animal welfare and, indeed, animal rights organisations. Throughout the Bill's progress, I have been struck by the messages that have emerged and have shown how strongly people feel about the need for us to ensure that the update in the Bill is turned into practical reality. We sometimes have lengthy debates in the House and pass laws that appear to be stringent, but then fail to ensure that they are reflected in the experience of the people or, as in this context, the animals that they are designed to protect.

I have a great deal of sympathy with what was said by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), although like many others I am not sure whether this Bill is the right place for his new clause, because in my constituency the River Colne has been hugely affected by sewage discharges. That has in turn affected fishing lakes and businesses involved in, for instance, water sports. We need to ensure that the measures outlined in the House during the passage of the Environment Act 2021 find their way into rigorous enforcement so that our constituents see cleaner, safer water, both for livestock and for human use, as part of their day-to-day lives.

I am a greater fan of the EU lawmaking process than, perhaps, many other Members. My experience has been mainly on the education side, but I think that ensuring that every stakeholder has the opportunity to contribute so we can ensure that the laws that emerge from their contribution reflect the widest possible range of concerns and are as effective as possible is a very worthwhile process. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) expressed concerns in this regard. In the spirit of trying to create legislation that constitutes an effective compromise and will make the difference to animal welfare that we want to see, I wholly endorse amendment 2, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), and I hope that the Government will adopt it enthusiastically tonight.

Both my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet and the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) spoke of the need to ensure that we make a real difference. Whether we are talking about dogs or horses, animals kept as pets, animals that are part of our food industry, animals in our farms, animals in our rivers or animals that may be bred for sport, we must not just refer sentimentally to the highest possible standards, but ensure that our laws are in step with those in other

countries, especially when it comes to trade deals. The food businesses in my constituency need to see high standards in the United Kingdom that reflect the high standards they expect to find in the markets with which we trade, and we need to ensure that those markets can trade freely with us on the basis of a high degree of parity.

**Sir Roger Gale:** My hon. Friend has been extremely generous in his comments about my own remarks. The briefing from the Countryside Alliance on amendment 2 indicates that this would reintroduce the terms of the Lisbon treaty, which was designed to protect bullfighting, and by implication would also protect foxhunting.

**David Simmonds:** That is no doubt a valid concern in the context of the Lisbon treaty, but when it comes to protecting events that are part of our heritage, those events need to be already taking place and legal in the country to which the rules apply. An element that was designed to protect bullfighting in Spain, which has never been present in the United Kingdom, would not fall to be protected within that legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) made some extremely clear and effective remarks. He made a valid point about the need to ensure that in the composition of any committee, we exclude not those with connections to interest groups but those who have expressed a view that would prejudge their position on a matter where they were required to be independent. That is an essential consideration. We make that same requirement for those who sit on juries or deal with court cases. For example, we require magistrates to declare any reason for excluding themselves from sitting in judgment on a case. The same applies to local authority councillors dealing with a planning application when they have a direct stake in the process. My hon. Friend has raised a valid point there, and in the light of other comments from across the House, there is clearly an opportunity to develop that a little further to take into account the widest possible audience of stakeholders. The point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet about the Countryside Alliance was also valid, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham has taken that on board.

9 pm

I will conclude by repeating that amendment 2 represents a sensible compromise and a step forward. It would ensure that we had good, effective animal welfare legislation to bring about the high welfare standards that my constituents with an interest in animal rights and animal welfare expect to see, while also respecting the need to ensure, in our trade deals, in the way we conduct our business and in the way we respect the heritage of the different communities in the United Kingdom, that we have laws that will be acceptable to all and observed by all and that can be enforced in practice—as we have heard from Members with experience in the veterinary world—so that we can produce a genuine improvement for animals in the United Kingdom, rather than simply an opportunity to express a sentiment about being a nation of animal lovers.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I rise to speak to new clauses 2 and 3. Many Members will be aware of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission,

which was established by the Scottish Government in 2020. The commission's evidence-based and expert-driven approach offers a good model for the English Animal Sentience Committee, and I would urge those who have expressed misgivings about how the committee will be constructed to look to Scotland to see that it is working and that recommendations are regularly made to Ministers who then act on them. However, although animal welfare is devolved, some issues still fall under reserved areas, and the SNP new clauses focus on those issues.

Of course we support the Bill, because it will enable the setting up of a committee similar to our own, but it could be strengthened to recognise the rights of sentient animals undergoing scientific testing and military experiments used by the Ministry of Defence. Last month, this House debated a petition calling for legislation to include laboratory animals in the Animal Welfare Act 2006. It is unacceptable that, in this nation of professed animal lovers, laboratory animals are not protected from unnecessary suffering under that legislation. Instead, the current rules on animals used in research are set out in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The Home Office is responsible for regulating and enforcing that law. However, much of what goes on behind closed doors at animal testing sites in the UK is hidden from view and shrouded in secrecy, as the law blocks access to information about the animals' treatment during experiments. Section 24 of the 1986 Act makes it a criminal offence for that information to be disclosed.

A requirement for the Animal Sentience Committee to provide assessments to the Government on such tests would help to ensure that the sentience of those animals was equally recognised and accounted for. New clause 2 therefore requires the Animal Sentience Committee to produce a report on the use of sentient animals in scientific experiments and military exercises by the MOD and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. Between 2009 and 2020, the MOD carried out over 60,000 experimental procedures on mice, rabbits, primates, pigs and other animals. Similarly, new clause 3 requires the committee to produce a report on the use of sentient animals in tests relating to medicine, cosmetics and weapons in Government policy. As I said on Second Reading, although those specific issues are still reserved to Westminster, polling of Scottish and Welsh residents shows that a majority want to see deadlines for phasing out animal testing. Those surveyed expressed a very strong aversion to testing on dogs, cats and monkeys. Despite these public concerns, the UK remains one of Europe's top users of primates and dogs in experiments.

We do not believe the general public are aware of the extent and nature of these experiments, or of which animals are used in them. Statistics for 2020 reveal that more than 4,000 procedures were carried out on dogs, almost all of them beagles, which are chosen for experimentation because of their size, docility and submissiveness. Most drug testing sees dogs repeatedly force-fed or forced to inhale substances for between 28 and 90 days to measure the effects of repeat exposure on the liver, kidneys, lungs, heart and nervous system.

There is enough evidence to show there are better, more accurate and more humane methods than resorting to testing on animals. Recent developments in evolutionary biology, developmental biology and genetics have significantly increased our understanding of why animals have no predictive value for human responses to drugs

*[Deidre Brock]*

or the pathophysiology of human diseases. Nevertheless, the Home Office says it has no current plans to review the use of animals in science. Meanwhile, the EU is moving away from cruel experiments on animals and towards cutting-edge replacements. The European Parliament recently voted in favour of developing an action plan to phase animals out of EU science and regulation.

The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made an excellent contribution. Although I support new clause 1, which makes worthwhile, reasonable suggestions on the details of the Animal Sentience Committee and its responsibilities, on which Ministers have been rather sketchy, and I urge the UK Government to take new clause 1 into consideration, the Bill is almost entirely concentrated on setting up an Animal Sentience Committee—largely based on our Scottish Animal Welfare Commission set up in 2020—in England, and therefore we will not be joining Her Majesty's Opposition in the Lobby.

The hon. Lady expressed considerable concern about amendments 2 and 7, and it is equally tempting to vote against those amendments. Amendment 2 is a Trojan horse to cover up the enthusiastic support of Conservative Back Benchers for continuing what are euphemistically referred to as “country pursuits” exactly as they have been practised for centuries. Amendment 7 is a disgracefully blatant attempt to carve out those who have a very strong interest in the protection of animals from membership of the Animal Sentience Committee. I found it hard to read that amendment, let alone to contemplate the Government accepting it.

The willingness of the Scottish Government to act on the guidance of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission's advice demonstrates their commitment to maintaining or exceeding the high EU animal welfare standards before Brexit. However, as long as animals are used in testing and military experiments and are denied full recognition of their sentience, Scotland and the rest of the UK will fail to keep pace. I urge hon. Members to vote to maintain the UK's proud history of supporting animal welfare by backing new clause 3.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jo Churchill):** As a starting point, we all agree not only that the issue of animal welfare and sentience is extremely important in this House, but that it has great resonance across the country. I say very gently, because our debate has been extremely wide-ranging, that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) put it most succinctly: this is a simple six-clause Bill, and all it seeks to do is direct that a committee be set up and that a Minister come forward with a report from across Government. If hon. Members are worried that it will not reach all parts of the Government, I would like to assure them that it will.

I will take the amendments in order and then address other comments from right hon. and hon. Members. New clause 1, which was moved by the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), would compel the Government to make an animal sentience strategy. The action plan for animal welfare already sets out the Government's current and future work on animal

welfare and conversation. The Government's plan is clear, and there is no need to mandate it in statute. I very gently point out that the reason we are here today is to bring forward one of the points in the action plan; as hon. Members have said, sentience has been a while coming, but we are all here tonight to make sure that we deliver on the promises.

New clauses 2, 3, 5 and 6 would mandate that the Animal Sentience Committee to produce reports on specific areas. It is important that we do not dictate the committee's work plan. Its members are the experts, not us, and are best placed to know where they can add value. The very first thing that the committee in Scotland did, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) said, was set out its own definition of sentience. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) pointed out, the understanding of sentience is always evolving, so we want to leave it to experts from the world of science and so on—I am sure he can name them much better than I could—to define it. We are not saying that sentience should not be defined; we are asking those who have the skills to do that work. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that that is in good faith where we are trying to go.

I would like to clarify the Government's position on some areas raised during the debate. I say gently to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith that the committee is best placed to decide which topics to focus on.

It is worth noting that the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory does not use animals in developing offensive weapons. To go further, let me reassure hon. Members that within that capacity, military working animals play an essential role, often in life-saving operations. They are looked after within the military by military vets and are much-loved members of the team.

I have been clear that we do not want the committee to duplicate work that is already taking place across government. That is why its terms of reference make it clear that it should not go over the same ground as the specialist Animals in Science Committee.

As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) said, the Environment Act 2021 was passed last year, on 9 November. The Animal Sentience Committee is not there to make value judgments and weigh up policy issues; neither is it there to monitor business activities, which is very much the thrust of what he is asking for. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned Ofwat and said that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale might be better placed if he directed his comments elsewhere. In that spirit, I urge the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his new clause. Parliament's scrutiny of trade deals is already informed by the expert input on animal welfare that is provided by the Trade and Agriculture Commission.

9.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) tabled amendments 3 to 9, 13, 21 and 22, and new schedule 1, all on the committee's governance and remit. I thank him for the constructive conversations we have had on the issue. The governance arrangements for a committee of the size that we propose do not warrant as much parliamentary time as would be warranted by the involvement of the Office of the Commissioner

for Public Appointments, to which my hon. Friend referred in amendment 7. We are not creating a new non-departmental body like the Office for Environmental Protection. His proposal would be more appropriate for a body much larger than the one we propose. We have listened to his comments and those of others and we agree that the optimal size for the committee is around eight to 12 members, which would keep it smaller and focused.

The draft terms of reference already provide transparency about how the committee will be run. I say gently that DEFRA is the best Department to host the committee because that allows it to be part of the animal welfare centre of expertise, along with the three other committees that are already based in the Department. The Secretary of State will be responsible for appointments, in line with the governance code on public appointments, under which we can already exclude people from extremist organisations. Applicants from any organisation—we have heard on several occasions both sides of the argument—must declare potential conflicts of interest, in order to be transparent and so that we can rely on the judgments. We do not necessarily want to exclude certain individuals from the committee because that could mean the loss of valuable expertise. Equally, it is not proportionate to exclude anyone who has worked for an animal welfare group. That would, for example, exclude my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border, because he has been a member of the British Veterinary Association. It is extremely important to make sure we get the right balance.

I agree with the comment from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham that the committee should be driven by scientists and led by those who know the science in this policy area. I hope he will be pleased that we are already developing non-statutory guidance to help Departments to follow best practice. That will be better than holding Departments to a one-size-fits-all model based in statute. I do not wish to require the committee to report on all Government policy across all Departments: it would be too much work for the committee and prevent it from carrying out its statutory function.

The terms of reference clearly state that the committee will be

“expected to prioritise considering current or recent policy”.

It is not to look retrospectively back at policy or to change existing legislation. The committee is to provide timely accountability and would not be fulfilling its role were it to look back, because much of current and future policy across Government will be in its focus. The terms of reference clearly set out that the committee’s focus will be on recent decisions and offers a definition of “policy”, which was asked for in amendment 18.

It is our intention and expectation that the committee will concern itself with the welfare of live animals. It would be difficult for the committee to identify a way in which a policy affected the welfare of a foetus or embryo as opposed to those of the mother. For example, where a pregnant cat was denied adequate nutrition, that would obviously affect the health of the kittens.

As I have said, we are committed to being led by the science when it comes to sentience and the use of the delegated power in clause 5 must be approved via the affirmative resolution. Both Houses must vote on any changes to the definition of “animal” within the Bill.

These things can change. For example, following the findings of the LSE report, the other place accepted the addition of decapods and cephalopods to the definition of sentient beings. For the purpose of the Bill, “animal” is defined as

“any vertebrate other than *homo sapiens*, any cephalopod mollusc and decapod crustacean”.

Anybody who tried to change that on a whim and did not go through the proper procedure, bringing forward the affirmative resolution and so on, would have a pretty hard time not only within this House but without.

Amendments 14 to 17 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham relate to the reports produced by the committee. Forcing the committee to make a yes/no judgment risks losing those important nuances, because things in this area are rarely that clear.

The Animal Sentience Committee and the Animal Welfare Committee have very different functions. We look on the Animal Welfare Committee to give expert advice, whereas the Animal Sentience Committee is there to scrutinise policy decisions with an eye to the science and to aid Ministers in the collection of evidence to give them the tools they need to base decisions on the best available information. Both the Animal Welfare Committee and the Animal Sentience Committee will be affiliates of the animal welfare centre of expertise, bringing that information together. Having scope to co-ordinate work plans and operate a joint referral mechanism will help to avoid duplication when we look at this across the piece.

**Deidre Brock:** In reference to the reports that we requested in new clauses 2 and 3, can the Minister describe to me by what mechanism the Scottish Government or other devolved nations could express their concerns about the areas that we have raised here on animal testing, cosmetic testing and the use of animal experimentation in the Ministry of Defence? What mechanism could they use to raise those concerns with the committee and eventually encourage it potentially to produce reports on those issues?

**Jo Churchill:** I would make two points. First, the hon. Member is presupposing that there will not be members of those devolved authorities on the committee. If people hold the most appropriate expertise, they may be there as a full member, or they may be co-opted in to look at a particular area of reference. There are other mechanisms that we always use in this place to hold the Minister to account. The Minister is bound to report to this place within three months of parliamentary sitting time. All the mechanisms will be in place, as well as those behind the scenes where we talk to devolved Ministers and so on, to make sure that things are raised in the appropriate way.

Amendment 2, which is in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), would require the committee’s recommendations to respect religious rights, cultural traditions and regional heritage. We have heard the strength of feeling on this matter both here and in the other place, and I assure him that we have listened and decided to support the amendment.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I thank my hon. Friend for her careful consideration of my amendment. I think it is a sensible, proportionate amendment that will allow

[Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

a committee with limited resources to focus on those really egregious areas where animal sentience is being abused, and not run into some of the less important areas. I thank her for accepting the amendment, and I thank all my hon. Friends who supported and signed it.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con) *rose*—

**Jo Churchill:** I will give way briefly.

**Mr Djanogly:** I thank the Minister for giving way, and I take this opportunity to thank her and the Secretary of State for having met colleagues on multiple occasions and listened. Many communities are fearful of the implications of this and, while I have not fallen in love with the Bill, the fact that amendment 2 will be made to it means that there will be a balance that was otherwise lacking. I congratulate her on listening.

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend. As many people who contributed to this debate have said, what we are seeking here is that balance.

Turning lastly to amendment 1 in the name of the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), we do not want to clog up parliamentary time with automatic debates on committee reports. We went over that in the Bill Committee. Hon. Members have parliamentary questions, Westminster Hall debates and the Backbench Business Committee, should they wish to use them.

In short, the Bill has been carefully drafted to create a targeted, proportionate and timely accountability mechanism on animal welfare. It is designed to support the House's scrutiny of Government, and I look forward to all those in the House making good use of it.

**Jim McMahon:** This has been an insightful debate and it was good to hear the passion on both sides from hon. Members who really care about this issue. New clause 1 only asks the Government to perform good governance, in that we want them to have a plan, to report on the plan and to be held accountable for the plan. The right place for that to happen is here in Parliament.

I hope the Government have listened to the concerns in the House about support for British farmers. I absolutely believe that they are the best in the world and that we have raised the bar on animal welfare standards and food production alike, but farmers often feel as though they are fighting alone, with a Government who just do not get it and are not on their side. We have seen that through procurement, fair funding, trade deals and more. I ask the Government to listen to those concerns not only on the Opposition side, but across the House, and to ensure that, when we demand so much of British farmers, we are on their side in everything we do.

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 286.*

**Division No. 213]**

**[9.27 pm]**

# **AYES**

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Abrahams, Debbie      | Antoniazzi, Tonia     |
| Ali, Rushanara        | Ashworth, rh Jonathan |
| Ali, Tahir            | Barker, Paula         |
| Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena | Begum, Apsana         |
| Amesbury, Mike        | Benn, rh Hilary       |
| Anderson, Fleur       | Betts, Mr Clive       |

|                            |                                                         |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Blake, Olivia              | Jones, Ruth                                             |
| Blomfield, Paul            | Jones, Sarah                                            |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben        | Kane, Mike                                              |
| Brennan, Kevin             | Keeley, Barbara                                         |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas      | Kendall, Liz ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden</i> ) |
| Bryant, Chris              | Khan, Afzal                                             |
| Buck, Ms Karen             | Kinnock, Stephen                                        |
| Burgon, Richard            | Lake, Ben                                               |
| Byrne, Ian                 | Lammy, rh Mr David                                      |
| Byrne, rh Liam             | Lavery, Ian                                             |
| Cadbury, Ruth              | Leadbeater, Kim                                         |
| Campbell, Mr Gregory       | Lewis, Clive                                            |
| Carden, Dan                | Lockhart, Carla                                         |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | Long Bailey, Rebecca                                    |
| Champion, Sarah            | Lucas, Caroline                                         |
| Charalambous, Bambos       | Madders, Justin                                         |
| Clark, Feryal              | Mahmood, Mr Khalid                                      |
| Cooper, Daisy              | Mahmood, Shabana                                        |
| Cooper, rh Yvette          | Malhotra, Seema                                         |
| Cruddas, Jon               | Maskell, Rachael                                        |
| Cryer, John                | McCabe, Steve                                           |
| Cummins, Judith            | McCarthy, Kerry                                         |
| Daby, Janet                | McDonald, Andy                                          |
| Davey, rh Ed               | McDonnell, rh John                                      |
| David, Wayne               | McFadden, rh Mr Pat                                     |
| Davies-Jones, Alex         | McGinn, Conor                                           |
| De Cordova, Marsha         | McGovern, Alison                                        |
| Debbonaire, Thangam        | McKinnell, Catherine                                    |
| Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh | McMahon, Jim                                            |
| Dodds, Anneliese           | McMorris, Anna                                          |
| Dowd, Peter                | Mearns, Ian                                             |
| Duffield, Rosie            | Miliband, rh Edward                                     |
| Eagle, Dame Angela         | Mishra, Navendu                                         |
| Efford, Clive              | Moran, Layla                                            |
| Elliott, Julie             | Morden, Jessica                                         |
| Elmore, Chris              | Morgan, Helen                                           |
| Eshalomi, Florence         | Morgan, Stephen                                         |
| Esterson, Bill             | Morris, Grahame                                         |
| Evans, Chris               | Murray, Ian                                             |
| Farron, Tim                | Murray, James                                           |
| Farry, Stephen             | Nichols, Charlotte                                      |
| Fletcher, Colleen          | Norris, Alex                                            |
| Fovargue, Yvonne           | Olney, Sarah                                            |
| Foxcroft, Vicky            | Onwurah, Chi                                            |
| Foy, Mary Kelly            | Oppong-Asare, Abena                                     |
| Furniss, Gill              | Osamor, Kate                                            |
| Gardiner, Barry            | Osborne, Kate                                           |
| Gill, Preet Kaur           | Owatemi, Taiwo                                          |
| Green, Kate                | Peacock, Stephanie                                      |
| Green, Sarah               | Pennycook, Matthew                                      |
| Greenwood, Lilian          | Pennycook, Mr Toby                                      |
| Greenwood, Margaret        | Powell, Lucy                                            |
| Griffith, Nia              | Qureshi, Yasmin                                         |
| Gwynne, Andrew             | Rayner, rh Angela                                       |
| Haigh, Louise              | Reed, Steve                                             |
| Hamilton, Fabian           | Rees, Christina                                         |
| Harris, Carolyn            | Reeves, Ellie                                           |
| Hayes, Helen               | Reeves, Rachel                                          |
| Healey, rh John            | Reynolds, Jonathan                                      |
| Hillier, Dame Meg          | Ribeiro-Addy, Bell                                      |
| Hobhouse, Wera             | Rimmer, Ms Marie                                        |
| Hodge, rh Dame Margaret    | Robinson, Gavin                                         |
| Hodgson, Mrs Sharon        | Rodda, Matt                                             |
| Hollern, Kate              | Saville Roberts, rh Liz                                 |
| Hopkins, Rachel            | Shah, Naz                                               |
| Hussain, Imran             | Shannon, Jim                                            |
| Jarvis, Dan                | Sharma, Mr Virendra                                     |
| Johnson, rh Dame Diana     | Siddiq, Tulip                                           |
| Johnson, Kim               | Slaughter, Andy                                         |
| Jones, Darren              | Smith, Cat                                              |
| Jones, Gerald              | Smith, Henry                                            |
| Jones, rh Mr Kevan         |                                                         |

|                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Jones, Ruth                                             |
| Jones, Sarah                                            |
| Kane, Mike                                              |
| Keeley, Barbara                                         |
| Kendall, Liz ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden</i> ) |
| Khan, Afzal                                             |
| Kinnock, Stephen                                        |
| Lake, Ben                                               |
| Lammy, rh Mr David                                      |
| Lavery, Ian                                             |
| Leadbeater, Kim                                         |
| Lewis, Clive                                            |
| Lockhart, Carla                                         |
| Long Bailey, Rebecca                                    |
| Lucas, Caroline                                         |
| Madders, Justin                                         |
| Mahmood, Mr Khalid                                      |
| Mahmood, Shabana                                        |
| Malhotra, Seema                                         |
| Maskell, Rachael                                        |
| McCabe, Steve                                           |
| McCarthy, Kerry                                         |
| McDonald, Andy                                          |
| McDonnell, rh John                                      |
| McFadden, rh Mr Pat                                     |
| McGinn, Conor                                           |
| McGovern, Alison                                        |
| McKinnell, Catherine                                    |
| McMahon, Jim                                            |
| McMorris, Anna                                          |
| Mearns, Ian                                             |
| Miliband, rh Edward                                     |
| Mishra, Navendu                                         |
| Moran, Layla                                            |
| Morden, Jessica                                         |
| Morgan, Helen                                           |
| Morgan, Stephen                                         |
| Morris, Grahame                                         |
| Murray, Ian                                             |
| Murray, James                                           |
| Nichols, Charlotte                                      |
| Norris, Alex                                            |
| Olney, Sarah                                            |
| Onwurah, Chi                                            |
| Oppong-Asare, Abena                                     |
| Osamor, Kate                                            |
| Osborne, Kate                                           |
| Owatemi, Taiwo                                          |
| Peacock, Stephanie                                      |
| Pennycook, Matthew                                      |
| Pennycook, Mr Toby                                      |
| Powell, Lucy                                            |
| Qureshi, Yasmin                                         |
| Rayner, rh Angela                                       |
| Reed, Steve                                             |
| Rees, Christina                                         |
| Reeves, Ellie                                           |
| Reeves, Rachel                                          |
| Reynolds, Jonathan                                      |
| Ribeiro-Addy, Bell                                      |
| Rimmer, Ms Marie                                        |
| Robinson, Gavin                                         |
| Rodda, Matt                                             |
| Saville Roberts, rh Liz                                 |
| Shah, Naz                                               |
| Shannon, Jim                                            |
| Sharma, Mr Virendra                                     |
| Siddiq, Tulip                                           |
| Slaughter, Andy                                         |
| Smith, Cat                                              |
| Smith, Henry                                            |

Smith, Jeff  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh John  
Stevens, Jo  
Stone, Jamie  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Vaz, rh Valerie

Wakeford, Christian  
West, Catherine  
Western, Matt  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Wilson, Munira  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Winter, Beth  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Liz Twist and**  
**Mary Glindon**

**NOES**

Adams, rh Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baynes, Simon  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Blackman, Bob  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Carter, Andy  
Cartledge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke, Theo  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse

Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Coutinho, Claire  
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, John  
Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Richard  
Gray, James  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Griffiths, Kate  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holmes, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kruger, Danny  
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Largan, Robert  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Loder, Chris  
Logan, Mark  
Longhi, Marco  
Lopez, Julia  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackrory, Cherilyn  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa

Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalf, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrissey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Morton, Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Randall, Tom  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Rutley, David  
Sambrook, Gary  
Saxby, Selaine  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simmonds, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Solloway, Amanda  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stewart, rh Bob

Stewart, Iain  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stuart, Graham  
Sturdy, Julian  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Timpson, Edward  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tracey, Craig  
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Vara, Shailesh  
Vickers, Matt  
Wallis, Dr Jamie  
Warman, Matt

Watling, Giles  
Webb, Suzanne  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Williams, Craig  
Wragg, Mr William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Gareth Johnson and**  
**Michael Tomlinson**

*Question accordingly negated.*

9.42 pm

*More than two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).*

*The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).*

### New clause 3

#### REPORT ON THE USE OF SENTIENT ANIMALS IN ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION IN GOVERNMENT POLICY

‘(1) The Animal Sentience Committee shall produce a report under section 2 on the adverse effects on the welfare of animals of government policy on experimentation on animals.

(2) The report shall cover both animal experimentation where alternative (non-animal based) methods of testing exist, and where no alternative exists.

(3) The report shall cover—

- (a) medical testing,
- (b) cosmetics testing, and
- (c) weapons testing.

(4) This report shall include recommendations for future government action under section 2 (3) and (4).’—(*Deidre Brock.*)

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 288.*

**Division No. 214]**

**[9.42 pm**

#### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Fleur  
Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
Barker, Paula  
Begum, Apsana  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blackford, rh Ian  
Blackman, Kirsty  
Blake, Olivia  
Blomfield, Paul  
Bonnar, Steven  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brock, Deidre  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burgon, Richard  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carden, Dan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Cherry, Joanna  
Clark, Feryal  
Cooper, Daisy  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Crawley, Angela  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John  
Cummins, Judith  
Daby, Janet  
Davey, rh Ed  
David, Wayne  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
Day, Martyn  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Debbonaire, Thangam  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dods, Anneliese  
Dorans, Allan  
Dowd, Peter  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Elmore, Chris  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Ferrier, Margaret  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flynn, Stephen  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Foy, Mary Kelly  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Glendon, Mary  
Grady, Patrick  
Grant, Peter  
Green, Kate  
Green, Sarah  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hendry, Drew  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hosie, rh Stewart  
Hussain, Imran  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, Darren

Jones, Gerald  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Ruth  
Jones, Sarah  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)  
Khan, Afzal  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Lake, Ben  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Lewis, Clive  
Linden, David  
Lockhart, Carla  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Maskell, Rachael  
Mc Nally, John  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGinn, Conor  
McGovern, Alison  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McLaughlin, Anne  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorris, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Mishra, Navendu  
Monaghan, Carol  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Helen  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Murray, Ian  
Murray, James  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Norris, Alex  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Olney, Sarah  
Oppurah, Chi  
Oppung-Asare, Abena  
Osamor, Kate  
Osborne, Kate  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Owatemi, Taiwo  
Peacock, Stephanie  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Powell, Lucy  
Qaisar, Ms Anum  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, rh Angela  
Reed, Steve  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, Ellie  
Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
Rimmer, Ms Marie  
Robinson, Gavin

Rodda, Matt  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shah, Naz  
Shannon, Jim  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, Alyn  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Jeff  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh John  
Stephens, Chris  
Stevens, Jo  
Stone, Jamie  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thewliss, Alison  
Thompson, Owen

Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Wakeford, Christian  
West, Catherine  
Western, Matt  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Wilson, Munira  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Winter, Beth  
Wishart, Pete  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Marion Fellows and**  
**Richard Thomson**

### NOES

Adams, rh Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Baron, Mr John  
Baynes, Simon  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Blackman, Bob  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria

Chalk, Alex  
Chishtil, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke, Theo  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna

Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, John  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Gray, James  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Griffiths, Kate  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Largan, Robert  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward

Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Loder, Chris  
Logan, Mark  
Longhi, Marco  
Lopez, Julia  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackrory, Cherylyn  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalf, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Morton, Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Randall, Tom  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Rutley, David  
Sambrook, Gary

Saxby, Selaine  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simmonds, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Solloway, Amanda  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stewart, rh Bob  
Stewart, Iain  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stuart, Graham  
Sturdy, Julian  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek

Timpson, Edward  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tracey, Craig  
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Vara, Shailesh  
Vickers, Matt  
Wallis, Dr Jamie  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
Webb, Suzanne  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Williams, Craig  
Wragg, Mr William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Gareth Johnson and**  
**Michael Tomlinson**

*Question accordingly negated.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** New clause 5 has been selected for a separate decision.

### New Clause 5

#### REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON RIVER POLLUTION ON SENTIENT ANIMALS

“The Animal Sentience Committee shall produce a report on the impact of government policy on river pollution on sentient animals.

(1) The annual report must include—

- (a) the number of sentient animals killed or injured as a result of polluted rivers.
- (b) a description of the actions of water companies to guarantee the protection of sentient animals.
- (c) an assessment of the effect of government policy on (a) and (b).

(2) The first annual report on the impact of polluted rivers on sentient animals may relate to any 12 month period that includes the day on which this section comes into force.

(3) The annual report must be published and laid before Parliament within 4 months of the last day of the period to which the report relates.”—(*Tim Farron.*)

*This new clause would require the Animal Sentience Committee to produce a report on the impact of polluted rivers on sentient animals.*

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 286.*

**Division No. 215]**

**[9.56 pm**

#### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie  
Ali, Rushanara  
Ali, Tahir  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amesbury, Mike  
Anderson, Fleur

Antoniazzi, Tonia  
Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
Barker, Paula  
Begum, Apsana  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burgon, Richard  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carden, Dan  
Champion, Sarah  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Clark, Feryal  
Cooper, Daisy  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John  
Cummins, Judith  
Daby, Janet  
Davey, rh Ed  
David, Wayne  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Debbonaire, Thangam  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Dowd, Peter  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Elmore, Chris  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Foy, Mary Kelly  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardiner, Barry  
Glindon, Mary  
Green, Kate  
Green, Sarah  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hillier, Dame Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hussain, Imran  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Ruth  
Jones, Sarah  
Kane, Mike

Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)  
Khan, Afzal  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Lake, Ben  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Leadbeater, Kim  
Lewis, Clive  
Lockhart, Carla  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Maskell, Rachael  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGinn, Conor  
McGovern, Alison  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorrin, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Mishra, Navendu  
Moran, Layla  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Helen  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Murray, Ian  
Murray, James  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Norris, Alex  
Olney, Sarah  
Onwurah, Chi  
Oppong-Asare, Abena  
Osamor, Kate  
Osborne, Kate  
Owatemi, Taiwo  
Peacock, Stephanie  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Powell, Lucy  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, rh Angela  
Reed, Steve  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, Ellie  
Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
Rimmer, Ms Marie  
Robinson, Gavin  
Rodda, Matt  
Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shah, Naz  
Shannon, Jim  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, Jeff  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh John

Stevens, Jo  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Wakeford, Christian  
West, Catherine

Western, Matt  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Wilson, Munira  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Winter, Beth  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Mr Alistair Carmichael and**  
**Jamie Stone**

**NOES**

Adams, rh Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Baron, Mr John  
Baynes, Simon  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Blackman, Bob  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke, Theo  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse

Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Foster, Kevin  
Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, John  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Gray, James

Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Griffiths, Kate  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heappey, James  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kruger, Danny  
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Largan, Robert  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Loder, Chris  
Logan, Mark  
Longhi, Marco  
Lopez, Julia  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackrory, Cheryl  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason

McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Morton, Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Mundell, rh David  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Pritchard, rh Mark  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Randall, Tom  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Richards, Nicola  
Richardson, Angela  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Rutley, David  
Sambrook, Gary  
Saxby, Selaine  
Scully, Paul  
Selous, Andrew  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simmonds, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Solloway, Amanda  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stewart, rh Bob  
Stewart, Iain  
Streeter, Sir Gary

Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Shailesh  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles

Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Michael Tomlinson and  
 Gareth Johnson

*Question accordingly negatived.*

### Clause 2

#### REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE

*Amendment made: 2, page 2, line 2, at end insert—*

“(4A) Recommendations made by the Committee must respect legislative or administrative provisions and customs relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage.”—(*Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.*)

*This amendment seeks to place a duty on the Committee to have regard to the balancing factors included in the Lisbon Treaty, Article 13 of Title II, to which the UK was a party before Brexit.*

#### Third Reading

10.10 pm

**Jo Churchill:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has been a privilege to shepherd this Bill through the House. Members in all parts stood on the manifesto—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Members are being amazingly rude. The Minister is trying to put Third Reading to the House. There are people who have not been here all evening and they are making a noise. Stop it!

**Jo Churchill:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I assure the House that I will be speaking. We all stood on a manifesto commitment to recognise the sentience of animals, and here today we can say that we have delivered on that promise. The Bill creates a timely, targeted and proportionate accountability mechanism in the committee; provides that expert assurance that Ministers are well informed; and gives us greater transparency about policies. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all hon. Members who contributed to the scrutiny of the Bill and everyone who took time to share their views with me, as this has helped to inform the discussion. We have, I hope, reached a clear shared understanding of how this Bill will work and of the fact that it will work.

I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and his colleagues on the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for their rigorous and constructive scrutiny of the Bill. I am also grateful to those who participated in the Public Bill Committee, which was chaired with such efficiency and good humour by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker). I thank the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones)

and her colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench for their engagement. Special thanks are due to my hon. Friends the Members for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) and for Bracknell (James Sunderland) for the way they have helped steer this Bill through. Proceedings on Bills depend on hard work behind the scenes, and I thank the parliamentary Clerks, the animal sentience top Bill team and my private office for their support and their sense of humour throughout. This Bill will recognise the fact of animal sentience in UK law, and I commend it to the House.

10.12 pm

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): I do not wish to detain the House any longer than is strictly necessary, but it is good to see so many Government Members so interested in the Third Reading of this Bill. As the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) noted in his excellent speech on Report, the Government could have tackled this issue head on had they not decided to oppose the recognition of animal sentience, and had they decided to carry over the rules and regulations covered by this legislation alongside the other laws that were carried over in the EU withdrawal Bill.

This Bill is an important one, and the House will know that Labour Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), have at all times sought to be critical friends, and to provide a wise and objective view. The Bill recognises that animals are sentient beings and creates an accountability mechanism that aims to ensure that UK Ministers have due regard to their welfare needs when formulating and implementing Government policy. An appropriate committee will be established to assess and report on the animal welfare impacts of policy decisions that have been taken, or which may be taken, by the Government. The relevant Secretary of State will be required to lay a written statement before Parliament responding to any such report. This is a small Bill, but it is an important one. If the committee is not set up with the correct terms of reference, or if it is not even allowed to establish its correct make-up, it is merely a paper tiger and a waste of time.

I am so grateful to the many animal welfare campaigners—Arthur Thomas and Claire Bass from Humane Society International, Matt Browne from Wildlife and Countryside Link, and James West, Sonul Badiani-Hammett and David Bowles—and all those who have worked with colleagues across the House to make this Bill fit for purpose. Let me also put in a word for my noble Friend Baroness Hayman. She is a fierce champion of the strongest animal welfare protections, and it has been a pleasure to work with her and Baroness Jones of Whitchurch.

I want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of all those involved in taking the Bill through the House, and I wish it well. I thank the staff of the House, the Clerks, the Committee staff and the parliamentary staff in the offices of all the Members involved. I acknowledge all those who sat on the Bill Committee, and give special thanks to our ever-present departmental Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon), and to my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport and for Easington (Grahame Morris).

I am grateful to the Minister for engaging with Opposition Members in recent days, but I have a word of caution for her: she must take every opportunity to rise up and take on her Back Benchers in the fight to improve animal welfare standards. As we have seen throughout the Bill's passage, there remain some who are just not willing to get this done. If the Minister and her colleagues show that courage, they will have the co-operation of those on our Benches.

10.15 pm

**Deidre Brock:** I thank the many animal welfare organisations that have been in touch with me, and the many constituents—I am sure this has been the experience of Members on both sides of the House—who have also been in touch because they really care. I thank all the House staff; I thank the Clerks for all their efforts, and for their patience with all of us during the relatively short period for which the Bill has been in the House and in Committee.

I wish the new Animal Sentience Committee well in its deliberations, and I look forward to seeing those deliberations bear fruit in the form of real, positive actions from the Government in the years ahead. We are known throughout these islands for having the greatest regard and love for animals. Let us do our level best by them, and show just how much we care through the regard that the Government show for the committee's actions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, without amendment.*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15),*

That, at this day's sitting, the motion in the name of Mark Spencer relating to Adjournment of the House (Today) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) will not apply.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** We now come to the motion on the Adjournment of the House. This is not the Question that the House do now adjourn—[*Interruption.*] I must inform the enthusiastic group sitting on my right that this is in fact the motion entitled "Adjournment of the House (Today)".

## ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

*Ordered,*

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until

(1) any Messages from the Lords relating to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill shall have been received and disposed of; and

(2) he shall have notified the Royal Assent to any Act relating to Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) agreed upon by both Houses.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft National Minimum Wage (Amendment) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.

#### ECCLESIASTICAL LAW

That the draft Grants to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2022, which was laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.

#### INSURANCE

That the draft Flood Reinsurance (Amendment) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Combined Authorities (Borrowing) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.—(*Gareth Johnson.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## COMMITTEES

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** With the leave of the House, we will take motions 14 and 15 together.

*Ordered,*

### COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS

That Mark Fletcher be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Laura Farris be added.

### COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

That Mark Fletcher be discharged from the Committee of Privileges and Laura Farris be added.—(*Gareth Johnson.*)

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. Under the Order of the House of today, I may not adjourn the House until any messages from the Lords relating to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill have been received and disposed of; and I have notified the Royal Assent to any Act relating to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill, agreed upon by both Houses. The House is accordingly suspended. I will arrange for the Division bells to be sounded a few minutes before the sitting is resumed.

10.20 pm

*Sitting suspended (Order, 14 March).*

## Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill

*Consideration of Lords amendments*

12.2 am

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Under the Order of the House of 7 March, proceedings on Lords amendments to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill may be entered upon and proceeded with at any hour and must be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement. Financial privilege is not engaged by any of the Lords amendments.

*Lords amendment 1 agreed to.*

*Lords amendments 2 to 64 agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Under the Order of the House of today, I may not adjourn the House until I have notified the Royal Assent to any Act relating to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill, agreed upon by both Houses. We will proceed with the Adjournment debate for no more than 30 minutes. If Royal Assent has not arrived by the end of the Adjournment debate, the sitting will be suspended.

## Police Custody: Rights of Minors

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Gareth Johnson.)*

12.5 am

**Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab):** I thank the Minister for her attendance at this late hour. This debate is motivated by the need to protect minors. Public bodies all have a responsibility to protect minors. Protecting the rights of minors while in police custody is vital, but children across our country have gone overlooked. Some of the most vulnerable in our society are suffering under insufficient safeguards, and reform is desperately needed.

I thank Deborah, my constituent, for being brave enough to share her experience with me. She used to work just around the corner for the civil service, and she is the mum of Jayden, whose story I will be speaking about today. I also welcome Dr Miranda Bevans and Dr Vicky Kemp, both professors of law and experts in this field, who have been invaluable in their conversations with me and in the preparation for this debate, and who are in the Public Gallery.

Jayden is a 15-year-old boy from my constituency. He is currently in the first year of his GCSEs and is described by his mum as,

“bright and sociable, part of a large close-knit family”.

Jayden was in his school uniform and on his way to school when he was arrested. There had been a complaint from a bus driver about a group of boys and the police had been called. By 10 that morning, Jayden found himself sitting in a custody cell made for adults.

Deborah, his mum, was worried when Jayden did not return home from school. She called his friends, their parents and the school. She was scared that her son had been harmed, knowing that too many children and young people have been stabbed and died on our streets, and desperately hoped that her son was not another victim.

At 6.46 pm, Deborah received a call from the station, notifying her of her son's arrest, nine hours after he was originally detained. He was alone for nine hours, and there was clearly no concern from the police about the level of chronic despair and anxiety he was feeling. By way of explanation for the nine hours, she was told a work shift change had taken place and custody was busy. In my view, there was no justifiable reason given for that level of neglect.

The chance is that Jayden left home at 8 am to go to school, and just under 11 hours later his mum was called. We must ask why he was treated so carelessly and who else that has happened to. Deborah told me that Jayden had asked for a phone call, but had not been permitted to make one. Again, that is stripping someone of their rights. It was as if he was being punished before being found guilty, and that is simply not good enough.

I remind the House of the law that already exists to protect children while in police custody. The Children Act 2004 places a statutory duty on police,

“to have regard to the safety, welfare, and well-being of children.”

A rights-based, “child first” approach in every encounter with the police is enshrined in the National Police Chiefs' Council's national strategy. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, or PACE, requires that detention is only authorised when strictly necessary and custody officers should prioritise vulnerable detainees.

Jayden's mum, as the appropriate adult and person responsible for his welfare, should have been notified "as soon as practicable" under code 3 of the statutory guidance to the 1984 Act. Jayden should have been given a phone call, as it is only under specific circumstances that that right can be denied or delayed.

Simply put, the law as it currently stands failed to protect Jayden, and it probably fails to protect other young people like him. The Minister may respond by saying that she cannot comment on the specifics of an individual case and to follow the pre-existing complaints system, which my constituent is doing. I understand that, but the reality is that this should never have occurred in the first place, and it is far from an isolated incident. This means that something is fundamentally wrong.

There are countless similar stories, many of which go formally unreported. Here are just a few from in and around my constituency and across the country. One child spent 34 hours in custody, including 10 hours post charge, with an appropriate adult only arriving after 16 and a half hours of the detention. A 16-year-old boy was kept in a holding cell with adults for three and a half hours without his mother or solicitors being notified. In 2019, a 10-year-old child was detained for 23 hours, from 7 pm on Wednesday to 6 pm on Thursday. Imagine that—a 10-year-old child being detained in a police cell for 23 hours.

We all know that not all young people, parents and carers complain. They do not complain for a number of reasons. Just one incident coming to the public's attention means that there are likely to be many more similar cases—probably more than we can imagine. In my recent conversations with Miranda and Vicky, I have heard of many more situations where it is entirely inappropriate for young children to be kept in a police cell. The law is simply not properly protecting children while they are in police custody. The overall number of children held in police custody has decreased over recent years, which is a welcome development. However, children are often detained for a long time, mirroring adult stays in a police cell and that, again, is not acceptable. Also substantial racial disparities exist in the overnight detention of children.

It is important to make this point: most custody officers up and down our country are trying their best to look after children who arrive in their custody. Being in custody is a risky environment for children and self-harm is shockingly prevalent in these cases. The legislation is not strong enough to prevent this. The procedure needs to be fleshed out, and a stronger and more serious stance needs to be taken. In accordance with PACE, whereby detention is used as a "measure of last resort" and for the "shortest possible time", will the Minister consider and commit to halving the amount of time that children can be held in custody from 24 to 12 hours? Will she also carry out a review looking at self-harm and mental health following young people's interaction with custody and the overnight detention of children in police custody?

In our system, the appropriate adult, often the parent, carries responsibility for oversight of due process—a role that they are unprepared for. What parent could ever envisage being the appropriate adult for their child in custody? What parent would ever even know what to do? Therefore, education is key to make sure that appropriate adults can fulfil this vital oversight role.

In 1991, the royal commission on criminal justice recommended the use of educational video resources to address that gap. Dr Miranda Bevan, in association with the National Appropriate Adult Network, recently produced a short animation educating appropriate adults about their role. It has received good early feedback. Will the Minister talk to the police powers unit and lead the Home Office to adopt it?

As well as reforming the system for the future, we need to deal with the ramifications of this issue here and now. Stays in custody are often the only interaction that children have with the criminal justice system. Police custody cells are designed for adults suspected of criminal activity and not for children. That environment can be deeply harmful for a child. As the House has heard, there are traumatised children walking around in my constituency inevitably shaken by their experience in custody. It shapes their perspective on the police force and sets in train fear and dread towards those who have been tasked with the mission to serve and protect. The unfair treatment of minors while in custody will have an impact on communities, so this situation really does need to be put right.

Deborah recently said: "I am constantly worried about my children coming into contact with the police that are here to serve and to protect our streets." She recently told me that because of his experience Jayden is now afraid of the police, when in fact he should feel that the police are there to help those in trouble. Where and who can people like Jayden go to when they need help if those that help him also oppress him? This breakdown in trust is an unnecessary and avoidable situation that also lessens the morale of the overburdened police force. The Conservatives claim they are a party of law and order, but surely a condition of law and order in our country is a healthy relationship between its people and their police service. Will the Minister increase and update the training to aid cross-cultural communication? Will she commit to greater funding for conduit organisations that act as a bridge between ethnic and poorer communities and the police?

One of the primary roles of Government is to protect vulnerable people and vulnerable children involved in the youth criminal justice system. Will the Minister work with me to make sure they are properly protected while in police custody?

12.15 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean):** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) for bringing these matters to the House, despite the lateness of the hour, and I acknowledge the importance of the topic in front of us this evening. I thank her constituent Deborah, who I understand is here, and I very much thank the hon. Lady for telling the story of her constituent and her son Jayden. I also acknowledge that we have Dr Miranda Bevan with us and I will speak about her contribution later in my remarks.

Custody is a core element of the criminal justice system and is critical for maintaining public confidence, obtaining intelligence, bringing offenders to justice and keeping the public safe. However, children should only be detained in custody when absolutely necessary. Where there are opportunities to divert children away, these must be considered. It is right and proper that children

[Rachel Maclean]

are acknowledged as a protected group with specific needs. Their treatment in detention is governed not only by domestic legislation, but by the UN convention on the rights of the child, which the UK has signed and ratified.

Everyone who works with children has a responsibility to keep them safe. Specific safeguards apply to children detained in custody, including a legal requirement for an appropriate adult to be present for interviews and strip-searches, if they take place, to ensure their rights are protected. Officers must take into consideration a child's age when deciding whether it is necessary to arrest them and determining the time at which an arrest takes place.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 places a legal limit of 24 hours on how long an individual can be detained in custody by the police before they must be charged with an offence or released. It can be extended by an officer of superintendent rank or above under certain circumstances, and further by a court up to a total of 96 hours. These legal limits apply to both children and adults. Police officers must follow those requirements when detaining children in custody. The hon. Lady has referred to a case where she is stating that that did not take place, and I know that she is raising that complaint with the specific force—I think in her case that is the Met police—or with the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

It is right that these procedures and requirements are subject to scrutiny and oversight. That is why Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services regularly inspects police custody suites. Via its inspection programmes of approximately nine forces a year, it monitors the treatment and welfare of children in custody and makes recommendations for police forces and partners in maintaining and where necessary raising service delivery. We expect forces to respond to those recommendations and take action when concerns are raised.

The hon. Lady has raised an excellent point about the opportunity of a custody period for the police to engage with those young people who might be involved in crime and pursue possible diversionary activity to prevent them from becoming further involved in the criminal justice system. We recognise that this is a perfect moment for that to take place. Several London custody suites have youth workers physically present to support detained children and engage with them and their parents.

The hon. Lady spoke about training for police forces and she is right to recognise that. The police uplift introduced by the Conservative Government is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to increase the diversity of the police. Attracting a broad range of talent, cultures and backgrounds to policing is a core ambition in our drive to recruit 20,000 additional police officers, and we are working really hard to deliver the diverse police workforce that our communities need by co-ordinating efforts between Government and policing not only to attract more diverse candidates into policing, but to ensure it is a career where all recruits can thrive. We have recruited more than 11,000 additional officers as part of that programme.

I am pleased to say that the police officer workforce is more representative than ever. The latest data shows the highest proportion of minority ethnic and female officers

since records began. There are now more than 10,000 black, Asian and minority ethnic officers across the police workforce. The Met police are our most diverse force, with 5,479 officers from minority ethnic backgrounds as of 31 December 2021 and some 21.4% of its joiners since April 2020 coming from those communities, but of course we must keep going further.

The hon. Lady is right that it is not simply about numbers; the training and cultural competence that officers possess is critical to successful policing. The College of Policing's foundation training for all those entering the service includes substantial coverage of police ethics and self-understanding, including the effects of personal conscious and unconscious bias. The initial training undertaken by all officers also covers hate crimes, ethics and equalities, and policing without bias.

Further training is then provided in specialist areas throughout an officer's career. For example, training for police investigators includes a specific focus on bias, policing fairly and the practical effects of those fundamentals on the investigation process. Training for those involved in public protection includes methods to raise officers' self-awareness of their own views, stereotypes and biases. We agree with the hon. Lady that it is vital that all police officers have the right competences and values, and an understanding, especially when dealing with the most vulnerable in our society.

The hon. Lady mentioned the important work carried out by Dr Miranda Bevan of the London School of Economics looking at and working with the National Appropriate Adult Network. Together they have recently developed video guidance for family members acting as appropriate adults to ensure that they can effectively support their children while detained. We are grateful for that work, which is groundbreaking and provides easily accessible information in what is often the most difficult of circumstances. The Home Office has been deeply involved in the development of that innovative project and will be working to raise its profile through as wide a dissemination as possible. We agree with the hon. Lady that it is an incredibly helpful piece of work.

Home Office officials are also engaged with research funded by the Nuffield Foundation to examine the impact of PACE on the detention and questioning of children and to explore the merits of a more child-centred approach to the police custody experience. We look forward to the findings of that research and will consider its recommendations carefully.

This is a vital issue and I repeat my earlier thanks to the hon. Lady for securing the debate. I am clear that, although it is vital for public safety that the police should have the required legislative powers to detain people in custody, they must use them judiciously, appropriately and within the law. Police custody suites must be safe places for everyone and that of course applies to children.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I may not adjourn the House until I have notified the Royal Assent to any Act relating to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill, agreed upon by both Houses. The House is accordingly suspended. I will arrange for the Division bells to be sounded a few minutes before the sitting is resumed.

12.23 am

*Sitting suspended (Order, 14 March).*

12.48 am

*On resuming—***ROYAL ASSENT**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) Act 2022

National Insurance Contributions Act 2022

Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022.

12.49 am

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Monday 14 March 2022

[PETER DOWD in the Chair]

## Ukrainian Refugees

*[Relevant documents: E-petition 609382, Offer fast track asylum to any Ukrainians displaced due to the invasion, and Oral Evidence taken before the Home Affairs Committee on 9 March on Home Office policy on Ukrainian refugees, HC 1168.]*

4.30 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 609530, relating to arrangements for Ukrainian refugees to enter the UK.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. This e-petition calls on the Government to waive visa requirements for Ukrainian refugees. I thank Phillip Jolliffe, who I believe is here today, for bringing the petition to the House, and the more than 240,000 petitioners who have signed it and related petitions since it was tabled just over a week ago.

On 24 February, the day on which Russia invaded Ukraine, the Prime Minister said:

“I say to the Ukrainians in this moment of agony, we are with you. We are praying for you and your families, and we are on your side.”

Many of us believe that being on Ukraine’s side must mean, at the very least, allowing Ukrainians fleeing Russia’s bombs and tanks to come to the UK for sanctuary, but the shameful reality is that we have put up barriers at every step of the way and we have turned away desperate, frightened people in their hour of greatest need.

We should have been prepared for this: we had known for months that Russian troops were massing at the Ukrainian border; and with his record of atrocities in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria and Ukraine itself, we had no illusions as to what President Putin was capable of. Indeed, on 20 February, the Prime Minister told the BBC:

“The plan that we are seeing is for something that could be really the biggest war in Europe since 1945”.

The next day, the US ambassador to the United Nations said that

“we will see a devastating loss of life. Unimaginable suffering. Millions of displaced people will create a refugee crisis across Europe.”

Just three days later, the Russian invasion began and so did the long-predicted refugee crisis. According to the UN, about 2.8 million refugees have already fled Ukraine. As President Putin’s hopes of a quick victory have evaporated in the face of fierce Ukrainian resistance, the fighting has only intensified, and however bad the conflict looks from the comfort of watching it on our television and computer screens, humanitarian workers and journalists have been very clear that it is 10 times worse on the ground. Families are struggling to seek safety. Hundreds of thousands have been left without food, water and electricity and with no access to medical care. Elderly people have been left trapped, unable to move. Last week, we will all have seen the horrible images of the maternity and children’s ward in the city of Mariupol destroyed in a Russian airstrike and the

reports of children buried under rubble. Authorities were digging a mass grave because the morgues were overflowing. Ukrainians have prepared to escape through humanitarian corridors but have had to turn back, because Russian forces have continued their assault. Which one of us would not want to flee such a nightmare?

We know that Poland has already welcomed about 1.2 million people fleeing that hell across the border. Moldova has accepted 83,000 Ukrainians, which equates to 3% of its own population. Although most refugees will no doubt want to remain in countries close to Ukraine, some are travelling further afield to western Europe. Faced with the continent’s worst humanitarian crisis in living memory, the EU swiftly announced and introduced an emergency plan, the temporary protection directive, to allow Ukrainians to live and work in the bloc for three years. As of Tuesday, about 10,000 Ukrainians had arrived in France and 30,000 in Italy; Germany, which is closer to Ukraine, has more than 120,000. The European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, said:

“All those fleeing Putin’s bombs are welcome in Europe.”

It was a warm, open-hearted message that so many Ukrainians desperately needed to hear. Of course, the UK is no longer part of the EU and has its own approach, based on two significantly less generous schemes.

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, who is making a passionate and well-informed speech. I wanted to briefly mention a constituent of mine, who has a friend from Ukraine who fled to Calais with her seven-year-old son. They were turned away and told they needed appointments at a UK visa centre. She finally managed to get herself an appointment in Brussels on 24 March; however, she was told that her son would not be allowed into the visa centre without an appointment of his own, even though he is seven years old, and there was no availability until the following week. Does my hon. Friend agree it is unacceptable to stop parents bringing their children into visa centres? Will she urge the Minister to take action to ensure dependants can share appointments and provide clarity to refugees about the necessity of these appointments, now that the UK Government have finally said that those with Ukrainian passports can apply fully online?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I would go further than it being unacceptable: it is completely heartbreaking to hear these stories and see the way in which many families and people in the most desperate of situations have been treated. We have seen heartbreaking images, so I am more than happy to put that question to the Minister, and expect to hear an answer when he responds.

Going back to the processes that are available, the first is the Ukraine family scheme visa, which allows Ukrainians with select family members in the UK to remain for three years, assuming they can get here.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): I have just come off the phone to my caseworker. Today, we have been contacted by a constituent whose father has managed to flee Ukraine over the Polish border. He went to a UK visa centre, and has successfully passed all his checks and been granted a visa, but he has now been told that he has to travel 300 km to Warsaw to pick it up. He is in

[Munira Wilson]

his 70s and has two bags of belongings; he is not in a position to do that. Does the hon. Lady agree that this is beyond ridiculous, and that people need to be issued with their visas on site if we are not going to waive the visa requirement?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I absolutely agree; the hon. Lady's point is very well made. I have no doubt that every Member contributing today will have heard such stories from our constituents about their family members who they are desperately trying to help. They have come to their MP for help, but so many people do not have that support available, and that my heart breaks for people who are encountering these challenges and do not know where to turn for help.

Speaking to the Home Affairs Committee last week, the Ukrainian ambassador himself seemed genuinely surprised to hear that the current scheme only applies if a relative has settled status, and that this had not been extended to all Ukrainians living here legally. The Home Secretary said on Thursday that she is looking at broadening that eligibility to include Ukrainians on time-limited work or study visas, so I hope the Minister can give some reassurances and further detail on that point today, to put minds at rest that that hurdle, at least, has been addressed by the Government.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster):** Might I be helpful? I appreciate that the hon. Lady would not have heard this statement before coming into Westminster Hall, but it has just been announced in the main Chamber that those with limited immigration leave will also be able to act as sponsors provided that they have six months' leave to be here in the UK, given the six-month minimum for providing housing.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Okay. The second route, the "homes for Ukraine" programme, has been announced in the Chamber today. As I understand it—I am happy to be corrected, because we have only just received the details—this route allows charities and individuals to sponsor Ukrainians to come here even when they have no family ties, and to stay with members of the public for at least six months and remain in the UK for three years. My understanding is that people will be paid £350 a month during the period of sponsorship, and local authorities will receive around £10,000 for refugees using this route. In practice, this scheme is likely to be extended mainly to Ukrainians already known to people in the UK.

As Members are aware, a statement on this matter is currently ongoing in the main Chamber. We will need to look at the details more fully, but what we do know is that these initiatives are still quite limited: they cover only selected people, those lucky enough to have family members here or to be chosen for sponsorship. They do not offer all Ukrainians fleeing violence the opportunity to come to our country as refugees. It should come as no surprise that in stark contrast to many of our European allies, the UK had issued just 4,000 visas as of Sunday afternoon, according to the Home Office.

The Home Secretary repeatedly raises security as a justification for the Government's approach. Security is by no means a trivial issue, but it is difficult to see what security has to do with the Government's decision to mostly

restrict access to selected family members of people settled in the UK. People arrive in the UK with all kinds of challenges, and we deal with them. Are the hugely restrictive schemes not just a policy choice that the Government have made for whatever reason, rather than a response to a specific security threat? If security concerns underpin the Government's approach, how does that fit with the suggestion made by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) that the public could find people to sponsor on social media? Is that really the safest way to go about that, if security is the main concern? It is telling that Germany, France and Spain, which no doubt share concerns about security within their borders, have not used that same rationale. I am afraid to say that it looks like the Government are searching for reasons for the highly limited and restrictive approach they have taken throughout the crisis. The Minister may give a response that explains and clarifies that for Members, but the public are struggling to understand.

Even the distinctly ungenerous design of those two schemes have been surpassed by the chaos and the confusion over how desperate Ukrainians are supposed to even access them, which has seen Ministers at times openly contradicting one another. The list of requirements that Ukrainians have faced is dizzying. First, they must create an online account on the Home Office website, and fill in a detailed application form in English. They must then upload proof that their family member has residence in the UK; they must prove that they were living in the UK prior to 1 January 2022. Evidence must then be provided of the link to the family member in the UK, and if they do not have that, they must provide an explanation why. If that documentation then needs to be translated from Ukrainian or Russian into English, the applicant is responsible for ensuring that happens. Before tomorrow's changes, even those with full documentation had to book and attend appointments to give biometrics, including fingerprints, in person at UK visa application centres. Those without passports will still have to. As Ukraine's ambassador told the Home Affairs Committee last week, most people do not have their passports with them—their homes were burned.

Many people who braved the journey to Calais found only a handful of Home Office officials, handing out crisps and chocolate bars before telling them that no visas would be issued there. Ukrainians were advised to call a UK number, visit a website or travel elsewhere—not the easiest thing to do when they have just arrived from a war zone. Disturbing news reports show children bursting into tears after hours of queuing outside UK visa application centres in sub-zero temperatures.

Many constituents who have contacted me have come to their own view on this: that the bureaucratic complexity and apparent indifference to the suffering of Ukrainian refugees is entirely consistent with the Government's overarching migration and asylum policy, under which anyone hoping to enter the UK is met with a system that is grudging, inefficient and designed to keep them out no matter what the costs on the other side of the ledger. One constituent contacted me seeking support to bring his family to the UK. After many anxious hours and days, his family managed to progress the case. He sent me a message saying,

"I am ashamed at the way this current government is treating Ukrainian refugees",

and that while they eventually managed to obtain support, “there will be many who don’t have the ability to receive that help”.

Another constituent added,

“I weep when I see elderly people queuing in sub-zero temperatures outside well-heated offices that they have had to travel extra distance to after their exhausting flight from bombs and war.”

A further constituent stated,

“I am hugely disappointed by our Government’s slowness to provide a safe haven for Ukrainian people.”

Others have described the response as “woeful”, “inhuman” and “overly bureaucratic”.

Too many times over the last few years, such as with Syria and Afghanistan, our Government have been too slow and too bureaucratic to respond in times of crisis. Ukrainians are just the latest victims. The Home Office must urgently co-ordinate the systems and staff necessary to run a humane and efficient admissions process—one that recognises that people fleeing a war zone are not necessarily going to have all their papers in order.

Before I conclude, I want to ask the Minister some specific questions. First, there is no doubt that the scale of the crisis is immense, with over 2.8 million already fleeing Ukraine and millions more to come. It is a disaster on a scale our continent has not seen since the mid-20th century. It is a huge challenge for the UK and its allies to deal with. It was also predictable. The Government have had intelligence that a Russian invasion of Ukraine was likely for some time. Presumably, Ministers also received advice on the unimaginable scale of the refugee crisis and the options available to help manage it, yet, clearly a decision was taken to help only a very small number of Ukrainians reach the UK. When the Minister responds, can he explain how and why the Government arrived at this decision and why, when we have known that this may happen for some time, the humanitarian sponsorship route has only been revealed today?

Secondly, the economic fallout of this war will not be confined to Russia and Ukraine. In the UK, we already know that the sanctions imposed on Russian oil exports will heighten pre-existing pressures on household finances. Humanitarian agencies have warned that the devastating effects will be felt especially by the world’s poorest. In Lebanon, for example, a reliance on imports from Ukraine and Russia has led to acute shortages in wheat, grain and cooking oil and skyrocketing food and fuel prices. Can the Minister confirm that, from now on, the Government will respond with the long-term vision that is required and that we will provide the support, while ensuring that it does not take away from the budgets we have already committed to help the humanitarian consequences of this crisis elsewhere?

There are Ukrainians already in the UK, including students sponsored by universities who are coming to the end of their course and whose leave to remain will come to an end soon. Understandably, many of them will not be able to return to Ukraine. Instead of granting concessions, as it has done with HGV drivers, pork butchers and seasonal workers, the Home Office appears to have the policy of making every single individual contact the Home Office separately. There is a risk that the Home Office will force them to make human rights or asylum applications, which will add a further administrative burden to the system.

My constituency office is still working to support people who arrived from conflict zones four or five years ago. Some were unaccompanied children, and they are still waiting for decisions on their cases. It makes no sense to force Ukrainians legally present in the UK to compete with Syrians and Afghans for the attention of over-stretched Home Office officials. Will the Government look at a way to automate this process for Ukrainians already in the UK?

As I understand it, same-sex marriage is not recognised in Ukraine. LGBT people might find it harder to prove their relationships to sponsors and their families. What are the Government doing to ensure that LGBT relatives and partners can get out of Ukraine safely without facing discriminatory barriers? On the sponsorship route, how many refugees do the Government anticipate will come via this route, given that it is likely to be restricted to people who are already known to people in the UK? Can the Minister confirm which families will have access to universal credit once the sponsorship ends? How will we deal with the obvious safeguarding concerns around the placing of vulnerable people—mostly women and children?

The Home Affairs Committee heard evidence that some staff working at TLScontact are taking what would be seen as an opportunistic approach to people attending visa application centres, recommending to vulnerable groups that they pay extra money to get an early appointment. Are the Government aware of this commercial, predatory approach that is being taken to a humanitarian disaster, and are they taking steps to deal with it? In November, the Home Secretary was warned by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration that customers at visa application centres often felt “forced to pay” due to a lack of free appointments and difficulties uploading documents. What action has been taken in response to that warning? Can the Minister also confirm that the Home Office is not offering its own paid services to expedite applications?

The Prime Minister has said that,

“The UK is way out in front in our willingness to help.”

Willingness is one thing—I would hate to think what unwillingness might look like, when our Home Secretary has gone so far as to imply that the Irish Government’s welcoming policy has put UK security at risk.

The petition calls on the Government to join the EU in waiving visa requirements for Ukrainian passport holders arriving in the UK. Everything we have seen so far suggests that the Government intend to respond by merely tweaking existing managed migration routes. However, the crisis will not go away any time soon. It will only get worse as President Putin targets more Ukrainian cities in his destructive war on civilians. Future waves of refugees are likely to be even more vulnerable, as those with fewer resources and connections will be the last to escape.

The petition’s creator, Phillip Jolliffe, contacted me in advance of this debate and said,

“I have been lucky to work with several Ukrainian engineers over the years. I have been in contact with some, and I fear the safety of others. I have heard back from one friend, he has already volunteered and deployed with his unit. It is hard for me to fathom the idea of men I worked with having to pick up arms and wave goodbye to their children. Last I heard, his wife and child remained in Kyiv. I feel great shame and frustration that they cannot come to the UK and receive shelter and aid—it is here waiting for them.”

[Catherine McKinnell]

Across Europe, the response to the Ukrainian invasion—even in some countries that have generally been quite hostile to refugees—has served only to highlight the UK's shameful policy. It is time for the Government to change course. If 27 European countries can do their bit, so should we.

The public response to this crisis—including this petition, which surpassed the 100,000-signature threshold for debate in such a short space of time—has shown that the British public have big hearts and open arms. They clearly do not want us to offer half-hearted, begrudging support, with painfully difficult conditions attached, to fleeing Ukrainians. The Government do not have to allow unlimited numbers of people to stay in the UK indefinitely, but they must treat this situation as what it is: a humanitarian crisis.

This country has offered sanctuary to those fleeing war on the European continent in generations past. Ukrainians who came here after the second world war have become an integral part of many local communities up and down the country, and many are doing what they can to help their fellow Ukrainians in this moment of unprecedented crisis. As we look to be entering a new era in world politics, exemplified by President Zelensky's historic address to this House, it is time for us to genuinely and open-heartedly offer that sanctuary again.

4.53 pm

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for opening the debate on this petition.

The response of the British people has been overwhelming. They have shown extraordinary generosity, which stands in stark contrast to the response of this Government. I can genuinely say that this is a time that I feel incredibly proud of our country, but I feel ashamed of this Government, whose response has been shambolic and shameful. I wish to outline some examples of my constituents and their families to highlight how the absurd and crushing misery of Home Office bureaucracy has impacted people fleeing Ukraine.

One of my constituents has a 74-year-old mother who is frail and in poor health. She has escaped Russian invasion for the second time. She applied for a UK visa on 5 March, when she was in Kraków; she was told to travel to Rzeszów to get her biometrics. On 7 March, this 74-year-old woman queued for seven hours in the freezing cold just to get to her appointment. She was then told that she would receive confirmation within 72 hours, but she was also told that she had to travel back to Warsaw, where she would get her passport stamped so that she could make her way, with her daughter, to the UK. It is now one week on and her daughter—my constituent—is stuck in a hotel while they wait for the email.

I raised this matter with the urgent inquiries line at the Home Office but I have had no reply. This morning, my caseworker went to talk to people at the caseworker desk in Portcullis House and they said, "Oh yes, it's been approved—it was approved last Thursday—but we haven't told her yet." We then rang my constituent and her mother. They had gone to the embassy anyway,

on the off-chance. They had just been told, within the same 10 minutes, that the application had been approved, but the embassy was not sure if it could print the sticker today—and if it could not, they would have to come back tomorrow. This woman is traumatised, she is exhausted, and her daughter is spending money on food, hotels and flights that they simply cannot afford.

To summarise, a 70-year-old woman applying to come to the UK has been asked to travel 855 miles over nine days, and she is waiting for a sticker to be printed. Will the Minister apologise to her and to everybody else like her who has been put through such an awful ordeal?

Another constituent of mine and his family have been lucky, because they have now gone through the process and are in a position where they can book their flights to come here. But they wrote to me last night and asked if I could share with the Minister details of the stark contrast between the support they had received in Poland and the bureaucratic nightmare of being processed by the UK authorities. They told me that in Poland, checks at the border take "a matter of minutes", and that they were

"made to feel welcomed and...safe".

They said that the UK's process had been a nightmare.

The family fled Kyiv for Poland on 5 March. On 9 March, they finally managed to get their biometrics done in Warsaw, after completing forms that took hours to fill in on a mobile phone. Two days later, on 11 March, they received an email saying that the decisions were ready, but the Home Office would not tell them what the decisions actually were, so, the next day, they had to go back to the visa application centre to have their passports stamped. However, while the mother-in-law's visa was stamped, her partner's was not. They were told, "There just isn't enough time today to get it printed. Come back tomorrow."

Finally, all the paperwork is in place and the family have managed to book flights to come back tomorrow, but it has taken them 10 days. My constituent's sister wrote to me:

"They were already exhausted and traumatised when they arrived in Warsaw. British bureaucracy added to their misery. Their very modest savings have been seriously depleted by the eight-day hotel stay. At least my family had my brother, a British citizen, to help them navigate the red tape. It must be doubly difficult for those who don't have that advantage and who don't speak good English. The Government must do much, much more, and quickly turn this convoluted system into something that is user-friendly for Ukrainians."

On top of those cases, I have other constituents who are affected, and many of them have said that they are confused. They are confused about whether they now need to attend appointments that they have secured in the coming weeks, given the rule changes that apparently are coming into place tomorrow, such that biometrics can be completed in the UK. They have asked the visa application centres whether they still have to attend those appointments, but they have not had an answer. I have asked the Home Office's MP hotline and I have not had an answer. And my caseworker went to the casework hub at 3.40 pm—just over an hour ago—and it still did not have an answer. Can the Minister give us an answer to that question today?

It is abundantly clear from these examples that it is time to waive the visa requirement before people come here. It is cruel to impose these layers of bureaucracy on traumatised refugees who are trying to escape war and

join their families. Like so many other Members, I have dozens of constituents who are willing to offer spare rooms—and, in lucky cases, spare homes—to Ukrainian families. I have one constituent who is the owner of a hotel chain. He says that he can offer work and accommodation to Ukrainian refugees immediately, but he cannot get hold of any information on how to do it. Refugee Action has indicated that there are refugee and asylum charities with a wealth of experience that say they have not been consulted by the Home Secretary. Why not?

Mr Dowd, thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak this afternoon. From the examples of my constituents and those of many other Members, it is abundantly clear that Home Office bureaucracy is causing untold misery, on top of the existing misery of those who are fleeing war. Please, can the Home Office just sort this out?

5 pm

**Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I want to use this opportunity to put on the record the experiences of my constituents in Lewisham East, and to press the Government to act and to listen.

There are 530 Ukrainians living in Lewisham, and many have family and friends in Ukraine. They have told me what they are going through and how the Ukraine family scheme is full of bureaucratic obstacles. There are no visa application centres currently operating in Ukraine, and those operating in other European countries are overwhelmed with the workload, as we have heard. My constituent's mother-in-law is in the middle of a two-week wait for the next available appointment at the nearest visa application centre in Poland. The situation at other visa application centres throughout Europe is no better, with reports of waiting times of up to two to three weeks. It is ridiculous, very painful and very traumatising for Ukrainian people.

Another constituent told me that their friend's daughter, who began her application 10 days ago, is still trapped in Poland due to the Home Office's bureaucratic red tape and delays to processing her visa. That is simply not good enough. Recent Government announcements on biometric data collection are welcome, but the Home Office should have done that weeks ago. Furthermore, the changes still will not tackle all the long delays that families are facing, and they will not include many of the people fleeing the invasion.

The Government often quote Scripture, so I will too. Matthew 25:35-40 says:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in”.

Those words strike me, because that is what the Home Office needs to be doing for Ukrainian refugees. Instead, it is making it too hard for refugees to come to our country. The Home Office is making it difficult for refugees to receive food, drink and warmth. I hope this is the result of incompetence rather than a desire to create a hostile environment for refugees, although I fear it may be both. I will end by asking the Home Office to commit to introducing emergency protection visas for those fleeing Ukraine who want to reach the UK.

5.3 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd, and to address the petition—although it is really quite disgraceful that, several weeks on from the start of the war, we should find ourselves still in a position whereby the United Kingdom Government, for reasons that escape me, are unable to emulate the generosity of our European Union neighbours.

Hundreds of my constituents in Edinburgh South West have signed the petition, and rarely have I received as many emails on a topic as I have on the issue of what the UK Government should be doing to help Ukrainians refugees. Like other hon. Members, many of my constituents have made practical suggestions. The sponsorship scheme update was announced in the main Chamber this afternoon—I managed to be there for the statement—but it seems to me that it does nothing to address the urgency of the situation.

What my constituents know but the UK Government do not seem to realise is that we have a moral obligation to help these people. We also have legal obligations under the refugee convention, but the Government are in the midst of passing a Bill that breaches those obligations. Surely, this huge crisis on our doorstep in Europe—the biggest crisis in Europe since the second world war—should be a signal that the UK Government need to revisit their policy on refugees and asylum seekers.

Last week, when I spoke in the main Chamber in the International Women's Day debate, I emphasised the plight of women in Ukraine and their children. Of course, women are particularly vulnerable in wartime because of the risk of sex-based violence. Sadly, we know that at least some of the Russian forces on the ground are committing war crimes in Ukraine as we speak. The imperative to send a signal that there is a safe route for these women and their children to come to the United Kingdom is very strong. We know from the United Nations that the majority of the now millions of refugees fleeing the country are women and children. Put bluntly, what these people need to know now is that they can have visa-free access to the United Kingdom with their children. We must match the European Union on that—no ifs, no buts. We really just need to get on with it.

The very helpful House of Commons Library briefing for this debate tells us that it would be perfectly possible, if Ukrainians had the same visa-free access as they have elsewhere in Europe, for security and biometric checks to be undertaken after they had got here. As I have said already, our European allies can afford visa-free refuge safely and securely, so why can the Home Office not?

On TV, we have seen queues of upset and exhausted people—including old people and small children, as hon. Members have said—waiting in freezing conditions outside British visa application centres. I have heard from Scots trying to assist people that desperate families have been thrown out of visa centres after waiting for hours, so that staff could close for lunch. If it was not so tragic, it would be almost comic. It is ludicrous. The Home Office needs to get its act together. This is not rocket science; other countries—considerably less wealthy countries than the United Kingdom's Union of nations—are managing to do a better job than us. The Government really need to up their game.

[Joanna Cherry]

As other hon. Members have said, the other European countries have been able to offer visa-free access by adopting a decision to implement the European Union's temporary protection directive with immediate effect. That directive establishes minimum EU-wide standards of protection for people displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, including rights of access to suitable accommodation, medical care, social welfare payments, and employment. The temporary protection can be granted for one year, up to a maximum of three years. As we know, the directive allows member states to provide more generous protection if they want to. If we had remained in the European Union, as my country voted to do, we would have been part of that scheme. However, there is no reason why we cannot emulate it.

The Immigration Law Practitioners' Association has said that lifting the visa requirement would be

"the single most effective step that the government can and should take to ensure the efficient evacuation and resettlement of refugees fleeing the invasion of Ukraine."

ILPA has also emphasised that removing the visa requirement would not prevent security checks from being made. It stated:

"Biometric enrolment can occur at the border as it happens for non-visa nationals arriving as visitors. Border checks can identify persons of legitimate concern without forcing ordinary civilians to take risks under gunfire to lodge visa applications."

I know that the current Government might find it hard to admit that the European Union has got things right and they have got them wrong, but it might help them to listen to the advice of Lord Peter Ricketts, our former National Security Adviser. Last week, in a debate in the other place, he said that

"the wholly inadequate arrangements that have been made"

by the UK Government "in and around Calais" for receiving Ukrainian refugees are actually threatening our safety in the United Kingdom, rather than assisting it, because they are undermining the

"close co-operation we need with our"

EU

"neighbours to keep our own citizens safe".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 March 2022; Vol. 819, c. 1663.]

Lord Ricketts elaborated on those thoughts in an interview with Mark D'Arcy for the Friday night broadcast of BBC Radio 4's "Today in Parliament". Drawing on his expertise, he said:

"Security is always a matter of risk management—there is never zero risk".

However, because the refugees are largely women and children, they do not, in his opinion, pose a security risk. That is the opinion of a highly respected former national security adviser, who has widely reported on these matters in the past. He went on to say that the United Kingdom Government need to take a

"a much more humane and open approach...and should not be requiring visas"

and security checks until people are here.

I ask the Minister why, if Lord Peter Ricketts thinks that we can do that safely, the European Union can do it safely and our near neighbours the Republic of Ireland can do it safely, the United Kingdom cannot get its act together and do away with visas to get these refugees into the country safely and quickly? I suggest that it is a matter of political will, and of a degree of hubris on the Government's part, because they would have to abandon

the political dogma of the Nationality and Borders Bill on refugees and asylum seekers. It is not just this crisis that has shown the deep-seated flaws in the Nationality and Borders Bill. Following the fiasco in Afghanistan last summer, many of the people who were supposedly warmly welcomed to our country are still in substandard hotels. Crises across the world show that the British Government's approach on these matters is completely wrong.

I am not a big fan of the other place, and that is not because I do not think it is good to have a revising Chamber—it is important, and I very much hope that, when Scotland becomes an independent country, we will have a revising Chamber as part of the checks and balances on Executive power—but the problem with the one here is that it is not elected. Having said that, it has some pretty sharp operators and people who know their stuff, including Lord Peter Ricketts, and they have realised that big changes are needed to the Nationality and Borders Bill. Over the last fortnight, in a string of defeats for the Government, the Lords removed some of the most egregious parts of the Bill, including the criminalisation of asylum seekers and the plans for offshore processing. It is particularly shocking that if the UK Government got their way, any Ukrainians who, having made it to our border with France and across the channel, tried to claim asylum here would be criminalised. How can that be right?

It is disappointing that no Tory Back Benchers are here to speak in this petitions debate. I am sure that they, like us, have constituents who are upset and concerned about the situation. This is not a party political matter but a concern shared across the nations of these islands and across political parties. Part of the reason for that is that in the past a moral panic has been created about the number of asylum seekers crossing the channel to come to the United Kingdom. I suggest to Tory Back Benchers that they, as well as their Government, have a responsibility to quell that moral panic by basing their policy making on evidence rather than scaremongering.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights, of which I am deputy Chair, heard evidence about people crossing the channel last year. Greece, Italy and Spain have all received many more arrivals in recent years than the United Kingdom. The United Nations reports, for example, that in 2020 Italy received around 34,000 sea arrivals, Spain around 40,000 and Greece 10,000, compared with the United Kingdom's 8,500. Putting the law to one side, whether we are Christian—as I am—Muslim, Jewish, Sikh or another faith, this is a moral problem.

We are one of the richest countries in western Europe, and the Government keep telling us how fast our economy is growing, although there is a bit of a question mark over the figures they pray in aid of that. If we are one of the richest countries in western Europe and have a fast-growing economy, why can we not afford to help more of these people?

This is the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the second world war. It should challenge all of our thinking about our policy towards our fellow men and women, particularly people right on our doorsteps in continental Europe. There has never been a better time for the Government to revisit their policy toward refugees and asylum seekers. Let us start with visa-free access for Ukrainian refugees. Then let us follow up with some humble pie by accepting the Lords amendments to the

Nationality and Borders Bill. That is what my constituents and millions of people across the nations of the United Kingdom want.

The European Union can do it. One of our most senior former security advisers says we can do it without compromising national security. Indeed, he says that to continue to operate in such a shambolic fashion will actually compromise our national security, because it will undermine the chances of good co-operation with our European neighbours. Minister, let us hear this afternoon why we cannot do it when the EU can, why we cannot do it when the Republic of Ireland can, and what is wrong with Lord Ricketts's analysis.

5.16 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Mr Dowd. I thank every single petitioner for using their power to act on this matter, and I thank people across our nation who have stood with refugees over these last few days, as millions of people have crossed borders and millions more have been internally displaced—no doubt soon to cross themselves into an unknown future.

Until 17 days after this most brutal of conflicts commenced, the UK showed no recognition of this reality nor of its responsibility, legal or moral, to give proper sanctuary. The powerful testimony of families welcoming complete strangers from across Europe to form new families has shamed this Government. These families asked for no checks, and they asked no questions. They have just shown compassion.

The hostile dogma of the Home Office says that women, children and old people fleeing war and terror must first collect a visa, as if going on holiday, or should opt to pick vegetables from our fields to enter the UK. What a disgrace. They face more risk themselves than they pose any risk to anyone else. While the U-turn was welcome on Thursday, the impact will be minimal, as family members will stick together until all have the required the documentation that the UK, unlike other countries, demands.

As with all passengers, and as goes for any of us, border security checks will screen for immediate safety. Once people arrive in the UK, with their whole lives packed into a single bag, families should then receive any emergency protection visa or documentation and the warmth of welcomes at our ports, airports or Eurostar. There is no need to process visas in centres across Europe. That can happen on arrival here and with no added so-called risk. A friend of a constituent sought to get a visa. They went and made inquiries and were told they should go to a place called Kyiv. For the Minister's information, Kyiv is in the middle of a war zone. That shows the shambolic mess operating in the Home Office.

At the same time, support should be given to people for all of their travel. They should get free travel through Europe and across the UK as they arrive and are placed with families. The Home Secretary seems to have confused and conflated security with sanctuary, and she has displayed her prejudice. Other nations have put our Government to shame. I was glad to see some movement over the weekend. To home a refugee and their family would be a privilege. While safeguarding is important, bureaucratic hoops must be removed, because it is what people across my constituency want and it is what I want.

We heard today about the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but it raises more questions than it answers. What happens after six months? What happens if a placement breaks down? Who will then safeguard the interests of that family? What about school places? What about access to our NHS? What about access to mental health services? They are already under immense pressure and yet specialist trauma services will be required. How are families matched? It seems that refugees somehow have to advertise that they are in need of a home and somehow families offering their homes have to find that match. Processes need to be in place and systems need to be adopted. I believe that today's statement only asked questions, but we desperately need answers, and we need those answers now.

The same should be true for the thousands of Afghan refugees who have been imprisoned in bridging hotels for the last seven months. They must not be forgotten, as they too have fled terror, and as they are locked away, their mental health is deteriorating and they are feeling abandoned by this Government. We need Homes for Afghans, too, and homes for all who flee. We must be generous as a country, as our constituents are demanding. This Government have too often been on the wrong side of history and the wrong side of humanity. Let not perfection be the enemy of good. If homes are checked and safeguarding is agreed, let people come to our constituencies and the homes of our constituents, and to where there is spare capacity in other buildings. I keep raising the issue of the 7,230 empty homes leased by Annington Homes to the Ministry of Defence; let them be occupied. In York, let the empty care homes be converted and empty hospitals be transition points. All must play their part. No more excuses. I trust that from this point, all our actions will restore our nation's reputation as a place of sanctuary for all.

5.22 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for opening the debate, and the almost 200,000 members of the public who have signed e-petition 609530.

I have seen an incredible response to the crisis in Ukraine from my constituents. The compassion and generosity being shown are commendable, but not surprising. The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary to those fleeing conflict or persecution. The disappointment arising from the Government's reluctance to open their arms wide to those fleeing Ukraine is being vocalised across the UK. I hope that the Government will now begin moving at pace to reflect in policy making the generosity of their citizens.

The Government's initial response to the refugee crisis was underwhelming. Although they may have expanded that initial commitment somewhat, it is not enough, and the details, including the numbers of refugees who will be eligible for the various routes, remain unclear. This is not the first refugee crisis that this Government have needed to grapple with, and unfortunately it will not be the last. The lessons are not being learned and are not informing policy making, because Ministers have been unwilling to pull back from decisions unpopular with the British public. The Government need to be able to react swiftly and proportionately. Our international allies have shown their ability to do just that, so there is no excuse for us not doing the same.

[Margaret Ferrier]

Reacting rather than proactively planning for these events is not sustainable. Creating bespoke visa processes weeks after a refugee crisis is already under way is inadequate. The Government must immediately provide surge resources to ensure that their officials can deal with this crisis effectively and without undue stress or strain on staff. The visa centre in Brussels is struggling to cope with the levels of demand. The Government will be allowing Ukrainians to make their applications online, to address the problem. Applications will still need to be processed and decisions made—just behind the scenes.

Although the Housing Secretary's statement today is welcome, it falls just short of being as helpful as it could be. People are desperate to help in any way they can, but for that to be meaningful, they need help to organise and mobilise. The Minister knows that I have a constituent who has offered one of his properties to house a family fleeing Ukraine. Today's statement gives him a little more information, but he is expected to identify refugees himself, if my understanding is correct. If Ukrainians must still go through the visa process, why can the Government not provide that support to match applicants with sponsors? They should be directing resource to the places where it is needed to facilitate that support. Leaving it to the public means only that it will take longer for Ukrainians to access support that already exists out there.

Throughout the crisis—from the early threat of Russian invasion right up until this very moment—the love that the Ukrainian people have for their country has been apparent. They do not want to leave their homes, their friends and their families. We need only look at how many civilians have decided to join the conflict and fight for their homes and for the future of their country, Ukraine. The vast majority are looking for a temporary sanctuary until it is safe to go home. We should do all we can to provide it.

5.26 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for introducing the debate, as well as all those who signed the petition.

The situation in Ukraine is heartbreaking. Scenes of devastation and loss have been beamed on to our screens every hour of every day since the launch of President Putin's illegal and illogical invasion. Many of us suffer just watching it, let alone understanding what must really be happening to the people who face attacks day in, day out.

I was pleased to join a number of my constituents outside Hornsey Church tower for a simple vigil with the Songworks choir and the Crouch End Festival Chorus, and to hear some children read their poems and share their thoughts about the importance of peace, of pushing for a peaceful resolution, and of President Putin waking up and stopping what he is doing. At the end of the event, I was delighted to meet Marta, the mother of a constituent, who came to the UK on Saturday. I am sure that the Minister is relieved to hear that there is at least one happy story in this difficult debate. I will briefly relay what that family went through.

Marta was one of the lucky ones. She managed to flee to Romania after the Russian invasion, but when she tried to reach the UK to be reunited with her daughter

and grandchildren, she entered a Home Office bureaucratic nightmare that went on for 10 days. There was no information on how to apply on the Government's website, and a different website crashed continuously. At one point, the demand for appointments was so high that people were told there were no appointments until May.

Ten days of sleepless nights and incredible stress followed for the family, all to bring over the wonderful Marta, who, when I met her last night, was in floods of tears, having seen the solidarity of local people who met her and heard what she had been through. It is ludicrous that families are going through that experience at such a difficult time. Marta's daughter told me:

"Currently, the attitude from the Home Office appears to be that this is an immigration process. It is not. These people are refugees fleeing war. That even the Ukrainians with family here are being denied a swift passage to come shames our country."

I want to put on record the first-rate work of my parliamentary staff, who rushed down to Portcullis House to meet the Home Office staff who were there last week—that casework ended up in a result. I wonder what the Minister thinks about all the other people who are as desperate as Marta but who, for one reason or another, do not have a contact here or the help of a hard-working constituency team in an MP's office, and who have no way of telling us what a terrible situation they are in.

In response to the brutal military campaign, Ukrainians have fled their homes and their country for safety elsewhere, in a movement of people not seen in Europe since the dark days of 1945. So many women and children have fled—as always, they are the worst affected by war. In response to the grave humanitarian challenge, many Europeans have opened their borders to provide much-needed safe refuge to those in need. Poland is hosting the bulk of those who are fleeing the devastation, but countries as far afield as Ireland are opening their doors in Ukraine's time of need. Ireland is a country of a little over 5 million people, but it has offered to take 100,000 refugees. We have a greater population and a larger economy. If we had a more efficient Government, we would have more money to manage the needs of all and to encourage people to share. I welcome what was announced in the Chamber in the last hour. We can all get behind that offer and encourage our constituents who have a spare room and who can step up to meet the extraordinary challenge to show that generosity of spirit.

Labour colleagues and I have applauded many decisions, such as the one announced today, but the failings of the Home Office need to be reviewed. I encourage the Minister, once the immediate crisis is over, to learn from the situation and from what happened with Afghanistan, which was an embarrassment, and not just for the Foreign Office. I know that the shadow Minister for Immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), is well placed to help with any review in the future because he led on the Afghanistan work from a Foreign Office point of view and so can comment on both schemes and how they are getting on. I welcome the appointment of a refugee champion, Lord Harrington. It would be useful to have a joint meeting shortly to thrash out the issues we deeply care about as MPs and to help the Home Office and Foreign Office to deal with such crises in a much more effective way.

Russia's military were massing on Ukraine's borders many months before the invasion. The Ministry of Defence and intelligence from the US were giving cast-iron warnings of an imminent invasion for much of the first part of 2022. The idea that this just happened 10 days ago is ridiculous. The Minister has first-hand briefings from the security services and will know that these events have been going on since well before Christmas. We needed to think through our actions. We know that the President of Russia lies and does so frequently, so we should have recognised that as a pattern from before, designed some risk assessments and put staff in place to deal with it.

This weekend, there has been what is called a surge of Home Office staff and I feel that once again we are lurching from crisis to crisis, which is typical of a Government who have no strategy. When a crisis comes, they fall down again, whereas if they had a strategy and could learn from their mistakes, we would not be here yet again. We all know that any invasion or military action inherently causes refugee flow, but yet again we are behind the curve and woefully out of step with both our European allies and the rest of Whitehall. That is a pattern of behaviour that we must tackle so that the next time there is such an event we can learn from the mistakes.

Every day I receive dozens, if not hundreds, of emails from my constituents in Hornsey and Wood Green who are keen to open their homes to those in need, willing to offer employment to Ukrainians and taken aback by the poor approach to date. We cannot continue to fail those in need and I urge the Minister to listen to the many calls today and to get a grip. The Ukrainian people have been added to the many Afghans seeking support. We owe it to those people in desperate need to live up to our moral responsibilities. Minister, fix the mess. This will not be the final refugee crisis and we simply cannot accept this shambolic reaction as the norm each and every time.

5.33 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd, and I thank everyone who has spoken so movingly.

I want to reiterate a point I have made in the Chamber: I have a UK national constituent with a Ukrainian wife with two daughters. They started applying to come here on 12 February in Dnipro. Since then, my constituent's wife and her daughters have had to cross Ukraine and now they are all in Warsaw. I will not go into any more detail than that.

I want to quote the latest email I have. I thank the staff in the hub in Portcullis House and I thank the Minister, too, because I have been pushing, shouting and screaming—doing everything I can—to get this man's wife and daughters back to Wishaw. The email from the Home Office hub says:

"I have just checked and the families visas were issued yesterday and manifested to Warsaw today. We will be in touch shortly regarding collection, please advise Mr Yardley not to travel to the VAC until we contact him.

As Mr Yardley's family have already made applications and given biometrics they will have to wait for a decision before travel. I appreciate this is frustrating however, as the family have provided biometrics they have been granted 3 years leave outside the rules." It is frustrating, but I am pleased that we can almost see the end of the road.

Should it have taken that long? No, of course not, and my constituent is a UK national. I want to weep when I think of Ukrainians without passports and who do not have a UK national to help them. What are we doing as a country? I do not understand why this is happening. I will rephrase that—I know why it is happening, but it should not be.

As of last week, the Home Office advice for Ukrainian refugees had been updated nine times and the Home Secretary's jumbled comments in recent days have only added to the confusion. It is also really concerning to hear of private firms who are cashing in. Can we please get that stopped, Minister? That is obscene and I think that the Minister himself would agree.

It is really heartbreaking that, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said, this country is a signatory to the UN convention on refugees, and the UK has international obligations to recognise refugees who are in the UK and to offer them the protection they need. Get on with it—this is ridiculous.

I could not be in the main Chamber today, but I have seen the update on the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme statement from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations. It is six pages with what looks like triple-spacing and very large print—I used to teach word processing—but I cannot find anything in here that I can give to my constituents that is of any use. This is happening continually.

**Catherine West:** Does the hon. Member agree that this is a classic case of this Government's government by press release, rather than having a strategy, a plan or a discussion with local government about how to implement things—that is, doing things properly?

**Marion Fellows:** I could not agree more. I also agree that we are dealing with refugees here and not immigrants. This Government need to get a grip.

One of the new schemes states that Ukrainian refugees will be able to apply online—hooray. Someone is in a war zone and is fleeing for their life. Do they have internet access? Perhaps, but even if they do, my constituent's application was lost three times in the TLScontact system. They had to reapply three times and they had to fly from Wishaw to Warsaw and then to somewhere else in the south of Poland to try to help get things done. Three times they had to fill out the forms and they could not even make appointments, because the system had gone down as well.

This is not going to work for people. We need, as the First Minister has said, to

"let people in and do the paperwork afterwards."—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 8 March 2022; c. 11.]

Common humanity demands that. Other countries have done it, so why can we not? I thought that this was supposed to be global Britain and that we were all on the front foot, trying to help. Minister, please take this on board. Waive the visas. That is what has to happen to get these poor refugees—I repeat that they are refugees—into the UK.

5.39 pm

**Mick Whitley** (Birkenhead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank all my constituents who have lent their names to this important petition and the countless others who have contacted me, either to urge me to speak up for Ukrainians fleeing from this devastating conflict or with offers to open their homes to families in need of sanctuary.

The British people have responded to this crisis with characteristic generosity, empathy and hospitality; not so their elected Government. As countries across Europe have thrown open their doors to the millions of Ukrainians forced from their homes, the UK alone has refused to lift visa requirements. Last week, we learned that while Poland has welcomed more than 1 million Ukrainians since the conflict began, the Home Office has approved visas for just 300. Ireland, a country with a population that is a fraction of the size of ours, has already accepted more than 5,000 Ukrainians. The Government are now promising major improvements in the numbers of people being admitted to the UK and the speed with which applications are being processed. Given the recent and unforgivable betrayal of Afghan nationals who risked their lives to support British forces in Afghanistan, that is a promise in which we can place very little confidence, and it is simply not good enough.

Let us be clear: desperate Ukrainians are no more migrants than the thousands of Yemenis, Afghans and Iraqis who this Government have left stranded in Calais. They are refugees and none of them has the luxury of time. As such, I wholeheartedly endorse the petition's objectives. The time has come to waive all visa requirements for people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine and establish safe and legal routes into Britain. History will not judge kindly a Government that fail the Ukrainian people in their time of greatest need, but sadly, I have little confidence in the Home Office to do the right thing. There is surely no politician in recent memory whose career has been defined by such cruelty, indifference to suffering and gross incompetence as this Home Secretary, and I am afraid that the rot runs deep.

When the Minister was challenged on the gross inadequacy of the support available to people fleeing Putin's war on Ukraine, he had the audacity to say that refugees could apply for seasonal worker visas so that they could come to the UK to pick fruit. In any other Government, such an appalling statement would undoubtedly result in a letter of resignation being handed to the Prime Minister, but this Minister could not even bring himself to apologise—shame, shame, shame. I hope that instead of parroting the same tired lines we have heard too often from the Dispatch Box, the Minister takes this opportunity to reflect on what has been said today, recognises how badly his Department has misjudged the mood of the public and mistreated innocent victims, and returns to his colleagues in Government with a loud, unequivocal message that refugees are welcome here.

I hope that the response to this crisis begins with a step change in how we treat all those displaced by war, persecution and climate breakdown. For far too long, the Conservatives have thrown up walls to those in desperate need of a safe place and whipped up hatred in the media for their own political advantage. Even now, when confronted by images of human suffering that none of us ever thought to see again in Europe, the

Home Secretary persists in her efforts to turn Great Britain into fortress Britain, including her shameful attempts to deploy the Royal Navy to stop crossings in the English channel. However, it is not too late for Ministers to recognise the error of their ways. It is not too late for the Government to finally begin to honour their moral obligations and lead the way in humanitarianism, instead of callousness and cruelty, and it is not too late to tear up the Nationality and Borders Bill before it becomes law, which will inflict such immense suffering on those who are in greatest need.

5.43 pm

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for opening the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee in such a strong way. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, because I have received help from the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy project for my work in this area.

I will start by saying a couple of things about the Homes for Ukraine scheme that is being announced in the Chamber at the moment. I have a number of concerns about this scheme. I welcome it and I am glad that the Government have taken the opportunity to recognise the generosity of the people of this country, but I share the concerns of the Refugee Council. Enver Solomon is quoted in *The Guardian* as saying, effectively, that this is a managed migration route that is not a suitable response to a humanitarian crisis. Another comment was that this sounds a bit like fostering without a social worker, so I want to hear from the Minister that adequate support for every family who comes through the scheme will be given to the local authorities and partner organisations that will have to support those people through a critical, traumatic time. It is also right that we should state very clearly that every family with a child should have a safeguarding assessment before they are placed. *[Interruption.]* The Minister nods his head, but that is not commonplace for other Home Office schemes, and it is really important that we recognise that. We need to go back to the fact that this scheme is not as broad as it could be. It will not provide the opportunity for a right to work and access to benefits, and it does not grant an emergency protection visa.

As a city of sanctuary, Sheffield has a proud history of supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and we are keen to do whatever we can. Hundreds of my constituents have signed the petition and many more will be involved in the solidarity efforts in other ways, whether that is through donating money to emergency services, organising collections such as that of Crookes social club or writing to me to express their concerns about the Government's approach. There has been a huge outpouring of support for Ukrainians in my city.

The other great thing about my city is our universities, which are offering support to their students and staff alike, but more needs to be done to allow family reunion for those individuals. It is not right that a nurse in the UK cannot bring over their family if they are on the wrong type of visa, and more needs to be done on that. There is also more that universities could do to help to change the lives of thousands of young people in Ukraine who have had their university teaching cut short, so I

hope the Minister is talking to the Minister for Higher and Further Education about potential avenues of support for students in Ukraine.

Last week, the Home Secretary announced her plans to allow Ukrainians with passports to apply for visas online. Of course, I welcome any steps to make it easier for people to come here, but the UK response remains inadequate compared with that of our European partners. I have several concerns about the family scheme, many of which have been raised by hon. Members. I particularly want to highlight the fact that the new online application will be accessible only to those with the right type of passport, yet some of the most vulnerable people are least likely to own one. How can we expect people who have never travelled outside Ukraine to complete such applications, especially as they are in English? My heart goes out to those families. There have been 4,000 births in bomb shelters. Caesareans have been done in the dark, for fear of bombing. These are very vulnerable people and we should be making it as easy as possible for people who are going through the worst ordeal to get here.

Ministers have also acknowledged that most Ukrainians do not have a passport, making most potential applicants ineligible to apply online. That is why it is hard to square this with the Government's claim that the scheme will free up appointments in visa centres for the most vulnerable people and the most complex cases. I asked last week what assessment has been done to understand who will benefit from the online move. As the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) mentioned, we do not even know whether people should keep their appointments or free up those appointments, and it is unclear from those who are providing information what people should do.

Much more must be done to remove barriers that prevent people from getting here safely, and we should think about the long term, too. We cannot forget the cruel Nationality and Borders Bill, which will see the UK abandon its obligations not only to Ukrainians, but to all refugees. The latest polling by British Future shows that three in four people agree with the principle that those fleeing war and persecution should be able to take refuge in other countries, including the UK. That clearly shows that the Government are misjudging the public's desire to help and the public mood. It is time that Ministers caught up with the public mood and stretched every sinew to help those fleeing the violence in Ukraine and provide the support that they and all refugees urgently need.

5.49 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for introducing the debate. She always does these things with the detail and information that helps to set the scene so well. It is probably fairly easy to set the scene, because our minds are full of it each day as we watch TV in the morning and at night. Each and every one of us is eternally frustrated by where we are.

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) made a straightforward request and I absolutely agree with her. When I see the suffering, pain, chaos and need, I say to myself, "Get them here." Let us get them here and process them. I say that with great respect to

the Minister. I am not being critical—I know that he wants to help—but I feel so frustrated with a system that seems to be bogged down.

There are 185,000 people who signed the petition; there are other petitions as well. The large volume of emails urging our Government to take action is reflected in the number of letters in my mailbag, and everyone else's mailbag here. The hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) gave examples—nothing illustrates this better than examples. We were not in the main Chamber to hear about the homes for Ukrainians scheme because we were here, but the Minister has informed us of what happened. I am thankful that the Home Office has decided to heed the calls for an easier form of visa, and to allow Ukrainians to provide biometrics details when they get here. I think that is what the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw wants—and it is certainly what I want. We should widen that scheme; if we can do it for those people, we can do it for more.

The homes for Ukrainians scheme is exactly what we need. It allows individuals, charities, community groups and businesses across this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to offer a room or a home, rent-free, to Ukrainians escaping the war, regardless of whether they have ties to the country. That enables a link to be established with many people who would like to offer a home but do not know how to go about doing it. One lady, who I know very well, rang my office this morning; her generosity is reflected in her daily life. She has a four-bed house in Newtownards on the North Road that is available. She wants to offer that house to a family. That is replicated elsewhere; each and every one of us will have lots of examples. A company has offered two properties in the Westlands in Newtownards; other people have offered rooms to sponsor families. I see lots of good happening right now. I have said to the Minister that if all those people are offering all those things, we should be doing our darnedest to make sure that we get the refugees here and housed as soon as possible.

One of my constituents is married to a Ukrainian. He came to see me on Saturday morning. His stepdaughter has a two-year visitor visa, which means that she can come here because the paperwork is there for her. She told Gary that when she went to Warsaw to get a plane home with the paperwork she had, which was okay, there were dozens of Ukrainians at Warsaw airport; they wanted to get here, but they did not have the paperwork. I see those people as being in a dire situation; they are a priority case and they need to move right away.

The scheme that has been announced will give £350 per week to families who can help, house and assist Ukrainian families. I understand that £10,000 will be offered for each citizen, to ensure that they can get healthcare, jobs and education. The system on the UK mainland is very different from what we have in Northern Ireland, where councils do not have a direct responsibility for education or health. How can councils in Northern Ireland access that money? It is simply and directly accessed on the mainland, but for us in Northern Ireland, the process will be slightly different. I want to make sure that we are all over the process and how to make that happen.

There is a Christian charity in Newtownards called Faith in Action that has been doing great work in Ukraine for 21 years. They have Ukrainians who are ready to come here. I hope that the scheme that the Government have announced—and that the Minister will be all over—

[Jim Shannon]

will enable those people to come right now to the accommodation that Faith in Action has for them. There are some 100 family groups who can bring in individuals and families. Last Friday, I visited Willowbrook Foods in Newtownards, which is offering 100 jobs to people—there are 100 vacancies in the company, by the way.

We can get people into Newtownards; we can get them into accommodation, and get them the jobs that they want. All these things are waiting for this scheme to be put in place. I want to make sure that that happens. The local charity shop, Elim Relief Association, has offered to furnish and supply clothing. People's generosity is incredible. Another of my constituents, John McNaught, is going to run a charity event that he holds every year. He goes around Northern Ireland collecting donations for charity, whether it be physical goods or money. He will be setting off at 10 o'clock next Monday.

Local churches have indicated their willingness to provide lunches and dinners in their halls until refugees are settled or the meals are no longer needed. A multitude of people in Strangford want to help—I have the most wonderful people in my constituency, as do others who have spoken about their constituencies. People are waiting anxiously to help.

I know that this generosity will be replicated throughout Northern Ireland. Indeed, employers who are having difficulty hiring staff—other companies have contacted me, as well—are saying that they can give employment to those able to work, so that they can provide. All the parts of the puzzle are there. We need to connect the dots and put in place the support system that is needed to get these people to safety, until it is safe to return to their homeland and start rebuilding, as they very much hope to be able to.

I am so thankful to the Home Office for allowing us to show our British hospitality and mentality of mucking in. I look forward to understanding the full and finer details of the Ukrainian scheme that the Government have announced, so that people in my community can do what they have been asking to do every day since the invasion: be of help to these poor people.

A charity called Hope for Youth has been on our news back home—I suspect it may be on the main news, as well—for organising 25 container loads of all sorts of necessary goods, such as medicines, clothing and food. Montgomery Transport is paying for lorries to Poland, where lorries from Ukraine will meet them, and take the goods across the border. Groups of individuals are making a magnificent effort. However, we need our Government to simplify the position and the scheme, so that we can move forward.

I am thankful to those who have donated goods and hygiene packs, those who have travelled in containers to provide goods and food to refugees on the border, and those brave souls who take food in their cars to Ukraine, to the thousands of people trapped in towns and cities with no food or medicine. We need to do more to secure routes to get essential food and medicine into all areas of Ukraine. Faith in Action works in south-east Ukraine, in the Donetsk region. It is under incredible attack from Russia at the moment.

Again, I urge the Minister to make the process streamlined and easy, so that those with homes can connect with the families who need them. I am a simple

person; I like things to be nice and simple, so that I can tell people just how simple they are. I ask the Minister to issue step-by-step guidance to each Member of this House; I am sure many other Members are in the same position, and have constituents who want to help but do not know what the process really is. I say that with great respect. We just want to understand better so that we can help.

To conclude, we need to make the path clear and straightforward and, above all, get these women and children to safety. The priority is to get them here, where people are willing to help. The need is now. I prayed for Ukraine in the days leading up to the inevitable invasion by Russia, as did many others present. The hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) referred to the Bible; as the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said, it is so important that we Christians come together. However, lots of other religious groups want to help just as much.

A combination of religious groups and family members are coming together in this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Along with prayers, we need to give practical help. I urge the Minister to make the way simpler at a time when only one thing really matters: the safety of those little lives and the vulnerable people who need our help right now.

5.59 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I apologise for not being here from the start of the debate, Mr Gray. I thank colleagues for their forbearance.

My small London borough is one of the top 20 in the country for the number of Ukrainian-born residents. It is an extremely diverse borough. I will not pretend that we yet have as many Ukrainian refugees as we did Afghan refugees last year; we had several hundred of those. However, it is a significant number and it is growing; one of the reasons why it is growing is that the Home Office is not dealing with the problem. The circumstances are very different, but the one thing those groups have in common is that they are victims of Home Office bureaucracy.

I have families in Ukraine, Poland and France. I have families who have had to split up because some could get further than others. Some have even got to the UK in this grotesque game of snakes and ladders, where the aim is to get to the next stage without going backwards. Some UK nationals have spouses or other relatives who are Ukrainian and are finding that visa centres are closed. I have constituents in the UK whose visas are expiring or have expired. Some have even been so delayed in applying for them that they are worried about being sent back or being sent out of the country. I hope the Minister will reassure us that there is at least no intention to exclude anybody in that way.

I asked my caseworker for an update today on all the cases, and almost every one ends with the line: "We have had no responses from the Home Office to any of our inquiries," or "We have made urgent inquiries to the Home Office but have had no response yet." We are seeing a repetition of what happened with Afghanistan last year, I am afraid. The system simply is not working. Every case turns on its own facts, but I will, with your indulgence, Mr Gray, read an e-mail I have received that

highlights a lot of the problems. It is from a constituent two or three days ago. The circumstances may have changed, but I do not think they have.

“My wife’s daughter-in-law along with her 12-year-old son fled Ukraine and are now in Warsaw Poland. In the last four days they have both been ill, probably due to cold, exhaustion and stress. They are now safely in a flat of friends of friends but she does not speak Polish or English. Because of this we have been trying to get them an appointment at the Visa Application Centre in Warsaw. This has involved us getting texts and images from Poland and Ukraine together with copies of documents we have in the UK. I have filled out their application forms, amassed all the evidence I can, and emailed it to the friends for them to print ahead of an appointment. I am erudite but even I have struggled with some of the English on the websites. So it would be almost impossible to do this in Poland, with no knowledge of English and with no access to a computer.”

He goes on to say,

“Firstly the application form, which is 8 pages long, has to be completed in English. Once the application is submitted on line the GOV.UK website directs you to a commercial partner’s website called TLS. There you can download a 7 page checklist which has to be completed in English. But then the website is not allowing you to download your completed checklist and accompanying documents. On the website you can also book an appointment—only you can’t because the website is not allowing you to do that either. Even when we can secure an appointment some of the evidence is in Ukrainian and so probably will not be accepted by the VAC”—The visa application centre.

“Also because they fled in a hurry they do not have all the documentary evidence required. Once they have attended an appointment there is no indication of how long they may have to wait to hear if their applications are successful.”

He ends by saying this:

“They are our family, we own our own home in Shepherd’s Bush, have room to accommodate them and money to cover all their expenses. But the red tape is not allowing them to come here. I hope you are your colleagues can put pressure on the Home Office to relax the rules immediately.”

I am not going to mention the name of the family, even though I do not think they would mind if I did. The Home Office has all those details. It has had them for some days. We have not had a response, and that is true for almost every case. Yes, every case will have different facts, but I hope the Minister can see that there is a common thread here.

I do not know whether this is wilful or negligent, or whether it is a matter of happenstance and the Government are trying to correct things, but the net effect is that the Government’s actions are the opposite of what they are saying. They are saying “We want to help,” “We will help,” and “We will help significantly—hundreds of thousands of people,” yet every case I see says that that is not true. Every case is stalled at some hurdle, geographical or bureaucratic, because of the way that the Home Office behaves. I ask the Minister: first, can he please reply to my emails? I do not think that that is too much to ask, given the urgency. Secondly, can he please look at this in the round, and at our duty, as a compassionate country that wants to take in refugees? I believe that the Government genuinely want to help, but let us see some proof, shall we?

6.5 pm

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Gray. Today’s debate was opened by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). Her speech demonstrated that she not only is knowledgeable

about what is happening in this crisis, but cares deeply. In fact, I not only heard, but felt, that everyone who has spoken today cares. I would not say that it is not often that we feel that here, but I have never felt it to the extent that I have today. Everybody cares, and we must get something done as soon as possible.

The fault for what is happening to the people in Ukraine lies solely with Vladimir Putin and the Russian regime—not with the Russian people, any of us, any of the Governments that make up the UK or Europe, and certainly not with the people of Ukraine—the blame lies, fairly and squarely, with Vladimir Putin and his regime. It is important to acknowledge that. However, the fact that we did not cause the situation is irrelevant when it comes to offering our support.

Along with my friend and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), I have been heavily involved in scrutinising the Nationality and Borders Bill, so when Russia so cruelly invaded and started bombing Ukraine, and Government Ministers started to remind us of Britain’s benevolent history, I worried a lot. I worried because I know that when the refugee sector named it the anti-refugee Bill, it was no exaggeration but an accurate description. I worried because a Government does not bring forward a Bill like that if they have any desire to protect people fleeing war, violence and terror. The Nationality and Borders Bill is clearly trying to send a signal that benevolent Britain is no more: “Don’t come here, because you will not be welcome.”

Of course, I know that the Bill has not yet been enacted; today, it reaches Report stage in the Lords. While I knew that those Ukrainians fleeing now, before that legislation is enacted, would be subject to the existing laws and rules, I was also very aware of how dreadful the current system is, and acutely aware of the attitude from this Government towards people in desperate need. That is why I was worried.

However, I hoped that the suddenness, the intensity, the urgency and, yes, sadly, the fact that they were European—which apparently makes a difference, although it should not—would kick-start the Government into action. I hoped that they would treat it as an emergency—a humanitarian catastrophe, where we simply had to help first and sort out the details later. That is what other countries have done, including Poland, Germany, France, and Italy. As per usual, they have taken far more people, proportionately, than we have or ever will—of that I am sure.

The Government keep telling whoever will listen that the UK takes in more people than other EU country, but that is not true. Last week at Prime Minister’s Questions, the Prime Minister said that the UK had done more to resettle vulnerable people than any other European country since 2015. However, it is not true.

When looking at the numbers per head of population, which is the only fair way to do it, for every 100,000 people, Sweden takes in 1,619; Germany takes in 1,274; Austria takes in 1,134; and Switzerland takes in 955. Does the Minister want me to tell him—I do not know if he knows this—how many we take in? For every 100,000 people, we take in 121. That makes the UK 17th—sometimes 18th—in the rankings in Europe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East said, that is shocking. No European

[Anne McLaughlin]

country can top the global list, because it is the developing countries—those most in need themselves—that take in the most people. Yes, that is right: those with the least are giving the most. More than 80% of the world's displaced people are living in developing countries.

As we have heard, the Government have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into providing the level of support now being offered to Ukrainians, which still does not match other comparable countries or poorer countries. One day, the Government will offer refuge only to those who have a family connection, and that can only be a very narrow definition of “family”. The next day, they change it so that other family members can come over, but they still need a visa and a passport; then some of them do not need a visa, but others do; and those who do not have a passport still have to apply from Ukraine or wherever they have fled to, but there are no appointments.

**Jim Shannon:** It is always very easy to ask, “Have you got a passport?” but when the bombs are falling and the bullets are flying, there are buildings falling and people are in fear for their lives, the last thing they go for is their passport or their identification: they get out and they move. Many people do not have that passport or identification, not because they do not have it, but because they do not have it with them: it is lying in their wrecked house, back where they came from.

**Anne McLaughlin:** I absolutely agree. Many people have never had a passport because they have never had the money to go anywhere where they would require one, or they cannot afford one. As the hon. Member said, lots of people do not know where their passports are; I do not know where mine is, because I am not planning to go anywhere soon. I am not planning to be in the middle of a warzone and to need to know where my passport is.

When appointments are available, the appointment might be in a fortnight's time. As we heard from the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), a person might get through everything, jump through all the hoops and pass the test, and then be told to travel 350 miles to pick up their paperwork—it is ridiculous. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) told us, they might get to their appointment only to be told to discard their seven-year-old child who is not allowed to come in. I accept that that cannot be Home Office policy, and I saw the Minister frantically messaging to find out what had happened there, but what kind of person would do that? Is that the kind of person we would want in that job? I am absolutely certain that nobody thinks that person is suitable to be in that job. It is chaos: the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) likened it to a game of snakes and ladders, and he is not wrong. If it is confusing for hon. Members and their teams trying to keep up with the advice we can give people, how much more confusing is it for someone in a state of heightened anxiety who does not necessarily speak English? It is almost as if this Government do not want Ukrainians to come here.

Other Members have made important points today. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said it was a disgrace that,

several weeks on, this scheme has still not been properly set up. I share that feeling, but I imagine that neither of us is surprised, because we both have ongoing contact with Afghans who are stuck in Afghanistan, begging us to help all these months on, and we still have no advice for them. As the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) said, there are people ready to help Ukrainians. We are getting emails daily from people who want to help, but do not know how. Obviously, I have not seen the statement in the Chamber, but I have not heard that much clarity is coming forward.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and others have pointed out, if a person is in a warzone, how are they supposed to apply online? Sometimes the internet is bad enough in Parliament, where we are not in a warzone; how is someone in a warzone supposed to be able to get internet? I could hear the exhaustion in my hon. Friend's voice as she spoke so movingly about her constituent and his struggle to get his family into fortress Britain. He would still be battling if she had not fought tooth and nail for him, but what about all those who do not have that support?

Why are the experts in the field not being consulted—Refugee Action, or the Refugee Councils of England, Wales or Scotland? Positive Action in Housing is an organisation in Glasgow that has a long-running project through which people can host refugees. I would want to know that anyone generous enough to offer to do so is being properly checked, because the dangers are obvious. Perhaps the Government could speak to groups such as Positive Action in Housing. I would also want to know that every single person taken into someone's home has the knowledge, the confidence and the means to reach out for help, should it be necessary.

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. There is a Division in the main Chamber. I therefore suspend the sitting for 15 minutes if it is one vote, or 25 minutes if it is two votes, after which we will probably move on to the Labour Front Bench.

6.14 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

6.30 pm

*On resuming—*

**Anne McLaughlin:** I know that the Minister is going to say that these things all take time. They do, but is he really saying that we cannot not keep up with other comparable European countries? If we are so much more bountiful in our approach to refugees, surely we therefore have more experience and should at least be able to equal the speed of other European countries.

The Minister will also no doubt repeat the trope that we cannot dispense with visas for security reasons, but the Government really need to stop pretending that what we are asking for is anything unusual. Thousands of people enter the UK every day without visas. Anyone coming from South Korea, Australia, Mexico, the US, Costa Rica and many other countries is not required to have a visa. If we are to believe that allowing Ukrainians to do that poses a threat to our safety, the Government must surely believe that the thousands arriving from those countries today, yesterday and tomorrow pose an equal threat to our safety—or are they seriously arguing that Ukrainians are uniquely likely to be infiltrated and

pose a threat? As we have heard, a security expert whom the Government previously trusted does not share their apparent fears. I will repeat the question posed to the Minister by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West: what was wrong about what Lord Ricketts had to say? Remember that the two Russians who caused such turmoil in Salisbury did not sneak in by pretending to be another nationality. They came in on visas, so a visa alone is not a safeguard.

I congratulate the petitioner, Phillip Jolliffe, on the efforts he went to in order to get so many people to sign the petition—some 184,949 people have signed it. I will end by saying what I think is the most alarming part of the way we are treating Ukrainian refugees: as confusing, chaotic and cold as their treatment has been so far, we are treating Ukrainian refugees better than we treat refugees fleeing other countries, and we are treating them a million times better than we will treat anyone, including other Ukrainians, who dares to ask for our protection once the Nationality and Borders Bill is enacted. If people are ashamed right now—I suspect that those who signed the petition are—they should prepare themselves to feel a whole new level of shame once that comes in.

**James Gray (in the Chair):** I call Neil Kinnock. I beg your pardon; I mean Stephen Kinnock. I am so sorry.

6.32 pm

**Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** As I said to Mr Speaker the other day, I have been having that since I was 13 years old. You are not the first, Mr Gray, and I am sure you will not be the last. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, and I thank the Petitions Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for securing this important debate. I also thank the thousands and thousands of petitioners, who I hope have all made their voices heard through us.

I begin my remarks by paying tribute to the Ukrainian people, whose bravery, fortitude and eventual victory will never be forgotten. President Zelensky is the leader of the free world, and he and his compatriots are fighting not only for Ukraine's freedom and democracy, but for the values that we all hold dear. They are showing tremendous courage, dignity and defiance in the face of Russia's barbaric assault. What a contrast, I am afraid to say, with the failure of the Home Office to rise to the challenge. From the Windrush scandal to the small boats crisis, and from the Nationality and Borders Bill to the response to Putin's barbaric assault on Ukraine, we are witnessing a Department whose approach is defined by a toxic combination of incompetence and indifference.

Let us turn for a moment to the broader context of this refugee crisis. We know that the vast majority of the Ukrainians who are leaving their country want to stay as close as possible to it. They are passionately patriotic and as such they will want to get back to their homes once the invaders have been defeated and Ukraine is once again able to rebuild as a vibrant, prosperous and democratic country.

However, it is also the case that some people will want to come to the UK and it is crystal clear that we should welcome them with open arms. Britain has a

proud history of acting as a safe sanctuary for those fleeing war and persecution. For example, during world war two the Kindertransport saved the lives of almost 10,000 children.

Since the invasion of Ukraine started on 24 February, over 2 million people have fled the country, and neighbouring countries such as Poland, Romania and Hungary have each taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees. For the reasons that I have already outlined, that is to be expected. However, it is not only countries on the borders of Ukraine that have shown great humanitarian spirit. Just look at Ireland; it has a population of only 4 million, yet it has already accepted 5,500 Ukrainians.

Now let us turn to the dismal performance of the UK Government. This country has 66 million people, but we have given visas to only 4,000 Ukrainians, set against 17,100 applications received. The Home Office is currently offering two schemes, as we have heard today. The first is the family reunion route. For those Ukrainians already resident in Britain, it allows entry to some—not all—of their relatives. The Opposition finally shamed the Government into widening the family reunion route to include extended family, but it still fell far short of where it needed to be. For example, a nurse on a healthcare visa was not allowed to bring his or her family into the UK because he or she did not have indefinite leave to remain. That was beyond unacceptable.

We welcome the U-turn that was secured today, but I ask the Minister why it took so long. Why do we appear to be having U-turns on an almost daily basis? It sends a signal that the Government have to be dragged kicking and screaming to do the right thing; it does not reflect well on the Government; and I am afraid to say that it leaves a stain on our international reputation.

The second programme is the community sponsorship scheme. It supposedly allows charities and individuals to sponsor Ukrainians even if there are no family ties. A pressing concern is that the community sponsorship scheme will become mired in bureaucracy and red tape. The Minister will no doubt be aware of a recent report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration that states that the application to arrival timescale of current similar schemes ranges from 73 to 398 days. I am sure that the Minister does not think that it could take up to 73 days for these desperate Ukrainians to be given access to our country and I hope that he will reassure us today that that will not be the case.

The processes are burdened with excessive red tape and bureaucracy, but there is also an issue around the institutional performance. The location of the visa centre that is supposedly being set up in northern France to assist refugees will not be made public and the centre will not offer appointments or walk-in access. The Home Secretary claims that a visa office in Calais will pose too much of a security threat and yet the Prime Minister overruled our security services to insist that Evgeny Lebedev be given a peerage. I think that tells us all we need to know about the priorities of this Government.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the shadow Home Secretary, said last week, we are

“making vulnerable people push from pillar to post in their hour of need”.

[Stephen Kinnock]

It is immoral to create this sense of confusion when all people need is a place to feel safe and secure. It does not have to be this way; it could be so much simpler.

Labour believes in putting people before paperwork, which is why we are calling for an emergency protection visa. It would be so much simpler than the community sponsorship scheme that was announced today. Our emergency visa would be based on the necessary biometric and security checks, but it would dispense with all the bureaucracy and red tape that the Government propose, and it would end the bottlenecks and queues by efficiently facilitating quick and easy access to our country in these dark times for the Ukrainian people.

In light of the chaotic and heartbreaking situation that so many hon. Friends and hon. Members have described so eloquently in their contributions today, I have the following questions for the Minister. First, last week in Prime Minister's questions the Prime Minister claimed that his Government have

"done more to resettle vulnerable people than any other European country".—[*Official Report*, 9 March 2022; Vol. 710, c. 318.]

Since 2015, the UK has accepted 92,000 refugees, while Germany, for example, has accepted more than 1 million. The Prime Minister has again played fast and loose with the facts, so will the Minister encourage his right hon. Friend to correct the record?

On the issue of the community sponsorship route, can the Minister provide an indication of the application-to-arrival timescale that the Government expect? It would clearly be completely and utterly unacceptable if Ukrainian applicants were expected to wait 73 days, and potentially up to 300 days, for their applications under this scheme to be approved. Finally, why will the Government not take our advice and implement Labour's emergency protection visa so that any Ukrainian can come to our country to seek refuge?

I have to be honest and say that the Home Office failures on this do not surprise me in the slightest. This Government have consistently and systematically failed refugees since 2010. We have only to look at their response to Afghans fleeing the horrors of the Taliban, with thousands of Afghans still stuck in hotels in our country; at the bureaucratic quagmire that was created for those who wanted to house those seeking refuge from the horrors of the Syrian war; or at the response to those seeking to cross the English channel, looking for sanctuary. To add insult to injury, the Government are using the Nationality and Borders Bill as a tool to criminalise those who seek sanctuary in our country.

If the Government wish to improve that record, they have to start showing some empathy and some efficiency, and that has to start right now with the way in which they are treating those who are fleeing Putin's bombs and bullets. They can do it by ending the bureaucratic and hostile environment that they have created. We therefore urge the Minister to remove the bottlenecks and to simplify the process. Our message to him, to the Home Secretary and to the Prime Minister is clear: please get a grip and please start putting people before paperwork.

6.42 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I thank

the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for opening the debate, and colleagues for their insightful contributions on a vital issue, although, given some of the comments in the debate about attendance, I do note that the clash with the statement in the main Chamber meant that people who may well have wished to participate in this debate decided to attend that instead. Some of the points being raised here were obviously literally being answered in the Chamber as we were sitting here, deliberating on this petition.

Putin's war on Ukraine is monstrous and unjustified, and this country stands shoulder to shoulder with the brave Ukrainian people against his unprovoked aggression. We have stepped up with our response, which includes giving Ukraine the means not only to defend itself but, ultimately, to drive the invader from its lands.

A number of points were raised during the debate, and I will briefly cover and go through them. A number of colleagues asked about passports, and one reason why we moved to the idea of the route without biometrics and based on passports was what we saw in looking at the analysis of those who had presented themselves, wanting to apply. In something like the first 2,000 people who presented themselves, fewer than 100 did not have a valid Ukrainian passport. Let me be clear that we are talking about a valid Ukrainian passport; we are not detailing the type of Ukrainian passport—those familiar with Ukraine's passport will know that it started issuing a new type of passport seven years ago—provided that it is valid. The vast majority have brought their passport with them.

On the question of whether we are offering paid priority services, I think we would all agree that it would be, frankly, immoral to offer a paid priority service in the family scheme, and I can certainly say to colleagues today that we are looking to suspend, across UK Visas and Immigration, our super priority and priority visa services. We will still prioritise people in the wider system who have compelling and compassionate circumstances—for example, someone seeking to travel to the UK for a funeral or perhaps someone who needs urgently to take up a role in the NHS. But we will look to suspend the general priority service—again, to free up UKVI resource. I think we all realise that it is actually right that at this time as many of our decision makers as possible are prioritised to this particular route rather than our normal type of priority visa services. Certainly, people should not be being charged at a VAC when they are looking to make applications to this route, and that is something that we are clear on. Also, suspending the wider priority visa services clears up any confusion if people inquire about the wider migration system while at that particular visa application centre.

I hope that colleagues will appreciate why it would not be particularly sensible to go into exact details on what safeguarding checks will be done on those who offer to sponsor people coming to the UK, but yes, safeguarding checks will be performed, as in the devolved Administrations. I think hon. Members will understand why it would not be sensible for me to start reading out the list of exactly what we will do and what we will check. Safeguarding checks on people who offer to be sponsors will be in place, because we are conscious that many of those being sponsored will be vulnerable, whether they are adults or children.

**Anne McLaughlin:** As well as asking for that, I asked about the people who are then placed with a family or with somebody who has a spare room. How will we ensure that they have the knowledge, the means and the confidence to reach out for help? Somebody who is taken in will be extremely grateful because they no longer have bombs raining down on them, but they may feel uncomfortable, or something may go wrong, and they may not want to report it. How can we ensure that people in that situation—primarily women and children—are able to do so?

**Kevin Foster:** That is a good point. Some funding is being offered to local communities. I take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about the slightly different structure in Northern Ireland, as we saw with the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied children, reflecting the devolved structure there. We are providing a funding package to local councils; I appreciate that hon. Members taking part in the debate will not have heard the statement in the main Chamber, but that is something we are working on.

I think it is safe to say that I and the Scottish Government have not always got on particularly well, but on a serious note, I welcome their genuinely constructive offers. I have had brief conversations with Neil Gray—he is co-ordinating for the Scottish Government, as Lord Harrington is for the UK Government—about what work they can do on those points. As colleagues have said, speed and getting people in are becoming essential. How can we do that?

My own community does not have the experience of Glasgow, for example, in welcoming communities of asylum seekers. That should not become a delaying factor across large parts of the UK, and balances need to be struck. There are funding packages to try to create that support. I also recognise that there are wider debates around how we can ensure that support is provided. That is what colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will be working on closely.

**Andy Slaughter:** If families do manage to reach the UK and do not have immediate offers of accommodation, which is happening—I gave the example of a family who could accommodate people, but others, perhaps in overcrowded social housing, will get relatives who they will not be able to accommodate—where should they go? Is the Minister saying that they should go to the local authority, which will say, “Yes, we have funding from the Government,” or is there some other solution?

**Kevin Foster:** There is a slightly different position for those who are already in the UK. The hon. Gentleman made a point earlier about people who are fearful of being asked to leave, and I reassure him that there is no prospect of removals to Ukraine. I will not, and clearly cannot, put a timeframe on that, but at this moment, any removals action has been suspended. That includes our voluntary returns; again, that would clearly be quite a bizarre thing to encourage at the moment. There is no prospect of someone from Ukraine who is ordinarily resident in Ukraine—there is a slight difference from Ukrainian nationals—being asked to return. We have already automatically extended a number of visas for those who are already here with temporary status as a

skilled worker or student. There is no need, at this stage, for them to apply for anything. Of course, if someone’s status is due to expire, they can certainly get in contact.

There is no intention that people will need to leave this country, and even if that were the case, there is in reality no practical return route anyway. To be very clear, Ukrainian nationals who are here lawfully do not need to leave, and we will make further announcements and confirmations over the next few weeks about the position looking forward. I think most of us would accept that the priority at this stage needs to be those who are in Ukraine and looking to make preparations in case they need to leave. We are particularly aware that there are large numbers of people in western Ukraine who, depending on what happens in the coming weeks with the military campaign, may move into Poland, Slovakia or Hungary if Russian forces come closer. Of course, we hope that that does not happen; we see the defence of Kyiv being mounted, and I think we can be confident that Ukraine is halting what was a Russian advance in that direction.

As I say, people here in the UK do not need to apply for different statuses, and later this year we will confirm the position on future entitlement to settlement and in other areas. However, I think we would all accept that at the moment there are very few Ukrainians arriving who are particularly focused on a potential indefinite leave to remain application in 2027.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the Minister for his constructive and positive response. I asked about the £350 per month and the £10,000—the different systems—and he has referred to that in his response. I am happy if he wants to write to me to let me know how the system will work. I gave the example that, in my constituency, we have 100 families who are willing to give accommodation, and we have 100 job vacancies available in one company, right now. Time is of the essence. How can we make that happen?

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the hon. Member for his constructive comments. A lot of that will be around the sponsorship route. My understanding is that the £350 will be given to the sponsor—the person providing accommodation. I take on board his point about the payment that will go to local authorities; it is a very different context in Northern Ireland, given the slightly different responsibilities around things such as children’s services, as we recognised in the NTS. It is probably better that I set out in writing the detail of how that will break down.

Another query was about those who have already applied for a visa who get a grant letter but do not have the vignette put in their documents or their passport, which is normally when there is a request to go back to the VAC. As of tomorrow, if someone has the grant letter, that will be enough to travel to the UK with a carrier, in the same way as the permission to travel letter system that we will establish and open from tomorrow. Again, we are looking to minimise the number of people who have to make appointments at VACs and go and collect particular forms of documentation.

**Daisy Cooper:** Will the Minister confirm whether people who have an appointment booked but do not yet have a form will be able, from tomorrow, to travel to the UK without that form? And what about people who

[Daisy Cooper]

have had their appointment, and who have applied and filled everything in, but are still waiting for the form to come back? There are two different types of people there.

**Kevin Foster:** Those who have not yet submitted their biometrics will have two options from tomorrow. The first is to make a separate application for permission to travel under the new system. They will get a PDF form emailed to them. Some people have asked whether the letter is posted—no, it will be emailed. By the way, that form can be shown on a phone, or it can be printed out by a friend or colleague. There do not need to be individual smartphones; if a family has one phone, they can show multiple forms on that phone. Again, we want to reassure people that we will not expect everyone to have a phone with the form on it.

If someone has already submitted their biometrics and they get a letter that says they have got their visa—the decision letter—under a normal visa process they would go back to collect the vignette in their passport that allows them to travel. My firm understanding is that, as of tomorrow, they will be able to show that letter saying that they have a decision with their passport and travel to the UK, rather than going back to the VAC to collect the vignette. If they have not yet done their biometrics, they can instead apply through the permission to travel scheme—the new scheme that we are launching tomorrow—and, if they get permission, proceed to the UK and sort out their biometrics up to six months after arrival. We will not be taking biometrics at the border, because we are looking to facilitate travel into the UK. Once people have a decision letter with their passport, they will be able to travel.

Obviously, if someone does not have a valid Ukrainian passport, it is still the process that they need to be documented. In many cases, people do not have any documents. They need to get a document that allows them to board an aircraft regardless of their destination, particularly if they are looking to travel by air from eastern Europe rather than ending up on a relatively gruelling land journey. That probably covers some of the points raised.

People have made comparisons to the Afghan system. Lessons are being learned. A lot of people are still in hotels. We had a great effort to get people out of Kabul, but it is safe to say that, put simply, offers for rehousing have not come forward from communities across the UK. There is certainly a challenge there. I was struck by the comment by the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) that all must take part. We see communities, such as Glasgow, that always step up. That is our biggest dispersal area and steps up in every refugee resettlement situation. It stepped up for Afghans and for Syrians, and I am sure the community will step up again in this context.

**Stephen Kinnock:** Will the Minister give way?

**Kevin Foster:** In a moment. I then look at other areas, and it is perhaps a tale of two cities. Edinburgh, which is not that far away, does not take part in the dispersal area system for asylum seekers. I am regularly struck by the arguments that all must take part. That is certainly another item that we will be looking at closely.

**Anne McLaughlin:** Will the Minister give way?

**Kevin Foster:** I will take an intervention first from the Labour shadow Minister, and then I will come back to the hon. Lady.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I thank the Minister for giving way. On the point about who is stepping up, I am sure he will be aware that, based on the current figures, councils that are led by Labour are taking between six and seven times more refugees than councils that are led by the Conservative party.

**Kevin Foster:** I am keen to encourage all to take part. I think there are only five councils that have not offered in principle to take part in the Afghan resettlement scheme. The hon. Gentleman will note what we recently did with the national transfer scheme, where every council in the UK—I acknowledge that it is done slightly differently in Northern Ireland—is now mandated to take part in the process around unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. He will also note the references I have just made to dispersal accommodation in relation to asylum seekers.

I am struck that there are communities that step up every single time, including in places such as Stoke-on-Trent with Conservative-led councils. In other areas I hear demands that people do things for asylum seekers, yet when we approach them about becoming a dispersal area, they seem strangely quiet.

**Anne McLaughlin:** COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, has told the Minister and his colleagues—as have I—that every one of the 32 Scottish local authorities, in addition to taking in refugees under the Syrian resettlement scheme, would be happy, if it were appropriate in terms of wraparound services and if there were any support, to take part in the asylum dispersal scheme. The problem is that the Government expect the councils to carry all the costs associated with that. There is no excuse; if the Minister is going to start supporting the councils, they will start chipping in with the scheme as well as with the refugees.

**Kevin Foster:** What I find interesting is that I regularly hear how it is about moral duties and that people should be taking part, but I have to contrast that with the situation that the hon. Lady has alluded to in Scotland, where 31 out of 32 local authorities are not dispersal areas, including the city of Edinburgh. The only place in Scotland that is a dispersal area is the city of Glasgow.

**Joanna Cherry:** On Edinburgh—

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order.

**Kevin Foster:** I will take an intervention in a moment. The only dispersal area in Scotland is Glasgow—I am certainly happy to confirm that to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). However, we have taken on board representations from local government, and we are engaging with local councils about how we alter the funding system. Still, it is a fair point that there are plenty of communities across the country that have made huge efforts to support the current dispersal system and there are others that have refused. With that, I give way to the Member for Edinburgh.

**Joanna Cherry:** I am not the Member for Edinburgh; I am the Member for Edinburgh South West. It is quite a big city with several MPs. The Home Office's own figures on section 95 asylum support show that, thanks to the efforts of Glasgow City Council, the percentage located in Scotland under that scheme is more than Scotland's population share and higher than any council in the United Kingdom. We are taking more per capita in Scotland than our population share.

In relation to Edinburgh, would the Minister care to apologise to Edinburgh City Council, which has made one of the most successful and generous contributions towards the resettlement of refugees? I have worked very closely with the council on that. He has made his point about asylum; would he like to acknowledge Edinburgh's world-renowned contribution to the resettlement of refugees?

**Kevin Foster:** Again, the hon. and learned Lady has highlighted how well Glasgow is doing. Earlier in my speech, I cited how Glasgow steps up every time, but the fact is still absolutely the same: Edinburgh is not a dispersal area. Thirty-one of Scotland's 32 local authority areas are not dispersal areas—that is a straight fact.

**Joanna Cherry rose—**

**Kevin Foster:** I will happily give way, but a fact is a fact.

**Joanna Cherry:** I did not ask the Minister about asylum; I asked him about resettlement of refugees. I am sure he must understand that there is a difference. He has had his wee go at Edinburgh about asylum. Now I am asking him, in fairness, to recognise Edinburgh City Council's sterling contribution towards the resettlement of refugees. As he knows, Scotland has taken more Syrian refugees per capita than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and that is largely due to Edinburgh. Will he have the generosity to acknowledge that?

**Kevin Foster:** I am happy to acknowledge all the generosity that there has been across Scotland in terms of the resettlement schemes, but the point still stands. It is rather odd to say, "There's a lot being done on dispersal accommodation in Scotland because of one council down the road, yet the place I represent doesn't need to take part in that." As I say, we will be looking to reform the scheme, but it is perfectly fair to point out that plenty of communities across the United Kingdom step up for refugees and are part of our dispersal accommodation system, no matter how people try to argue it.

**Catherine West:** I will try to help the Minister with a different point. He has mentioned the Syrian scheme and the two Afghanistan schemes, and now there are at least two schemes for the Ukrainian conflict. Broadly, off the top of his head, where are we with the Afghanistan scheme? Obviously, we do not know how many more applicants to the Ukraine scheme there will be, because Ukraine is currently 18 days into the most dreadful war. Broadly speaking, we think we know what happened with the Syrian scheme, but could he tell us about the Afghanistan scheme?

**Kevin Foster:** As the hon. Lady will appreciate, the situation in Afghanistan presents some unique difficulties. Of course, we cannot—

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Kevin Foster:** I will come to colleagues, but I will deal with the hon. Lady's intervention first. We are still helping people get out of Afghanistan. I hope she appreciates why it would not be sensible for me to go into some of the routes and methods that they use to exit Afghanistan at this time, but we have certainly made strong progress. There is a challenge now, and my colleague Minister Harrington will be looking at how we can move people on from hotels. As I say, one of the points that we have learned from the scheme is about trying to pair up the accommodation and give more people an opportunity to take part. However, our cohort from Afghanistan is slightly more difficult, given that we brought out mostly larger families. In the case of Ukraine, it is mostly single women with children, given that men between 18 and 60 are required by Ukrainian law to stay and fight.

I will give way to the hon. Member for Strangford and then I will make some progress.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the Minister for the Afghan scheme. We in Northern Ireland have been very active in responding to that. In my neighbouring constituency of North Down, which has become the central point for bringing people from Afghanistan, people have been in the Marine Court hotel for seven months. We are very keen and anxious to get them into the jobs and accommodation that we have spoken about in the past. Can the Minister give us an update on when he hopes to see those people filtering out into the constituency?

**James Gray (in the Chair):** With regard to Ukraine, Minister.

**Kevin Foster:** In terms of Ukraine, we hope to set things forward very quickly. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in the House earlier.

I am conscious of the time and that votes are due again. Given the petition's call, I want to be clear that, as stated by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, we do not believe that a blanket visa waiver is the right way forward—a position that appears to have been endorsed by the Opposition, given their call for visas rather than waivers, with biometric checks included. Normally, security and biometric checks are a fundamental part of our visa process, in order to keep people in this country safe and ensure that we can identify those entering our country. That is consistent with our approach to the evacuation of Afghanistan.

Although it is easy to dismiss, it is vital to keep British citizens safe and to ensure that we are helping those in genuine need. Sadly, we are already seeing people presenting false documents, claiming to be Ukrainian and seeking to enter the UK, including some whom Border Force has subsequently identified as being of other nationalities and having no links to Ukraine. This should not detract from our work creating safe and legal routes for Ukrainian nationals to come to the UK.

**Marion Fellows:** I congratulate the Minister on dancing on the head of a pin so well. Could I also point out to him that my own area, North Lanarkshire, has taken refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Syria and is taking refugees from Afghanistan? We have a long history of taking refugees without UK Government intervention, going right back to 1919.

**Kevin Foster:** We look forward to that area signing up to be a dispersal area as well then. I will be very pleased to take that forward.

Using a visa process means that processing can be controlled and vital security checks carried out, including ensuring that the people coming are actually Ukrainian, meet our eligibility criteria and do not present a risk.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister give way?

**Kevin Foster:** I have given way quite a lot; I need to make some progress.

We have announced our bespoke Ukraine family scheme. That scheme significantly expands the ability of British nationals, people settled in the UK and others to bring family members to the UK, extending eligibility to adult parents, grandparents, children over 18, siblings, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins and in-laws, and all of their immediate family members. We have ensured that the scheme is easily accessible, fee-free and does not include any salary or language requirements.

We recognise though—again, as has been said today—that we need to speed things up. Therefore, as announced by the Home Secretary last week, in order to further support the Ukrainian people, from tomorrow, holders of Ukrainian passports who are outside the UK will no longer be required to provide their biometric information when making applications under the Ukraine family scheme. Once applications have been processed, individuals will receive a permission letter sent electronically enabling them to travel to the UK, and will not be required to collect a vignette in their passport. They can either print that letter or show it on any smart device, including a family member's smartphone or device if they do not have one of their own. Those granted status under this scheme will be able to come to the UK for three years, with the right to work and access benefits. Applicants who hold identity cards and do not have a valid passport will still need to attend a visa application centre in person and provide their biometric information, but this new system will mean that our VAC capacity can focus on those who need it.

The Prime Minister has also announced plans for a scheme to introduce a new sponsor group to enable Ukrainians with no ties to the UK to come here, with more details having been announced in the main Chamber this afternoon. That scheme is completely uncapped, and to help colleagues, a “frequently asked questions” section has just gone live on gov.uk.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Could he say how long it will take for a family with no family connection in the UK coming through the Homes for Ukraine scheme to be placed with a family here? [*Interruption.*]

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. There is a Division in the main Chamber, and I therefore suspend the sitting for 15 minutes. We will recommence at 7.22 pm.

7.7 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

7.22 pm

*On resuming—*

**James Gray (in the Chair):** The Minister was on his feet when we were interrupted.

**Kevin Foster:** Thank you, Mr Gray. I have not forgotten the intervention, and I have had an unusually long time to think about it. In terms of the timescale, from today individuals and organisations can register their interest in becoming sponsors. Applications will be open for individual sponsors and named beneficiaries from Friday. We aim to expedite decisions quickly. Again, some of that will slightly depend on how many we have come forward. But we are certainly keen that, very quickly after Friday, the first people will be able to arrive under the sponsorship scheme. As we say, there will be safeguarding checks—there will be checks on the individuals—but the approach will be around ensuring that we can expedite decision making as much as possible. I would reassure Members that we will be working with the devolved Administrations and others where appropriate on the type of checks—again, where possible, with a view to the speed. I would also make the point that there is no limit on the sponsorship scheme; there is no set amount—we could think of other schemes where we have set a particular ceiling or quota, but there is no limit, except in terms of the offers that come forward.

Making the scheme a success will require the whole of society to come forward and show our heartfelt concern and solidarity, as we did as a society 80 years ago, when many communities across this nation welcomed evacuees from the industrial cities and the potential landing grounds for an armed invasion of this country. Many formed lifelong friendships afterwards. This country has a history of being generous, and the scheme will facilitate that.

We do want the wider diaspora in the UK. I also take on board the point that people have made: ultimately, the goal is not to evacuate Ukrainians from Ukraine, to serve Vladimir Putin's purpose but, in the long run, to ensure that people who have had sanctuary here and in other European countries can return to a free and democratic Ukraine, with the invaders driven from their country. That is our ultimate goal, but we will ensure that people are able to come and take advantage of the generous offers that people are making.

We are in unique times. We have brought forward two major schemes at rapid speed. We recognise that colleagues want us to go faster, and we will. As I am speaking, more visas are being granted and, from tomorrow, permissions to travel via the new simplified procedure will be introduced.

We believe that this is a country that wants to stand beside the people of Ukraine and to demonstrate solidarity by making offers to provide housing into which we can welcome them. We can all contrast this generosity, this solidarity, with the vicious campaign that Russia has unleashed on innocent civilians, bombing maternity hospital and shelling residential areas—a type of barbarity that we hoped we had seen the end of in Europe 80 years ago, and which our grandparents fought to end at that time, making such sacrifices.

We think of the sacrifice that the Soviet people made to defeat Adolf Hitler. Over 20 million Soviet citizens lost their lives in that conflict. To see what is being done in the name of the Russian people by their own Government is absolutely tragic, but the hope that we can take from 80 years ago is that despots and dictators who thought

that they could conquer Europe soon found themselves in the annals of history, having been defeated by free and democratic peoples who united to defeat them. That is what we are doing against Putin's Russia, and soon that will be the victory that is secured by the Ukrainian people.

7.26 pm

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank the Minister for his response, because it feels as if we are finally getting on the same page, both across the House, and in terms of where the British public are when it comes to the response that we want to see from us a country, which we rely on the Government to deliver—*[Interruption.]*

**James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. There is a Division in the main Chamber. Rather than come back after voting, may I put the Question? Would that be agreeable? I am very sorry; I hope the hon. Lady does not mind.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 609530, relating to arrangements for Ukrainian refugees to enter the UK.

7.27 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Monday 14 March 2022*

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Online Safety: Cyberflashing Offence

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp):** I wish to inform the House that the Government are legislating through the Online Safety Bill to create an offence related to the behaviour known as cyberflashing.

It is important that we effectively criminalise this behaviour, which usually involves a person sending an unsolicited photograph or film of genitals—be it their own or another person’s—to another person or persons. Photographs and films can be sent in a variety of ways, including on peer-to-peer platforms, on dating or meeting apps, and social media. The recipients of such unsolicited images can experience significant humiliation, alarm, or distress.

The Government plan to implement the Law Commission’s recommendation for how this offence should be constructed as laid out in the Law Commission’s “Modernising Communications Offences” report, published in July 2021. This will involve inserting a new section 66A into the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to create a new criminal offence of intentionally sending or giving a photograph or film of any person’s genitals to another person with the intention that that person will see the genitals and be caused alarm, distress or humiliation, or for the purpose of obtaining sexual gratification and reckless as to whether the recipient will be caused alarm, distress or humiliation.

We hope it will address increasing public concern expressed about behaviour of non-consensual sending of images of genitals, especially over electronic networks, and the harms associated.

I would like to express my sincere thanks for all the work that the Commission has carried out as part of this review over the past four years.

[HCWS675]

## EDUCATION

### Education Update

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker):** Today, I am providing an update to the House on three elements of this Government’s work to enable every child to fulfil their potential by ensuring that they receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time. This is in advance of the forthcoming Schools White Paper, which will demonstrate how our education system can deliver on the Government’s priorities of building back better after the pandemic and levelling up across the country.

My update today addresses our work on tutoring, the Oak National Academy and with the Education Endowment Foundation.

I can now confirm to the House that over one million courses have been started by children across the country through the National Tutoring Programme. Of these, around 532,000 were provided through the school-led tutoring route, which provides funding directly to schools giving them greater flexibility to source their own tutors, whether external or staff already working in the school.

We are building on this success by transferring, this academic year, up to £65 million to school-led tutoring from the academic mentor and tuition partner pillars of the programme. This will give schools even greater autonomy to deliver high quality tutoring to as many children and young people as possible, reflecting the Department’s continued focus on following the evidence of what works.

To support schools further and meet increasing demand, the eligibility criteria for recruiting academic mentors into schools has been updated, with minimum A level requirements replacing the requirement for a degree, along with increasing the rate of pay for all graduate mentors looking to enrol and support the programme.

Alongside, we are giving schools working with tuition partners increased discretion to determine the size of groups receiving tutoring; our advice remains that three pupils per tuition group is optimal, but we are raising the maximum group size to six pupils to allow greater flexibility where needed, such as for phonics where pair work is required.

This Government will continue to build on the success of the National Tutoring Programme this year, in particular the school-led route. Schools, tutors and other stakeholders have continued to provide feedback to the Department over the course of the year—in particular regarding the need for a programme that is as simple as possible—and we are exploring all options to make sure that feedback is reflected in the programme next year.

Tutoring is vital for providing extra help to pupils. But the heart of their education will of course come from the outstanding teaching they receive in their classrooms.

We want to empower teachers to focus on delivering the best possible lessons, and support schools by giving them access to resources and approaches that have proved their effectiveness.

Oak National Academy has been one of the great achievements coming out of the education system’s response to the pandemic. Over 500 teachers from over 50 schools, trusts and partners worked together, delivering over 140 million lessons.

Building on this success, we will now establish a new arm’s length curriculum body incorporating Oak, working independently of Government and collaboratively with the sector.

Curriculum design is complex, and we want to share the very best practice so teachers can draw inspiration from examples of evidence-based, carefully sequenced curriculum design.

Under the framework already provided by our excellent national curriculum, the curriculum body will lead the creation of curriculum maps and resources which will be freely available to all teachers, parents and children.

Instead of each teacher reinventing the wheel, they will be able to access content, for free, that continuously evolves and improves through feedback from teachers across the country—reducing workload and of course improving lessons and curriculum expertise. The resources will be entirely optional and will not be mandated by Ofsted.

At the heart of this body will be collaboration and partnership, with the sector and with providers of resources. The curriculum body will work closely with teachers to ensure it is meeting their needs, including those supporting children with additional needs. We are committed to building on the “by teachers, for teachers” approach that has been a key success factor for Oak National Academy.

The body will continue work with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to ensure its resources are informed by the best available evidence and align with best practice.

With the same motivation to use evidence where we can, we will permanently put evidence at the heart of the teaching profession by re-endowing the EEF. As independent evidence guardians in the system, the EEF will continue to generate and spread world-leading education evidence. This work will include leading an ongoing cycle of reviews of the underpinning frameworks for teacher development to make sure they are always based on “what works” to improve pupil outcomes. The EEF will keep these frameworks updated in line with the best available evidence from this country and abroad, giving an independent badge of assurance to our teacher development programmes.

We will also continue to work with the EEF to scale up and spread effective teaching practice in literacy and numeracy to ensure pupils have the best chance of catching up following the pandemic.

Further details on the endowment will be confirmed in due course.

[HCWS676]

# Ministerial Correction

*Monday 14 March 2022*

## LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

### Help for Rough Sleepers

4. **Steve Brine:** What steps his Department is taking to help rough sleepers find accommodation. [905898]

**Eddie Hughes:** We have committed more than £800 million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in this year alone. That includes the investment of £202 million through the rough sleeping initiative fund, which provides 14,500 bed spaces and approximately 2,700 staff throughout the country. We are also

helping people to find longer-term accommodation, including through the £433 million rough sleeping accommodation programme, which we expect to provide 6,000 new homes before the end of this Parliament. So far, we seem to be having some success, because the rough sleeping snapshot taken in November and announced a couple of weeks ago shows that numbers have fallen for eight years in a row.

*[Official Report, 7 March 2022, Vol. 710, c. 6.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes):*

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine).

The correct response should have been:

**Eddie Hughes:** So far, we seem to be having some success, because the rough sleeping snapshot taken **in October and November** and announced a couple of weeks ago shows that numbers **are at an eight-year low**.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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Monday 21 March 2022**

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**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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