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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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OFFICIAL REPORT

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Party/Group</b>
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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# House of Lords

Thursday 18 January 2024

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Durham.

## Care Home Staffing Question

11.07 am

Asked by **Baroness Pitkeathley**

To ask His Majesty's Government how they are planning to address current staffing levels in care homes, and any connected delayed discharges from hospital wards and the impact on NHS waiting times.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Markham) (Con):** We estimate that the number of adult social care filled posts increased by 70,000 in the last 18 months. The Government remain committed to the 10-year vision to put people at the heart of care, making up to £8.1 billion available over two years to strengthen adult social care provision and discharge. Funding is enabling local authorities to buy more care packages, help people leave hospital on time, improve workforce capacity and reduce waiting times.

**Baroness Pitkeathley (Lab):** I thank the Minister for that reply, but I am not sure that I find it very reassuring. Your Lordships' House will know that delayed discharges and long waiting times are largely the result of shortcomings in the care sector, especially the shortage of staff in care homes, where international recruitment has been a lifeline. It was therefore a surprise when the Government elected to put further pressure on this sector by increasing the minimum annual salary required for employees applying for a visa, banning them from bringing dependants to the UK and requiring care firms to be regulated by the CQC if they are to sponsor these visas. Far from being broadly relaxed about these proposals, as the Secretary of State for Health claimed, the care sector is most alarmed about how this will affect recruitment, especially as no consultation at all took place before the policy was announced. Will the Minister please further explain to the House how the Government intend to ensure that there are enough staff in the care sector to cover the enormous and growing need?

**Lord Markham (Con):** The whole point of the title *People at the Heart of Care* is the recognition that staffing is critical to this. While it is early days, I believe the 70,000 increase in staff over the last 18 months, as I mentioned in my Answer, is a positive step. We had a very positive announcement just last week about the care pathway, setting out a career structure, which has been welcomed. For instance, ADASS, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, said that these are

“positive steps to help make adult social care a real career choice now and in the future”.

We really are making advances in this space.

**Lord Allan of Hallam (LD):** My Lords, as the Minister has likely anticipated, 2024 is going to be a year when we keep hassling him for a long-term workforce plan for social care. Assuming he is not going to announce the imminent publication of one, can I at least ask him to commit to commissioning and publishing an independent report into the potential impact of the visa changes described by the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley? The Government are of course entitled to make it harder to get visas, but they should be upfront and transparent about the downstream effects.

**Lord Markham (Con):** The Home Office has made an impact assessment of that. It thinks it will impact about 20,000 staff; we recruited about 100,000 last year. The main thing is that, by making sure that only CQC-registered bodies are able to recruit in this way, we are trying to make sure it is done in the correct, ethical manner by high-quality providers, which I think we would all agree is the right approach.

**Baroness Manzoor (Con):** I welcome the additional care staff that my noble friend mentioned, but there are some real pressures in rural areas where people cannot get carers to come and work. Can he say what is being done about that? Also, because he mentioned it previously, can he give an indication of whether there is a greater number of community hospitals that patients could be discharged into?

**Lord Markham (Con):** I thank my noble friend for the question. The whole point of trying to develop the career structure that we talk about is to make sure that it is a career that people want to go into across the board, be it in urban or rural areas. Part of that is putting in place about 100,000 training places—this is the first place in the world that has been set up—to try to set up a real career structure. We are starting to see early signs of it working. The number of beds blocked has decreased by 10% in the last few months. It is early days, but it is beginning to work.

**Baroness Murphy (CB):** My Lords, does the Minister not agree that, while the increase of 70,000 people is very welcome, it is in the context of a turnover of nearly 400,000 every year in care because of the poor career structure? I understand and appreciate that £70 million has been put into training and a care workforce pathway, but does he not agree that it is profoundly inadequate compared with the £11 million a day that is put into NHS nurse training?

**Lord Markham (Con):** The 70,000 increase is a net increase, so it takes into account the turnover of staff, many of whom rejoin somewhere else in a social care setting. Notwithstanding that, I agree with the noble Baroness that a turnover rate of around 28% is too high in any sector. For about 20% of employers the turnover is only 10%, so clearly some know how to develop a career structure and have motivated staff who will stay there. The intention behind the programme and the career pathway we are trying to set up is to try to get more of that across the system, because retention is key.

**Baroness Wheeler (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister told the House on Tuesday that hospital discharges have recently been reduced by 10%. However, he knows that this figure goes up and down as some people leave hospital while more come in at the other end, and it depends on which period of time is measured. From July to November last year there was in fact a steady rise, so we need to be specific about dates when we talk about making progress. On the care settings that patients are being discharged to—care homes—how are the Government keeping track of how the extra funding allocated to deal with chronic local staff shortages has supported the discharge process? Will it continue in the longer term?

**Lord Markham (Con):** The noble Baroness is correct that the numbers are a result of flow. We are seeing thousands more people hospitalised through A&E, so the fact that we have managed to reduce the back end indicates a positive way forward. To measure precisely what the noble Baroness asked about, we have now set up a kind of flight control system for each integrated care board, as I have mentioned, which looks at data across the system to monitor the number of hospital beds and places needed on a case-by-case basis. The noble Baroness is absolutely correct that having that data is key.

**Lord Kamall (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend the Minister mentioned the importance of a career structure to encourage people to work in the care sector. On the question from the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, about visas for carers, one issue that has not been addressed is that of personal carers. It is very difficult to sponsor or get a personal carer for individuals, and therefore there is a massive shortage. Can my noble friend the Minister say what the Government are doing to make sure that we can have more personal carers, whether from a domestic workforce or through immigration?

**Lord Markham (Con):** My noble friend is correct that the recruitment of personal carers is harder. I know that this is close to his heart. I can probably serve him best by giving him a written reply setting out the details of what we are doing.

**Lord Turnberg (Lab):** My Lords, to make this an attractive job for a care worker, we have to not only give them a pay rise above the national living wage, which is their basic pay, but make this into a profession. If they are professionals, they will then have a career structure that is recognised nationally. Will the Minister encourage that development?

**Lord Markham (Con):** Yes, I totally agree. That is why we announced this career pathway last week, to try to do exactly what the noble Lord is talking about. It has been welcomed; I quoted from ADASS, but a number of other bodies have welcomed what we are trying to do. We aim to do what the noble Lord said: to make it a profession that people really want to join. There are qualifications for it, advancement and apprenticeships, which are all part of setting up a career structure.

**Lord Swire (Con):** Does my noble friend the Minister not agree with me that there is still massive potential with the 500 or so community hospitals we have in the United Kingdom? Many are extremely well supported by their local community, and many still retain beds.

**Lord Markham (Con):** Yes. I have seen a number of really good examples of the kind of step-down care that my noble friend is talking about, or intermediate care that can be used as interim measures. We are trying to bring more of them on board, as well as the very good virtual wards. We have set up 11,000 virtual wards, and they are making a difference as well.

**Lord Watts (Lab):** My Lords, the Government say that they have done an assessment on the effects of the visa changes. Can he tell us how that was done if the Government did not discuss it or consult with the sector?

**Lord Markham (Con):** It was a Home Office impact assessment, so I freely admit that I do not know exactly who was consulted; I will happily get back to the noble Lord on that. I know that the assessment looked at all the different parts, including the salary cap and the impact on dependants. For instance, it was not thought that the restriction would have much impact on dependants because not many people come with dependants in the care sector. It looked into each bit, but I will happily let the noble Lord know more in writing.

## Private Rented Sector Ombudsman Question

11.17 am

Asked by **Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe**

To ask His Majesty's Government what progress they have made in designing and tendering for the new Private Rented Sector Ombudsman Service.

**Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab):** My Lords, in begging leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, I declare an interest as the chair of the Property Ombudsman for tenants and those in the PRS whose landlords use agents.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Scott of Bybrook) (Con):** The Renters (Reform) Bill allows the Government to select a scheme through open competition or to appoint a provider to deliver a designated scheme. In Commons Committee, we announced our preference to deliver through the Housing Ombudsman service, which provides social housing redress. However, no final decision has been made, and our priority is choosing a provider that offers the high-quality and value-for-money service we require.

**Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab):** I thank the Minister for her reply. I very much support what the Government are doing to establish a landlord ombudsman for the private rented sector; it is long overdue. Given that the new ombudsman will cover the whole of the rental sector—the one for social landlords has been indicated as the preferred option—can the Minister

confirm that the Government will consult existing ombudsmen in the sector on the rationalisation, and can she explain how they will fit into the new landscape? Can she confirm that the Government's final decision in selecting an organisation to provide a unitary ombudsman service for the combined social and private rented sectors will follow the formal public procurement process? What will the timescale be?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** The noble Baroness asked a number of questions. First, we have sought extensive procurement and legal advice on this, and we are confident that the approach we are taking is in line with procurement regulations. I can only reiterate that this work is still in its very early stages, and no decisions have been made. Of course, we will talk to stakeholders throughout the whole of the process. If the noble Baroness or any other noble Lord would like to meet me and my team, I am happy to do so as we go forward.

Secondly, the question on the interaction between schemes is very interesting. We envisage that, where a complaint covers both landlords and letting agents, the separate schemes will work together to triage the complaint effectively and, if necessary, have a joint investigation. Importantly, we want to make sure that, where it is not clear which scheme a tenant should complain to, there is no wrong access point. We will work together to make sure that the tenant gets the service that they require.

**Lord Young of Cookham (Con):** My Lords, I too welcome the Bill's proposal to establish a private rented sector ombudsman service. There will be an opportunity when the Bill reaches your Lordships' House to discuss the issues raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, as to where this service should best be provided. What powers will the ombudsman have to enforce his or her findings? Who will bear the cost?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** I thank my noble friend. He is absolutely right: the Bill will come to this House shortly and I am sure we will have many more debates on this issue. As far as powers are concerned, the Bill says that the ombudsman's enforcement powers will be to expel the landlord from membership of the organisation unless they deal with their obligations and then rejoin, and they will be liable for civil and, in the worst cases, legal penalties if they continue to operate without that membership. Those are quite strong powers that will back up local authorities' powers. On the scheme's funding, it will be a landlord membership scheme, as is the Housing Ombudsman scheme. Membership of that scheme is at £5.75 per unit.

**Lord Khan of Burnley (Lab):** My Lords, when the Government's new or expanded ombudsman is established, it will have to work closely with local authorities and will have enforcement responsibilities, but it is important that that work is not duplicated. Does the Minister have any plans for the department to issue guidance on how local authorities and the ombudsman can work together? How do the Government propose to resource the new ombudsman service, given the potential increase in demand that may emerge?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** Of course we will work with the local authorities as the Bill moves forward. The ombudsman will complement local authority decisions and back them up.

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab):** My Lords, I very much welcome the expansion of the ombudsman service. My worry about what appears to be a decision by the Government is that representatives of private tenants, which will be different from the ones dealt with already, will not get a voice if there is no open procurement. I hope the Government will look to representatives of private rented accommodation to ensure that they are involved in the choice of ombudsman so that it fits that particular client group.

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** My Lords, of course we will, but what is important is the tenants, who sometimes do not know where to go. In my opinion and that of the department, it is important that they have one front door and that they get the services they require.

**Lord Stunell (LD):** My Lords, can the Minister give us some idea of the timetable by which these things will come into force? In the meantime, Section 21 evictions are continuing, private tenants are at a major disadvantage and landlords are, it appears, accelerating their use of Section 21 to pre-empt the incoming legislation, so the settlement of these issues is really important. Can she give us some help on when we will actually see an ombudsman in post working and dealing with the complaints that private tenants very legitimately have?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** That is a really important question with a very simple answer: we intend to have the redress available as soon as we can after the Bill receives Royal Assent. We are working on that strongly at the moment, because it is an important service for tenants.

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** My Lords, I declare my interest in the private rented sector. Can my noble friend the Minister tell us how the private sector will be made aware of this new process, if and when this new policy is implemented?

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** I thank my noble friend. It will need a lot of communication. We have already had Make Things Right in the social rented sector, which has increased people's awareness of the scheme to 63% from below 55%. We will continue that campaign. As we move to a new ombudsman for the private rented sector, we will continue to have a strong campaign to ensure that all rented sector tenants understand their rights.

## LGBT People: Diplomatic Service *Question*

11.25 am

Asked by **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town**

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the apology on 5 July 2021 by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for the historic ban on LGBT people serving in the Diplomatic Service,

[BARONESS HAYTER OF KENTISH TOWN]

whether they will take steps to ascertain how many staff were dismissed or forced to resign between 1967 and 1991 as a result of the ban; and whether they have considered compensation similar to that proposed by Lord Etherton's Independent Review into the service and experience of LGBT veterans who served prior to 2000, published in July 2023.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):**

My Lords, the FCDO has rightly apologised for the unjust ban on LGBT+ officers serving in the Diplomatic Service prior to 1991. The department is also actively monitoring the outcomes of the Etherton report, its effectiveness and the lessons learned, which could be learned for our organisation. I know the noble Baroness's interest in this. I will follow up with her directly as we make progress in this respect.

**Baroness Goldie (Con):** My Lords—

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab):** I thank the Minister for that. Many years ago, my former colleague, the rather brilliant Gareth Williams, was a high-flying diplomat, but he was dismissed from the service the very moment he revealed that he was gay—no future, no career, no apology, no debate, and a great loss to the country, which therefore could not use the services of this very talented man. The Minister took action on this after I and my noble friend Lord Collins raised it with him, and we got the very welcome apology to which he referred. The problem is that that was not sent to my friend Gareth Williams nor, of course, to all the other people who were dismissed from the Foreign Office, and there has been no attempt to identify who was dismissed so that they can have the apology before anything else. Could we maybe look through the records and see who else lost their job, and at least make them aware of the apology for the ban on LGBT people working in the Diplomatic Service?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** Of course. That is a very pragmatic and practical suggestion, which we will take forward. I assure the noble Baroness that we are doing exactly that and working with the sensitivity that is required. The noble Baroness would have noticed my Written Ministerial Statement issued at the start of this month on issues of accreditation, as part of modernising the FCDO for the diversity of our workforce today, for the kind of diverse families that are now involved with and rightly celebrated within the FCDO.

**Baroness Goldie (Con):** My Lords, I apologise to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter. I know that the MoD found the report from the noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton, immensely helpful. We were indebted to him for his excellent independent review. I have also had the privilege of working closely with my noble friend the Minister on a number of issues. This is complex and sensitive. I suggest that it would

be a useful collaboration for the two departments to consider how they might work together and share experience.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** Over many years, if I have learned one thing it is to listen to my noble friend very closely. Of course we will take that forward, but I assure her that, notwithstanding her departure from the Ministry of Defence, we continue to work very closely across the two departments.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, it is still extraordinary to think that this ban had ever been in place in the first place. The current situation is that many LGBT staff for the FCDO work in very complex and, indeed, hostile environments in their postings, regrettably all too many of which are in Commonwealth countries. Will the Minister agree that there had perhaps been a practice within the FCDO to suggest that LGBT staff should not apply to these postings—indeed, that would potentially cause complications with visa applications and housing support—but that there has been a very welcome cultural shift within the FCDO to ensure that postings facilitate LGBT staff to work in complex environments and then support them? I hope the Minister will agree that this is a long overdue but very welcome cultural shift. Does he agree that this is important for locally recruited staff in those countries as well?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** I agree with the noble Lord, and I assure him that, certainly in my time at the Foreign Office as a joint Minister and at the FCDO, we have made great strides forward. I recognise the importance of the recent announcement we have made, both to facilitate and to demonstrate directly that this is a modern department, dealing with complex issues in the world but, equally, we are proud of all our diplomatic staff.

**Lord Cashman (Lab):** My Lords, I welcome this Question, which deals with an issue that some of us in this House have been working on for decades. Indeed, I was privileged to work with the noble Baroness, Lady Goldie, on widening this issue into the Armed Forces. It is always good to see the Minister at the Dispatch Box on this issue. May I suggest that he encourage the noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton, to look at his report to see how it could be widened to deal with the diplomatic and intelligence services? Perhaps he could look at the Canadian model: the Canadian Government have considered equality of treatment for those in service to the Government, and I believe that serves as an excellent model.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** I begin by paying tribute to the noble Lord for his work in this area, and to that of my noble friend Lord Lexden, too, for what has been done in this place. I also acknowledge the noble Lord, Lord Collins, on the Opposition Front Bench, because we have worked closely on this issue. Of course I will take the suggestion forward in working with other key partners. I have gone through the recommendations of the report, and I know that the MoD has already implemented just about half of them. I think the MoD is looking very much at, and is

seized on, recommending the important financial reward element, which has been acknowledged as a principle. Of course, in the two departments we will want to see what can be learnt from that. There are different ways of working, and I am sure there are crossovers, which are being looked at actively as I speak.

**Baroness Barker (LD):** My Lords, does the Minister agree that there is a distinct difference between the Ministry of Defence and the FCDO? Service records, and reasons for dismissal, were usually matters of public record, and known to friends and family. That is not always the case with employment in the FCDO and the intelligence services. Does he agree that there is, therefore, an increased onus on the department to actively seek out people who may have been victims of this policy, to ensure that they are aware of remedies and apologies to which they may be entitled.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, I note what the noble Baroness has said. As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter, also pointed out, it is important that we are proactive, but also sensitive, in our approach. I assure the noble Baroness that that is exactly the approach of the FCDO, led by the permanent under-secretary in this respect.

**Lord Herbert of South Downs (Con):** My Lords, I draw attention to my entry in the register as chair of the Global Equality Caucus, and the Prime Minister's special envoy on LGBT rights. The fact that people can now serve openly, regardless of their sexual orientation, throughout the Diplomatic Service, including at senior rank, with a number of such ambassadors representing our country, is obviously an immensely important step forward. Nevertheless, are there not still a number of countries where it would be very difficult for members of our Diplomatic Service to be open about their sexual orientation, particularly at senior level? That is a sign of the polarised world in which we increasingly find ourselves. Will my noble friend assure me that the Government will continue to take all possible steps to promote LGBT+ rights wherever possible, and particularly to take action in countries where those rights are being reversed?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** Again, I acknowledge my noble friend's important work as the special envoy for LGBT+ rights on behalf of the FCDO. I very much welcomed his direct participation. He rightly raises the issue of countries around the world. There are about 65 such countries—he alluded to this—31 of which are in the Commonwealth. We have taken a practical approach. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, will remember that during the premiership of my right honourable friend Theresa May we took specific steps on allocating finance, and then worked quite sensitively on, for example, legislative reform, to see how progress could be made. That focus continues.

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, I deeply appreciate what the noble Lord has done, particularly when we first raised this issue. One of the things that his department can do, and has been doing, is raising awareness through active civil society and supporting

civil society, in the conditions that our diplomats face. I know that, certainly in Balkan countries, our ambassadors have been proactive in inviting civil society in to ensure that they are defended and can be vibrant. Can he reassure me that we will continue to do this work, and work with the APPG to which the noble Lord has just referred?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, I can give the noble Lord that assurance. We work in very practical terms, through invitations to particular events. He will appreciate, I know, the sensitivity in certain countries, where even meeting visiting Ministers is a challenge for those civil society representatives. We often consciously do not publicise the meetings but work constructively with them and will continue to do so. The important issue here is that we see progress. There has been regression but, as my noble friend Lord Herbert also pointed out, we stand forth and represent the rights of all communities and all people everywhere—but do so in a way that brings practical progress in their rights.

**Lord Lexden (Con):** My Lords, as a result of the superb review by the noble and learned Lord, Lord Etherton, compensation will be made available for LGBT veterans who suffered so severely the effects of injustice. Should not compensation also be considered in relation to these other loyal servants of the Crown whose happiness was destroyed and careers ruined as a result of similar injustice?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, acknowledging my noble friend's work in this area, I recognise the point he has raised. He will know that I cannot make that commitment at this point, but I assure him that we are looking carefully at the noble and learned Lord's recommendations for the crossover application and at what more can be done.

## Taiwan: Elections

### Question

11.36 am

Asked by **Baroness D'Souza**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the implications of the outcome of both the presidential and legislative elections recently held in Taiwan.

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):** My Lords, the elections on 13 January are a testament to Taiwan's vibrant democracy. My noble friend the Foreign Secretary issued a statement following the result congratulating Dr Lai on his victory and calling for both sides of the Taiwan Strait to renew efforts to resolve differences peacefully through constructive dialogue, without the threat to use force or coercion. The UK, of course, has a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

**Baroness D'Souza (CB):** I thank the Minister for his response. The PRC warned Taiwan that voting the wrong way might lead to war, and threatened force.

[BARONESS D'SOUZA]

Nevertheless, reunification remains central to President Xi's China dream. It is reported that President Biden is about to send a high-level delegation in support of Dr Lai's victory in Taiwan, and the success of this election will allow Taiwan to continue its commitment to human rights and democratic values. But what further support will the UK Government provide for Taiwan's global integration, including membership of international organisations, as well as protecting safe passage of commercial shipping through the strait, and the semiconductor industry?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, the noble Baroness rightly raises important issues of trade. The United Kingdom has a thriving trade relationship with Taiwan, worth about £8 billion, and I assure her that we are focused on key sectors such as trade, education and culture. I have already addressed the issue of stability and security, and it will continue to be stressed in our representations to China directly. Peace in the strait is important in the global world as it stands today.

**Lord Faulkner of Worcester (Lab):** My Lords, I declare an interest as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Taiwan. I would like the Minister to convey to his noble friend the Foreign Secretary how great the sense of appreciation in Taiwan was on receipt of the message of congratulations on the elections at the weekend. He is right to say that it is a vibrant democracy. In fact, it is democracy, more than anything else, that won the election. A turnout of over 70%, with 14 million people voting in a completely peaceful environment, is a huge testament to democracy in Taiwan. I echo what the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, says about help with further initiatives in which we do not go as far as formal recognition, but which involve Taiwan in world bodies to which they are placed to contribute, such as the World Health Organization. I hope that the Minister was able to give some encouragement on that too.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** I thank the noble Lord for his work in this area and I will of course convey his thanks to my noble friend the Foreign Secretary. I assure him, and the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, that there are occasions—for example, at meetings of the World Health Assembly—when we have been very much at the forefront of campaigning for Taiwan's engagement and involvement. On Taiwan as a state, this is not just about Taiwan and China; it is important for the whole world, and ensuring security and stability in the Taiwan Strait is reflective of that priority for His Majesty's Government.

**Lord Bellingham (Con):** My Lords, the Minister mentioned the £8 billion in bilateral trade. He will be aware that there has been a significant amount of Taiwanese investment in East Anglia, particularly in semiconductors, renewable energy and other technologies. Can he say something about the recently signed enhanced trade partnership? Post Brexit, could it be upgraded to a full trade treaty, and will our Ministers be working on that?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** We certainly welcome the partnership agreement. As I understand it, the Department for Business and Trade has no current live plans for an FTA. However, the diversity of our trade with Taiwan across goods and services has been bolstered, and Taiwan is now the 35th largest trading partner with the United Kingdom.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, I was very happy to write to the president-elect on behalf of these Benches as he is the leader of our sister party; it is always welcome to congratulate a Liberal who has won an election. I know it is a rare occurrence, but it is a particularly welcome one in this regard, given that having a liberal democracy in the region is important. However, closer relationship with Taiwan is also in our strategic interests in the context of the resilience of the UK's relationship with China. Further to the Question, does the Minister agree that, in advance of discussions about a full FTA, a much wider UK-Taiwan industrial strategy would be in our strategic interests, particularly involving the sectors of our economy that would benefit from closer links with a liberal democracy, rather than with China?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** On the noble Lord's first point, I fear that if he is asking for a reciprocal letter of congratulations from Taiwan, he will be waiting a long time. I take on board the point he raised. The manufacturing base that is Taiwan provides a huge opportunity for us to do more in that space.

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, I will pick up a theme that I have already covered in Question Time today. One important ingredient of Taiwan's path to democracy has been an active, vibrant civil society. I would not leave things to the Liberal party—in fact, it is that civil society that has guaranteed democracy. What are the Government doing to support that development, not only in Taiwan but in the region as a whole? That can be a strong beacon for economic prosperity for the whole region.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, the noble Lord knows how much I agree with him on this point. Civil society is intrinsic to any progressive society, particularly democracies, be they emerging, fragile or indeed established. The more we can do to encourage civil societies, strengthening their constitutions and encouraging their consultations with policy and programmes, the better, and we will of course do so in Taiwan and in the wider region. I recently visited India, for example, and importantly, part of my engagement there, at times discreetly, was with civil society to ensure that its voice is part of our thinking.

**Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford (Con):** My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady D'Souza, already mentioned the risks that regional tensions pose to tech-enabled sectors due to their dominance in the semiconductor and connected sectors. The UK's semiconductor strategy sets out a number of measures to try to mitigate these risks. Will the Minister have conversations with colleagues in DSIT to try to update



this strategy in the light of these election results, and could he mention some of those recommendations today?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, I have already alluded to the importance of our relationship with Taiwan, the need to strengthen global trade and the role Taiwan plays in that regard. I will certainly take back my noble friend's question on current live conversations and build in her suggestions.

**Baroness Hoey (Non-Affl):** My Lords, does the Minister share my disappointment that the Taoiseach of Ireland, a so-called neutral country, made a very strong statement yesterday in Davos that Taiwan was part of China?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, although we recognise Taiwan's place and its relationship with China, we have always been very clear, while recognising issues of sovereignty, that the vibrancy of Taiwan's democracy and its autonomy—we have seen it again in the vibrancy of its election—are important principles to protect. Therefore, in the important engagements we have with China on a whole raft of issues, we ensure that those points are raised directly with it. I cannot speak for the Taoiseach or indeed a Prime Minister or president of another country.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** But of course, my Lords, the People's Republic of China has never been able to claim that Taiwan has ever been part of the PRC, so talk of reunification is completely wrong. Great emphasis has been placed on the congratulatory messages sent to President-elect William Lai, and rightly so. However, what about the bellicose and intemperate remarks from Beijing and the People's Republic of China denouncing those statesmen and women who have sent those congratulatory messages? What does that say about China's own aggressive intentions towards Taiwan in the future? Are we making proper preparations and risk assessments on everything from the economy to defence arrangements in the light of the potential invasion of Taiwan? In particular, will the Minister return to the questions about our own reliance on things such as advanced semiconductors, 90% of which come out of Taiwan, and the failure to provide observer status for 24 million people at the World Health Organization, in light of our experiences during the pandemic?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con):** My Lords, on the noble Lord's second point, I have already said that we have led on that and will continue to campaign for Taiwan's direct engagement as an observer at the World Health Assembly. On the issue he raises regarding China, we will of course emphasise this in the continuing bilateral representations that we make in our relationship with China. However, like many others, including the noble Lord, we are concerned about the consequences should peace and stability fail in the Taiwan Strait. As I have said before, this is not just about China and Taiwan; there are also global implications, and of course we recognise that and are planning accordingly.

## Arrangement of Business *Announcement*

11.47 am

**Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, before we move on to the main business, I want to raise an issue which should concern all Members of the House. When we have timed debates, frankly, Members on all sides of the House are speaking too long and going over their speaking limit. That results in other Members not getting a chance to reply, particularly the Front Benches, or sometimes with take-note Motions the Member who moved the Motion. I certainly want to hear the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, and the noble Lord, Lord Trees, at the end of their debates today. It is discourteous to other colleagues to go over your time, particularly in a timed debate.

I noticed that on today's Order Paper the first debate is limited to six minutes for Back-Benchers. That is quite a lot of time. For the third debate, it is seven minutes. Respectfully, if you cannot make your point in six or seven minutes then maybe you should reflect on how you present yourself to the House. It is wrong that we do this.

We have another issue in that we now have persistent in-the-gap speakers. Speaking in the gap should be used very sparingly when you have not managed to get in. Persistent in-the-gap speakers can be found on all Benches, and I suggest that noble Lords who do it stop doing so.

**The Lord Privy Seal (Lord True) (Con):** My Lords, the noble Lord makes a very fair point. I spent nearly 30 years in local government in a council chamber where you were not allowed to speak for more than five minutes, and I think I managed to get my case over sometimes. It shows full respect to other Peers to respect those limits, although I know that sometimes the limits are quite short. If I may say so, it is also true at Question Time, where there are not time limits, that sometimes questions and answers are too long. We have discussed this before and we on this side strive to be briefer. I have noticed that there is now quite a wide tendency to read questions, either from pieces of paper or even smartphones. The normal guide is 130 words a minute, so if speeches or questions are written out then there really is no excuse for them to last longer than they need to. I agree with the noble Lord that it does not show full respect to other Members. I am grateful for what he said; I agree with him and I am sure that the House listened carefully to him.

**Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op):** I endorse the comments of the Leader of the House about Question Time. I have always said that the clue is in the title: it is Question Time.

**Baroness Garden of Frognal (LD):** My Lords, I suggest that the Whips could be a bit more assertive when people go over time, because often they sit there while the time goes on and the rest of the House is getting agitated, but they do not intervene. Please can they intervene rather more?

**Lord Lilley (Con):** My Lords, would there not be more time for Back-Benchers if we ended the quite unjustifiable right of the Lib Dems to reply to every debate?

**Lord Naseby (Con):** My Lords, how is this to be communicated to all those Members of your Lordships' House who are not present this morning?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, perhaps some Members of your Lordships' House read *Hansard*, but my noble friend makes a good point; we communicate these matters through party groups and will continue to do so. I certainly sometimes make the point to Ministers not to go on for too long—perhaps sometimes people see me doing that. We will communicate this, and I hope all Members of the House will read what has been said by the noble Lord opposite and others.

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, in response to the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, and not just defending the Liberal Democrats, I point out that the two largest parties in your Lordships' House do not represent the choices of a very large number of British voters and we need to hear from a variety of voices.

## Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill

*First Reading*

11.51 am

*The Bill was brought from the Commons, read a first time and ordered to be printed.*

## Biosecurity and Infectious Diseases

*Motion to Take Note*

11.52 am

*Moved by Lord Trees*

That this House takes note of biosecurity, and the threat of infectious diseases for human, animal and plant health, in an age of globalisation and climate change.

**Lord Trees (CB):** My Lords, after that I think I had better get a move on. First, it is a pleasure to welcome the Minister to the House and his new role; I wish him well and look forward to working with him. This is a major topic, so it is something of a baptism, but I hope fire will not be involved. I also thank all those who put their names down to speak; I am very grateful indeed. Finally, I draw attention to my declarations in the register.

In 1624, when John Donne wrote

“No man is an island ...

Every man is ...

A part of the main”,

he could not have imagined how prophetic that might be—although perhaps not in the way he intended. The movement of humans, animals and plants, and of animal and plant products, is now at a speed and scale that John Donne could not have imagined. We now exist in a global village, potentially shared with global

pathogens. In 2001, the then director-general of the WHO, Gro Brundtland, commented rather less poetically than John Donne that

“with globalization, a single microbial sea washes all of humankind”.

Of course, the same is true for animals and plants.

This debate has a very broad scope, including human, animal and plant infections, and that is deliberate, in view of the interrelatedness of many of the issues, as recognised in the One Health concept. This debate is about biosecurity in the United Kingdom, so it concerns the threat of geographic spread of pathogens and pests to the UK and also of their potential establishment in the UK. The former can be very serious, even without the possibility of the latter, but if both conditions are met—spread, incursion and sustained transmission, as in Covid-19, foot and mouth and ash dieback—the consequences can be catastrophic.

Climate change is one driver of changes in infectious disease geography. A major recent review concluded that over half of infectious diseases of humans can be aggravated by climatic hazards. This is particularly relevant not only to the spread of pathogens but to their establishment as transmitted infections in new locations if vectors such as insects and ticks are involved.

While some pathogens are spread by the movement of free-living wildlife or invertebrate vectors such as insects, most human, animal and plant pathogens are spread by human-mediated transport, which means that they can travel vast distances in very short times—frequently shorter than the time it takes for their signs and symptoms to become apparent, which is very significant. The scale of global movements is now huge. In 2022, 224 million passengers passed through UK airports. In 2021, we imported food from 161 of the 195 recognised countries in the world. In 2022, we imported 18.6 million forest trees. Animal products can be in the UK in less than 12 hours from countries such as Mexico or Thailand.

A good example of the effect of host movement and infection spread to the UK is with respect to dogs and dog pathogens since the abolition of quarantine for rabies control and its replacement with rabies vaccination in 2000. This has had the effect of vastly increasing the number of dogs coming into the UK every year from around 5,000, which had previously spent six months in quarantine, to now in excess of 300,000 arriving within a matter of hours. We are fortunate that this has not yet resulted in any epidemic disease in dogs, but we have seen an accumulation of novel, previously exotic infections in our UK dog population. The latest of these is *Brucella canis*, a bacterial infection that is transmissible dog to dog but is also zoonotic—that is, transmissible to humans—which is a matter of particular concern.

With regard to plants, the effect of imported tree pathogens has been particularly devastating. A whole generation of British children has grown up who have not seen a full-grown elm tree, as a result of the ravages of Dutch elm disease, imported with elm products from Canada in the 1960s. This has been followed by the import of ash dieback disease affecting ash trees, which it has been estimated will cost us something like £15 billion to clean up and deal with.

Finally, with regard to human health, a number of infections are regularly reported in immigrant communities, such as malaria and TB, which fortunately do not spread easily in the UK, but some infections, of course, particularly respiratory viruses such as the virus causing Covid-19 and flu viruses, can spread rapidly from travellers to the resident population, with devastating consequences.

What of current threats? With apologies to Donald Rumsfeld, there are infections we have had in the past and might have again in the future, such as foot and mouth disease, which might be regarded as the known knowns. There are also infections that we have not experienced in the UK but which we are aware of and recognise that they present a new threat. African swine fever in pigs is a good animal example—perhaps a known unknown. Of course, there are unknown unknowns: infections yet to emerge from wildlife or plants, or newly evolved drug-resistant pathogens, escapees from laboratory research or creations of bioterrorism.

In humans, a major disease risk yet to reach the UK is the mosquito-transmitted dengue fever virus. This has spread north and west in continental Europe—from eight to 13 countries just in the last 10 years—and has caused locally acquired infections in the Paris region: as close to the UK as that. Transmission in the UK would require its mosquito vector to be established, but conditions are already favourable in the south—for example, around London.

In animals, avian influenza is a major current problem. That presents particular biosecurity challenges since it is introduced into our domestic and wild bird populations by migrating birds. African swine fever, which I have already mentioned, is a disease that has been expanding its range in continental Europe. It is carried by wild boars and causes serious disease in domestic pigs. It survives in meat products for many weeks, or even months, so there is a very real threat of its introduction to the UK through the 1 million tonnes of pigmeat we import annually, the vast majority of which comes from Europe.

In plants, our ambitious goals for the reforestation of the UK, which include planting 30,000 hectares of new woodland annually, are threatened by a host of tree pathogens that could spread to the UK. We risk losing more trees than we can possibly plant. For example, in 2020-21, more than 1,300 hectares of larch trees had to be felled in Wales to control a pathogen causing severe larch dieback. That was more than twice the area of new larch tree planting that year.

What is being done about these risks? The Government are to be congratulated on publishing the *UK Biological Security Strategy* in 2023. What progress has been made in enacting the commitments made by the Deputy Prime Minister, Oliver Dowden, in the other place in June 2023? Other developments have included the replacement of Public Health England with the UK Health Security Agency. A number of other different organisations and academic groups have been established or have evolved in response to biosecurity challenges. Time forbids me to mention these in detail.

Ironically, while, after Brexit, we now have the legal ability to regulate importations from continental Europe, we have not yet fully used those powers, although our

proximity to Europe and our still substantial trade links mean that it is a likely source of a number of animal and plant pathogens. For example, there has been a recent outbreak of antibiotic-resistant salmonella in humans in the UK as a result of the importation of infected poultry products from Poland. This emphasises the importance of the new import inspection capability—the so-called border target operating model, or BTOM, which has been much delayed. Can the Minister say when BTOM will be working at full capability and with adequate human resources, especially of veterinary surgeons?

Given the scale of the surveillance challenge regarding imported goods or the movement of live humans, animals and plants into the UK, it will be essential to harness and further develop modern technologies for detecting pathogens and identifying high-risk situations. What are His Majesty's Government doing to support and encourage research and development of high-throughput, high-technology biosurveillance tools to provide a metaphorical biosurveillance door through which all risk items pass?

Another important element is raising awareness—in the public, as well as in industry and commerce—of the challenges of biosecurity and, where relevant, the importance of travel vaccination. In 2018, the House of Lords EU Committee produced a report on the effects of Brexit on biosecurity in animals and plants. It highlighted the example of Australia and New Zealand, which have a highly effective biosecurity arrangement achieved through both legislation and public awareness. Can the Minister highlight what His Majesty's Government are doing to increase public awareness of biosecurity threats?

While globalisation has brought great economic benefit, there is a cost to it—namely, the almost inevitable financial catastrophes from breaching our biosecurity, some of which I have outlined. These events can severely affect other attempts to improve human, animal or plant health, improve the environment and enhance biodiversity. We are spending millions in taxpayers' money coping with the catastrophic impacts of imported diseases once they arise. Should we not be investing more in measures to try to prevent those happening? A major recent review of the costs of the global Covid-19 pandemic, and of global measures which might help prevent or reduce the inevitability of further pandemics, concluded that the associated costs of pandemic prevention and response efforts would, for 10 years, be only about 2% of the total cost of the global Covid-19 pandemic—estimated at between \$8 trillion and \$15 trillion.

Given that trade is a vector for pathogen transfer, on the same principle as for the environment where the polluter pays, should not those who benefit financially from trade have to bear some responsibility when biosecurity is breached? The EU Committee report of 2018 commented that the facilitation of trade post Brexit must not be allowed to compromise the UK's biosecurity—a matter of considerable and continuing concern.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that there are very significant risks to the UK's health security for humans, animals, plants and indeed the environment, and plenty of evidence that these risks are increasing because of

[LORD TREES]

climate change and globalisation. Although it may be difficult—indeed financially, practically and politically impossible—for us to prevent the emergence of infectious disease threats in other parts of the world, we do have the ability to try to reduce the risks of incursions of infectious diseases into the UK while allowing, as far as possible, unhindered trade. Just as we are increasingly recognising the importance of energy security and food security—the latter of which may be imperilled by the introduction of new animal and plant pathogens—I suggest we should equally recognise the importance of biosecurity.

12.07 pm

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach (Con):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Trees. He is a distinguished Member of this House and this is an important topic. I might tend to disagree with some of what he said—probably because of my slightly different job as a horticulturalist. But I certainly join him in welcoming our new Minister. He knows that he has a hard act to follow, but all of us who heard him at Question Time on Tuesday will know that he is a fine appointment.

I must declare my interests in the register, but I think my background in the horticultural and farming business is probably more important. I shall concentrate on horticulture, hoping to show that international co-operation is the most important way in which we can deliver biosecurity.

Perhaps I might be excused some personal history. I left school at 17 and went to work in the family bulb-growing and farming business. I was ambitious for its success. I went to work in the Netherlands at a nursery and bulb farm. I learned an important lesson—they were very good at their horticulture. Although they were competitive and entrepreneurial, they worked together and shared, even across borders.

Which brings me to the substance of this debate. The sciences were what I knew about, and it became clear that science lay at the foundation of biosecurity. Discovering the cause of pests and diseases was also its remedy. Eventually, as the result of my interest in science and the regulation of commerce, I chaired the European Bulb Committee, which was set up in Brussels to advise on the integration of horticulture within Europe, its regulatory framework, co-operation and product biosecurity across what became the European Union.

However, here comes the rub. Without doubt, Brexit has hindered this trade, particularly with the Netherlands, in both additional bureaucracy and costs. Biosecurity is about international co-operation. Nothing demonstrates this better than plant breeding, in providing new varieties to protect against evolving pest and disease pressures. It is an expensive business: up to 25% of a plant breeding business's income can be spent on R&D, according to the British Society of Plant Breeders. It is also a risky business: roughly half of plant breeding research is focused on disease resistance and tracking the genetic battle between plants and disease. This battle is why the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act, which we passed in the previous Session, has been so important.

However, as the British Society of Plant Breeders has pointed out, regulatory separation between us and our trading partners in effect doubles the cost of registration and delays testing, trials and certification, which are all part and parcel of making sure that the remedy is effective. Noble Lords will see that I am of the view that we need to find ways of working together again, trusting our differing and diverging regulatory systems, if we are successfully to deliver resilience and responsiveness to present and future disease threats—both at home and abroad—and to provide the biosecurity and trade that the world needs.

12.11 pm

**Viscount Stansgate (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Trees—he is my noble friend; I hope that I am allowed to use that term—on securing today's important debate. I welcome those Members who are here to take part in it. Frankly, I wish that we had more debates of this kind in the Chamber. I will do my best to bear in mind what was said earlier about the time limit. The introduction from the noble Lord, Lord Trees, was masterly and comprehensive. I wish the Minister well in his maiden speech at the Dispatch Box.

I know that noble Lords have received useful briefings from organisations with an interest in this broad subject. I thank them all. I pay tribute to the valuable briefing from our own House of Lords Library and the briefing produced by POST in April last year. I recommend that today's readers of *Hansard* should consult them all.

I want to use my time to convey some of the points raised with me by the Royal Society of Biology, in particular its science policy team. The House will know that the Royal Society of Biology is the major scientific society covering the biological sciences; I should draw the attention of the House to my entry in the register of interests as a fellow. The RSB submitted evidence to the *UK Biological Security Strategy* in 2022 and to the Emerging Diseases and Learnings from Covid-19 inquiry in 2023.

It is the view of the society that, in responding to threats to UK biosecurity, government policy-making should take into account all available evidence from all available sources, whether environmental or concerning human or animal health. Frankly, we cannot take a piecemeal approach to biosecurity because, if you do not consider the issue in the round, the risk is that you displace one problem with another. Action on one specific front is not going to be enough. The Government should optimise the use of evidence synthesis so that our society and its ecosystems, its health systems and the food, feed and fuel—even the construction material production systems—that we rely on are able to avert and be resilient to disease, biological attacks and other biological risks.

By construction materials I mean, for example, wood. The health of trees is of huge importance, especially when considering the threats from overseas; mention has already been made, quite rightly, of ash dieback. I think this is one of the reasons why Members have taken quite an interest in the recent Bill to facilitate the CPTPP: because of the biosecurity risks

that arise from trade in that part of the world. For example, a bacterium called *Xylella fastidiosa*—I hope I pronounced it right—has not yet been detected in the UK but is known to have been responsible for major outbreaks in Europe. It causes disease and plant death in more than 650 plant species, including crops such as plums, cherries, almonds, blueberries and rosemary. Other hosts include tree species such as oak, elm, ash and plane—all of which, as we know, we have here in the UK. Stricter measures are necessary, especially at our borders, to prevent the import of biosecurity risks.

Another risk that we should take extremely seriously concerns the indiscriminate use of antibiotics in animals, which is all too prevalent in parts of south and south-east Asia. I shall return to this in a moment.

It is fundamental that the evidence base used by the Government to decide their policy incorporates the One Health principles and that these are incorporated into future policy-making decisions. This is an important point that I would like to emphasise. The One Health principles are an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimise the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognises that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants and the wider environment—including ecosystems—are closely linked and interdependent. The Government must co-ordinate their efforts with funders and other stakeholders to enhance and incentivise One Health research and education. They must also integrate One Health into their evidence base and take it into account alongside their long-term strategy to tackle current and future threats. One Health policy must not be solely human and animal focused but should encompass as broad a range of aspects as possible, including plants and other organisms, environmental factors and the interactions between these.

There are different types of threats to UK biosecurity. It is vital that the funding for and prioritisation of zoonotic diseases do not detract from resources focused on the continuing threat of other pandemics. Emerging infectious diseases in plant populations can seriously jeopardise food security, biodiversity and the natural environment, with serious health and economic consequences. Insufficient biosecurity measures have increased the risk of pandemics across species, including what you might call the silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance, as well as hampering the treatment of current and emerging infectious diseases. I hardly need to tell your Lordships that AMR remains a major threat that faces us all. If we cannot keep one step ahead of nature's ability to adapt and develop resistance to antibiotics, we will go straight back 200 years to the early 19th century, when a cut on your knee could lead to infection and death; to be more up to date, treatments that we now have for HIV, as well as hip and knee operations, would be too risky to attempt and deaths would soar as a result.

My time is coming to an end so I will finish by saying this: this biosecurity debate is one side of a coin that has climate change on the other. It will benefit us all if we understand how important that is because we have lots of threats facing us in this country, and biodiversity loss and climate change are two of the most important.

12.17 pm

**The Earl of Kinnoull (CB):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Viscount, Lord Stansgate; as ever, he was very thought-provoking. I add my congratulations to my noble friend Lord Trees on not only his excellent and thorough introduction but on securing this very important debate. I also welcome the Minister and wish him good luck in his maiden speech.

I start by declaring my interests as set out in the register, in particular as chair of the UK Squirrel Accord. I am heavily involved in the complex issues surrounding the difficulties caused by invasive alien grey squirrels destroying our native broadleaf trees. In May 2023—here, I go back to something that the noble Viscount just said—the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Benyon, said that

“you cannot have net zero without talking about trees”.—[*Official Report*, 22/5/23; col. 598.]

I am sure that everyone in the Chamber today would agree with that. At the same time, many sources have concluded what the UK Squirrel Accord knows to be true: the biggest threat to our broadleaf woodlands is the grey squirrel. They ring-bark trees aged between 10 and 40 years, making them susceptible to a host of pathogens and thus killing many and damaging much, if not all, of the rest in affected plantings. This greatly reduces the yield and quality of the timber. This has resulted in many landowners and managers in England simply not planting the native broadleaf trees that are needed as a significant part of our net zero strategy.

The UK Squirrel Accord is the coming together of 40 organisations of the United Kingdom to address this unpleasant truth. It comprises the four Governments, their nature agencies, the main voluntary sector bodies and the principal private sector players. The accord has not only ensured good communication among member bodies but allowed scientific research to be commissioned together. Quite a lot has been achieved in laying the groundwork for a major initiative in reducing the number of grey squirrels—in large part, through the use of fertility control.

This exciting research is being led by the Animal and Plant Health Agency, or APHA, which is based outside York. It includes strands on the fertility control substance itself, the hoppers that will be used to distribute it, and, most importantly, the rigorous computer modelling that underpins the rollout strategy. The research phase is now in its fifth year, which will give way to the landscape trials phase and then a licensing phase, before the rollout. The Minister has ministerial responsibility for APHA, and the Defra family and APHA have been very helpful and involved in the accord since it came into being. Does the Minister agree with the essential proposition that fertility control research represents the outstanding near-term option as a key weapon for grey squirrel control?

The APHA research has been funded in part by the Defra family, but just over £1 million has been raised from private UK individuals and trusts. I thank very much those people. Some of these generous donors have also brought the welcome offer of help in the large-scale field trials, when the time comes. I hope that it does not seem ungrateful to the Minister to

[THE EARL OF KINNOULL]

observe that much larger sums of government money are being spent in other individual areas of disease and invasive alien species. Given the central need to deal with this issue, for net-zero reasons alone, I urge the Government to consider upping the resource that they devote to it.

Before I close with some specific asks, I congratulate APHA on what it has achieved so far in the research. It is a remarkable institution, filled with dedicated and expert staff. There are various areas where the Government can help. One is around the speed and cost of the licensing process that we are about to undergo, both for the hoppers and for the substances that will be left behind in them. Another is around increasing the co-ordinating resource that the UK Squirrel Accord has available for the next phases. We have been correctly resourced in people and monetary terms up to now, thanks to much generosity from the 40 accord members. However, there will be a step change in what we need to do going forward, and this needs more resource. The Forestry Commission recently came up with an important part of what we need in the field, for which I warmly thanked it. However, we need a small amount extra at the centre. It will take a lot of effort at the centre to deal with further planning, engagement and the education of people up and down the country, and there are a number of other issues as well. If we have a bit more resource now, we will make a better job of dealing with the squirrel. Will the Minister agree to meet, as an introductory thing, to discuss these matters?

12.23 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, and to throw in some good news about grey squirrels, which is the increasing spread of pine martens. Early evidence shows this to be having a positive impact, in reducing grey squirrel populations through natural means. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for securing this crucially important debate and for his expert introduction to it. I join others in welcoming the Minister to the Front Bench and to your Lordships' House; I am sure that in the future we will have many debates discussing driven grouse shooting, but not today.

We are speaking in what is now an age of shocks. We have the climate emergency and the collapse in biodiversity, and we have choked our planet in plastic and other novel entities such as pesticides and pharmaceuticals. Our biogeochemical flows are hopelessly out of balance. We have exceeded so many planetary limits. Within that environment, diseases present far more threats than they have in the past. Biosecurity is now a much more pressing issue. In bringing the Green approach to this debate, it is really important to stress the precautionary principle and the sense that what will protect us ultimately is a healthy natural world, healthy people and a healthy environment—the One Health approach, which has already been mentioned several times. If we think about many of our plants, we find that we have bred them in ways that have removed their natural protections. We need to have a diversity of crops and to look at natural ways in which we can manage the threats that are presented.

During Covid, we were all acutely aware of the phrase, “No one is safe until everyone is safe”. I very much fear that, since then, the acknowledgement that we need a healthy world, and humans to be able to be healthy all around the world, has really slid off of the agenda. Of course, the cuts to the official development assistance have certainly seen the UK doing a lot less. Vaccine inequality is one of the issues that absolutely needs to be put on the agenda here. One statistic that might shock your Lordships' House is that, still, in low-income countries, fewer than 25% of people have had even a single Covid vaccination. That is despite all the wonderful scientific discoveries and the effort that was made. The effort has not been shared around the world, which is a huge problem for us all.

It is tempting to think, as we have already heard and will hear a great deal more, that biosecurity means that, essentially, we have to put up walls to keep these threats out. Of course, that is something that we have to do. Mention has already been made of food security. Traditionally, from this Government and others, there has been a belief that we do not have to worry about producing our own food because we will just import it from around the world. That is a huge risk, as has already been referred to in the example of African swine fever, given by the noble Lord, Lord Trees. It is a security issue for all of us, to make sure that we do not import more food that is necessary. What if we build those walls to keep out biosecurity threats? Take the example of flooding: the risk with the flood wall is that, if it is overtopped and built too high, the impacts are very great. When we talk about biosecurity, we have to think about the security of the whole world.

We also have to think about the security of our own environment from the One Health approach. We still do not have the UK national action plan for the sustainable use of pesticides. If we are thinking about a healthy environment in the UK, that is crucial. If we think about a healthy environment around the world, so many actions in the UK are having massive impacts. Many Members of your Lordships' House are champions of efforts to prevent deforestation. Deforestation is a crucial contributor to damage to the idea of “one health”, through the spread of human, animal and, potentially, plant diseases.

I had a meeting yesterday on this and will in future be bringing to your Lordships' House the idea that, in all our companies and supply chains, there needs to be a duty to prevent environmental damage and human rights damage. Those things are also a biosecurity issue, and we need to see this in a holistic way. In thinking about the whole issue, and looking at the themes, I think diversity is the key to health. One of the things that we are seeing is the great microbial extinction—something that has come to scientific attention only in the last year or two. That is a real threat to the balance we have, and to the rise of diseases, as we have taken away beneficial microbes.

I could mention many diseases here but I will finish by focusing on the threat that is presented to all our health and to animal health from factory farming. We have already talked a great deal about antimicrobial resistance. I believe that it is this threat that will demand the end of factory farming. However, when

people talk about factory farming, they are usually thinking of it being on land, but in UK salmon farming we have seen a significant increase in antimicrobial use—it is broadcasting antibiotics into the sea to spread around the world. Such behaviour has to stop.

12.29 pm

**Baroness Hayman (CB):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness and to speak in this debate. I declare my interest as chair of Peers for the Planet and should perhaps declare an interest as a vice-chair of the All-Party Group on Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases. I share that honour with the noble Lord, Lord Trees, who introduced this debate so effectively and comprehensively that none of us should go over six minutes in our contributions, because there is no need to repeat the devastating analysis he gave of the risks to the UK. I will focus on the risks that come in response to climate change, particularly of vector-borne diseases, which are so susceptible to changes, sometimes very small, in climate.

I remember talking to physicians in Texas many years ago about their concern at seeing locally transmitted cases of dengue. These had never been seen before in Houston but were growing in response to different climatic changes and, of course, population changes. The noble Lord, Lord Trees, said that no man is an island—that is the phrase we always use—but, these days, no island is an island either. We cannot protect ourselves totally by putting up barriers to the importation of these sorts of diseases. I believe that means that, while we are focusing today on the risks to the UK, we have to understand that the burden of many of these diseases and their increase is being felt not in the future for the UK but in the here and now in parts of Africa and Asia, where they are spreading.

That makes me ask the Minister—who, like everyone else, I welcome—to perhaps say something when he replies about the support we are giving in other countries, as part of a global responsibility for health and as self-protection for this country in not putting barriers up, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, was saying, but taking away the threat of that disease importation and the threat caused by the other health effects of global warming and climate change that lead to instability, mass migration and refugee problems, of which we have a very Eurocentric view. There are huge refugee problems caused by the effects of climate change in areas other than the ones that we are talking about in this debate.

We should never forget the health effects of pollution. The burning of fossil fuels, leading to the pollution of the atmosphere, particularly in cities, is thought to cause 7 million premature deaths annually. The air quality in areas of cities, not just in Europe but in India in particular, can be catastrophic when they then have extreme heat events. We have to recognise that heat stress, pollution, flooding and drought—all those effects of climate change—have profound effects on health.

It was significant that last year's COP 28 was the first COP with a whole day relating to the health effects of climate change and biodiversity loss. It brought forth a declaration, signed by 143 countries,

agreeing that they needed to facilitate collaboration on human, animal, environment and climate health changes, such as by implementing a One Health approach addressing the environmental determinants of health, strengthening research on the linkages between environmental and climatic factors and antimicrobial resistance, and intensifying efforts for the early detection of zoonotic spillovers. I hope that the Minister can say what we as a country are doing to implement that declaration.

12.34 pm

**Lord Lilley (Con):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Trees, on securing this debate, introducing it so comprehensively and demonstrating its importance. The Government's *Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain* says:

“Since our departure from the EU, the number of plants and plant products entering Great Britain that require inspection has increased significantly”.

I want to explore why, what those inspections will involve and how effective they are likely to be.

As I understand it, before we left the EU in January 2020, we relied on plant passports for higher-risk plants. These were issued by growers who themselves were subject to inspection from time to time. Henceforth, all consignments that used to come with a plant passport must be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate issued by the exporting country's plant health service. We also recruited 200 extra inspectors, presumably to carry out our own additional inspections. Does this requirement for increased inspection reflect a new and enhanced threat?

The Forestry Commission says that there seems to have been an increase since 2002. Indeed, there has been one new outbreak affecting trees every year, although there were far fewer before that date. As far as I can see, there is no evidence of any recent acceleration, but I may be wrong. When new controls were announced as coming in shortly, the Government cited African swine fever and another disease, whose name I forget. I certainly see signs in France and Italy about the danger of African swine fever. If there are specific threats, should the checks not be focused on those? Is that the intention, or will we spread the checks more widely?

Are we introducing these controls simply in retaliation because the European Union applies its SPS rules to us? We know that its SPS rules quite often go beyond what is required for health and are somewhat protectionist in their intent. If so, I would counsel against that. Tit for tat is always a bad approach. We should threaten to do things only if it is part of a bargaining strategy with a realistic prospect of us reverting to a situation of mutual recognition, which we had before leaving.

Will the controls be a significant burden on trade? I understand—and I am grateful to the CEO of Fera for this information—that in 2021 a quarter of a million consignments were notified to the PHSI, 30,000 were tested and 6,000-plus were found to contain pests, with more than one pest or problem in some, so there was a 2.5% success rate, as it were, in those consignments assigned. In future, will we be testing a far greater number? Are we expecting any great increase

[LORD LILLEY]

in effectiveness as a result, or are we doing it simply because, as is so often the case, regulators have a natural desire to increase their powers and budgets? Some of the lobbying I have received certainly has a whiff of that about it.

Let us suppose that what is being proposed and introduced is necessary, will be effective and will not induce a great extra burden on our businesses. In that case, we should all welcome it as a great Brexit benefit—something we could not have done while we remained a member of the EU.

12.39 pm

**Lord Krebs (CB):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, and to join others in congratulating my noble friend Lord Trees on his excellent introduction to this important debate. I also join others in welcoming the Minister and look forward to his maiden speech. I should declare that, among my interests in the register, I am a scientific adviser to Marks & Spencer.

In recent decades, this country has experienced four major farm animal disease outbreaks caused by breaches in biosecurity. First, there was mad cow disease, or BSE, in the 1990s. Here, the deregulation of the manufacture of meat and bone meal and the consequent lapse in biosecurity allowed the disease to spread within the cattle population. The infective agent, the prion protein, could pass on the disease via meat and bone meal because the rendering temperature had been reduced.

Secondly, there was foot and mouth disease in 2001. This epidemic was the result of inadequate biosecurity and monitoring. It originated from infected imported pork products fed as pig swill, and it spread rapidly throughout the country because of movement of livestock. MAFF was slow to recognise the scale of the problem and to implement appropriate biosecurity measures.

The third disease, bovine TB, has been an ongoing problem in this country since the 1980s. Here, there are two biosecurity issues: the transmission from wildlife, primarily badgers, to cattle and transmission from cattle to cattle within and between farms. Although the randomised badger culling trial showed that the latter is more important than the former, in the past 13 years emphasis in policy has been placed on killing badgers rather than on measures to prevent the spread of the disease among cattle. The fact that the comparative skin test for bovine TB in cattle has a sensitivity of only around 50% in field conditions means that there continues to be a hidden reservoir of infection in our cattle population.

The fourth disease caused by problems with biosecurity, referred to by my noble friend Lord Trees, is avian flu. As he said, this poses a particular problem because it is spread by wild migrating birds. What lessons have the Government learned from these four major problems that we have faced in recent times? Have those lessons been enshrined in Defra thinking and in policy for the future?

I will now briefly look to the future. The risks, as my noble friend Lord Trees expressed so clearly in his introduction, include a mixture of unknowns—for

example, mutations of pathogens, just as BSE may have arisen from a mutation of the scrapie agent—and other risk factors that are known and more predictable. We have already heard about these: international trade, wildlife reservoirs, climate change, drug resistance and animal husbandry, as mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett of Manor Castle.

I will ask the Minister about two aspects of planning for the future. The first is early warning. The Government have a programme to monitor pathogens called PATH-SAFE, described in their literature as

“a three-year project to develop a pilot national surveillance network, using the latest DNA-sequencing technology and environmental sampling to improve the detection and tracking of foodborne and antimicrobial resistant pathogens through the whole agri-food system from farm to fork”.

Can the Minister update us on the progress of that project?

My second point about the future is import controls, already mentioned by a number of speakers, including the noble Lord, Lord Lilley. As we heard, since Brexit there have been no border checks on imports from the European Union, but the new risk-based approach to inspections, the border target operating model, which has been delayed five times, will finally kick off at the end of this month. It will go through a series of phases in April and October until its introduction is complete. The model relies heavily on documentation rather than physical inspections. What proportion of checks will be physical, rather than looking at pieces of paper? Will port health authorities have the required resources to carry out paper and physical checks?

This applies only to legal imports, and illegal imports are likely to pose much greater risks to biosecurity. We know from the experience of Dover Port Health Authority in October 2022 that there are major consignments of illegal meat coming in from eastern Europe and, importantly, there are still ongoing imports of bush meat from Africa—which is completely unregulated—that could carry major disease risks. What is the Government's estimate of how much illegal bush meat and other meat is imported into the UK and what is being done to bear down on that and enhance our biosecurity?

12.45 pm

**Lord Rees of Ludlow (CB):** My Lords, we should be grateful to my noble friend Lord Trees for securing this wide-ranging debate. I will focus on the threat of global pandemics to humans.

Covid-19 was a wake-up call. The published national risk register had been inadequate. No pandemic other than flu was rated as a major threat. Covid was primarily a medical catastrophe but it cascaded into other sectors: to schools and, through its impact on supply chains, manufacturing. There needs to be more joined-up government thinking and firmer guidelines about who, regionally and centrally, has authority in emergencies.

It is welcome that the risk register has been improved. Especially welcome are the comprehensive *Biological Security Strategy*, published just last September, and the strengthening of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention at its 2022 review. The 100-day mission concept to have a vaccine within 100 days of identifying



a threat was launched at the G7 in 2021 when the UK held the chair. Can the Minister provide an update on what has happened to follow that up? All these measures need to be global. The earlier a new virus can be identified, the greater the head start in responding before a global spread.

Importantly, pandemics not only spread faster and more globally than they did in the past but cause far worse societal breakdown. European villages in the 14th century continued to function even when the Black Death halved their populations. In contrast, societies today are vulnerable to serious unrest as soon as hospitals are overwhelmed, which could occur before the fatality rate is even 1%. That is why we need to contemplate a societal or ecological collapse that would be a truly global setback. Covid-19 is not the worst that could happen.

The origin of Covid-19 is controversial. A leakage from the Wuhan lab cannot be ruled out. Be that as it may, we cannot rule out future lab leakages. I recall, for example, that a foot and mouth outbreak in the UK was caused by a leakage from the Pirbright lab in 2007. There is surely a case for enhancing security and independent monitoring of the level 4 labs around the world that are researching these lethal pathogens and, more importantly, ensuring that experiments on lethal pathogens are not done in less secure labs.

Can we rule out a future release that is intentional rather than accidental? To be sure, Governments and even terrorist groups with specific aims will always be inhibited from releasing engineered pandemics because no one can predict where and how far they can spread. The real nightmare would be a deranged loner with biotech expertise who did not care who became infected, or how many.

In contrast to the elaborate, conspicuous equipment needed to create a nuclear weapon, which can feasibly be monitored by international inspectors, biotech involves small-scale, dual-use technology that will become widely accessible. There are thousands of academic and industrial labs around the world where dangerous pathogens are being studied and modified. An increasing number of individuals will acquire the requisite expertise. The dangers are looming even larger. Regulation of biotech is needed ever more today.

However, what is really scary are doubts about global enforcement. Could the regulations be enforced throughout the world any more effectively than drug or tax laws can? Whatever can be done may be done by someone, somewhere. This is the stuff of nightmares.

The rising empowerment of malign, tech-savvy groups, or even individuals, by biotech will pose an intractable challenge to Governments and aggravate the tension between freedom, privacy, and security. The world is unprepared for the moral and practical challenges posed by burgeoning biotechnology in general. These scenarios call for clear thinking and well-crafted policies that recognise both biotech's stupendous potential for human flourishing and its huge potential risk to our safety—indeed, to humanity itself.

We must hope that vaccines and antidotes become ever more effective and speedily produced, in step with the growing threat, and that the UK can indeed achieve influence in what has to be a global programme.

12.51 pm

**Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab):** My Lords, it is both a delight and an honour to follow the noble Lord, Lord Rees, and to join other noble Members in congratulating and thanking the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for securing this debate and for his excellent opening speech. We are fortunate in this House to have the benefit of their respective world-class scientific expertise, communication skills and deep commitment to the cause of increasing our biosecurity.

As is now clear, climate change is a driver of multiple other risks, from emerging zoonoses and disease transmission to compromised food security and an increase in drug-resistant infections. The Covid-19 pandemic is a lesson on the degree to which the entire world is vulnerable to a pandemic or another, as yet unanticipated, major public health event. It is sobering that by near-universal consensus, this vulnerability is set only to increase. The IPCC's *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report* could scarcely be more unequivocal on this specific question. It predicts that, in the near term, we will face

“multiple risks to ecosystems and humans”,

including a greater incidence of

“food-borne, water-borne, and vector-borne diseases”.

These are not merely warnings of a possible dystopian future, but something that already is crystallising into observable reality. We are seeing spikes in malaria transmission in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the first ever locally acquired cases of malaria in Florida and Texas, and, as has already been mentioned, outbreaks of dengue fever in Paris. In 2022, there were more cases of dengue fever in Europe than in the entire preceding decade. Forecasts suggest that, owing to a rise in global temperatures, malaria transmission seasons could be up to five months longer by 2070. Malaria rates in Mozambique are at their highest since the current reporting phase began in 2017. Over 70% of anti-malaria drugs in Africa are imported; what are we doing, or encouraging the international community to do, to stimulate local manufacture of drugs to ensure that weaknesses in the international supply chain do not result in preventable deaths in Africa?

What are the Government doing in either conducting or commissioning predictive modelling of the expected impacts of climate change on current and future disease transmission? If we are to equip ourselves adequately to deal with this crisis, a reactive approach will be insufficient. I welcome the new US-UK Strategic Dialogue on Biological Security and would be grateful for an explanation how, in granular terms, such co-operation will enhance our ability to anticipate future biosecurity threats.

On globalisation, I turn now to recent representations to the Government by port health officials in Dover. Since September 2022, when checks were first introduced, 57 tonnes of illegal, non-compliant pork imports have been seized in Dover alone. The Dover port health manager describes the scale of these illegal imports as “unprecedented” and suggests that for every tonne seized, multiple tonnes are going undetected. These illegal pork imports significantly increase the risk of

[LORD BROWNE OF LADYTON]

African swine fever entering the UK, something that would have a devastating impact on agriculture and, in turn, offer a further incentive to those who wish illegally to import meat.

Given that the cost of living crisis has led to an increase in the illegal food trade, can the Minister elucidate the reasons for the proposed shift in customs checks from Bastion Point to Sevington, 22 miles from the Port of Dover itself? Defra's rationale thus far seems to focus on cost but, given that concerns have been raised by industry sources at Defra forums, I suggest that it may be worth thinking again. The Dover Port Health Authority suggests that this change could easily lead to unexamined goods travelling 22 miles across the UK, with all of the attendant risks of possible infection, diminishing UK biosecurity. It claims it has not received appropriate assurances from Defra as to how existing standards could be maintained and that the Sevington facility, unlike Bastion Point, will not be operational 24 hours a day. Given the degree of concern expressed by the health authority and the UK food industry, does the Minister not agree that further work is needed before this change responsibly can be put into effect?

To return to the broader themes of this debate in the little time remaining, I join other noble Lords in welcoming the Government's 2023 biosecurity strategy. Its ambitions, if realised, would make a genuine and substantive contribution to enhancing our biosecurity. I agree with the Centre for Long-Term Resilience that sustained resourcing will be critical in making its implementation a success. While the £1.5 billion being spent annually is welcome, have the Government considered a longer-term, multi-year funding settlement that would enable implementation to proceed securely and at pace?

I remind the Minister that the Government's first biological security strategy was published in July 2018, just as Parliament was rising for the Summer Recess. To my knowledge, it was never debated in Parliament and while it warned of the need to co-ordinate government actions better and for a "truly comprehensive approach" to meet risks, including pandemics, it manifestly failed so to do, to such an extent that the parliamentary Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, in its December 2020 report, found that Covid-19 exposed "profound shortcomings" in Britain's approach to biosecurity.

As this debate makes clear, we face a variety of long-term biosecurity threats, and our response to these risks must be considered, proactive and durable to ensure that we keep this country safe.

12.56 pm

**Baroness Murphy (CB):** My Lords, the House has not seen much of me this last year, because last year I was one of the 100,000 people to be admitted to hospital in the UK with cellulitis, going on to septicaemia, which then progressed very rapidly to sepsis. I owe my life, or at least my legs, to flucloxacillin. So I thought I would talk about antimicrobial resistance today. I am perfectly well now, by the way, so no worries for the future.

First, antimicrobial resistance in humans is due to inappropriate or excessive prescribing by doctors, of whom I am one, not just in the UK but worldwide. Some 58,000 people in England were reported to the UK Health Security Agency—probably an underestimate, of course—to have had a resistant infection in 2022; that was a rise of 4% in a single year. With *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, for example, which is a very common cause of sepsis in this country, 30% of the bug's subtypes are now resistant.

Pre-pandemic, there was a very healthy drop in prescriptions, which was due to doctors' efforts to reduce the number of inappropriate antibiotic prescriptions, which are usually given out for very mild virus disorders, of course. But this has not been maintained after the Covid pandemic; in fact, they are on the rise again, and we need another big effort. What are the Government doing? I realise that I am asking for some Department of Health wisdom here, as well as the Minister's own.

The second issue, of course, is, as we have heard from everybody, the global impact of antibiotic resistance, which is brought by travellers from abroad. At the moment, Asian and Asian British ethnic groups have almost double the proportion of antibiotic resistant infections—35%—compared with only 19% in white British ethnic groups. This is probably because of antibiotic overuse in south-east Asia.

I was sceptical about this—I thought it could not be happening that quickly—but recently an elegant study looked at subtypes of enterobacteria causing dysentery that are currently found in India and Pakistan, and you can map the progress of the subtypes cropping up all over the UK, so it is due to international travel. The Hospital for Tropical Diseases recently reported 92 travellers arriving in Britain from south Asia and Nigeria with enteric fever caused by salmonella and found that 30% were multiple drug resistant.

Globally, the financial costs of resistant strains of malaria, HIV and TB are directly related to poor prescribing and inadequate courses of treatment. In this age of global travel, as we have heard from others, the transmission of resistant strains of tropical diseases is of increasing importance. The ill-educated beliefs of patients impact very much on doctors' prescribing habits. We know that GPs who do not prescribe antibiotics tend to be less highly rated and less popular. In Romania, Greece and Hungary most people buy their antibiotics over the counter and there is very little control indeed. In Cyprus, Estonia, Italy and Spain, most patients get antibiotics left over from previous courses—and I bet there is not anyone in this House who has not done the same. We use antibiotics from last year if we think we have something that we need to use them for. We need a real effort to reduce these.

Finally, I want to mention the issue of antibiotics in livestock. The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, has brought the issue of fish farming to our attention because it is one area where we are not making progress. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for his brilliant personal briefing on this. We are making good progress on tackling resistance in animals by the improvement of their environments so they do not get infections in the first place, the control of veterinary medicines and the

excellent work done by vets in the UK. However, as we have heard, that is not necessarily the case in other countries. We have achieved a 42% reduction in fluoroquinolones and reductions in other important drugs, such as cephalosporins, that are important to human beings.

So we are making good progress. We probably do not need to make it statutory by banning things; it is always better to do it with the co-operation of the agencies, individual professionals and farmers involved. However, we need to make greater progress on antimicrobial resistance. I know the Government were negotiating with the pharmaceutical industry to see what could be done. Can the Minister tell us how far have we got on our project there?

1.03 pm

**The Earl of Caithness (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Trees, on securing this debate, and I welcome my noble friend the Minister to the House and the Front Bench.

The human devastation wreaked by Covid-19 has demonstrated the huge potential impact of zoonotic diseases and the need to use every scientific tool at our disposal to prevent and guard against future outbreaks. The role of science and innovation is critical in providing potential solutions.

I am glad to say the UK ranks third in the world in agricultural research. To pick up almost the last point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Murphy, world-leading progress is being made by UK scientists using the most advanced genetic techniques to develop animals that are resistant to many of these potentially zoonotic diseases. Scientists at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh pioneered the gene-edited trait conferring complete resistance to porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome in pigs. The first PRRS-resistant pigs are expected to be approved for commercialisation in the United States later this year but not in the UK. Our scientists are at the forefront of research to combat infectious diseases such as avian influenza in poultry and African swine fever in pigs. What are the Government doing to unlock the potential of these advances for British farms more quickly?

With reference to the precision breeding Act, will the Minister reconsider the imposition of extra animal welfare hurdles in relation to precision-bred animals, which do not currently apply to conventionally bred animals, because the underpinning rationale of the legislation is that precision-bred organisms could equally have been produced using conventional breeding methods?

Infectious diseases do not differentiate between animals reared intensively or extensively, and the biosecurity associated with modern housed livestock systems is more effective at keeping disease out or keeping disease in. Thus, does the Minister agree that good intensive livestock farming may be the key to reducing the risk of future pandemics? Bird flu, for example, is spread by migrating wild birds, so the response to an outbreak is not to increase the extent of free-range systems but to keep all farmed poultry indoors. The recent news from the UK's Animal and Plant Health Agency that an unprecedented and highly contagious bird flu outbreak in the sub-Antarctic has spread to mammals there is a further sobering reminder of the ability of these emerging

infectious diseases to cross species barriers. Can the Minister please give the House an update on that position?

The crossing of species barriers takes me on to wild animals and plants. There are increasing calls for species reintroductions to help to meet government biodiversity and species abundance goals and to build resilience in ecosystems by reinforcement, assisted colonisation, reintroduction and translocation. The number of new pests and diseases affecting trees in the UK has increased by almost 500% over the last 20 years, and most of those have come from imported stock. Why is Defra not following best practice in vetting for disease in its code and guidance on reintroductions of plants and animals? The [ recommends that a disease risk analysis is carried out for all conservation reintroductions and translocations.

The House of Commons EFRA Committee's recent inquiry into species reintroductions highlighted Natural England's evidence to it that disease risk is a weakness in the current Defra code and guidance, and it recommended the need for any reintroduction or translocation risk assessment to include disease implications. Only 10 native species are subject to the Defra code. Consequently, most native species translocations, even outside their current or historic geographical range, are unregulated and the risk of the spread of disease is not addressed.

When Covid-19 struck we turned to the best available, most advanced genetic technologies for solutions, and we celebrated the scientific developments in both the public and private sectors that made this possible. We must apply the same science-based principles to the use of new genetic technologies in agriculture to improve prospects for the control of infectious diseases. That is essential for the health and welfare of animals and plants, and to reduce the risk of future pandemics in the human population. The very essence of biosecurity is that preventing something arriving is much more effective and cost-efficient than trying to eradicate it once it is here.

1.09 pm

**Lord Carrington (CB):** My Lords, I welcome this important and topical debate, and I thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for initiating it. I also believe he may have had something to do with the headline in today's *Financial Times*, "Dover Port warns of food safety risk". The article says that health inspectors at Dover have warned that a proposed 70 per cent cut in government funding poses a risk to food safety and animal health. This should be a matter of great concern to the noble Lords, Lord Krebs and Lord Browne.

I declare my own interests, as set out in the register, in farming and woodland. The debate covers a wide variety of issues, but I would like to confine my remarks to the central importance of healthy trees and woodland when we address biosecurity and climate change.

In 2020-21, around 13,500 hectares of new tree planting was undertaken in Great Britain, of which England and Wales accounted for only 2,500 hectares. Driven by achieving net-zero carbon by 2050 in the 2019 climate change legislation, the English tree strategy

[LORD CARRINGTON]  
of 2021 identified, as we have heard, a target of 30,000 hectares of new planting a year by 2025—next year. We therefore have a huge mountain to climb in terms of planting trees, made even more complicated by diseases such as ash dieback and, of course, climate change. That leaves aside the fact that appropriately fertile land, and alternative uses of that land driven by profitability calculations, taxation considerations and much else, can be a major disincentive. We still await the Government's promised land use framework, which will attempt to reconcile the competing demands of food production, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, forestry, flood management and much more. Perhaps the Minister could use his influence to accelerate the promised framework, in which climate change factors are major ones.

Today we are focusing on biosecurity, diseases and climate change, which, together with increased tree-planting targets to assist our carbon strategy, mean that every effort must be made to improve and increase our source of trees through careful selection, based on genetic diversification, in order to breed more resistance to diseases and better-quality hardwood. This can be achieved by genotyping basic materials to ensure high and representative genetic diversity.

Simultaneously, we need to increase the availability of the improved planting material of native and non-native species. We need to look at importing, both to increase conventional seed supply and to identify planting stock from warmer climates. This needs to be carefully controlled; we are lucky in this country to have scientific research organisations such as the Future Trees Trust doing precisely this. With improved planting stock, there are other major advantages such as faster establishment, reduced mortality and a reduced need for herbicides, resulting in improved timber quality and, of course, earlier carbon capture. Much of this improvement in planting stock mirrors what has been done in the farming industry in identifying new seed varieties to increase yields and provide greater resistance to pests and diseases. The passing of the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act last year has given this research a major boost.

A highly important aspect of the likely requirement to import seed and plants from overseas is to enhance and promote the plant certification scheme in nurseries to ensure traceability and engender confidence in our imports. This was a major issue raised by the House of Lords Horticultural Committee in its recent report. I would be interested to hear from the Minister, if he has time, of any further government plan to support, widen and strengthen that scheme, including making it compulsory.

1.14 pm

**Lord Chartres (CB):** I am particularly glad to follow my noble friend Lord Carrington because he has enabled me to, among other things, shorten my own remarks.

“Thanks noble Trees, our Entish Lord  
For laying bare the grievous ills  
Impending on our scepter'd isle.  
England, set in a silver sea  
That doth no longer serve us

In the office of a wall or as  
A moat defensive to a house,  
Is subject to mounting threats”.

It is perhaps not usual to address your Lordships' House in blank verse, but it may be a modest way of indicating the severity and scale of the challenges we face. After all,

“A verse may find him whom a sermon flies.”

The poets have long understood what the noble Viscount, Lord Stansgate, and the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, have impressed upon us: the importance of a One Health approach. They have also long understood that we live in an entangled world, including and beyond the wood-wide web, and that the health of our trees reflects and influences our state of mind, our health and our economy.

“The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd”

says Shakespeare in “Richard II”, and the play is full of the reverberations between the life of trees and plants and the state we are in as a country.

In that very helpful briefing paper produced by Fera, there is a horrifying Forestry Commission graph showing the cumulative increase in the number of new pests and diseases affecting trees since 1971, and the particularly alarming increase in the frequency of such outbreaks since 2002. Over the last 20 years there has been a 500% increase, keeping pace with the increased globalisation of trade.

The admirable Woodland Trust publishes an invaluable up-to-date list of the key pests and diseases affecting our trees, along with, crucially, guidance on how to recognise them and report them. As we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Trees, there are some pests and diseases already with us but there is a worrying number waiting in the wings. The elm zig-zag sawfly is the newest threat to our badly damaged elm populations. The emerald ash borer has killed billions of ash trees in the US; if it arrives here, it will further damage our vulnerable ash populations. Likewise, the North American native bronze birch borer could decimate our own birch trees.

One of my favourite native trees is the juniper. It now faces a dedicated pathogen, *Phytophthora austrocedri*, which infects juniper trees and then kills them. Time does not permit me to anathematise any further the red-necked longhorn beetle or the *Sirococcus tsugae*. But the Government are aware, as previous speakers have noted, of the scale of the challenges. In particular, can the Minister update us on the results of the three-year trial of the proposed invasive species inspectorate? The noble Lord, Lord Krebs, has already alluded to that theme. Is this vital contribution to our biosecurity to be established on a permanent basis?

There are many other things which can be done, as other noble Lords have pointed out. I would underline the value of investing more in the proven capacity of citizen science monitoring and reporting programmes. That would contribute to raising consumer awareness of the problem, as would the inclusion of a biosecurity warning in air-steward cabin safety briefings. We have been talking about international travel; one thing that could be done, just by passing a regulation, is to add to those safety briefings in international air flights some biosecurity warning. At the same time, as my noble friend Lord Carrington said, as far as possible it is

clear that we ought to source and grow trees in the UK and, crucially, invest in the skills needed to cultivate them.

“Let us lift high the phytosanitary shield  
To repel the pests and contagion,  
Lest child child’s children, cry against  
Us, woe!”

1.20 pm

**Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab):** My Lords, I am not going to attempt to replicate the approach of the previous speaker. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for introducing this important debate. It is, in truth, an honour and a privilege to be able to take part, given the eminence of the speakers who are contributing today. The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, who is not in her place, referred to the need to avoid repetition. At this stage of the debate that becomes increasingly difficult, but I say also that repetition is sometimes important as a form of emphasis—we need to emphasise the issues here, so if anything I say is too repetitive, I do not apologise, because I think the points need to be emphasised.

It is important that we discuss this critical issue of biosecurity in an era characterised by globalisation and climate change. The interconnectedness of our world has brought unprecedented benefits, but it also exposes us to new challenges. Today, we are talking particularly about infectious diseases that can threaten human, animal and plant life. Where people, goods and information travel across borders with unprecedented speed, infectious diseases do not recognise geographical boundaries. As we know all too well, a virus originating in one part of the world can swiftly find its way to distant continents, crossing national borders before we can appreciate the scale of the threat that is posed. This demands a collective and co-ordinated effort on a global scale. So I hope the Minister will be able to reassure us that the Government recognise the scale of the measures that are needed to combat the threat of infectious diseases.

The noble Lord, Lord Carrington, has already referred to the story in today’s *Financial Times*, but it merits further emphasis and a demand on the Minister to provide a satisfactory response. For those who have not seen it, today’s *Financial Times* reports that inspectors at Dover, the UK’s busiest port, have warned that they are facing a 70% cut in central government funding which they say will pose a risk to British food safety and animal health. The Dover Port Health Authority told the *Financial Times* that Defra plans to impose the funding cut to its inspection team at Dover from April and stated:

“The impact of the cuts will be significant and increase the threat to GB safety by an order of magnitude”.

That was a statement from the head of the port inspectorate. I think the House requires a specific response to that story, albeit at short notice.

Given the importance of these issues, what else should the Government be doing? I shall just suggest some particular issues on which I ask the Minister to respond. First, I think the Government’s approach should be proactive rather than reactive, which perhaps it has been in the past, and also on the precautionary principle: we should always err on the side of safety, rather than hoping for the best. Specific proposals that

perhaps the Minister could respond to include the issue of the Non-native Species Inspectorate. Will the Government be making an announcement on whether this process will be made permanent? It is an essential part of a precautionary approach, so perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

Another specific proposal that has been made is that there should be a positive list for exotic pets: rather than having a list of species that cannot be imported to become pets, there should be a list of those pets we know are safe, and anything else should be subject to restriction, inspection and, if necessary, investigation of whether they are acceptable.

Finally, can the Minister give us reassurance about the position on freeports? The Government trumpeted their policy of allowing freeports greater freedom and fewer restrictions. Will the rules apply equally to freeports as they do more generally?

1.25 pm

**The Earl of Cork and Orrery (CB):** My Lords, I have yet another thank you very much to my noble friend Lord Trees for what has been a quite exceptional debate. It is interesting that it is exactly four years to the week since this subject was last debated in your Lordships’ House, and a lot has moved on in that time. I declare my interest as a trustee of the International Dendrology Society and, not surprisingly, admit that my remarks are somewhat limited to the plant end of the spectrum of this wide-ranging debate. For those whose Greek is on a par with mine, dendrology is the science and study of woody plants; specifically, their taxonomic classifications.

It is rather hard to follow the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Chartres, and even the most recent speaker, because they enunciated a number of the things that I wanted to mention. But, as we have heard, some repetition is not a bad idea. In the past 10 years, much has changed in the world of plant health and protection—and here I unashamedly issue a compliment to Defra, where the chief plant health officer for the UK, Professor Nicola Spence, has been a sure and steady hand in moving forward the health of our plant stock. We have also seen, as we have heard, Defra’s 25-year environment plan, which includes, in recent years, a tree health resilience strategy, a Great Britain biosecurity strategy and a plant health research and development plan.

The arrival of Brexit has complicated the biosecurity landscape but has allowed us to get away from the EU’s one-size-fits-all approach to the subject, which tended to mean that problems originating in Mediterranean countries would inexorably find their way here, through common trade and travel arrangements. In that time also, the advance of gene sequencing for plants has given us a much greater understanding of the nature of the problems we face, and of the susceptibility of individual plants to the diseases attacking them. As has been mentioned, citizen science is now being employed to report infestations and diseases, and such reports to the chief inspectorate are now running into many thousands per year.

In summary, we are increasingly well protected by an ever-more alert department and its agencies, not to mention the financial side of things, but the work they

[THE EARL OF CORK AND ORRERY]

are doing has been well received in the industry. All of this is well known and understood by those interested in the trades associated with plant health and movement, such as forestry and horticulture. It is also pretty well understood by those who live and make their livelihood in the countryside. But the great multitude of our increasingly enormous population have little idea of the problems which face us, and with which these agencies must deal. A cynic might add that a large proportion of them care even less. The real issue facing us, therefore, is awareness. As we have heard, the cost of the Chalara Fraxinus, or ash dieback, epidemic has been estimated at about £15 billion over the next few decades. That is a huge figure and, if you look out of the window of a train or at home, you see skeletons wherever you look. These have all got to be cleared and someone has to pay for that.

On the other hand, the value to the national balance sheet of our plant stock, both trees and the agricultural and horticultural sectors, is reckoned at £175 billion—in other words, it is worth looking after them.

There is an urgent need for continued, and increasing, training and awareness campaigns focused on all the sectors previously mentioned, and especially on a mobile, travelling public. This increased awareness must also extend to the amateur gardening sector—no more returning from trips abroad with sponge bags full of likely specimens and the soil in which they grew. To illustrate the size of the problem, there are reckoned to be 90 pests that can attack oak trees, 165 for potatoes, 130 for roses and 160 for tomatoes.

Possibly the two most high-profile concerns at present, both of which have been mentioned in passing, are the bacterial disease *Xylella fastidiosa*, which has devastated the olive plantations of Italy, France and Spain—olive is much more important than the other plants mentioned, but nevertheless they are all part of it—and the emerald ash borer, a beetle that attacks ash trees, especially when they are already weakened by another pathogen, the ash dieback. This pest is spreading across the world from its origin in the Far East and has reached Ukraine, which does not have a lot of time to deal with it. It has equally devastated the American ash population. I therefore have two questions for the Minister. What is the latest situation on these two pests, *Xylella* and ash borer? What measures are being taken to combat them?

There are some advantages to our being an island, and there is no doubt that our moat helps to keep things at bay, but many insects can travel over water. The Asian hornet and longhorn beetles have both arrived on the wind.

One area I find hard to understand is the behaviour of our nursery and horticultural trades in importing large volumes of plants that we can perfectly well grow ourselves. It should be impossible to obtain an import certificate without offering proof that the plant in question is not available from growers in this country. This is not a matter of civil liberties. It is a matter literally of life and death to the plant populations concerned, and to the livelihoods of our growers.

1.32 pm

**Lord de Clifford (CB):** I congratulate my noble friend Lord Trees on raising this topic in the House and on his detailed introduction. I welcome the Minister to the Chamber and wish him all the best in his maiden speech. I declare my interest in this matter, working for a large group of vets with an interest in both the farming and companion animal sectors.

My colleagues who specialise in farm animals were delighted that this subject was being raised in the House. Their initial comments and concerns were that the UK does not value its biosecurity, as there is little public awareness of this matter and the potential dangers to public health and animal health from new infectious diseases.

As mentioned by my noble friend Lord Trees and the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, African swine flu is currently a major concern for the pig industry. The disease grows ever closer to the UK. It is now well established in eastern Europe, not only in farming herds but in the wild boar population, where its presence is a lot more concerning, with cases being reported as recently as September in Sweden. The effect of this highly infectious disease on the UK's pig herd is significantly more than on many other nations, as at least 50% of our breeding sows are housed outdoors, and therefore the risk of infection is significantly higher. If the infection were to get into the national outdoor pig herd, it would potentially be as devastating as the foot and mouth outbreak back in the early 2000s.

The most likely route of this infection to outdoor pigs is by their consuming infected meat discarded by a member of the general public. This could be a ham or bacon sandwich, made from contaminated meat illegally imported from areas where African swine flu is established, thrown away close to a field of outdoor pigs. As my noble friend mentioned, the importing of illegal meat has become a real issue. As reported in January, the Dover Port Health Authority has seized more than 57 tonnes of illegal meat, possibly a fraction of what is coming into the country from restricted areas in eastern Europe.

We welcome the introduction of the border target operation model that will introduce some border controls at the end of January, but there are concerns, as mentioned by other noble Lords, about its funding and the number of inspections that can be done. Can the Minister guarantee resources for these inspections?

A very simple threat to our biosecurity is the threat from the general public when they bring food back into the country on return from holidays. The public are totally unaware of the potential danger to our national pig herd. There is little or no public information service explaining the potential threats to our nation's biosecurity by bringing food or plants back to the UK. This is the opposite of the island countries in Australasia, which have huge biosecurity controls when you enter their country, and publicise them.

Mosquito-transmitted diseases are another threat to our nation's animals. Currently, we have two outbreaks of such a disease. Bluetongue is a disease that affects both cattle and sheep, and we have outbreaks in Kent and Norfolk. The current infection is a great worry to

farmers and vets in the UK, as the outbreak first occurred in November at the very end of the normal danger period when the cold weather normally reduces the number of mosquitoes being blown over from Europe. The warming of the climate means that these mosquitoes are more likely to survive longer. It is hoped that the cold weather will hold back the current outbreak from spreading further around the country, although some cases have been reported in the last few weeks in the current infected areas. The other concerning feature of this current strain is that there is no vaccine for it, which potentially could allow bluetongue to become a significant disease within the UK cattle and sheep population.

The noble Baroness, Lady Murphy, mentioned antimicrobial resistance. As a nation, we tackle issues that we foresee as long-term problems for human and animal health. An example of this is antibiotic resistance. We have reduced antibiotic sales for use in production animals by 57% since 2014, and human use has also fallen over this period. But what do we do as nation? We import foodstuffs from nations that do not have the same restrictions on the use of antibiotics, or policies to reduce their usage. Therefore, we are importing antibiotic resistance from other nations.

As we continue to seek new international trade agreements with other nations whose biosecurity policies may not be as robust as the UK's, we need to ensure that biosecurity is on the negotiating table to protect our nation and not undermine what we are trying to do in this country.

1.37 pm

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for his mobilisation of this excellent debate and congratulate the Minister on hitting the ground running with his splendid response to OPQ on Tuesday. It is a great honour to follow the noble Lord, Lord de Clifford, whose remarks were very apposite.

We are still recovering from Covid, the massive global pandemic. As the Minister during that time, I am only just recovering myself. There is a psychological tendency to try to avoid thinking about something that was so uncomfortable, so unpleasant and so damaging for so many people. I want to focus my comments on the gap that I see between the very good and well-intended biosecurity strategy published in November last year and what is actually happening on the ground, particularly—but not only—in the medical sphere.

The biosecurity strategy has a very clear vision that, by 2030, the UK will be resilient to a spectrum of biological threats and a world leader in responsible innovation. The timing of that is quite a long way out—six years. The very slow pace of the Covid inquiry shows us how difficult we are finding it to come to terms with the lessons from our response to the Covid pandemic. That is hitting us hard in trying to put in place the necessary measures we need to be ready for the next big hit.

Readiness, response to a pandemic and resilience are three areas where I think there is severe deficiency. On our pandemic readiness, and on vaccines, there are some encouraging signals that there is focus, including

the deal with Moderna, the future manufacturing hub and the UK Vaccine Network. However, a lot of it is subscale and is taking a lot of time. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Rees, that the 100-day ambition is something that we have not heard a lot about. I echo his request for an update from the Minister.

A number of noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Krebs, mentioned how slowly both international and domestic surveillance systems are moving. The WHO and the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board are struggling for funds and political momentum. It would be good to see Britain leaning in on that. On our investment in high-throughput biosurveillance, the noble Lord, Lord Trees, quite rightly pointed out that a lot of that capacity has been stood down. On wastewater analysis, the good functionality that we had put in place during the pandemic has now been taken apart. Our efforts on international data sharing and the standardisation of reporting—quite a dull-sounding subject but very exciting to those of us, like me, who take these things seriously—have, I am afraid to say, stalled since we were pushing it under our G7 chairmanship.

On response capacity, I will spotlight two areas, one of which is health. As the noble Lord, Lord Rees, pointed out, the integrated national public health function in the UK has fallen back rather than being invested in. UKHSA funding has been reduced; the public health grant to local authorities has been reduced; OHID has been embedded into the Department for Health and Social Care, rather than being empowered; capacity on the ground for DPHs has been reduced; tracing capacity has been wound up; and the integration of the national and local response is extremely unclear, to put it mildly.

On vaccinations, many of the habits that were in place have fallen back. Many noble Lords will have read about the measles outbreaks in the Midlands, and now, it seems, in London. When it comes to the strain on the NHS, we have fallen back a long way.

On government leadership, we have not got a Taiwan-style pandemic Act in place. The management of our borders—and here I mean for people—in order to use our island status to protect ourselves has also fallen back.

On resilience, the health of the nation is deteriorating rather than improving. Part of that is because the drivers of poor health are still in place: mouldy homes, junk food, the internet and dirty air. They are resulting in an increase in obesity, diabetes and so on.

We can rebuild and make Britain a healthier country. We can put in place the infrastructure necessary to respond to a pandemic. However, this will take government leadership. What does the Minister think the Government can do to empower the biosecurity strategy and make it move faster, and to deliver the kind of infrastructure we need, so that we are truly ready for the next pandemic?

1.43 pm

**Baroness Fairhead (CB):** My Lords, I warmly welcome the Minister and join the House in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Trees, on securing this debate. I draw the attention of the House to my role at the Oracle Corporation. I also apologise in advance to the medical

[BARONESS FAIRHEAD]

profession if I mispronounce any medical terms—sadly, I am not a qualified doctor, much to my father’s disappointment.

It is a great pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, and I will cover some of the same ground. The threat of infectious diseases is both demonstrable and significant. The threat is growing, as today’s debate and the forecast from the integrated review of security and the UK Health Security Agency confirm. I therefore welcome and support the Government’s response, with the updated *UK Biological Security Strategy*. The key, as in all such strategies, will be in its effective implementation.

For the purpose of this debate, I will focus on human health in two areas: data, including data security, and international co-operation. During the pandemic, multiple data sources were used creatively: medical, social and environment. The CDC used Google searches on symptoms, and, as the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, mentioned, we used nascent waste monitoring capability. Sometimes the data lagged events and was manually derived, such as claims data in the US, but had that real digital data been available, it could have enabled Governments and health authorities to pinpoint and target more effective ways of resolution. What is being done to improve our continued access to timely, digital, broad-ranging data sources? The security of that data, particularly personal medical data, and the public faith in its usage, is critical. What is being done to clarify the security ground rules and standards for such use? The Government have committed to building a national biosurveillance network. Now is an ideal time to start developing the rules of engagement.

As I said, access to personal health records will be key and the Government have correctly committed to using anonymised data, with only very limited exceptions. Encouragingly, recent poll evidence suggests that 81% of the public support health data sharing to develop new treatments, while 74% believe that they should be involved in how that data is used. As the issue is both technical and cultural, perhaps the Government could consider engaging now in a study to see which aspects the Government can support *ex ante* and begin constructive dialogue on those ground rules.

Beyond personal data, the Government must also identify and protect data at risk from hostile actors. By necessity, that must include dual-use technology and research. By their very nature, many of our extraordinary biotech advances have the capacity to do ill as well as good, as the noble Lord, Lord Rees, highlighted. If you can build a therapeutic protein that binds to a human receptor, you can also create a virus that does the same. The Government will not only need to establish clear standards but must require a very clear accountability at department level to enable timely responses. The aim must be for those responses to create the “biosurveillance door” referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Trees, while not crushing innovation from our brilliant life sciences and biotech sectors. I look forward to hearing from the Minister on those issues.

For data and data security, the presumption should be that we work with our international partners, because, as many of your Lordships have said, diseases recognise

neither political nor geographical boundaries. Our international partners need to work with us to share their own data. Importantly, as the approach to data security differs around the world, they each must have the autonomy to decide what they share. In the end, we need to see whether we can have a ground rule for what data can be shared. In this area, perhaps modelling offers some opportunity, as it typically brings lower security risks. But to maximise the benefits of sharing, consistency in terms and approaches will be critical.

That brings me to the broader point of international co-operation. Our goal must be a global biosurveillance capability. During the Covid-19 pandemic, international data sharing increased dramatically. The UK played, and continues to play, a leading role in multinational organisations such as the World Health Organization and the OECD to help other countries. This is a vital area, as the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, highlighted. The origins of many infectious diseases are inevitably outside our shores, but a global biosurveillance network surely offers us the best chance to detect and understand outbreaks early, to minimise the effects of future outbreaks and to protect us today and for generations to come. I look forward to any update on the implementation of our biosurveillance strategy that the Minister can give.

1.50 pm

**Baroness Walmsley (LD):** My Lords, I congratulate the Minister on his appointment to the Front Bench and the noble Lord, Lord Trees, on his very comprehensive introduction to the debate. I also welcome to the noble Baroness, Lady Murphy, back to good health and to the Chamber; she made a very important speech today.

When we were a member of the European Union, we benefited from sharing with other members measures to prevent plant and animal, as well as human, diseases. We shared intelligence of disease threats; common rules on phytosanitary standards, border security and animal health; world-leading scientific and pharmaceutical developments; and veterinary expertise. Since we left, we have had to invent our own system and develop partnerships where we can. Our developing border controls regime, some of which came into effect only this month, is very important in that respect. We have heard very important points from several noble Lords on that subject, including the noble Lords, Lord Taylor, Lord Lilley, Lord Krebs and Lord Davies of Brixton.

As a botanist, I will focus on diseases of plants, including those that we eat and those that we need for other purposes. Half of all emerging diseases of plants are spread due to the increasing globalisation of the trade in plants and plant materials, including soil, by both traders and individuals. Natural spread, assisted by weather events, is the second most important factor. Global warming can also enable the establishment of pests that would otherwise not survive a winter here in the UK. As we know, our country has just had the warmest year for decades, and that affects our economy and biodiversity.

As a former member of your Lordships’ recent special inquiry into the state of the UK horticulture business, I will mention some of our findings on plant diseases and the effect on our economy of poor control.



Sandy Shepherd, managing director of Ball Colegrave, told us, as a witness from the industry, that biosecurity is

“the fundamental thing that we worry about in our business”.

All our witnesses were particularly concerned that bringing infected plants from abroad could infect UK stock. The UK Plant Health Risk Register contains 1,423 pests and pathogens that have been assessed for the threat they pose to the UK, of which 998 have been spread via live plant movement. Although I agree with the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, on grey squirrels, they do not fall within that category.

Fruit trees and bushes and forest trees are particular issues. The Woodland Trust tells us that we import about 19 million forest trees every year and that 20 serious diseases of trees have been identified through imported trees since 1990. That has accelerated the loss of tens of millions of trees. Given the Government’s ambition to plant millions of trees for carbon capture and biodiversity reasons, it is vital that we minimise the risks to the survival of those trees from imported diseases. The Woodland Trust told the committee:

“The single most effective biosecurity safeguard is to reduce the need for imported plants and source all trees for planting in the UK, from stock that has been grown its entire lifespan in GB”.

It suggested to us that an improved labelling system for UK-grown trees would enable consumer confidence that the product they are buying is biosecure and UK-grown for the whole of its lifespan, not imported and just grown on in the UK for a couple of weeks.

For imported plants I know that the Government are working with the Plant Health Alliance on a voluntary certification scheme but, as the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, said, the committee recommended that this be compulsory. However, we felt that more support for compliance would be needed for SMEs in the industry. Both the RHS and the National Trust support the Plant Healthy scheme, but Martin Hillier from Hillier Nurseries told us that the accreditation scheme was a good start but should be compulsory and set at a higher standard.

The Woodland Trust tells us that the overall ambition to reduce reliance on tree imports will be realised only if we invest in the UK nursery sector to equip nurseries with the skills, labour, funding and policies that enable the scaling up of production of UK-grown trees. This will also create green jobs to benefit the local and national economy. The committee agreed with that and called on the Government to improve recruitment of people into horticulture and increase the training opportunities for them, from T-levels in schools to apprenticeships and higher education, as well as careers advice. In addition, the timescales of many growers are long and require long-term planning, which is difficult without a clear UK strategy for horticulture, and preferably a Minister with responsibility for ornamental and environmental horticulture as well as the edibles part of the industry. Will the Minister take this back to the department? Without this support UK growers will struggle, and we will have to rely on imports with all the consequent biosecurity risks.

We also need a high-level quarantine scheme for high-risk hosts based on scientific research. For example, olive trees, which were mentioned by the noble Earl,

Lord Cork and Orrery, when infected with *Xylella*—a serious pest for our native trees—can remain without symptoms for 12 months, so they should be quarantined for at least that length of time. We were promised that that would be explored in the GB plant health strategy, but it has not yet been done. Can the Minister say when it will happen?

Another effect of climate change which impacts UK growers, especially in the south-east, is shortage of water. If the UK horticulture industry is not supported to transition to sustainable water management practices, it will jeopardise our ability to grow our own trees and be self-sufficient. The Plan for Water is welcome but water management in the horticulture sector requires more effort, such as looking at the planning barriers for small reservoirs on growers’ and farmers’ own land.

Horizon-scanning for new and emerging threats, research and risk assessment are essential if we are to keep track of incoming diseases and those that are becoming more prevalent. Here the International Plant Sentinel Network, co-ordinated by the Botanic Gardens Conservation International and supported by Defra, plays a key role. I must declare an interest here as I was the honorary chair of the board of BGCi for 10 years and retain an interest in its work. The IPSN uses plant species held in botanic gardens’ collections outside their natural range as sentinels to gather evidence on new and emerging pests and diseases and novel host-disease interactions that can affect UK biosecurity. It provides an early warning system for emerging pest and pathogen risks and is a pivotal partner in the UK biosecurity strategy, which has been mentioned by many noble Lords.

Tools developed include digital plant health checkers to enable non-specialists to monitor plant health issues. For example, the emerald ash boring beetle, which was mentioned by the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Chartres, and the noble Earl, Lord Cork and Orrery, is a great danger to our ash trees, and is common in eastern Ukraine and western Russia but fortunately not in the UK—so far. The tool helps people to recognise it to enable early warning in case it comes in on imported plants. Another initiative involved citizen scientists in identifying the sap-sucking insects that can transmit *Xylella*.

Botanic gardens also use alien plants in their collections to monitor for dangerous pathogens. Related to this work, may I ask the Minister whether there is any consideration of the inclusion of invasive alien plant species in the biosecurity strategy, due to their potential to host key pests and pathogens?

So much of this work depends on data and IT systems. I was therefore concerned when I read that Gareth Davies, chief executive of the National Audit Office, in his annual statement yesterday, said that three-quarters of the Defra IT budget is spent on maintenance of out-of-date IT systems. Given what we know can go wrong when IT systems go wrong, is the Minister confident of the robustness of the department’s disease surveillance system?

Finally, I have one more question, about surveillance of risk. Due to complex and expensive biosecurity regulations related to the movement of plant material nationally and internationally, it is becoming near

[BARONESS WALMSLEY]

impossible for scientific institutions to exchange material to support research into pests and diseases. Would the Government consider exemptions for bona fide research institutions contributing to the management and control of plant pests and pathogens?

2 pm

**Baroness Hayman of Ullock (Lab):** My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register and that I am co-chair of the APPG for the Timber Industries. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for his excellent introduction and for bringing this important debate to us today; and I very much look forward to hearing the Minister's maiden speech.

The debate has focused on a number of areas of concern. First, on health, noble Lords talked about how Covid-19 exposed a lack of preparedness for biological hazards, and about our vulnerability, which my noble friend Lord Browne of Ladyton particularly pointed out. My noble friend Lord Stansgate talked about the importance of One Health principles around people, animals, plants and ecosystems, which was then picked up by other noble Lords. We also heard that the number of emerging zoonoses is increasing globally; several noble Lords talked about the global challenges we face. Most notably, the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, talked about the global impacts on health, as did the noble Lord, Lord Rees of Ludlow. My noble friend Lord Davies of Brixton also drew attention to the fact that infectious diseases do not, of course, recognise borders.

In this challenging context, we need to recognise the importance of understanding, monitoring and preparing for any future pandemic. The threat of an influenza pandemic, for example, has regularly topped the UK National Risk Register for most impactful hazards. We need to understand the evolutionary pathways by which things such as avian flu could jump to humans and how non-human flu could become a human pandemic; and we need better comprehension of the consequences of failing to address the rise of antimicrobial resistance infections. I welcome back the noble Baroness, Lady Murphy, and her speech on this issue.

Invasive non-native species of plants and animals are one of the greatest global threats to biodiversity. Their introduction typically leads to a reduction in species richness and abundance, and degradation of the environment; they often outcompete and prey on native species, bringing disease and pathogens. FERA has been mentioned in the debate, and the important briefing that it sent to noble Lords. It talked of the significant increases in the volume of plants and plant material potentially infected with harmful organisms being sent from the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate to its diagnostics laboratories. Every interception is a potential biosecurity risk that has been successfully neutralised, but a disease has to enter the country only once and not get picked up in order to become established and have a potentially devastating impact on our economy and biodiversity. For example, within our borders, the number of new pests and diseases affecting trees in the UK has increased by almost 500% over the last 20 years.

RSPCA and Born Free research has highlighted that zoonotic disease spread by the import of exotic pets into the UK is an overlooked risk to human health. Several European countries have adopted a positive list of species that can be kept, provided that the conditions meet welfare and safety criteria, with potential exemptions for conservation work in zoos. Will the Government consider this precautionary approach? Government should ensure that the same level of sanitary protection applies to imported wildlife as applies to our livestock and fish industries, with improved border controls, quarantine and testing for pathogens identified as threats to UK biodiversity.

The noble Earl, Lord Caithness, and the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, talked about the need for imports to be managed correctly, and the noble Lord, Lord Krebs, talked about border controls and mentioned Dover in particular. I therefore wonder whether the Minister saw yesterday's report in *Farmers Weekly* about the Dover Port Health Authority urging Defra to reconsider plans for a 70% funding cut to its work in seizing illegal meat imports, a move that the authority says could jeopardise efforts to keep African swine fever out of the country.

The National Pig Association says that cutting the budget could be "catastrophic" for the pig sector and the British Poultry Council has stated that the current situation for poultry meat businesses remains critical following avian flu, drastic increases in costs of production, energy and feed, labour shortages and difficulties with trading. Are the Government looking at the areas that they have requested—investment in robust biosecurity and the viability of vaccination in commercial property?

There are many examples of invasive species causing huge problems for biodiversity, and we have heard about many of them today. Signal crayfish carry crayfish plague, which kills the UK's only native species, the white-clawed crayfish, which is now recognised as globally endangered. Buglife's "PotWatch" survey identifies increased reports of non-native flatworms, which can reduce local earthworm populations by 20%. Invasive pests, pathogens and diseases are commonly spread through horticultural imports. The noble Lord, Lord Trees, mentioned the huge increase in trade and imports and the impact of this. We know that invasives can travel in live plants and plant products, through the soil and the packaging they are conveyed in, and that routes for invasives to spread often bring about significant breaches of UK biosecurity.

We have heard that climate change is exacerbating these risks, as it makes it easier for invasive species from warmer climates to establish themselves in the UK. Furthermore, as new trade routes and freeports open, there is a greater chance of new species entering the UK, as biosecurity measures at international borders have not kept pace with the growing volume, diversity and origins of global trade and travel.

Trees have been a central part of today's debate. The Woodland Trust has been mentioned by noble Lords; it has clearly demonstrated that the UK has an unsustainable rate of new tree threats, significantly compromising government aims, as we have heard, to create new woods and trees for biodiversity, carbon

and people. Many noble Lords have mentioned the importance of tree diseases such as ash dieback—a clear example of how tree imports can have a catastrophic impact on our trees and woodlands. We now expect to lose anything between 50% and 80% of our existing ash trees. I am sure that anyone who walks in the countryside or even drives along its roads can see the sad state of our ash trees. We also have severe dieback of larch trees in the UK, which has been mentioned. The problem is that it can jump to other species, which is why so many larch trees are being cut down. When I walk my dog in the woods in Cumbria, it is heartbreaking—areas are completely devastated, with every single tree gone.

The cost of dealing with new pests and diseases often falls to farmers and land managers as well as to government, and ash dieback has been predicted to cost around £15 billion. To put this into perspective, that is almost twice the estimated cost of the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. We have to protect our precious woodlands and trees from these increasing pest and pathogen arrivals. Prevention is cheaper than cure. As the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, said, the overall ambition must be to reduce reliance on imports, properly equipping nurseries with skills, labour and funding.

Buglife sent a good briefing on how concerned it is that current phytosanitary requirements for imported goods are simply not fit for purpose and are significantly weaker than the exporting standards required to trade to the EU. Can the Minister explain why this would be the case? It is really difficult to detect many small species, such as ants, snails, slugs and beetles, in imports. Will the Minister look at Buglife's suggestion that the most suitable preventive measure is to end the importation of soils and potted plants containing soil? Other countries do it, so why is this not something that the UK could look at?

We have also heard about the Government's commitment to a three-year trial of an invasive species inspectorate. As this trial is now nearly complete and inspections have revealed high levels of non-compliance, are the Government thinking of making this permanent? It would clearly make a huge difference.

In conclusion, public awareness was mentioned by a number of noble Lords, specifically the noble Lord, Lord de Clifford. This is an important part of the battle against our problems with biosecurity. There is a compelling need for the UK Government, industry and society as a whole to invest in redoubling efforts. We need a proper, evidenced-based way to identify emergent issues and tackle them.

2.10 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Douglas-Miller) (Con) (Maiden Speech):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, and other noble Lords for their very kind words. I am honoured and privileged to be giving my maiden speech in this afternoon's debate. The key issues impacting our environment, such as biosecurity and species loss, are not only close to my heart but one of the central challenges we currently face. I shall return to this subject in a minute.

In researching maiden speeches, I was struck by two recurring themes. The first is a desire for brevity—a subject raised by the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, this morning. My wife's grandfather, Sir Walter Bromley-Davenport, was a prominent Member of the other place. He provided some formative training in this area. Whenever anyone stood up to make a speech, including the vicar for his Sunday morning sermon, he would mutter in a terrible stage whisper, "Five minutes". If anyone dared to exceed the allotted time, he would follow up with an even worse stage whisper, "The fellow doesn't know when to stop".

The second theme is consistent reference to the warm welcome that new Members of this place receive from Black Rod and the many others who make up the wonderful team here. I add my own thanks for the very warm welcome that I have received. I am also grateful to my noble friends Lord Benyon—currently in Guatemala—and Lady Fraser of Craigmaddie for introducing me to the House just before Christmas. Both have offered me useful advice on how to navigate this place. I hope that your Lordships will bear with me as I find my feet in this unfamiliar landscape.

I am conscious that I have two tasks today—to respond to this debate and to give your Lordships a little personal background on my journey to this Dispatch Box. Let me start with a brief summary of the latter. In my working life, I have held a number of different jobs. I have been a soldier, a retailer, a commercial property manager and involved in quite a few start-up businesses.

I have also had the great privilege of working with some of our country's most prestigious conservation charities and NGOs, most recently as chair of the Atlantic Salmon Trust. Like many other conservation charities, the Atlantic Salmon Trust is an amazing organisation, fighting to preserve the iconic wild Atlantic salmon from further decline. One of the most valuable things I learned about wild salmon is their importance in maintaining the health and biodiversity of the ecosystem they live in. The recovery actions that benefit a keystone species such as wild Atlantic salmon also benefit every other species in that ecosystem. If we are serious about reversing biodiversity decline, focusing on these keystone species is a very good place to start.

Running concurrently with my various day jobs, I have been a hill farmer and land manager for more than 30 years in the Scottish Borders, where I live with my wonderful wife, three children and a menagerie of other animals. The backbone of our farm is a flock of hardy blackface sheep. It is just as well that they are hardy, as our farm starts at a height of 600 feet and climbs to a little over 1,700 feet. At the top of our hill is open moorland—a hunting ground for golden eagles, peregrine falcons and a range of other raptors. It is also home to mountain hares, lapwing, grouse, snipe, golden plover, curlew, adders and many other rare species. They are all abundant, due to our careful habitat creation and targeted predator management—two essential ingredients in reversing biodiversity loss. One of the great joys of my life is that I can hear the eerie and evocative call of the curlew from my bedroom window in the spring and summer months.

[LORD DOUGLAS-MILLER]

Our constant objective and overarching aim is to balance nature recovery with farming and food production. As many in this place will know, balancing these two sometimes contradictory objectives is not easy. The time and cost of implementing nature recovery on the farm can create some difficult economic frictions and the very process of farming can present some really hard choices—choices that reflect the realities of life and nature on the front line. This balancing act—it is perhaps better described as a rebalancing act—represents one of the most difficult and important policy challenges for government today. Not only will it guide the future prosperity of our farming and rural communities and help secure domestic food production, it will be the main driver in delivering species recovery and climate change mitigation. I know that getting this balance right is no easy task, but it is certainly not mission impossible—the rather surprising view expressed in my introduction to your Lordships' House before Christmas.

My second, rather more important, task this afternoon is to congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Trees, on securing this debate and to thank noble Lords for their valuable contributions. This has been a stimulating debate, with the full spectrum of views expressed—so much so that my support team have run out of paper with the number of messages that they have been sending to me.

The noble Lord, Lord Trees, is absolutely right to highlight globalisation and climate change as the key issues impacting biosecurity. Pests and diseases know no borders, while new and emerging threats are often the result of trade and globalisation and can be further exacerbated by climate change. In addition, upholding high biosecurity standards is paramount for food production and food safety, for human and animal health, and to support our economy and trade. Plant diseases alone are estimated to cost the global economy more than \$220 billion annually, and up to 40% of global crop production is lost to pests each year. These are huge numbers that are unlikely to reduce as climate change drives the geographical expansion and the host range of pests and diseases.

Healthy plants and animals are not just an important tool in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss; they directly contribute to many of the UN sustainable development goals, in particular to end hunger, to achieve food security, to improve nutrition and to promote sustainable agriculture. I assure noble Lords that this Government are focused on not only responding to these changing threats but protecting animal, environmental and plant health. The Government published their biological security strategy last summer, aiming to build UK resilience to the increasing spectrum of biological threats. The strategy specifically highlights the interdependencies between environmental, plant, animal and human health—a subject raised by many noble Lords this afternoon.

Let me assure noble Lords of the robust measures that we have in place to maintain and improve our ability to detect, prevent, respond and recover from outbreaks. Surveillance and detection are key to minimising risks from imports. We monitor and respond to trade and movement threats and have a strong information-sharing relationship with our European

and international partners; for example, when EHD, a disease acute to deer, appeared on the continent, we stopped imports from affected countries and enhanced post-import testing from neighbouring regions. Our strong sanitary and phytosanitary standards are upheld by checking products in their final form and by assuring the whole production chain of our trading partners.

Our new border target operating model further sets out how we will introduce a new global regime that better targets high-risk commodities while simplifying processes for trade where it is safe to do so. The noble Lord, Lord Taylor, talked eloquently about the need for us to balance the sanitary and phytosanitary risks with the need for trade to flow freely. Having recently visited one of our border control posts and seen for myself the work taking place, I am confident that we have the balance about right for the upcoming rollout of the new BTOM system, which starts in earnest in April this year.

Our world-leading science and research capabilities further support our biosecurity. The UK's health, agriculture, plant, environmental, and life science sectors are supported by a large cadre of expertise—of international standard reference laboratories and innovative research programmes. Research on new diagnostics, vector-borne diseases and veterinary vaccine technology, are just some examples. Indeed, our globally respected scientists at the Animal and Plant Health Agency require world-class facilities. I was delighted to see first-hand on a recent visit why our Weybridge laboratory is internationally recognised for diseases such as avian influenza and rabies. In fact, it has the largest number of internationally recognised reference laboratories anywhere in the world, something that we should be justifiably proud of.

The first stage of the Government's £200 million redevelopment of this vital facility has begun. Once completed, it will be a world-leading facility. It will not only cement the UK's global science status—since almost two-thirds of infectious diseases in humans originate from animals—but safeguard and enhance the UK's capability to respond to the increasing threat from zoonotic diseases, protect public health and underpin the UK's trade capability with animal export products, which are worth over £12 billion per year to the UK economy. I am committed to working with colleagues in the Animal and Plant Health Agency and across government, including His Majesty's Treasury, to move the next stage of the Weybridge development forward.

On the plant side, the £5.8 million Holt Laboratory in Hampshire opened in 2022, conducting world-leading research on plant pests and disease threats. The Fera Science laboratory in Yorkshire, mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman of Ullock, and many others, is our science reference laboratory for plant and bee health. Its work is vital for our success.

As many noble Lords have noted, despite our best efforts we cannot keep every disease and vector of disease out. Therefore, it is vital that we promote strong biosecurity and maintain our response capabilities. Unfortunately, in recent years we have had several opportunities to test these capabilities, including responses to the Asian hornet and the oak processionary moth, and on the animal side, avian influenza and, most recently, bluetongue virus.

We continue to regularly test our capabilities through exercises and horizon scanning, we learn lessons when outbreaks do occur, and we invest in improvements. We work closely with sector groups on our preparedness and outbreak response, and we remain ever grateful for their insight and commitment.

I am conscious of the time and the length and breadth of noble Lords' questions. It would probably take me more than my 20-minute slot just to answer those. If I fail to answer anybody's questions, I will write and place a copy in the Library.

The noble Lord, Lord Trees, and many others, asked about the progress on the biological security strategy. Defra is a key delivery department in the *UK Biological Security Strategy* published last June. It commits the Government to addressing biological threats, including those related to animal and plant health and invasive non-native species. Defra is working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care to lead the "respond" pillar. This includes having robust contingency plans for biological threats; ensuring that the UK border maintains biosecurity with a new BTOM system, which is going live this April; and establishing a new inspectorate to tackle invasive non-native species, which is now up and running. In parallel, our *Environmental Improvement Plan 2023* set out how we will improve our environment at home and abroad, including through biodiversity.

The noble Lord also asked when the border target operating model would be working to full capacity. When the new certificates for EU imports come into force in January, they will need to be signed by an official veterinarian from the exporting country to confirm their safety of origin. It is the responsibility of that country to appoint official veterinarians who are qualified and authorised to do that job. Our Chief Veterinary Officer has been in constant contact with her colleagues in Europe on this subject.

On the number of vets we have here, I should probably declare an interest: my son's partner is a vet, and I understand some of the issues around retaining young vets in our country. More than half her intake from the University of Bristol just three years ago have ceased to practise. Retaining and recruiting young vets over here is very important. We are aware of this issue and the high demand for this vital profession.

The noble Lord also asked questions on how Defra works to improve public awareness of threats to plant health and how to prevent them. The Government cannot act alone on plant health: we have a collective responsibility to keep our plants healthy. Campaigns are ongoing to raise awareness of plant health and biosecurity. This includes pests that are already present, such as oak processionary moth, as well as threats that are not yet present, such as *Xylella*. There is active join-up across the Defra family group with external stakeholders on plant health communications, including an annual collaboration campaign for National Plant Health Week.

Other noble Lords joined the noble Lord, Lord Trees, to ask about preparedness for a future pandemic. The Covid pandemic has focused us on being better prepared. Disease events that we once thought would happen once in a lifetime have increased and may be at least

once a decade now. Globalisation and trade, the demand for imported food, and cheap travel all enable diseases to spread silently and far more easily. The UK is strongly advocating for international collaboration on pandemic preparedness and working towards better early-warning systems; more sensitive, cost-effective and faster diagnostics; and improvements in vaccine development.

The noble Viscount, Lord Stansgate, the noble Baronesses, Lady Murphy and Lady Bennett, and the noble Lord, Lord Browne, raised the important issue of antimicrobial resistance. I am unlikely to share the view of the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, on the proven benefits of grouse-moor management, but I think we will agree that the issue of increased antibiotic use in the salmon farming industry is alarming. Antimicrobial resistance is a global threat. It can lead to untreatable or difficult-to-treat infectious diseases in humans, animals and plants. We are vigilant to its spread. We have a well-established surveillance programme that monitors the use of antibiotics in animals and resistance in major food-producing species. To tackle antimicrobial resistance, we are committed to reducing unnecessary use of antibiotics in animals.

I am conscious that there were many other questions from noble Lords but, as I said, I would prefer to write to them and leave copies in the Library.

In bringing this debate to a conclusion, I again thank the noble Lord, Lord Trees, for securing this timely debate and allowing me the opportunity to reinforce my department's commitment to biosecurity. Protecting the biosecurity of the United Kingdom is at the forefront of this Government's agenda, as our extensive and ongoing investment into the science capability at Weybridge demonstrates. This Government's One Health and climate-focused approach is a key element of our biological security strategy: supporting efforts across environmental, plant, animal and human disciplines to safeguard our biosecurity. My department and our key partners across government are committed to this strategy. Not only does it address biological threats but it will deliver on our pledge to hand over our planet to the next generation in a better condition than when we inherited it.

2.32 pm

**Lord Trees (CB):** My Lords, I am conscious of time constraints, particularly after the remarks of the Leader of the House, so I will not say as much as usual and will be constrained in what I say with regard to the Minister having given his maiden speech. One usually says rather more, but we met for the first time only last night and I hope he will forgive me. I am grateful for his willingness to meet, and I very much look forward to working with him. With a background as a farmer and keeping sheep, he will know all about diseases, parasites and other useful things, and his knowledge of wildlife, conservation, food production and land management will be great assets in his role. I am delighted to note that he has a vet in the family, which I am sure will help.

I thank all the speakers. I never cease to be surprised and impressed, although I should not be, by how, without connivance, so many different facets are raised in debates in this Chamber. People bring different

[LORD TREES]

views on a subject and they are always articulated eloquently and with great knowledge. There is some repetition but, as several speakers mentioned, repetition has its place and virtues, and can do some good. I hope that we have helped raise the profile of this important subject. It was gratifying that there were so many speakers, which is testimony to the importance of biosecurity in all its facets. I am pleased that my good friend, our convenor, the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, managed to get his grey squirrels into the debate. The only thing left to do is to agree the Motion.

*Motion agreed.*

## Global Heating

### *Question for Short Debate*

2.35 pm

*Asked by Baroness Sheehan*

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of recent reports that global heating is likely to pass the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold this year, and how they intend to cooperate with international partners to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

**Baroness Sheehan (LD):** My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who will be contributing to this debate; their participation is much appreciated. I also draw attention to my role as a director of Peers for the Planet and to the excellent briefing produced by it for this debate, entitled *Why UK Action Matters*. My own contribution will focus primarily on the 1.5 degrees Celsius target, its significance, and why breaching it matters.

Let me take us back to the last day of the Paris COP in 2015, when euphoria broke out because, against all the odds, 196 nations had signed up to the common intent of keeping global temperature rises well below 2 degrees Celsius, and to pursue efforts for a rise of no more than 1.5 degrees higher than pre-industrial levels. This agreement was important because it reflected the acceptance of the overwhelming consensus among climate scientists that greenhouse gas emissions from the industrialisation of western economies since the 1800s are heating our planet to unacceptable levels. The evidence was incontrovertible then and it is even more so today.

I will just say a few words about the Keeling curve, named after its creator, Dr Charles David Keeling, who first started to plot the concentration of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere in 1958, taking measurements at Hawaii's Mauna Loa Observatory. Keeling was interested in the seasonal variation of the concentration of carbon dioxide, which showed, if you like, the respiration of our planet as a living, breathing organism. However, as measurements accumulated, he noticed something odd: the annual trend in the concentration of global carbon dioxide was upwards, rising from about 360 parts per million in 1959 to about 370 parts per million in 2000 and around 420 parts per million today. The more numerically inclined noble Lords among us will notice that the rate of change is increasing. When taken together with measurements of concentration of atmospheric carbon

dioxide from Antarctic ice cores, and plotted on a graph, as NASA has done on its website, a frightening picture emerges. In the span of the 800,000 years for which we have data, there is an exponential spike in the concentration of carbon dioxide since the start of the Industrial Revolution—a comparatively tiny speck of time.

We also know that there is a direct link between atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide and global warming, which is manifesting itself as the climate chaos and threat to nature that we see today. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was created to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options. Through its assessments, the IPCC determines the state of knowledge on climate change. IPCC climate scientists are urging political leaders to do all they can to keep within the 1.5 degree Celsius target because, in a world with a rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius, many of the deadliest effects of climate change are reduced—some of which we heard addressed in the previous debate on infectious diseases. Beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius, the catastrophic, irreversible melting of ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica is likely to be triggered, meaning that sea levels would continue to rise well beyond 2100.

There are signs that this is happening already. Yesterday, the *New York Times* reported that NASA studies show that Greenland is shedding 20% more ice than previously estimated. The loss of the ice sheet could mean that the associated albedo effect would be lost—that is, the reflectivity of the ice would disappear with the ice sheet, and the newly-exposed bare ground would absorb the sun's heat instead and release methane into the atmosphere, exacerbating heating even further. In addition, melting freshwater would reduce the salinity of the surrounding ocean, with consequences for the system of ocean currents that govern our weather, including the Gulf Stream. We would quite literally be in uncharted waters.

The year 2023 was the hottest by far ever recorded—shockingly, even hotter than scientists had predicted. Despite that, we have not yet breached the IPCC 1.5 degrees Celsius target, which is a longer-term average, but are we going to overshoot it? The answer to that question has to be yes, very probably, but what matters is by how much and how we deal with it. That is still within our control. Indeed, COP 28 has instilled hope that we can limit the damage. The early success of COP 28 on day one, when the loss and damage fund was announced, boded well.

I cannot overstate the importance of the fund. Small island nations and low-lying nations are already suffering the consequences of the climate emergency. To ask them and other developing countries to pay to reduce emissions that they were not responsible for, and to put in place costly adaptation measures for their very survival, is to rub salt into the wound and unjust. In any case, they simply do not have the resources to do so. Yet research from Oxford University tells us that cumulative emissions from small emitting countries, ourselves included, add up to a significant 31% of total development global emissions. We are all in this together.

The fact is that, unless we get smaller developing countries on board, we cannot transition away from fossil fuels—a phrase that is now in the world lexicon thanks to the final agreement document of COP 28; although in my view, and I believe that of the Government’s team of negotiators at COP 28, “phase out” would have been the preferred term. Nevertheless, finally, after 26 or so COPs, we have a mention of fossil fuels—a belated but welcome recognition globally of the cause of the climate emergency.

However, even if we were to stop emissions from fossil fuels tomorrow, according to the Royal Society and other esteemed sources, it would take many thousands of years for atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> to return to pre-industrial levels, due to its very slow transfer to the deep ocean and ultimate burial in marine sediments. What is needed today is global leadership to move us away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible. We must stop adding to the inventory of greenhouse gases while ramping up energy from renewables, because the world needs more energy.

For many years, the UK has been in the vanguard, particularly in generating renewables. Where we have led, others have followed. However, the world is aghast at this Government’s recent actions to give the go-ahead to a new coal mine in Cumbria and their insistence on pushing ahead with the unnecessary Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill to issue new annual licences to oil and gas companies. My own view is that both measures are gesture politics and neither will ultimately matter. The real damage is the loss of our powerful voice on the international stage, helping the world to move away from the precipice of climate breakdown and the associated collapse of our planet’s natural ecosystems.

I will leave noble Lords with one very important example of why our presence on the world stage matters. Action on methane is essential because methane is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide and responsible for a whopping 30% of global warming since pre-industrial times. However, it is much shorter-lived than carbon dioxide and achieving significant reductions would have a potentially rapid effect on atmospheric warming. In Glasgow at COP 26, we led the world on getting a global methane pledge signed. I ask the Minister: where is our leadership on the issue today? What action have we taken?

In conclusion, hope has always sustained humankind and experience has shown that, when the global community acts as one, we can move mountains—and move mountains we must to safeguard our planet. Britain’s place must be at the forefront of that effort.

2.45 pm

**Lord Lilley (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, on securing this debate. Like her, I want to emphasise the importance of science and the IPCC. I studied physics at Cambridge, so I know that the basic science of global warming is rock solid—but many predictions about the likely consequences of higher temperatures are flimsier and claims of harms attributed to climate change sometimes lack any scientific basis.

First, you cannot prove a trend from a single event, however dramatic, or from a single year, however unusual. As an example, last year wildfires near some

fashionable tourist resorts and smoke from Canadian wildfires blowing down to New York led to claims that this proved we were all going to roast. But NASA satellites have monitored wildfires for a couple of decades and I looked up what the NASA site said. It said that the area burned by fires had declined by 25% over the period that it had been monitoring it, and that on a typical day in August—it was August when I looked it up—there are 10,000 fires burning worldwide, so plenty to choose from if you want to be alarmist. Hurricanes and individual storms are dramatic, but there is no upward trend in hurricanes or in the damage they cause relative to the size of the world economy.

In the opposite direction, sea ice, which the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, mentioned is currently—this January—at the highest level for 23 years. But of course my point about a single event and a single year not being able to prove a trend applies just as much to that. Like her, I imagine that over time a warmer climate will lead to the melting of Arctic ice. But that is not the same as onshore ice—or rather, it will have the same effect on onshore ice. The noble Baroness quoted the IPCC but did not go on to say, as it says in paragraph 5.22 of its report on 1.5 degrees global warming, that this will take hundreds to thousands of years. I think that we can possibly deal with it over that period.

The best summary of what the IPCC says is in chart 12.2 in its most recent assessment review. It assesses what impact climate change has been having, whether it is out of line with variability in the past and what is expected to happen up until 2050 and the end of the century. It says, of course, that temperatures have been rising and are expected to go on rising. Extreme heat, as a result, has been rising and will go on rising. Mean precipitation has not yet risen out of line with normal variability but is expected to do so before 2050 and in the second half of the century. It will be more extreme in some areas and less extreme in others. However, the IPCC says that it has neither observed, and nor does it forecast, up to the end of the century, anything unusual in the way of river floods, landslides, droughts, wind speeds, storms, cyclones or fire weather. Despite the fact that it expects a continuing rise in sea level, it does not expect that to cause any appreciable or unusual coastal floods or erosion.

I think we ought to take into account what the IPCC says about these things. When I raised it before with the Minister’s colleague, his officials wrote back and said, “Oh, but that’s just in the science section of the IPCC report”. Well, I thought it was the science we were supposed to take seriously. But if we do not, previously I asked Ministers whether they knew of any IPCC-assessed reports that suggested that if we did nothing to stop global warming, it would lead to the extinction or elimination of the human race. They said there were none. So, let us not encourage exaggeration. I do not want to see global warming continue, because I am a Conservative and I do not like unnecessary change—but it is not going to lead to the elimination of the human race.

Let us look at the opening words of the economic chapter of the IPCC report:

[LORD LILLEY]

“For most economic sectors, the impact of climate change will be small relative to the impacts of other drivers. Changes in population, age, income, technology, relative prices, lifestyle, regulation, governance, and many other aspects of socio-economic development will have an impact on the supply and demand of economic goods and services that is large relative to the impact of climate change”.

So I urge those who get alarmed about climate change to actually read the science. When they do, they will find it is a problem, but not the end of the world.

2.50 pm

**Baroness Kingsmill (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, for initiating this short debate. It is interesting that there was some overlap between these issues and those that were mentioned in the previous debate: I found it very useful to be able to sit through both. I am also grateful for and somewhat amused by the very contrarian view that the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, put forward: it is the essence and the strength of this House that such contrasting views can exist contentedly together. I, on the other hand, feel that global warming is the biggest threat to life that the world faces over the coming decade. The year 2023 was the hottest on record, according to the WEF *Global Risks Report* published ahead of COP 28 in Dubai.

In light of this, it is gratifying that there was, at the COP, a historic agreement to transition away from fossil fuels. Some might say, “About time”, and others will perhaps say, “Too little, too late”. It is nearly 30 years since the first COP in Berlin, and some 10 years since the Paris Agreement establishing the goal to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. It is likely, in fact, by most views, that this figure will be exceeded this year. I would be grateful if the Minister would explain how the UK is planning to contribute to the transition and how the issue of new oil and gas licences for exploration in the North Sea will assist this transition.

However gratifying the agreement may have been to the participants and those who worked so hard in Dubai to reach this level of compromise, it is simply not enough. It was not accompanied by a plan of action or a timetable. No country can provide this alone; what is needed is a global strategy and partnerships. Again, I would like the Minister, perhaps when he closes this debate, to examine what partnerships he has in mind and how we are going to work together with our partners to address these issues.

Nevertheless, while climate heating is a global issue, it is most closely felt at a local level and it is the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries that are feeling the worst effects of sea levels rises and extreme weather events. For example, floods in Pakistan last year are estimated by the World Bank to have caused at least \$30 billion-worth of damage. In Dubai, at COP, in addition to the agreement to transition away from fossil fuels, it was agreed to operationalise a loss and damage fund to assist countries most affected by global heating. Some \$700 million dollars was pledged, but this has been described by experts as “minuscule” in the face of the disasters endured by many as a result of global heating.

So far, it appears that these are pledges only. The money has yet to be forthcoming, nor is there yet a plan for how and to whom it will be distributed. Perhaps the Minister would like to confirm what the UK’s actual contribution to this fund will be and what plans there are to distribute it.

As has been mentioned, COP 28 also stipulated a tripling of investment in renewable fuels. The UK has a good history in renewable energy, and I would be grateful if the Minister could advise the House on the current investment in renewables and what plans there are to meet COP’s tripling target.

COP 28 cannot be just a talking shop with vague agreements and pledges but no legally binding commitments. There must be continuing serious debate about how issues of fairness and equality can be addressed, if there is not to be a great loss of trust in COPs generally. Furthermore, the wealthy countries, whose historic and continuing carbon emissions are the dominant cause of global heating, must take action. Fine words are not enough: we need serious action.

I am advised that, at another major global conference taking place in Davos, climate heating is low on the agenda, unfortunately, as conversations about war, inflation and Trump dominate. It is apparent that, for the moment, this is a time when other issues need to be addressed as well.

2.56 pm

**Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP):** My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, on bringing this debate, but when I sat down to write my speech, I felt this great wave of weariness wash over me. Not because of the topic, which is an existential threat for many species and scenarios, but because I have been talking about climate change and its dangers, disasters and opportunities for three decades. Of course, the Green Party has been publishing its policies to cope with these devastating changes for the past 50 years. So, I could simply refer noble Lords to my speech of blah, when I said “Blah”, and so on, but I will play the game and debate.

When 99% of scientists explain that we have a problem, it is a fool who listens to the 1% who disagree. But that is what keeps happening, with individuals and governments. Intelligent people like the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, pick and choose their facts to argue that it is fine: there has always been variation, it has been hotter in the past, it will not be as bad as everybody says it is—but of course, it will be. The 1% of scientists who—

**Lord Lilley (Con):** My Lords—

**Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP):** No, I will not give way and use up my time. You can speak afterwards.

The work of the 1% of scientists who say that climate change is not as bad as it is made out to be often contains errors and cannot be replicated. It is an excuse to keep things as they are when clearly, that is exactly what is causing such serious problems. Somehow, the last few seasons of floods, droughts, record-breaking temperatures and unsettled and unseasonal patterns



have failed to wake up these deniers and delayers. The impact of these happenings—the deaths, the starvation, the absolute distress—does not seem to register.

There are things we must stop doing and other things we must start doing: there is a constant balance between mitigation and adaptation. For example, I spoke to a Conservative Peer earlier today and he talked about the future of carbon capture and storage, which the Government have recently ploughed money into. Yet our natural carbon capture and storage systems—the oceans, wetlands, plants, et cetera—are constantly trashed in the name of progress. There are plans for deep-sea dredging, not knowing which ecosystems could be damaged. We know more about the surface of Mars than we do about the deep ocean. Our ignorance will cause more problems, probably not too far in the future.

It is possibly not the end of the world but it is the end for many species, and probably the end of a comfortable life for the majority of people—obviously, not for the super-rich; I dare say, they will cope. For example, yes, we should plant trees, but we should also stop cutting down older trees in forests. We must insulate houses when they are built, which is better for the dwellers and for the planet. Transport accounts for around a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions across the world, and many Governments are implementing policies to decarbonise travel. We are behind on that. We can make it easy to walk and cycle, to use public transport or car clubs. We must reduce our flights, especially the use of private jets.

Finally, I have a question and also a suggestion. Does the Minister see that this Government have failed on the climate crisis and that they need to dump the idea of new oil and gas licences and adopt the Green Party's policies, so we can keep our fingers crossed that we do not reach the next two degrees of warming in the next decade or so? I recommend reading our Green Party manifesto. It is chock full of practical, sensible policies, often cheaper than anything the Government are promoting. They are policies that really do make sense—and they will not cost us the earth.

3 pm

**Baroness Hayman (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interest as chair of Peers for the Planet. I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, both on securing this serious debate and on her comprehensive, well-evidenced introduction to it.

I accept and find myself in accord with the analysis of the scientific evidence given by the noble Baroness and the noble Baronesses, Lady Kingsmill and Lady Jones of Moulsecoomb. I will leave it to the Minister to respond to the analysis of the IPCC report—the whole report, not only the bar charts and the analysis of the noble Lord, Lord Lilley. I know that the Government do not agree with what he is suggesting and that their 2030 strategic framework for international climate and nature action, published in March 2023, stated that climate change and nature loss were

“two of the defining challenges of our time”.

I do not find it totally reassuring to be told that whatever climate change does and whatever its threats and challenges, it does not mean the extermination of

the human race. That does not make me sleep better in my bed, thinking about my children and grandchildren's future, or the future of the people who live in countries threatened by sea level rises, floods, famine or drought.

We have enormous challenges before us. This country has done well, and we have led in this area. What worries me is the backtracking we are seeing on our own commitments; as a result, we risk losing credibility in providing leadership. I worry that the Prime Minister's change of direction has led to a loss of credibility and undermined our own efforts. One of the problems is that we are dealing with a phenomenon that impacts a huge number of sectors, as we heard in the last debate. We see them individually, but we do not see issues of supply and demand together, or health alongside business, transport and energy. We do not have a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach.

The machinery of governance for climate change issues is a real problem that we need to tackle. We need a more comprehensive approach that recognises the effects across different sectors and policies. As I said earlier, I am worried about the Government's announcements telling us that a better, fairer way of meeting our obligations would involve putting back the planned date for phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars, putting back the date for phasing out the installation of oil and liquid petroleum gas, and exempting households from the requirement to phase out some fossil fuel boilers. They will all have an effect on demand, and that will make it more difficult for us to meet our targets. I put in a plea for a comprehensive government approach to this and to the delivery of the very high-level aspirations that the Government have in this area.

3.05 pm

**Lord Young of Norwood Green (Lab):** My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, on giving us the opportunity to debate this issue; it is a very opportune time to do so. At the risk of being called a fool, a denier or a contrarian, I concur with what the noble Lord, Lilley, said, because he was absolutely right in his analysis. That is not to say that I am not worried about climate change or, to refer to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, the future for my children and grandchildren—of course I am. But the question of what we do about that is the real importance of this debate.

I was very interested to hear the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, mention that we supported a coal mine in Cumbria. It produces a tiny amount of coal and, if we had not produced it there, it would have been imported. I very much doubt the idea that that will somehow destroy our leadership in the world.

The oil and gas licences are perhaps more important, and I can understand the concern about them. But I want us to focus on the fact that, no matter what a number of people may think, we will continue to need gas for approximately the next 20 years. Those who oppose the use of it seem to have forgotten the fact that we actually import LNG, which makes up about 20% of our usage. It comes from the USA and Qatar, and none of those countries extracting gas has come to grief, although there are lots of predictions about

[LORD YOUNG OF NORWOOD GREEN]  
that. If we will not accept that, those who argue against it should tell us how we will survive, but I do not believe that they have the answer to that.

I listened carefully to my noble friend Lady Kingsmill and the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Moulsecoomb. The latter said that, because she and her party have been talking about this for so many years, it means that they are absolutely right—unfortunately, it does not. No one is arguing with her that we should not deal with the challenge of climate change; her solutions are what people, quite justifiably, challenge.

The other thing that people seem to suggest is that nothing will change technologically—but it will. The Government are supporting the development of small modular reactors. They will be very important and a good development in government policy. They will give us the opportunity to create green hydrogen or maybe even blue hydrogen. Carbon capture and storage is still expensive at the moment, but it will definitely come. There will be other developments in technology. Should we be worried that other countries are not taking up some of these developments? We should—and we should encourage them to do so.

It is interesting that we contribute only 1%—we seem to forget that. We also seem to forget that the biggest culprits are certainly China, probably the Soviet Union and maybe the USA. We are still leaders in what we are doing, and I am puzzled to hear those who want a change in government policy imply that we are somehow not. It is unfortunate that people say that.

I ask the Minister to confirm the point that I made about small modular reactors and their possible contribution. I heard the talk about having fewer flights; we will have to live in a very poor world if we take up all these policies. We are developing biofuels, which will make a significant contribution to that.

I make my own contribution. I cycle in every day and I have an electric car, so I encourage other people to do the same. I genuinely congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, because it is important that we regularly have these debates and get the Government to justify the stances they are currently taking. I thank the noble Baroness and those who have contributed. I hope people will accept that I am neither a denier, a fool nor a contrarian—although there is nothing wrong with being a contrarian; they are often proved right.

### 3.10 pm

**Earl Russell (LD):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Sheehan for bringing this timely debate and all who have spoken. Earth is on the brink of surpassing the internationally agreed threshold for climate warming. The Paris Agreement's long-term goal of keeping warming "well below" 2 degrees Celsius and aiming to limit it to 1.5 degrees is a global benchmark, conceived and internationally agreed to avoid the worst impacts of global temperature rise and to minimise risks. To my mind, the issue is clear. To the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, I say that every disaster movie starts with somebody questioning a scientist.

For the first time, 1.5 degrees of warming has been passed temporarily, and 2023 obliterated the record for the hottest year by a large margin. Earth was 1.48

degrees hotter. The average temperature was 0.17 degrees higher than in 2016. Half of all days were 1.5 degrees warmer. The last three months were 1.7 degrees warmer. Huge Canadian wildfires drove up yearly global carbon emissions by 30%. Sea surface temperatures rose alarmingly. We are outside the safe limits that humanity requires and the target for controlling global climate change is closing.

However, we must have hope, and a lot has changed. Other speakers have referred to that already. A decade ago, we were on target to hit 3.5 degrees by the end of the century. Due to the international action already taken, this has now reduced to a probable 2.4 degrees to 2.5 degrees. To keep global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees, current global emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050, according to the UN.

Last year was a step change for the growth of renewables, with an extra 507 gigawatts of capacity produced globally. Last year, China alone added more solar power than the world added in 2022. Last year saw a 49% global increase on the previous year, and the International Energy Agency recognises that enough renewables to power the whole of America and Canada should be produced over the next five years.

I warmly welcome the Conservatives' 2019 manifesto commitments to net zero by 2050. We need to work collectively on these issues. The time for arguing about the science is over. I also recognise the great work that the noble Baroness, Lady Jones, and others have done on this issue. It is important that we work together.

However, to my mind, the Conservatives stopped being world leaders last year. I find it strange that the Uxbridge parliamentary by-election was a tipping point in this country's conversation on climate change. The PM decided to take a new course on climate change, now backing the motorist, feeling that we must "ease the burdens". Commitments on phasing out petrol and diesel cars and gas boilers were diluted. The tone and the language changed, and the urgency was scaled back. Our commitments risk being collateral damage.

The pointless decision to extract new North Sea oil will do nothing to provide us with energy security and, as others have mentioned, damages our international reputation and standing. Chris Skidmore, who resigned over these matters, said:

"There's been a pivot towards trying to create a culture war on the back of net-zero as somehow being a measure that is juxtaposed to energy security. It is completely false".

As a direct result of that decision, our international reputation has suffered—built over years, destroyed in seconds. The public spectacle of our climate change Minister being flown back to support the Prime Minister did not help.

We need to set a clear example. We need to be a world leader. The Climate Change Committee did welcome the Government's 2030 strategic framework, saying that overall it was commendable. But more must be done to support the ambitions with detailed further actions, as the noble Baroness, Lady Kingsmill, argued.

I ask the Government to stick to their own policies, to reduce the anti-green rhetoric and to continue to step up to the challenge. Given that the IPCC's remaining global carbon budget for 1.5 degrees is not getting any

bigger, perhaps the Minister might tell the House what additional measures His Majesty's Government will now take to reduce emissions in line with the UK's proportionate share of that crucial budget.

3.16 pm

**Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab):** My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, for securing this debate and for her introduction. I am mindful of the contributions of the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, and my noble friend Lord Young. It is good to have these debates, not least to recognise some of the challenges that we face and the need to hone all the evidence and bring the arguments together to make sure that we can move forward together on this important issue.

As we have heard throughout the debate, analysis published by NASA indicates that the earth's average surface temperature in 2023 was the warmest on record, with global temperatures around 1.2 degrees Celsius above their baseline period of 1951 to 1980. This links with what billions of people around the world have experienced—extreme flooding, rising sea levels and exceptional heat, accompanied by widespread unprecedented media coverage, bringing evidence of these impacts into households across the world.

The inclusion of the 1.5 degrees Celsius target was regarded as a great breakthrough in the Paris climate agreement of 2015. Although this was a drop of only half a degree, the IPCC has since spelled out the growing risk of calamities if 1.5 degrees is breached, and the consequent need to halve carbon emissions by 2030 to have any chance of avoiding them. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, and my noble friend Lady Kingsmill for outlining those calamities, and the risks, so well.

As we know, the EU's Copernicus earth observation programme has stated that 2023 was the warmest year on record "by a large margin" and has estimated that it is likely that a 12-month period ending in January or February this year will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level. The Met Office has also projected that global temperatures could temporarily exceed the 1.5 degrees threshold in 2024. Although this would not of itself mean a breach of the Paris agreement, I think we can almost all agree that the first year above 1.5 degrees will indeed be a difficult milestone to reach in climate history, even taking into account the impact of El Niño in boosting temperatures.

Against this backdrop, serious alarm has been raised about the current UK Government's changes in policy, despite the rhetoric and their welcome commitments and targets. As we have heard, these policy changes include: pushing back the planned date for phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans from 2030 to 2050; reversing the plans to introduce a new requirement for landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency of their properties; and the even more damaging decisions to approve a new coal mine in Cumbria and to allow the approval of new oil and gas licences in the North Sea—which, we also know, will not contribute to reducing energy costs or increasing energy security.

This all speaks of a Government who simply do not understand the impact of trashing our reputation as a world leader on tackling climate change, the damage

they are doing to the confidence of investors and businesses and the subsequent damage to our economic prospects, as well as our ability to deliver net zero. Indeed, although the Climate Change Committee's 2023 progress report commends the overall aims of the Government's 2030 strategic framework, it cautions that

"more must be done to support the ambitions expressed in the document with detailed future actions".

Further, it criticises the Government for the reputational damage the UK has suffered over the past year as a result of their policy changes, stating that these changes represented a "retreat" from the strong leadership position established during the UK COP presidency in 2021. The report talks about the

"decline in profile for international climate issues",

highlighting that domestic policy decisions

"clash with the UK's international messaging".

I conclude by asking the Minister for the Government's views of the risks posed by the temperature rise predictions highlighted in today's debate. Further, do the Government have plans to respond constructively to the criticisms levelled at them from the international community? Does the Minister acknowledge that our reputation has been severely damaged and, if so, will he tell us what actions the Government will take to restore our reputation as a global climate leader?

3.21 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Lord Callanan) (Con):** I thank and pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, for bringing forward this important debate. It has been short but interesting none the less, with some excellent contributions from across the Chamber. I will seek to address as many of the points made as I possibly can.

Although the title of this debate focuses on efforts to adapt to climate change, it is of course equally of paramount importance that we do our utmost to limit further warming in this critical decade. In sharp contrast to the picture painted by the noble Baronesses, Lady Jones and Lady Blake, and the noble Earl, Lord Russell, the UK is—and is proud to be—a world leader on climate change. We are totally committed to net zero, to the Paris agreement and to keeping 1.5 degrees alive. We were the first major economy to halve its emissions, and we have one of the most ambitious decarbonisation targets in the world. We have achieved that while growing our economy by more than 70% since 1990. We have a much better record than—to pluck a random example—Germany, where the socialists and the greens are in government, because it is practical action that counts rather than fancy green rhetoric.

On assessments relating to the likelihood of exceeding 1.5 degrees of warming relative to pre-industrial levels this year, the World Meteorological Organization and the Met Office recently confirmed that 2023 was the warmest single year on record globally, at around 1.45 degrees above pre-industrial levels. While reaching 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels in a single year does not mean that the Paris agreement long-term average temperature goal has been reached, it is clearly a concern that record temperatures are already being

[LORD CALLANAN]

set. The latest IPCC synthesis report drove home just how important it is that we limit the rise in average global temperature to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Every increment of global warming will increase the adverse impacts of climate change, multiplying hazards and compounding risks that are more difficult and more complex to manage. That is why we put keeping 1.5 degrees within reach at the heart of our own COP 26 presidency and our international climate diplomacy efforts since then.

To answer the points made by the noble Baronesses, Lady Jones, Lady Hayman and Lady Blake, the Prime Minister has underscored our commitment to delivering on net zero. Our 2030 target means the deepest cuts of any major emitter since 1990, and we are determined to deliver on that. We were the first major economy to set a net-zero target in law, and we are committed to delivering net zero at home and, of course, to driving forward progress internationally to keep 1.5 degrees within reach in this critical decade.

However, it is of course a fact that the UK produces just 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We can address the remaining 99% and keep 1.5 degrees in reach only through international action and leadership, which is what we are providing. We made it the centrepiece of our COP 26 presidency and under the presidency, the proportion of global GDP covered by net-zero targets increased from 30% to over 90%. We will continue to focus on the most practical and deliverable measures that bring the largest global carbon savings.

At COP 28, we focused on driving forward efforts to protect forests, to scale finance for the transition and to accelerate net-zero transitions across a number of different sectors. On forests, we announced £576 million to support countries taking action to halt forest loss and to protect nature, and we saw the commitment to halt and reverse deforestation enshrined in the UAE consensus. We drove forward initiatives to scale finance, including the Prime Minister announcing £1.6 billion worth of new international climate finance programmes, and we endorsed the climate finance framework, which champions reform of international financial institutions to make them bigger, better and fairer.

The UK was also at the forefront of efforts to accelerate decarbonisation in many key sectors. To take an example, the International Partners Group, co-led by the UK and the EU, launched the Vietnam Just Energy Transition Partnership—JETP—a £15.5 billion resource mobilisation plan to help accelerate Vietnam's transition from fossil fuels through to clean energy. The Powering Past Coal Alliance, which we also co-chair, announced 13 new members—including the USA, which has the world third-largest coal fleet—all committed to phasing out unabated coal power and to building no new coal capacity. We were also pleased to see two new breakthroughs launched on buildings and cement. In response to the question asked by the noble Baroness, Lady Kingsmill, these are just some of the international partnerships and initiatives that we will continue to drive forward action on.

As many noble Lords noted in the debate, important progress was made in Dubai. We are now globally unified around a commitment to transition away from fossil fuels, underpinned by a goal to triple renewables

and double energy efficiency. A new fund for loss and damage has been established, and the first global stocktake under the Paris Agreement was successfully concluded.

Of course, we all know that that is not enough. Looking ahead, we have to work harder with partners to ensure that many of these key commitments are met, such as that to triple renewable power. The noble Lady Baroness, Lady Kingsmill, questioned what we, as the UK, are doing to scale up renewables. First, we have made very significant progress already. Since 2010, renewables have gone from less than 7% of our electricity supply to 48% in the first quarter of this year. Today, the UK is proud to be home to the five largest operational offshore wind farm projects in the world, and we have an extremely ambitious target to increase offshore wind to 50 gigawatts of capacity by 2050.

On the international side, we will continue to scale up renewables through UK initiatives such as Power Breakthrough and the Green Grids Initiative, which is all about scaling up the net-zero grids that we will all need for a net-zero future.

In answer to the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, on new oil and gas licences, this is of course a matter which we have debated across this House many times. I point out that while the Government are of course scaling up our own clean energy sources, such as offshore wind and nuclear, I agree with my noble friend Lord Lilley and the noble Lord, Lord Young of Norwood Green, that the UK still needs to utilise oil and gas for most of our energy needs. That will be a continued need over the coming decades.

New licences will slow the decline in UK production levels, rather than see them increase above current levels, as has been implied. Even with any new licences, oil and gas production in the UK is still expected to decline by 7% year on year—faster than the average global decline needed to align with the UN 1.5 degrees centigrade pathway. I have made the point many times before that it makes no sense to import LNG from other countries with higher carbon emissions when we could obtain it from our own resources, albeit that these resources are continuing to decline as the fields become depleted.

On adaptation, as noble Lords have set out, the impacts on climate change are already being felt. The UK has long recognised its importance. We are delivering on our commitment to spend £11.6 billion on international climate finance through to 2025-26, to ensure a balance between adaptation and mitigation, including at least £3 billion on protecting and restoring nature.

To support the most vulnerable in our world who are experiencing some of the worst impacts of climate change, at COP 27, the Prime Minister announced that we would triple our funding for adaptation from £500 million to £1.5 billion by 2025. Over the past 12 years, our international climate finance has helped over 100 million people cope with some of the worst effects of climate change. At the COP 28 summit, the UK negotiators were successful in helping to agree a framework to bring the global goal and adaptation into alignment. Of course, although we accept that there is further work to be done, this is a critical step

towards more meaningful action. During our COP 26 presidency, we secured a commitment to double adaptation by 2025. We will continue to push for more donors to help deliver on this commitment.

To address another point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Kingsmill, we welcome the establishment at COP 28 of the new fund covering loss and damage, with funding in excess of \$650 million. The UK announced a contribution of up to \$40 million to this fund, with a further \$20 million for funding arrangements, including for early warning systems and disaster risk finance. Given the scale of the need, it is essential for the success of the fund that it attracts new and wider sources of funding, including grants and concessional loans from public, private and some innovative sources. We will continue to progress this as much as we possibly can.

Also at COP 28, my colleague, the Minister for Development and Africa, announced a further £100 million of UK funding to help many vulnerable people adapt to climate change. The UK can be proud of its record and of everything that we are doing—both domestically and through the leadership we are providing abroad.

**Lord Young of Norwood Green (Lab):** Before the Minister sits down, will he respond to the point I made about the Government's support for small nuclear reactors?

**Lord Callanan (Con):** I am happy to do so. I did not cover it directly in my speech because we made a big announcement about it last week. I answered Questions on it in this House only the other day. We are progressing big-scale nuclear reactors. We are committed to making a decision shortly on the progress of Sizewell C. We have provided £200 million to Rolls-Royce for the development of new SMRs. Great British Nuclear is rolling out our campaign of both SMRs and AMRs. Many of our existing nuclear plants will go offline towards the end of this decade. We need to make sure that we make the investments to replace them because that will be essential if we are to reach net zero. The noble Lord's point is well made.

My time is up, so I will draw my remarks to a close. The House can rest assured that the UK will continue to deliver on net zero at home and to push and accelerate action internationally, while championing the need to address many of the worst impacts of climate change. The science demands that we drastically accelerate global action on mitigation in what will be a critical decade ahead. We will progress all these efforts both at home and internationally. Once again, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, for securing this debate, and all noble Lords who contributed.

**Lord Gascoigne (Con):** My Lords, I thought I would just repeat the point made earlier in the Chamber by both the Leader of the House and the Opposition Chief Whip, the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy of Southwark, concerning the importance of brevity in this debate—indeed, in all debates. If noble Lords speak for the full time limits in this debate or exceed them, there will be insufficient time for the Minister and the noble Earl,

Lord Kinnoull, to respond. So I humbly request that noble Lords stick to the allocated speaking time, which is a maximum of seven minutes. Thank you.

## Intergovernmental Relations Within the United Kingdom

### *Motion to Take Note*

3.35 pm

*Moved by The Earl of Kinnoull*

That this House takes note of intergovernmental relations within the United Kingdom.

**The Earl of Kinnoull (CB):** My Lords, last Saturday, 13 January, was the second anniversary of the servicing of the new UK intergovernmental relationship regime, replacing the October 2013 arrangements that had been so overtaken by events. Today is therefore a good time for us to be here to debate this vital structural component of our union.

The past 25 years have seen huge changes in how we are governed, with the devolution of much power from Westminster in various stages. However, the job of creating the mechanics of how the UK's resulting governmental bodies interact has struggled to keep step. This has contributed to the significant creaks and groans within the union that have been of such concern to so many here today, and certainly to me.

Before I make some remarks about this new regime, I think it worth briefly reviewing the history. In 1999, following the first round of devolution, the first of a succession of memoranda of understanding was agreed. It sought to promote and improve relations between the UK and the devolved Governments and was updated several times, including in 2012. That led to the draft MoU of October 2013, which, until January 2022, as a draft, was the documentary repository of the arrangements between the four Governments. The October 2013 MoU vested responsibility for the arrangements under it within the UK Government with the Deputy Prime Minister, a position vacant from May 2015 to September 2021: there was no captain of the ship.

The Scottish independence referendum was in September 2014. The resulting Smith commission agreement led to a substantial additional number of powers being devolved, as duly happened pursuant to the Scotland Act 2016 and the Wales Act 2017. These significant changes in the devolution settlements represented yet more things that the drafters of the October 2013 MoU had not sought to address at the time.

The Constitution Committee delivered an excellent report, *The Union and Devolution*, in May 2016. It concluded that the UK Government must

“devise and articulate a coherent vision for the shape and structure of the United Kingdom, without which there cannot be constitutional stability”.

The Brexit process kicked off in June 2016, just a month later, and exacerbated the situation. In the European Union Committee's report of June 2017, *Brexit: Devolution*, we said:

[THE EARL OF KINNOULL]

“The devolved governments, and some of our witnesses, have also argued that fundamental reform is needed to give the devolved institutions a more formal role in UK decision-making post-Brexit, analogous to that of regions and states in federal systems”.

The start of 2018 was probably the low point, but in March 2018 a review of intergovernmental relations, the IGR review, was launched. This was, to quote GOV.UK, a

“joint review of the existing Memorandum of Understanding on Devolution”.

In July 2019, the noble Lord, Lord Dunlop, was asked to review the UK Government’s union capability, a task he very ably concluded in late November that year. Then, after a period of great silence, on 24 March 2021 the Dunlop review and an update on the IGR review were published. The Dunlop review is a seminal and well thought-through document, and it is a pity it had to wait in the wings for 16 months. It had a number of principal propositions, including the creation of a great new office of state in the Cabinet and the reorganisation of the devolved nation departments, with a single Permanent Secretary.

The 15-page update on the IGR review, by then three years in the making, appeared to be quite close to the finishing post and, as I said, the final document surfaced on 13 January 2022, about four years after the start of that review. What also appeared, on 24 March 2021, was the inaugural *Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Report*, then a Cabinet Office document. This has now settled into a rhythm of quarterly reports, with a larger annual report into IGR activity. This transparency is as commendable as it is vital, and I will come back to it shortly. That, then, is the potted history. It demonstrates a woeful lack of focus on devolved matters over many years. Even if we have a better structure now, the challenge is how to use it to the advantage of us all and our union.

I turn therefore to the most recent intergovernmental relations quarterly report. As I said, the first iteration was a Cabinet Office document. Today, these responsibilities form only part of the portfolio of one of the busiest ministries, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Michael Gove is also the Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, but it seems that this vital task is not important enough to make it into the ministry name. The symbolism here is wrong, and we must do better.

On looking at the dashboard for the meetings in Q3, and for the rolling 12 months to Q3, I am struck by the asymmetric level of engagement. DLUHC had 28 IGR meetings in the rolling 12 months. The Ministry of Defence had one. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology had none, albeit that it has been in existence for only six months. There is also a concern that IGR meetings are generally ad hoc, and not fully planned and diarised well ahead. Can the Minister describe to us how DLUHC tries to ensure full engagement by all Whitehall departments, and what constitutes an IGR meeting?

One of the reasons why the IGR mechanism took almost four years to surface was the negotiation of the dispute resolution mechanism among the parties. Two years in, can the Minister say how many disputes have been raised and how many have been resolved?

On 20 December 2023, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP spoke of the dispute over the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill in a formal Statement to the Scottish Parliament. She said:

“Before the Bill reached stage 3, we reached out to the UK Government, finally getting a meeting with the Equalities Minister the day before stage 3 started”.

Stage 3 is the final stage of the legislative process in Scotland. Minister Somerville and her team were clearly aware of the problem of the potential clash of the Scottish Bill with the UK’s equalities legislation, which is why they sought out the Whitehall Equalities Minister. However, I can find no mention of the IGR mechanism being engaged on the issue at all. Can the Minister confirm whether the IGR mechanism was engaged at any time over this debacle, whether a dispute was at any time raised and what lessons have been learned from this most difficult issue?

On 27 November last year, 20 months after the surfacing of the new IGR structure, DLUHC published a paper entitled the *Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat*. This was very helpful, if rather horribly late. Can the Minister tell us whether the secretariat is made up of full-time dedicated staff and includes staff members from all four Governments? In any event, the IGR mechanism is so important to our union that an annual and formal debate in both Houses on the state of intergovernmental relations is a necessity. Can she also comment on this?

In January 2020, I was in Canada at a conference of Commonwealth speakers representing the noble Lord, Lord Fowler. Our host had also invited the speakers of its many regional assemblies. Over the course of three days, I had the opportunity to speak to many of the Canadians. The consistent message was how much effort they put into their union, with a regular diet of meetings and gatherings and the consistent involvement of the Prime Minister. One especially experienced speaker told me that, after their Quebec tensions in the mid-1990s, “We not only had to talk the talk—we had to walk the walk”. The Canadian model includes its Ottawa Government, the 10 provinces and three territories. They have around 80 structured meetings a year. Its dedicated secretariat comes from the participants. It has its own informative website, albeit that the more sensitive meetings have no public documents. The secretariat is neutral and fully independent. Are the Government looking at the Canadian model for intergovernmental relations—or any other models—in what I hope is an unending search for the best?

In closing, I note that this House has spent a lot of the last year on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act. This foresees, among much else, English devolution. Will the Minister comment on whether English devolved Administrations would be an equivalent part of the devolved intergovernmental structures within the United Kingdom? In any event, I very much look forward to this debate and its strong field of speakers. I beg to move.

3.47 pm

**Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, for securing this debate and for his excellent introduction to the issues. Commuting as I do from Glasgow, I clearly

have a Scottish focus on the issue of intergovernmental relations. I think that I will be in the minority today; the Welsh contributions will be more numerous. I note, once again, my disappointment at the lack of representation in this House from the party currently in government in Scotland. That is its choice, but one that I fear cuts off its nose to spite its face.

I declare my interests as laid out in the register. My work as a board member of Creative Scotland and as chief executive of Cerebral Palsy Scotland brings me into regular contact with the Scottish Government and their officials, and I currently chair the Scottish Government's National Advisory Committee for Neurological Conditions.

In preparation for today, I turned to the Scottish Parliament Information Centre's most recent briefing on intergovernmental relations, which outlines, as the noble Earl touched on, how many different bodies have wrestled with this issue, including parliamentary committees, academics, independent commissions and the excellent Dunlop review. The majority of these criticised the previous Joint Ministerial Committee for a number of reasons, including ineffective dispute resolution, the role of the UK Government and a lack of transparency. The question, surely, is whether the three-tier system implemented by this Government since 2021 has fared any better. The noble Earl asked the Minister for very specific responses on some of these issues, and I look forward to her replies. I am afraid the sticking point is that, whatever this Government may do, as Michael Gove, the Minister responsible, points out in his foreword to the IGR annual report for 2022,

“this is not a one-government job”.

For over two-thirds of the Scottish Parliament's 25 years, the SNP—which is, by definition, opposed to devolution—has been the party in government in Holyrood. The SNP's *raison d'être* is independence, and everything it does and says is measured through that lens alone. As long as there is devolution, there is no independence. Humza Yousaf has already confirmed that independence will be “page one, line one” of the SNP manifesto at the next general election.

In the early years, day-to-day relationships could be managed through informal political channels by representatives from the same party, relying on good will. Any pretence that this Scottish Administration have to good will or co-operation between Holyrood and Westminster is long gone. Over the past 25 years, much has changed. We have devolved yet more powers to the Scottish Parliament—tax raising and social security, for example. We hoped they would contribute to Scotland taking more responsibility over its own affairs, but we did this without implementing any additional accountability or scrutiny.

So, the Scottish Government make their choices. Scotland is the highest-taxed and most complicated tax area of the United Kingdom. Its health service is close to breaking point; its education system has plummeted down the rankings; and business and enterprise are treated with contempt. Public spending in Scotland amounts to 50% of GDP. Making different choices, though, is the whole point of devolution.

What should this Government do about the state of intergovernmental relations with Scotland? I agree with Michael Gove, who said in an evidence session to the Constitution Committee that, from a Westminster perspective,

“on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis Ministers have very good relationships with their counterparts in the devolved Administrations”.

I also welcome the devolving of civil servants away from London and across the UK, including to Scotland. However, Mr Gove recognised in that same evidence session that

“Ministers in the Scottish Government have a different constitutional vision, so there is an incentive for them, when a political platform is provided, to try to amplify what they perceive to be weaknesses ... and to downplay the day-to-day effectiveness of our arrangements”.

This was clearly in evidence during Covid, with competing daily press conferences, and continues today with the opening of Scottish government offices and ministerial meetings abroad.

The hypocrisy of the SNP, on the one hand barely tolerating our monarchical structure in Scotland while Angus Robertson was quick to offer to host the new King and Queen of Denmark due to her “strong Scottish connections”, is breath-taking but unsurprising. It is just another way to find every opportunity to push the limits of the Scotland Act.

We will not have any real opportunity for change until the next Scottish Parliament elections in May 2026. Until then, I urge this Government and any future Westminster Administration not to fall into any of the SNP's traps. Whether it is regarding equalities and gender recognition, recycling or foreign affairs, all are painted to the Scottish public as examples of the “democratic deficit”. They are staging posts on the “journey” to independence. If the SNP loses those elections then, as its MP Tommy Sheppard put it, “the debate on independence stops”.

Hooray, I say.

Perhaps then we can focus on what we should change. Perhaps we could agree on what thresholds need to be reached before any future constitutional referendum is contemplated. Perhaps we need to revisit the Scotland Act to impose some much-needed scrutiny on the woefully incompetent legislation emerging out of Holyrood. Perhaps that is why the SNP disapproves of your Lordships' House so much—it fears the scrutiny of a second Chamber.

3.53 pm

**Baroness Andrews (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure, as always, to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Fraser of Craigmaddie. I should reassure her that the Welsh are very rarely in a majority in this House. We should take advantage of that this afternoon. I am grateful to the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, for enabling us to have this debate and for the forensic way in which he introduced it. It is timely because there is much to welcome in the new IGR structure, especially the greater clarity in terms of process, accountabilities and dispute resolution. As he was saying, this is a work in progress and I entirely agree with him about the challenges of how it will be used. I look forward to the Minister's response to his important questions.

[BARONESS ANDREWS]

I will focus on Wales, because what gives this debate extra edge today is that we have had the much-anticipated report of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales, chaired by our very own Archbishop Rowan Williams, and by Professor Laura McAllister. It has concluded that

“The relationship between the UK government and the devolved governments has fallen far short of the co-operation that citizens expect and which is essential to the successful operation of the Union”.

It calls on the need to protect the Union from the risk of “gradual attrition” if steps are not taken to secure it, and sets out the options for Wales in terms of the future of its governance.

Now, its conclusions consolidate much of what has been marked by intergovernmental relations of recent years. However banal this may sound, no matter how good our structures are, unless those trusted relationships can be retained and made resilient, Westminster and the devolved Administrations will always have an asymmetrical relationship.

That is certainly reflected in Wales’s relationship with Westminster. In July last year, the UK’s conduct towards Wales was described as

“attempts to undermine the devolution settlement and ... continued disrespect for the Welsh Government and the Senedd”,

which has damaged intergovernmental working. When he was asked during the Covid inquiry how the new intergovernmental structures were working, the First Minister said they would work only where there were existing good relationships in place, but that

“the new machinery has not succeeded in sparking those arrangements”

or “new forms of interaction”, and that too often relationships just reflected the whim or will of the individual Minister. Indeed, we saw the failure of that will during the Covid pandemic itself, when, despite what we were told in this House, the relationship between Wales and Westminster was one of incommunicado some of the time. Now, that was a basic failure of courtesy, let alone co-ordinated policy.

This House has seen at first hand how the Government have introduced legislation that has overridden the basic precepts of devolution—consultation and consent—and this is documented in the commission’s report. But in this House, I am delighted to say that noble Lords have played a key role in protecting the devolution settlement from the worst effects of provocative legislation, presented to the DAs without care or consultation.

The Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee, which I had the privilege of chairing for two and a half years, had a ringside seat—sometimes we were actually in the ring itself—for intergovernmental relationships. It was not so much a case of benign indifference but more a question of “prod and provoke”. It was our conviction that common frameworks could help to mend those relationships and build a stronger Union. But the prevailing political mood was in effect to make common frameworks a victim rather than an agent of positive policy, as seen particularly in relation to the internal market Act and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act. These brand-new mechanisms, these common frameworks that were

invented post-Brexit for managing divergence within the internal market, were intended originally to be positive instruments for taking collaborative policy across the UK, whether that was on agriculture or health, and in so doing to draw the Union closer. That opportunity has been lost so far because they have become focused on compatible processes rather than policy. Insofar as they are successful, it is because the officials working across the four countries have made them so.

What has been lacking is political leadership, and in our final letter to Mr Gove—I completely agree with everything the noble Lord has said about the way the Cabinet Office is marginalised here—we said that the failure to provide drive and focused leadership, which would have galvanised the contribution common frameworks could make to the Union, explains why we described in our reports that common frameworks have been an unfulfilled opportunity. Indeed, we had a whole cohort of Ministers trooped in front of us—some with a better grasp than others—but they all displayed a rather cavalier attitude towards the frameworks and no real grip on what they could actually achieve. Mr Gove has disputed our arguments, of course, but he does say that he thinks the IGR reforms have created “a better overall context”. The obvious question is how; I hope the Minister can answer that.

Recently, the Interparliamentary Forum drew attention to the difficulties caused by the United Kingdom Internal Market Act—a Bill that was fought in this House, where we were able to protect the dispute resolutions of the current frameworks against being subordinated to UK legislation, which was very important—and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act, which virtually dismissed any concerns on the part of either Wales or Scotland as to how their regulatory frameworks would be impacted.

Given that the union is now more troubled, less robust and less certain about boundaries and functions, the publication of the report today, which calls on the Westminster Parliament to secure through legislation “a duty of co-operation and parity of esteem between the governments of the UK”

is vital. I hope the Government will listen and learn from that because parity of esteem between the different cultures and conditions of the countries of the UK must be at the heart of reviving the relationships if they are not to become even more frayed.

Wales carries the burden of inherited poverty and ill health. It is an exceptional legacy. Underfunding for years means that the Welsh Government simply cannot meet the needs of Wales. The reason why that is so, and its repercussions in the context of the union, is part of the conversation that the commission has started across Wales by making recommendations about the strengthening of the union and raising options for its future. I hope the Government will listen intently to that.

4.01 pm

**Baroness Humphreys (LD):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews. I thank the Convenor of the Cross-Bench Peers for initiating this debate and for dedicating his interest to issues of devolution, particularly since his election to his new



position. Those of us who have highlighted the difficulties faced by our devolved parliaments in recent years welcome his support and his empathy.

In October last year, Mark Drakeford, the Welsh First Minister, appeared before the Welsh Affairs Committee in the other place and explained how in the first 20 years of the existence of the Welsh National Assembly, now the Welsh Senedd, relationships between Welsh officials and UK government officials were cordial and positive. That was confirmed for me in a conversation with my noble friend Lady Randerson, who was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Wales Office from 2012 to 2015, in the coalition years. She recalled how, through co-operation and sheer hard graft, legislation that might have breached the Sewel convention—the convention designed to ensure that the UK legislates in devolved areas only with the consent of the devolved legislatures—was worked upon late into the night. Legislation was sometimes held up until agreement was reached between the two Governments so that legislative consent could be granted.

All that changed in 2019, with the incoming Brexit Government and their focus on a unionism that has sometimes been described as hyper-unionism and a focus on legislation intended to “bind the Union together”, whether it broke Sewel or not. Now the Sewel convention is broken almost routinely—it has been broken at least seven times in recent years—and, when the Welsh Parliament refuses legislative consent to a Bill because it encroaches on its devolved responsibility, we see that UK Ministers just go ahead and enact the legislation anyway, leading to a breakdown of relationships.

Calls for a return to more co-operative working and for regular meetings between officials of the UK and those of the devolved Governments led to the publication of the *Review of Intergovernmental Relations* in January 2022. I pay tribute to the work of officials of all four nations for their efforts in producing the new agreement. It was a time-consuming endeavour, and I hope it grows to be more successful over time and that there is scope to strengthen its weaknesses.

This agreement between the four nations has three tiers and appears to be working quite well at some levels. The biggest disappointment is that the Council of Ministers has met only once, when the new Prime Minister took office. Unfortunately, there was no Northern Ireland Executive to take part in that meeting to represent the voice of the people of Northern Ireland. I am sure we all hope that this issue is resolved soon. I believe that the Council of Ministers has not met since then.

The Welsh First Minister was both realistic and frank when he said he has

“an impression of a Government that knows that it is coming towards the end of the current parliamentary term and whose energy to invest in reviving intergovernmental relations is at a relatively low ebb”.

Certainly, it is becoming clear that the present system cannot be successful if the UK Government, as the major player, are not fully committed to leadership and partnership working.

Like the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, I welcome the publication today of the report by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales, which concluded that the way in which Wales is ruled is unsustainable and cannot continue because it does

not provide stability or prosperity. The commission hopes that the report will act as an impetus for change for the people of Wales and, it stresses, that the conversation will continue. It presents the people of Wales with three options: enhanced devolution, a federal UK or independence. Enhanced devolution, it argues, runs the

“risk of continued relatively poor economic performance, low incomes and poverty”.

A federal UK is more complicated and would depend on greater devolution to the regions of England, which is not presently there. Independence would mean

“hard choices in the short to medium term”,

but the commission notes that

“it took Ireland ... 50 years and EU membership to grow its economy to match the UK’s”.

It also calls, of course, for the Sewel convention to be legally binding.

Perhaps it is time to accept that all the work on intergovernmental relations in the UK is merely a sticking plaster unless the UK Government are completely committed to its success, and that the future lies in one of the commission’s three options. The commission does not support any one option but provides information to enable the people of Wales to come to their own conclusion. My hope is that another Government of another colour at Westminster will, in the near future, enable the change that Wales needs.

4.07 pm

**Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd (CB):** I too thank the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, and congratulate him on obtaining this debate. I also thank him for his excellent analysis of what has happened over the last 10 years. I would like to follow that up with a more rough-and-tumble view of my experience over the last six years. As Professor Linda Colley said in her masterly analysis, *Acts of Union and Disunion*, a “policy of drift” will not lead to strength. If we look at what has happened for the past six years, when I have seen it at first hand, we are in a policy of drift.

The first phase, it seems to me, was the phase that occupied our time until our exit from the European Union. The European Union Committee produced a most able report, which said that the European Union provided much of the glue that held the union together. Nothing happened; there was drift.

We then turned to a period when I do not think there was drift—certainly not drift of a benevolent kind. It was characterised by the internal market Act, which did so much to damage relations, and by a marked reluctance to co-operate by taking the view that London knows best. That was unfortunate.

Thirdly, more recently there was a much more positive view, and I pay an especial tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist, who did so much to try to change the mood. She did much to improve co-operation and to try to get the Welsh Government, who were prepared to co-operate, involved. For example, one way in which she did this was to get something sensible agreed about the mission statements in the levelling-up Bill, where those concerned seemed to have entirely forgotten, in drafting large areas of policy, that a significant number of those had been devolved. I very much hope, and this is my question

[LORD THOMAS OF CWMGIEDD]

for the Minister, that we will continue this. I hope that she is going to exercise the role that the noble Baroness, Lady Bloomfield, occupied. If not, who is? There should be someone doing that in this House when there is a Welsh Government interested in co-operation, in contrast to what we have heard about the Scottish Government. Fortunately, it appears to be continuing, and we see that in some of the current clauses of the victims Bill about to begin its Committee stage.

Although I regard it as essential that we get the mood music right, there is a much deeper question. It is a great coincidence—I was going to put it down to masterly strategy, but I do not think you can achieve that in timing debates in this House—that this debate coincided with the delivery of the report of Dr Rowan Williams, Lord Williams of Oystermouth, and Professor Laura McAllister today, because I think they raise a much more important question. I want to look at it not through their lens but through a different lens, which is the lens of the union. I think we have forgotten how to make clear the purpose of the union and how we strengthen it.

It is quite obvious, when we look at powers, that there are some powers that are almost exclusively for the London Government, if I may call it that: defence and foreign policy. Even on those, there is a tiny interaction with devolved government. There are other areas. For example, one can take macroeconomic policy and right down through economic policy development, where there is an absolute need for co-operation. I think that what we lack is not merely a proper, coherent structure but a proper understanding of what our union is for, who takes the lead and how we get co-ordinated policies. One example of where this went wrong a little earlier this year was dealing with the legislation to do with standards during strikes. Had anyone properly analysed whether we wanted a situation in which the London Government took over and decided minimum standards for hospitals in Wales? Fortunately, they came to their senses and did not do this in respect of ambulances, because the statutory instrument was limited to England and did not cover Wales, but we need a more coherent view of what the union is for, analytically set out, and how the powers interrelate, instead of what we get at the moment: “It says that industrial relations are reserved; therefore, forget it”. It is a completely nonsensical policy.

What we need is not only the analysis that the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, provided about the structure of the intergovernmental relations but what is behind that—an analysis of the powers of the constitution. How this is to be done, I am not sure. Maybe the Constitution Committee of this House can do it, but it is a formidable task. Maybe we could persuade the Government, or an incoming Government, to do something, or maybe one of the think tanks will take it on, but a really good starting point would be the Act of Union Bill that the noble Lord, Lord Lisvane, introduced in October 2018. It set out a very simple analysis of the powers of the union. We need to build on that and build our structure on intergovernmental relationships through an analysis of the powers. But we also need good will, and I hope the Minister will be able to reassure us on this.

4.14 pm

**Baroness Drake (Lab):** My Lords, the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, in his excellent speech, set out the history of the evolution of how the UK’s government bodies interact. He concluded with the observation, with which I agree, that it demonstrates a lack of focus on devolved matters over too many years and, even with a better structure, the challenge remains of how to use it to the advantage of our union.

Constitutions matter, but they need constant attention and occasional repair if their vitality and adaptability are to be sustained. The new intergovernmental relationship regime is a vital structural component of our union, but it will deliver only if it is accompanied by the right behaviours, culture and respect embedded within it.

The Constitution Committee observed in its 2022 report *Respect and Co-operation* that the shared governance of the United Kingdom requires more “respect and partnership” for the union to flourish, and that

“it must enjoy popular support in each nation, based on ... common benefits accruing to all”.

The report also said:

“There has ... been evidence at times of a unilateral approach to strengthening the Union, which has been insufficiently sensitive to its pluralism”

and:

“Prime Ministers have a critical role to play in making the new intergovernmental structures a success”.

Rather than simply asserting their reach, they should seek

“strong relationships between the four administrations”

and demonstrate a sensitivity to, and an understanding and consideration of, the interests of the people and their devolved Governments.

Similarly, Whitehall’s continuing traditional centrist approach to government is further confirmed by the asymmetrical levels of engagement by departments in intergovernmental meetings, evidenced in the noble Earl’s speech. His perceptive observation of negative symbolism in the responsibility for intergovernmental relations resting with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, but not captured in its title, adds to the risk of the department’s broader responsibilities undermining the sharpness this vital area deserves.

Since the introduction of devolution in the late 1990s, politics in the UK has become significantly more pluralistic and less consensual. It is unfortunate that greater progress on reforming intergovernmental structures was not achieved before the challenges of Brexit and Covid-19 demonstrated their inherent weaknesses and contributed so much to the decline in trust. Even the best governance structures may not resolve fundamental differences between Administrations, but challenges have been building up over decades, leading to a discernible atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty in popular debate. I noted the comments made by the noble Baroness, Lady Fraser, about the Government’s disagreements with the SNP, but that does not exempt the Government from their responsibility to the citizens of Scotland and Wales in the union.

The success of the new intergovernmental arrangements will depend on how the Government and devolved Administrations operate them, and whether they are committed to achieving shared objectives, rather than simply managing—or choosing to accentuate—their differences. Take, for example, the UK Internal Market Act, passed without the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd. The agreement reached, however, between the UK Government and devolved Administrations in response—to disapply the market access principles where the four Administrations agreed that divergence between the different parts of the UK was acceptable—was welcome. But then, sadly, we hear from the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, that the opportunity that the common frameworks presented was never fully seized.

The Sewel convention is a fundamental part of the UK's devolution arrangements. It provides that the UK Parliament does not normally legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the devolved legislatures. While the legislative consent procedure generally worked well from 1999, implementing Brexit placed it under great strain. At least nine Acts arising out of Brexit and impacting on devolved matters passed without consent.

We have seen the increasing use of secondary legislation by the Government to pursue policy, a concern captured in the excellent report, *Democracy Denied?*, by the Delegated Powers Committee. The convention does not apply to secondary legislation impacting devolved matters.

For the Sewel convention to operate well, good faith is required between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. It is undermined if the Government refuse to seek—or choose to act without taking—all reasonable steps to ensure consent. I agree that it is also undermined if devolved Administrations recommend the refusal of consent to their legislatures for purely political purposes. I ask the Minister: what steps are being taken by the Government to demonstrate their commitment to the convention, recognising the loss of trust flowing from the exceptional circumstances of the last few years?

Finally, the question asked by the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, as to whether English devolved administrations will be an equivalent part of the devolved structures within the United Kingdom, is so important. The place of the governance of England in the union should not be overlooked. Greater decentralisation could address concerns about the governance of England, which is highly centralised, with greater regional economic inequalities compared with almost all other western European countries.

A new process of English devolution began in 2014, involving bespoke deals with local authorities; 10 areas have mayoral devolution, and every part of England could have a devolution deal if it wanted one. However, what is not clear is the extent to which the current processes will actually deliver improved governance and, more importantly, improve intergovernmental relations. It is, as the noble Earl put it, an “oh so important question”.

4.21 pm

**Lord Wigley (PC):** My Lords, I thank the noble Earl for facilitating this debate and congratulate him on his impeccable timing. As we have heard, fortuitously, today the report by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales, co-chaired by Dr Rowan Williams and Professor Laura McAllister, was published. The headlines in today's papers in Wales are:

“Independent Wales viable, says report”.

This has become a serious option because of the manifest failings of the current devolution settlement, and the abysmal intergovernmental relationships between Westminster and Cardiff Bay. I pay tribute to all those who have worked diligently over two years to produce the report.

Having served as a Welsh constituency MP for 27 years, prior to devolution, for four years in the first National Assembly and for 12 years in this Chamber, I hope that my perspective will help this debate. As MP, I felt the frustrations of representing a Welsh constituency for which many public policies were conceived and delivered by non-elected quangos, existing to serve the needs of the UK Government, not the priorities of the people of Wales.

In the first National Assembly I saw at first hand the inadequacy of the Barnett formula, which has been recognised by a committee of this House. I saw a Labour Government at Westminster refuse to put that right and even refuse to give the Assembly the cash it received from the European Union for regional development. Only the intervention of Michel Barnier, the EU regional commissioner, persuaded Gordon Brown to pass over to the Assembly the money to which it was entitled.

One of my first battles in this Chamber was to protest at the way in which the coalition Government clawed back £400 million which the Welsh Government, to their great credit, had saved through year-end prudence: a fund intended for capital spending on schools and hospitals. The devolution settlement for Wales has not been working, it still is not, and it has to be put right.

As people increasingly see the shortcomings of the devolution settlement, more and more realise that Wales must take greater responsibility for governing itself. In 1979 there was huge uncertainty about devolution and the proposed Assembly was rejected in a referendum. By 1997, after 18 years of Tory rule, Wales voted yes by a whisker for a relatively powerless Assembly. By the 2011 referendum, there was a two-to-one majority for giving the Assembly legislative competence. Today, up to 40% of voters are sympathetic to independence: “indy-curious” is the term which has been adopted. It is not a majority, but it is a significant number.

Much of that political shift has arisen because of the way in which people in Wales perceive the UK Government as being out of sympathy with my nation's needs. As we have heard, at the time of Brexit promises were made that the EU's economic support would be fully replaced by Westminster—that has just not happened. There were also threadbare promises of intergovernmental co-operation.

[LORD WIGLEY]

At times, there has been little less than a disparaging attitude towards the Government elected by the people of Wales, particularly towards First Minister Mark Drakeford. That was most clearly seen at the time of the Covid lockdown. It was personalised in the behaviour of the First Minister and the Prime Minister. At the height of Covid vulnerability, Mark Drakeford camped out in his garden to minimise the danger that he would transmit Covid; at that very time, Boris Johnson was partying in Downing Street. People here fail to understand the respect this brought to our First Minister in comparison with Britain's Prime Minister.

The stark difference we see between attitudes and values in Wales and Westminster is the most fundamental driver of the wish to go our own way. The fundamental question for this House is whether we can create a new partnership between the nations of these islands, based on maximum self-determination and mutual respect.

The commission's report, published today, considered four main issues. The first was the challenge to democracy that we experience in Wales, as do other countries. The commission suggested that Wales has the potential to create a robustly more democratic culture. Secondly—this is particularly relevant to this debate—the commission commented that:

“The relationship between the UK Government and the devolved governments has fallen far short of the cooperation that citizens expect”.

It goes on to consider the state of intergovernmental relations and the boundaries of the Welsh devolution settlement. Thirdly, the commission identified areas in which new devolved powers are essential to protect the current settlement. All parties in this House that want to make devolution work should consider that constructively.

The commission believes that the present devolution settlement has an inherent incompatibility and vulnerability. As has been mentioned, it suggests three alternative ways forward: first, entrenching devolved powers in law and devolving the justice system, welfare, employment, broadcasting and railways; secondly, a federal system for the UK, including a written constitution; and, thirdly, the option of independence, which the commission concluded was a viable option.

The report makes 10 detailed recommendations. Of those directly relevant to this House, I will draw attention to four. Recommendation 4 states that

“Parliament should legislate for intergovernmental mechanisms so as to secure a duty of co-operation and parity of esteem between the governments of the UK”.

Recommendation 5 states that the UK Government should legislate

“to specify that the consent of the devolved institutions is required for any change to the devolved powers”.

This was the subject of my Private Member's Bill that was passed by this House last year.

Recommendation 6 states:

“The UK Government should remove constraints on Welsh Government budget management”—

that resonates with the clawback of devolved funds that I mentioned. Finally, Recommendation 9 says:

“The UK Government should agree to the legislative and executive devolution of responsibility for justice and policing to the Senedd and Welsh Government”.

That was proposed by the Silk commission, which the noble and learned Lord, Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, has addressed.

I hope that the UK Government will consider these issues positively and that the Labour Party will realise that tinkering at the margins is just not good enough. We need vision, empathy and a spirit of co-operation that is bold and confident enough to contemplate a new partnership between our four nations. I hope that people of goodwill, in all groupings in this Chamber, will open their minds to such possibilities.

4.28 pm

**Baroness Wolf of Dulwich (CB):** My Lords, I join others in thanking the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, for securing this debate and for his wonderful opening speech. I will focus on some specific matters, rather than the overall architecture of intergovernmental relations, and in particular on the lowest tier of the interministerial groups that focus on specific policy areas.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, noted, we can easily get so focused on process that we do not notice that devolution has meant growing divergence. Devolution means that things have happened and I am not sure that we take enough note of this happening or build it into our relations between Governments.

No one will be surprised that an example I want to focus on is education, but I apologise for the fact that my examples will be English and Scottish, because those are the two systems that I know well. We have always had major differences in our school systems. That is not only entirely acceptable but, in theory, a source of strength, because we can look at what works in different systems and they are alike enough that one can draw some useful lessons. We do not always do that, but it is a real opportunity.

But we have to remember that the United Kingdom has a national economy. Different parts of it may have different strengths, but we have a mobile labour force and young people take it for granted that they will have the freedom to move easily around the entire UK. This starts to be relevant when we think about our professional, vocational and technical education systems. Sometimes you have to have differences—for example, legal education has to be different in Scotland—but there are areas in the older professions where we have either natural or government-mandated mechanisms to ensure adequate alignment. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges is the membership body for 24 medical royal colleges and faculties across not only the United Kingdom but Ireland, and the Nursing and Midwifery Council is UK-wide. But, once you go beyond the traditional professions, there is a surprising lack of join-up.

Ours is a world with a growing number of licences to practise. In England, we are trying very hard to revitalise apprenticeships and we have the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. But there is no formal provision for IfATE or the Scottish Qualifications Authority to take note of each other's standards. IfATE certainly has no resources explicitly

to work with the SQA on aligning training expectations. Equally, the English Government are trying to develop a range of higher technical qualifications, but I do not know of any explicit attempts to take account of the much stronger provision in Scotland of higher national diplomas, over a wide range and with a lot of experience. There might be some informal discussions but there is nothing formal. This is something we should worry about.

The other example I will use briefly is higher education, where I must declare an interest as a professor at King's College London. Here too we have a national system that we are not taking enough note of as things diverge. We have a national system of application to university in UCAS and a national body for student loans in the Student Loans Company. Again, the systems are diverging. That might be perfectly all right, but there is an assumption among all young people in all four of our countries that they can apply to national institutions—I think UCAS is an institution—and that they will be able to move around.

There is also the research economy, which is very relevant to our economic future because, if we do not maintain real research strength in this country, our future is genuinely grim. The UK Government recognise this by funding a large research budget, and specifically by running the research excellence framework: a four-country, UK-wide exercise that provides a periodic intensive review of the quality of research provision. It has certainly been a spur to action in universities and a major source of our international reputation as a very strong provider of higher education. It is run jointly by Research England, the Scottish Funding Council, the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. England uses it as a way to target money into high-achieving universities to ensure that a certain number have the strength to maintain an international research reputation. In England we have to target because we now have 416 registered providers of higher education compared with the, in my view, more reasonable numbers of 18 in Scotland and 11 in Wales.

Devolved Governments do not have to spend any of that money on research; it comes under the Barnett consequential. Again, that is fine, but it is also true that divergence is increasing, which has—in quite a short term, let alone the long term—some real knock-on effects for movements of staff between universities within the United Kingdom and for the future of a joined-up national UK-wide university system.

My point is not that the London Government should take back control, but that we are not discussing those growing divergencies in any systematic way. I was therefore extremely concerned to learn that the UK Education Ministers Council met only once in 2023.

In conclusion, I echo the comments of my noble friend Lord Kinnoull, and ask the Minister if we can please have some more information on how those meetings are organised, and whether there is any systematic effort to make sure that the four Governments take note of and address divergencies that may be very fruitful, but which, when they impact on the economy

of a single nation—the United Kingdom—need to be addressed consistently and in depth by all four Governments.

4.36 pm

**Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Lab):** My Lords, I cannot recall intergovernmental relations ever being mentioned when the Cabinet committee considered devolution for Scotland and Wales in 1997. Indeed, after the elections to the Parliament and the Assembly, when I, as Welsh Secretary, had to deal with the Welsh Government, relations were very good. They were good, really, because of personal relationships. We had a Labour Government in Cardiff, a Labour Government in Scotland and a Labour Government in Westminster, so it was relatively easy for intergovernmental relations to be good.

In my case those relations were based on a telephone call to Rhodri Morgan at 10 o'clock every morning of the week. That helped things considerably, because that is how it worked. I returned to Wales after some years in Northern Ireland, and the world had changed. I was then given some responsibility for overall devolution, which meant that I had to deal with Alex Salmond. That was different. There was not a 10-minute phone call every day to Alex. There were, shall we say, challenging negotiations and discussions—always friendly, but extremely challenging. The world was beginning to change, with a separate Government in Scotland now, from Wales and from Westminster.

Of course, that was to change too, after the victories of the Conservative Government in the elections that were to follow. That is the basis of why relations have not been good. There have been different political parties in charge of those Governments, and in a way—here in Westminster and Whitehall, particularly—it was all about devolving and forgetting: devolve, and it is up to them now.

I remember many occasions in Cabinet, discussing matters such as health or education, when I reminded my colleagues gently that the issues we were discussing did not apply in the same way to the 15 million people who lived in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. That was usually met with a great yawn or a rolling of the eyes. That is dangerous, which is why it is so very important that the indifference we have seen—until recently, anyway—to intergovernmental relations has to change.

This came to the forefront in the pandemic. People suddenly realised that things were different—that there were different Governments in Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland, dealing differently with that terrible tragedy of the time. That led eventually to the excellent report by the noble Lord, Lord Dunlop, which I commend. I also commend Michael Gove for accepting most of it. There has undoubtedly been a change because of that—but it does not go far enough.

It is a coincidence that today, the Senedd in Cardiff received the report of the commission in Wales on the constitution, led by Rowan Williams and Laura McAllister. That is such an important report in the context of what we are discussing today. In it, they talk about why things have gone so badly. There has been virtually no prime ministerial engagement whatever

[LORD MURPHY OF TORFAEN]

with these intergovernmental relations issues—including, incidentally, in Northern Ireland, but that is for another day. There have been poor commitments from Ministers, as well as a huge turnover of Ministers, which does not help. The recommendations of the Welsh commission and indeed the simultaneous recommendations of the commission I sat on with Gordon Brown, on the British constitution, are to be welcomed. Whoever wins the next election has to look very carefully at how we deal with these internal relations in the United Kingdom.

Both commissions recommend a statutory council—in Gordon Brown's words, a

“Council for the Nations and Regions”.

Both commissions talk about the need for parity of esteem, which has gone. It is a phrase we used in Northern Ireland a great deal in setting up the Good Friday agreement, but it applies also to how we look at each other in terms of our nations within the United Kingdom. It is a recognition of a new political landscape but also that better relations between the Governments means strengthening the union rather than the opposite, which is so hugely significant.

The other issue I want to touch on briefly is a parallel arrangement in the United Kingdom that was set up by strand 3 of the Good Friday agreement: relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom. There is the British-Irish Council, which has come to life a bit now—it went into atrophy for some years, but it is better now. However, most particularly I want to refer to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, on which Members of this House have served for a number of years. That brings together the Parliaments of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey. It does remarkably good work, often unannounced. For example, I am currently sitting on an inquiry into security between these islands. In a way, that is a model of how to deal with relations between our Parliaments. However, it is not just about the Parliaments but the Governments of the United Kingdom and the need to strengthen our union. Whatever happens in the election, that must be a priority.

4.42 pm

**Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (CB):** My Lords, I am very grateful to the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, for this debate, and I think we probably all agree that good intergovernmental relationships are desired. On a very personal note, it is 50 years today since I arrived in this country. I grew up and was born in a federal state that had a written constitution and a second Chamber which represents the component states of the federal state—and they are still arguing. Therefore, all these things are not a panacea; but the fact that we are having the debates is the really important thing.

I want to talk about an issue in respect of which, although Wales and Scotland have the powers to exercise a particular function, they have chosen not to, and that is the Civil Service. I declare an interest as the current First Civil Service Commissioner. The arrangements in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, which sets out a legal requirement that the appointment of civil servants in England,

Scotland and Wales must be made on merit and after fair and open competition, are important. Northern Ireland has separate arrangements; nevertheless, some 4,550 UK civil servants work in Northern Ireland.

Working from London, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that significant differences exist. A number of speakers referred to that, and particularly to the time during Covid when it became apparent that things were done differently. However, they were done differently for very good reasons, either because of the priorities of local populations or because the demands were different. We so quickly forgot that doing things differently in different parts of the United Kingdom is not a bad thing; it is a good thing if we use it as an opportunity to learn from each other. However, this will not happen if there is no trust and no common agreed standards and shared understandings. In addition, comparable data is very important. I caution against divergence when we start gathering data on different bases and different assumptions, because that divides us in a way that is not helpful to anyone.

UK civil servants, whether they work in London, Edinburgh, Belfast or Cardiff, are all subject to the provisions of CRaG, which involves the Civil Service Code recruitment principles, but there are provisions for divergence, and there is a requirement for consultation. Just to put this in context, in Wales, there are 38,655 UK civil servants; in Scotland, there are 53,495; and in England, there are 416,850. As I said, although the arrangements in Northern Ireland are different, there are still over 4,000 UK civil servants there.

The Civil Service Commission chairs all the interviewing panels for directors-general, Permanent Secretaries and the majority of director posts. In 2022-23, we chaired 229 of these competitions, of which three were for the Scottish Government and seven for the Welsh Government. We take our role as regulators incredibly seriously and would argue that we have a unique vantage point of ensuring that consistently high standards of quality across the UK Civil Service are maintained.

We also have a system of linked commissioners, where major departments as well as Scotland and Wales have a dedicated commissioner. They work with Permanent Secretaries, advise on issues and share good practice. Our current Scottish linked commissioner is Paul Gray, who was the chief executive of NHS Scotland and director-general of health and social care. We are currently in the process of recruiting additional commissioners, and I very much hope that we will be able to identify at least one new commissioner with an understanding and experience of Wales.

In the last few days, the Civil Service Code, which is rarely spoken about in political debate, has gained some attention. As the Civil Service Commission ultimately deals with complaints brought by civil servants regarding conduct that is thought to conflict with the Civil Service Code, I thought it might be helpful just to remind everybody of its basis. CRaG is very clear: there must be a Civil Service Code. There may be separate codes of conduct covering civil servants who serve the Scottish Executive or the Welsh Assembly Government, but, before publishing a code, or any revision of the code, the Minister must consult the First Ministers of both Scotland and Wales.

No Administration in the UK, or any of the devolved Administrations can deliver their priorities unless they are supported by a strong and competent Civil Service. Therefore, I expect our UK civil servants to get experience working in all parts of the UK. Moving in and out enriches not only the individual's professional experience but benefits the Administrations they serve. I would argue that no director-general or Permanent Secretary should be appointed unless they have some experience in one of the devolved Administrations or our big local authorities. At the moment, this happens in some cases, but it really does not happen enough.

I have one curious little anecdote which I picked up when I chaired a competition in Scotland. There was the observation that London-based civil servants who are used to dealing with single large departments probably do not prepare enough when they are applying for jobs in Scotland and Wales because they do not appreciate the nature of the difference and the breadth of experience they have to bring to the job. They would enrich their own experience by moving in and out of Whitehall in regular patterns.

With all this in mind, I assure the Minister and the House that the Civil Service Commission will continue to play its role in ensuring strong intergovernmental relations based on a UK-wide Civil Service. As the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, put it so nicely, it helps with the creaks and groans of the current arrangements.

4.49 pm

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD):** My Lords, in winding up his speech, the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, said that what we needed was constitutional stability. We have not had it for the last five years. We have had intense constitutional instability, as the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, keeps reminding us in his latest book. Effective government will not survive unless we have some quite serious constitutional change within the next five to 10 years. I look to the next Government to be a great deal less cautious about attacking some of these major issues of our constitutional weaknesses and engaging in constitutional change on a cross-party, consultative basis to make sure that we try to get some of this right.

We need constitutional, doctrinal and cultural change. The doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty was honed by AV Dicey as part of his campaign opposing Irish home rule. He said that the Imperial Parliament was always right and there could be only one centre of power, thus Irish home rule and devolution were impossible and had to be got over. Post Brexit, we heard the doctrine of indivisible parliamentary sovereignty being put out very strongly. This doctrine includes the idea that local government is simply an agent of central government—Michael Gove clearly believes this completely—and that local and regional democracy are not an important part of our democratic life.

We need cultural change because, as a number of noble Lords have said, we need parity of esteem and to take seriously those working at a lower level. Multi-level government is something we have to learn, and which is foreign to a great deal of the way in which British and Imperial government has operated in the last 150 years. I would remind the noble Baroness, Lady Wolf,

that one of the advantages of being within the multi-level government system of the European Union was that our universities, many of which had been really quite parochial, learned about foreign partnerships. We moved towards a degree of convergence across Europe in the structure of degrees because we were part of that broader complex. We have to learn a different approach to politics.

I thought it would be helpful if I spoke as a Yorkshireman, and as someone who has been involved all my life with politics in Yorkshire, about the problem of England and of English regions. I was walking back from Millbank just before this debate with a Yorkshire Conservative MP. He was talking about our common approach in asking for a Yorkshire regional entity, and saying how Gove and others had pushed us back on it. It was very much an all-party approach—from local council leaders, MPs and others in Yorkshire. It was pushed back, so we now have a North Yorkshire Council which has had imposed upon it as a condition of the regional deal a North Yorkshire elected mayor, for which there are already five candidates. On the first past the post system, it is quite possible that the new mayor will be elected with no more than about a third of the vote. Of course, the mayor will not just represent North Yorkshire; he or she will represent York, which was kept out of North Yorkshire because it was either under Liberal Democrat or Labour control and therefore not to be included in Conservative North Yorkshire.

Yorkshire is a mess. There is no ward representative on the new North Yorkshire Council who takes more than two hours to drive from his or her home to county council meetings. I remind noble Lords that Yorkshire is the largest county in England, with a population equivalent to that of Scotland. It has no voice to speak for it in London.

The problem of England—it is also a problem of the devolution settlement that we already have because England is so dominant in it and English Ministers so often forget about the relevance of the other devolved authorities—has to be faced. I hope that, whatever new Government we have, we will at last grasp the need for a coherent approach to regional and local government within England.

Incidentally, that will also begin to resolve the problem of the overconcentration of civil servants in London. I can remember when the West Riding authority had a substantial education department, because it ran its own education. Education is now controlled very clearly from London. I can remember when there was a regional centre of government in Leeds. If you pull these things back, civil servants will spend more of their careers—at the very least some of them—working outside of London. That is a much better way of ensuring that we have a thriving democracy.

I welcome the Dunlop review, which was entirely right to say that what we need is one senior Cabinet Minister responsible for intergovernmental relations. I remember the Department for Constitutional Affairs, which, in effect, did some of this. I am not persuaded that we still need, in a Cabinet of 33—that is already too large to be an effective decision-making body—three separate Secretaries of State for devolved powers.

[LORD WALLACE OF SALTIRE]

Incidentally, we have not talked about the British-Irish Council in all this. It was originally part of the way in which we dealt with the devolved Administrations, the Government of Ireland and the Crown dependencies, which we always forget about. It seems to me that, in some way or other, we need to grapple in the next Parliament with the question of what exactly the role and responsibilities of the Crown dependencies are. As we have recently learned, a number of Members of this House keep their financial interests there for tax-efficient reasons. As such, the question of the Crown dependencies' relationship with the UK is one that a committee of this House might like to examine.

Where do we go from here? It seems to me that the task of the next Government is to grapple with this issue, partly because levelling up has clearly not succeeded. I feel resentment from the people I meet in Yorkshire about the failure of levelling up, as well as about the promises made by Boris Johnson and others. The thought that we would have begun to have improved infrastructure and greater finance for local authority action has been disappointed.

We would be much better off if we had the formal arguments that we see in Germany about fiscal federalism, which means dividing up the regional impact of the national budget. We would then begin to talk about it, rather than saying, "Oh well, there's the Barnett formula, which is automatic", then forgetting about the regions of England. Considering that part of fiscal federalism would be provision for a second Chamber in which there would be regional representation, it could be part of the way in which we might make the weaknesses of our system of government rather less awful than they have been. In a sense, we are half way towards a federal system. We need to go a little further in that respect. I would welcome an open discussion about the regional distribution of public spending, rather than the empty promises that Boris Johnson made, which have led to so much disillusion in the north, the south-west and elsewhere.

We certainly need to restore local democracy in England. It has been dreadfully weakened. As we all know, a number of local councils are likely to go bankrupt in the next year or two. That matters. We know from public opinion polls that public trust in local democracy is higher than public trust in national democracy. Incidentally, we also know that public trust in Westminster politics has fallen below 10%—the lowest it has yet hit. This ought to worry all of us in both Houses very considerably.

We need to strengthen intergovernmental machinery, as a number of noble Lords have said. We need regular ministerial attendance and to develop, as the Lords Constitution Committee said, a modern form of shared government which is fully understood at all levels of government. There are indeed many other areas of constitutional reform which a new Government should take in, but that perhaps will wait for a future debate.

5 pm

**Lord Khan of Burnley (Lab):** My Lords, as a proud Lancastrian it is a pleasure to follow a Yorkshireman, the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltire—although

he did say that Yorkshire is a mess, which was an interesting statement. I was looking at the noble Lord, Lord Gascoigne, a fine Lancashire man, for solidarity.

I thank the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, for securing this debate and introducing it in such an eloquent manner. I thank noble Lords from across the House for making informative and useful contributions, many of which came from great expertise and experience. This debate is timely, and there are numerous questions and concerns that the Government need to address.

Since 1998, intergovernmental relations have been an important yet understudied part of the United Kingdom's new machinery of government, once described by the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, as the "hidden wiring" of the UK's territorial constitution. The King's Speech late last year promised to promote the integrity of the union and to strengthen the social fabric of the United Kingdom. This can be achieved only through a strong working relationship between the nations and regions of the UK. Unfortunately, the Government have often ridden roughshod over devolved Governments, leaving the union less stable and less secure than ever before.

Working in co-operation is always better than conflict, and we need the structures and institutions of shared government to drive this forward. Each part of the UK should have an equal and respected voice in decision-making, giving those responsible for delivery the freedom to innovate. While the specific policy solutions may vary across the regions and nations of our country, the UK also needs an underlying vision and a Government who are prepared to work in partnership with devolved Governments and local leaders to achieve this—a point which so many noble Lords across this House have made in this debate.

Today, as we speak, we are witnessing 100,000 people striking in Northern Ireland, with no indication of the formation of an Executive, and the deadline to achieve this being midnight tonight. What update can the Minister provide on the situation in Northern Ireland? What preparations are the Government making to address the situation? Do the Government foresee a new election in Northern Ireland? When can we have a functioning Northern Ireland Government? Can we have an update on this situation?

Northern Ireland's involvement in the new intergovernmental relations structures has been impacted by the absence of a fully functioning Executive or Assembly since February 2022. We understand that senior civil servants have been attending intergovernmental review meetings in the absence of ministerial representation. Their attendance at ministerial meetings is in an observational capacity. What impact are these observers having on intergovernmental relations? The noble Baroness, Lady Stuart of Edgbaston, made a point about the great work that civil servants are doing in different parts of the devolved Governments, but what impact are they having here, as observers? After the intergovernmental review, a new structure was established in January 2022, providing ambitious and effective working to support our Covid recovery, tackle the climate change crisis and inequalities, and deliver sustainable growth. How can this be achieved when there is observer status in Northern Ireland?



How can you have dialogue, strategy and sustainability discussions when there is only observation from one particular side?

What is the Minister's response to the Welsh and Scottish Governments' view that progress and momentum in implementing the new ways of working and mechanisms agreed as part of the view were slower than anticipated? The Welsh Government said that this was because of "the instability of the UK government over this period and frequent UK ministerial changes"—a point that the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, also referred to.

We note that the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales was taking evidence and its report has been launched, as mentioned today by the noble Lord. What is the progress on evaluating recent practice in terms of meeting the intentions set out in the review and is the new machinery being used to operate a partnership approach?

The commission's report was published today. It also talks about the "fragility of intergovernmental relations" as one of the "pressure points" of devolution, and states:

"The machinery for inter-governmental relations operates at the discretion of the UK government, and its reduced engagement in recent years has coincided with its willingness to override conventions".

I refer noble Lords to the operation of the Sewel convention, particularly in Wales, whereby the consent of the Senedd is required for UK Bills that impact on devolved powers, which is of concern to the Welsh Government. In Wales, the Government reported late engagement from Bill teams in the UK Government and a reluctance to share information and drafting, and called these

"symptoms of a disregard for the legitimate interest the Welsh Government and Senedd have in UK legislation which touches on devolved issues".

UK Bills introduced during 2022 that the Senedd refused consent to include the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill, the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill, the Procurement Bill and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. The UK Government has ignored the Senedd's refusal of consent, in breach of the Sewel convention. In 2023, the Welsh Government also recommended that consent be withheld in relation to the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, the Illegal Migration Bill and the majority of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill.

At a recent meeting of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, the Counsel General was asked to comment on Sewel in relation to the new dispute resolution process, which a number of noble Lords have referred to. He said:

"The crux of the problem with Sewel is ... the lack of codification of Sewel—the lack of clarity as to what it means, and the diverse ways in which it is treated".

These disputes are problematic and

"ultimately, a political process of a constitutional disagreement that doesn't have a real justiciable status"

is not enough.

The new dispute resolution mechanism introduced after the intergovernmental relations review is still relatively untested—a point that the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, mentioned at the start of his speech.

The Senedd research service noted that a dispute between the Northern Ireland Executive and the Treasury appeared to be the only known use of the new dispute procedure so far. Can the Minister outline where else the dispute mechanism has been used and the nature of any dispute?

We have heard some excellent contributions across the House, and recurrent themes have been highlighted during the debate. I conclude by agreeing with what the UK Government said in September last year:

"The need for effective intergovernmental relations ... has never been greater".

This is understood to be in light of Brexit, Covid-19, climate change and international conflict. However, the lack of stability at the heart of the UK has been detrimental to intergovernmental relations. In practice, implementation of proposals has been disrupted by such instability. Does the Minister agree that having five UK Prime Ministers in the space of seven years, and constant reshuffles, has had a negative impact on effective intergovernmental collaboration?

The noble Baroness opposite mentioned the three-tier structure, as well as giving a very strong perspective in relation to Scotland. How is the three-tier system working, and what are the operational issues with this?

I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, that this cannot be dealt with by a sticking plaster approach. We need a stable and sustainable approach—a point that my noble friend Lady Andrews talked about. The theme and message for me is the phrase used by my noble friend Lord Murphy when he said that parity of esteem is needed. Better relationships between the Governments will eventually strengthen the union.

In concluding, I say that respect, good will, strong relationships and shared objectives across our nations are needed now and, unfortunately, they are missing from the Government's approach. I look forward to hearing the noble Baroness's reply.

5.10 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Penn) (Con):** My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, for securing this important debate. I also thank all noble Lords for their contributions. As the noble Earl and others have said, this is a timely debate and many noble Lords have said that that is because of the publication today of the report by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales. I hope noble Lords will forgive me if I do not comment on that report. Not only is it hot off the press but, as it was commissioned by the Welsh Government, it is for them to respond in the first instance.

However, I of course acknowledge that many of the issues that we are discussing today and have heard about in this debate cross over with the issues discussed in that report, which is relevant and significant to our debate today. Our debate is also timely because this year we celebrate 25 years since the four Governments of the United Kingdom started to work together under the umbrella known as "intergovernmental relations" and we are two years into the new arrangements for those arrangements, so it is a good opportunity to take stock.

[BARONESS PENN]

Every week, we see Ministers and officials across the United Kingdom and its Government work together, formally and informally, to tackle shared challenges. That might be through the forums established through the 2022 intergovernmental relations review or through new initiatives that the UK Government have brought forward, such as the Islands Forum, where Governments are able to discuss directly the range of issues that are important to island communities, or, as referenced by the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, as part of our commitments across these islands—for example, through the British-Irish Council, which brings together the Governments of the UK and the devolved Governments with those of Ireland, the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey, which recently held its 40th summit. That focused on the theme of transforming children's lives and celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

There is good ongoing policy co-operation and exchange taking place between the Administrations as part of that council, including on housing, energy security, renewables, the environment and the early years. That continues to be an important part of intergovernmental relations and the different ways in which we continue to engage across the UK and beyond.

Indeed, between January and September 2023, as regards intergovernmental relations, there were over 150 ministerial meetings between the UK Government and the devolved Governments, covering topics including the economy, energy, net zero, the environment, health and trade, to name but a few, and taking place in, among other places, the 16 ministerial groups that we have set up. As we have heard from noble Lords across the Chamber today, that is what the people of this country rightly want and expect: for their Governments to work together on the issues that matter to them, their families and their communities.

We have heard on occasion from the Front Benches opposite about how rosy things were in the early years of the devolution settlement in terms of relations between the different Governments before a period of decline. It will not surprise noble Lords to hear that the analysis is not one that is shared by this Government, but I fully acknowledge some of the challenges brought by some of the big constitutional questions we have faced, such as Brexit, which we have had to navigate across our nations in recent years.

The noble Lord, Lord Murphy, illustrated quite well why relations were so rosy in those early years when there was a Labour Government as the UK Government, in Scotland and in Wales and how things shifted, even with a Labour Government in Westminster, with an SNP Government in Scotland. It is important to acknowledge, as my noble friend Lady Fraser of Craigmaddie did so well, that, when you have Governments with fundamentally different or opposing views of our constitutional arrangements and the operation of devolution or its existence, and who may have an incentive to pursue differences, relations between those Governments can be more challenging.

I will emphasise two things in that context. First, the test for intergovernmental relations, and whether they are effective or not, is whether they can help

navigate those differences, not just operate when everyone is of the same view or political persuasion. We have sought to build that in the new arrangements in place today. I think they are a good basis for that. Secondly, I do not want to overestimate or overemphasise the points of difference or difficulty we have in intergovernmental relations; we in this Chamber and elsewhere focus on where they are tested and challenged most acutely, but we should not overlook the day-to-day work and co-ordination done by civil servants and Ministers on a range of shared interests across our nations. We should look at the challenges and how we can improve our operation across those, but we have heard about the importance of, as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Thomas, said, the good will that is brought to these discussions. I think that remains true in the vast majority of intergovernmental relations today. We should not lose sight of that, even where you have Administrations of different political persuasions.

I turn to the question from the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, on how the Department for Levelling Up tries to ensure full engagement by all Whitehall departments in this process and what constitutes an IGR meeting. We have a network of senior responsible owners across government, and he referred to our commitment to transparency reporting, which equips DLUHC to hold other departments to account. He pointed to the difference in the frequency of formal engagement; that is partly guided by the nature of the relevant department's work—for example, the extent to which it works in areas which are largely reserved or devolved. It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that much engagement also happens at an official level. In terms of what constitutes an intergovernmental meeting, it is where Ministers from among the four Governments, but not necessarily every Government, meet. Our transparency dashboard allows you to see the number of different IGR meetings per quarter, whether it is through the structure of the IMG or a bilateral, trilateral or quadrilateral meeting. The 28 meetings that DLUHC held covered the breadth of the department's responsibilities, which, as we have heard, are significant.

The noble Baroness, Lady Wolf, made some good points about the need for co-ordination across education—even where it is a devolved area, to respond to the point of the noble Lord, Lord Murphy, about the importance of not devolving and forgetting but continuing to work with each other. She is absolutely right that the last meeting of the UK Education Ministers Council was in June 2023. I understand that the Department for Education is liaising with its devolved counterparts on the next IMG meeting; this is to be chaired by the Scottish Government and arranged by them in line with the rotating chair arrangements that they have in place. But the points she made about co-ordination in this space were well made.

The noble Earl also asked about the secretariat that we have in place and whether it has full-time, dedicated staff, which indeed it does. At this point, it is comprised of officials from the UK Government and the Scottish Government. We look forward to the Welsh Government assigning a member of staff in due course. Decisions on the Northern Ireland Executive assigning a member of staff will be taken once the Executive are restored.

Of course, we measure the success of our approach not by the number of meetings held but by the outcomes they deliver. Through the renewed structures of our joint approach to intergovernmental relations, we have supported tangible benefits across our union. We have supported the economy by unlocking two green freeports in Scotland and two freeports in Wales, which between them will attract £15 billion of investment and create around 95,000 new high-skilled jobs. It is how we are delivering two investment zones in Wales—Cardiff and Newport, and Wrexham and Flintshire—with each zone set to attract £80 million over five years.

It is also how we have supported some of the landmark events in our country's recent history, from the Platinum Jubilee to the state funeral of the late Queen and last year's Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. Governments have necessarily worked closely together to keep people safe and ensure that everyone can come together to mark these significant national events. They build on successes that we have had over a number of years in sporting collaborations, from hosting the UCI Cycling World Championships in Glasgow in August to plans jointly to host the UK and Ireland Euro 2028 tournament.

We have shown through collaboration our support to some of the world's biggest challenges. For example—I believe the Scottish Government also cite this—following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK Government, working with the devolved Governments, created the ground-breaking Homes for Ukraine scheme, which ensured that Ukrainians could find a safe home and refuge in the UK. We were able to deliver COP 26 in Glasgow only through a joint determination to create a safe and secure environment for the world to come together. More recently, we have worked closely with the devolved Governments to improve the health of future generations through a joint UK-wide consultation on creating a smoke-free generation and tackling youth vaping and the harm that it can cause.

However, as I acknowledged earlier, that is not to say there have not been significant challenges in working across governmental and administrative boundaries where Governments have varying priorities. Taking note of intergovernmental relations within the UK demands that we recognise this, and making the system work requires not just one Government or Administration but all four working together maturely, as citizens of the United Kingdom rightly expect.

The noble Earl and the noble Lord, Lord Khan, asked about the dispute resolution mechanism. The devolved Governments and the UK Government continue to work to resolve issues at the lowest possible level. The noble Lord, Lord Khan, is correct that the dispute resolution mechanism has been engaged once to date between the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, in relation to a scheme setting out the payment of pensions to persons who sustained injuries because of Troubles-related incidents. That dispute is currently on pause due to the Executive's absence.

The noble Earl asked whether a dispute was raised in relation to the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. No dispute was raised but ministerial discussions took place between Administrations, as the noble Earl acknowledged, on the UK Government's concern about

how the proposed legislation would interact with reserved powers. The Secretary of State for Scotland's decision to use the power in Section 35 was about the legislation's consequences for the operation of Great Britain-wide equalities protections and other reserved matters. The courts were clear that the order was lawful and appropriate. However, the noble Earl is right that we will always seek to reflect when we have these moments of disagreement and see where we can learn lessons to make sure that we can handle them in the best possible way in future.

The noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, raised the work on common frameworks. I take this opportunity to thank her for her crucial work in chairing the Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee and to pay tribute to the work of that committee and the contribution it has made to the effective delivery of that programme.

I hope the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, will not mind me quoting her slightly more positive assessment of these frameworks in her letter to the Secretary of State, where she said:

“the Frameworks have proven to be robust, innovative, and unique sources of collaboration between the UK Government and the devolved governments”.

I of course acknowledge that it was immediately followed by the point which she made in this debate: the committee's view is that

“Common Frameworks remain an ‘unfulfilled opportunity’”.

While I acknowledge to her that the programme has evolved since its conception, as has the political environment in which the frameworks operate, it is also true that the framework outline agreement necessarily focuses on ways of working and governance processes required to enable the productive discussions about policy. In many areas, though, those processes are beginning to bear fruit and be used to develop UK-wide approaches. For example, the resources and waste framework was used to agree the joint consultation on banning wet wipes containing plastic across the UK, as published in October, so the programme has evolved since its conception. More time may have been spent on setting up the processes than we originally envisaged, but those processes are also beginning to bear fruit.

The noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, and others including the noble Baronesses, Lady Humphreys and Lady Drake, also raised the impact of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act. While the frameworks were, prior to the Act, the primary means of managing the internal market, the fact that they now share this space with the Act does not undermine the common frameworks. The Act works in tandem with the common frameworks, with at least three-quarters of the frameworks covering policy areas with regulation in scope of UKIM principles. Where a common framework is used to agree a common regulatory approach, UKIM principles do not apply, incentivising joint working.

The Government do not view UKIM as altering the devolved settlements. Individual legislatures retain the ability to make regulations in areas where they have competence and the devolved Administrations are able to make and enforce regulations within their own jurisdiction. Yes, the Act establishes the market access principles, which ensure that regulations made in one nation do not affect intra-UK trade by creating internal trade barriers, but should the UK Government

[BARONESS PENN]

and a devolved Administration agree that a specific regulation should be excluded from the application of those principles, there exists a process by which to do so. It is worth remembering the importance of the UK internal market. For example, in Scotland, 60% of outgoing trade is with the rest of the UK—more than its trade with the rest of the world combined.

Many noble Lords also raised the Sewel convention. We remain absolutely committed to the Sewel convention and to working with devolved Governments on all Bills that engage the legislative consent process. It has been necessary to legislate without the consent of the devolved legislatures in only a small number of cases. As noble Lords have referenced, these largely related to legislation on EU exit and the implementation of new trade deals. In the vast majority of cases, we have legislated with consent. The noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, referred to the efforts made by previous Governments to secure legislative consent. I say to her and others that, in the Bills I have worked on which have engaged legislative consent Motions, similar efforts have been made to secure that legislative consent. I hope that reassures noble Lords.

I share the praise of the noble and learned Lord, Lord Thomas, for my colleague, my noble friend Lady Bloomfield and the energy she brought to advocating for Wales's interests. She has of course been replaced in that role by my noble friend Lord Davies of Gower, who will continue in his work; we also have our colleagues my noble friends Lord Caine and Lord Offord, in their respective Northern Ireland and Scottish roles. It is the role of all Ministers across government to ensure that we consider properly the role of devolution and the devolved Administrations when it comes to policy-making. We have had a bit of a discussion about where responsibly for this lies in government. I urge noble Lords not to focus too much on the name of a particular department, but I have seen first-hand the energy and commitment that the Secretary of State in DLUHC brings to his role as Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, not just in the work of DLUHC but in encouraging and galvanising action across government.

I am conscious that I am slightly short of time. The noble Earl called for an annual debate in both Houses. That would of course be for the leadership of both Houses, but I will make representations and refer to the debate that we have had today. He also referred to the Canadian model and other models. The Government did look at international comparisons as part of the IGR review, including speaking to officials in Canada, and we will continue to focus on how we can make these arrangements most effective, including learning from other nations.

As for the Northern Ireland elections, the restoration of the Executive is of course a top priority, and the noble Lord, Lord Khan, is right that the deadline is the end of today. I do not have a further update to give to the House at this stage.

I will draw my remarks to a close so that we can hear from the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull.

5.30 pm

**The Earl of Kinnoull (CB):** It remains for me to thank everyone who has taken part in this extremely interesting and wide-ranging debate. There were a lot of things that were completely new to me, including everything that the noble Baroness, Lady Stuart, said, and I feel improved, so thank you very much. I was going to say that every fibre of my body felt that it was a good debate, but I cannot feel my toes, because of the temperature, so that would not have been truthful.

I must say that, as ever, the Minister gave a very thorough and helpful response, and I thank her for that. Time meant that she did not get to the English devolution point, and I hope she will not mind writing to everyone about that, because there was considerable interest. I also thank the Leader and the Whips' Office who, for special reasons, made a big effort to help get this debate on, and I am very grateful for that.

I have two more thank yous. The first is to the Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee and the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews. It has done this House a tremendous service over a long time, and I will not get the chance to express my personal thanks for that, but I have had an up-close and personal look at it over the years and it is really a work of tremendous quality and depth, so thank you. The other is to the noble Baroness, Lady Drake, and the Constitution Committee, which carries a proud flame on this issue. Rereading the two Constitution Committee reports, which I reread in preparation for this, you see how it keeps a watchful eye on this area, and I am grateful to both noble Baronesses for speaking in the debates so clearly.

I thought there were a few themes that came through. First, there was the theme of the two-way street: it is not just the Whitehall Government who need to work at this but all the Governments. Everyone benefits if it works properly. Secondly, we have quite a good structure at the moment, and it is important that we use it. Although we heard good words from the Minister about its use, there are things, such as the Prime Minister not really turning up to meetings that are planned once a year, that show that the use is not fully there yet, and we do need to use this structure. In fact, we need to work at our union, with, as the noble Baroness, Lady Drake, said, the occasional repair—I thought that was a very good way of putting it. We need to work at it, and that includes everyone in this Chamber, everyone who is in government and all the equivalent people in the devolved areas of our nation.

We desperately need to build the interpersonal relationships. The interesting thing is that in the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly—something that I had a lot to do with; I do not go to it any more, because I do other things—those have become extremely warm now and it can get things done, and that is simply by getting people into a room and getting the relationship going. I loved the expression “parity of esteem”, which the noble Baroness, Lady Andrews, and the noble Lords, Lord Murphy and Lord Wallace, produced: I think that is a very good way of putting it. We need to work towards that, but thank you very much and I beg to move.

*Motion agreed.*

## Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) Order 2024

*Motion to Approve*

5.34 pm

*Moved by Lord Sharpe of Epsom*

That the draft Order laid before the House on 15 January be approved.

*Relevant document: 8th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee*

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) (Con):** My Lords, I am grateful to the House for its consideration of this draft order, which will see Hizb ut-Tahrir proscribed.

It may be helpful if I start by setting out some background to the proscription power. Some 79 terrorist organisations are currently proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. For an organisation to be proscribed, the Home Secretary must believe that it is concerned in terrorism, as set out in Section 3 of the Terrorism Act 2000. If the statutory test is met, the Home Secretary must then consider the proportionality of proscription and decide whether or not to exercise their discretion.

Proscription is a powerful tool with severe penalties, criminalising membership and invitations of support for the organisation. It also supports other disruptive activity, including immigration disruptions and terrorist financing offences. The resources of a proscribed organisation are terrorist property and are therefore liable to be seized.

The Home Secretary is supported in his decision-making by advice from the cross-government Proscription Review Group. A decision to proscribe is taken only after great care and consideration, given its wide-ranging impact. It must be approved by both Houses.

Part II of the Terrorism Act 2000 contains the proscription offences, in Sections 11 to 13. An organisation is proscribed if it is listed in Schedule 2 to that Act or, in most cases, it operates under the same name as an organisation so listed. Article 2 of this order adds Hizb ut-Tahrir to the list in Schedule 2 as a new entry.

With this House's consent, Hizb ut-Tahrir, including all regional branches, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, will be proscribed. Having carefully considered all the evidence, the Home Secretary has concluded that Hizb ut-Tahrir is concerned in terrorism and should be proscribed. Noble Lords will understand, I am sure, that I am unable to comment on specific intelligence. Nevertheless, I can provide Members with a summary of the group's activities, which supports this decision.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, which I will now refer to simply as HuT, is an international political organisation with a footprint in at least 32 countries, including the UK, US, Canada and Australia. Its long-term goal is to establish a caliphate ruled under Islamic law. HuT's headquarters and central media office are in Beirut, Lebanon, and its ideology and strategy are co-ordinated centrally.

The British branch, which I will refer to as HTB, was established in the 1980s. While HTB is afforded autonomy to operate in its local environment, it is

important to emphasise at this point that HuT should be considered as a coherent international movement, with HTB recognising the overall leadership of HuT on its website. This decision to proscribe therefore relates to HTB, and other regional branches, in forming part of a single, global entity, which is HuT.

There is current evidence that HuT is concerned in terrorism. HuT's central media office and several of HuT's Middle Eastern branches have celebrated and praised the barbaric 7 October terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas, which, as noble Lords will be aware, is a proscribed organisation. When the proscription of Hamas was extended to include both the military and political wings in 2021, the Government were clear that Hamas prepares, commits and participates in acts of terrorism.

Further recent activity includes an article attributed to HuT's Egyptian branch, which referred to the killing of Jewish tourists by an Egyptian police officer as

“a simple example of what should be done towards the Jews”.

Elsewhere, HuT has frequently referred to Hamas as “the heroes of Palestine” in articles on its website. HTB also published an article on its website, which was subsequently removed, which described the 7 October attacks as a “long awaited victory” and referred to the fact that they

“ignited a wave of joy and elation amongst Muslims globally”.

It is the Government's view that the content included in this article betrays the organisation's true ideology and beliefs, aligned with the organisation's global output.

HuT has regularly engaged in anti-Semitic and homophobic discourse. While HuT claims to be committed to non-violence, it rejects democracy and its aims bear similarities to those of terrorist groups, including Daesh, which of course is already proscribed.

The decision to proscribe is supported by our international partners. Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned in many countries around the world, including Germany for anti-constitutional reasons, with restrictions also placed on its activities in Austria, among others.

Proscription is a powerful tool. It will significantly thwart HuT's operations in the UK. It is a criminal offence for a person to belong to a proscribed organisation; invite or express support for a proscribed organisation; arrange a meeting in support of a proscribed organisation; or wear clothing or carry or display articles in public in such a way or in such circumstances as to arouse reasonable suspicion that the individual is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation. The penalties for conviction of proscription offences can be a maximum of 14 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

The first duty of the Government is to keep the people of the United Kingdom safe. They rightly expect us to take every possible measure in service of that endeavour. Our message is clear: we will not tolerate the promotion or encouragement of terrorism, nor will we accept the promotion or glorification of Hamas's abhorrent attack of 7 October. We will confront anti-Semitism wherever and however it rears its ugly head, taking every possible step to keep the Jewish community in the United Kingdom safe.

[LORD SHARPE OF EPSOM]

We must and will use every available measure to safeguard our values and tackle terrorism in all its forms. I therefore urge the House to support this proscription, which is a proportionate and justified response to the promotion and encouragement of terrorism, and to calls for violence and disorder, as espoused by HuT. I beg to move.

**Lord Polak (Con):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend the Minister and the Government for this. I am not sure that I am going to go down the route of, “What took us so long?” I recall Tony Blair talking about banning Hizb ut-Tahrir. I even recall our new noble friend the Foreign Secretary talking about it in 2010, before becoming Prime Minister, saying that it was something that would be done. Therefore, I am very grateful to the Minister and his colleagues for ensuring that it has been done.

I guess I declare an interest: I am a Jew, and very proud of it. I know full well what Hizb ut-Tahrir wants to do to me, my family and my co-religionists. I am grateful to the Minister for this measure, so obviously I will support it.

However, the Minister will know that I do not miss an opportunity—and I will not miss this opportunity. While the Government are on a roll and have done the right thing, they know that I and others in this House believe that the IRGC should be going in exactly the same way. The IRGC are the masters of everything that we do not like, in the way that the Minister described at the beginning. While thanking him, I hope that he will not mind me asking for a little bit more. The IRGC needs to be proscribed.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for introducing the measure so clearly. I agree with what he said. It is regrettable that I have had to cover a number of organisations to be proscribed—regrettable because we are living in an age, unfortunately, when there are organisations which abuse our liberties and freedoms. They are either terrorist organisations themselves or they support terror.

Indeed, we live in an age of heightened conflict. Next week, I and other noble Lords will be considering another suite of sanctions related to the conflict in Ukraine, and I will be receiving a delegation of Lebanese who are fearful for the security in that country—the country the Minister referred to.

These are difficult times. Therefore, as we protect our communities as well as our freedoms and liberties, it is unfortunately necessary to have measures such as these. The Minister said, quite rightly, that there are high bars to be reached before proscription. I know that he will not comment on the previous attempts at proscription—I also read the reference to the previous calls; I do not expect him to comment on that—but I will ask him a few questions on the measures coming forward.

5.45 pm

Before doing so, I note very strongly that the Community Security Trust and the Board of Deputies of British Jews have supported these measures. One of

the more regrettable activities in the UK since October has been the heightened level of anti-Semitism. It is to be noted also that there has been an increase in the number of incidents of Islamophobia. The level of tensions in our societies has been heightened, but that is not an excuse for anti-Semitism or for putting fear into part of our community.

I am sure that the Home Office has been monitoring this very closely, and I would be grateful to hear, either today or in writing, whether the Minister has information on the monitoring of cases of anti-Semitism. What are the levels of prosecutions at the moment? The Minister spoke with great passion in previous debates on the need for the police to prosecute. It is clear that, even after 100 days, many parts of our communities do not feel safe. I have many friends, as do other noble colleagues in this House, whose families and friends still live in fear and intimidation. That is unacceptable in the United Kingdom.

On the wider aspects of this measure, the Minister referred not only to the UK link—the British arm—but to its wider reach. He referenced the headquarters in Lebanon. I note that government advice had been provided for British residents to leave Lebanon a number of weeks ago. I would be grateful if the Minister wrote to me on the Government’s assessment on both travel advice and the safety and security of British residents abroad. As he said, it is our duty to ensure that our country is safe, while our nationals are safe and receive the best quality advice if they are resident in, work in or travel to another country.

On the impact in the UK, I note that no impact assessment of this measure has been carried out—it does not necessarily meet the threshold—although that is not a criticism. The Government stated:

“There is no, or no significant, impact on the public sector”

or on

“business, charities or voluntary bodies”.

If that relates to the police, does the Minister have an assessment of whether there are likely to be prosecutions, given what he outlined on unacceptable behaviour? He may say that Ministers never comment on such things, but we need to be prepared, if we are proscribing organisations, to ensure that our police are properly equipped to enforce the proscriptions once Parliament has approved them.

This country benefits from a great tradition of freedom of speech and expression. We will always oppose incitement and prejudice leading to fear and a lack of safety for individuals. Regrettably, some organisations abuse that, so it is correct that we need action.

I will close on an unrelated matter, if the Minister will give me some forbearance. We will next interact on Monday, on the Rwanda treaty, about which I wrote to the Foreign Secretary. The Minister is nodding, indicating that I may receive a reply, so I am grateful for that. On that basis, I hope he will accept our support and be able to respond in kind.

**Lord Coaker (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for opening the debate today clearly and concisely, and I agree with much of what the noble Lords, Lord Polak and Lord Purvis, said.

Today's proscription order is underpinned by the exceptional men and women who serve in our intelligence and security services, in government and in our police. They work tirelessly to keep our country safe. We are extremely fortunate to have them. Keeping our country safe is the first duty of government and a common cause that we share and all treat with the utmost seriousness. On that basis, it is vital, as the Minister knows, that the Government and His Majesty's Opposition work in the national interest on these crucial issues.

As the Minister laid out, this order will amend Schedule 2 to the Terrorism Act 2000 to add Hizb ut-Tahrir to the list of proscribed organisations. Doing so will make it a criminal offence to belong to Hizb ut-Tahrir, to engage in activities such as attending meetings, to promote support for the group or to display its logo. After years of serious and increasing concern about Hizb ut-Tahrir's activity in the UK, His Majesty's Opposition strongly support its proscription. It is a necessary step to effectively counter its hateful extremism and divisive rhetoric, which threatens the safety and security of our country. As the Minister outlined, proscription of this international terrorist organisation comes after other countries, including Germany, have already banned it.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has been proscribed now because of its escalating activity in the aftermath of Hamas's barbaric terrorist attack on Israel. Unlike the condemnation of these attacks by the vast majority of Muslims here in the UK, who are just as horrified as the rest of us, Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain glorified as heroes the Hamas terrorists who revelled in acts of indiscriminate violence against civilians. Again, unlike the deep sorrow and outrage the British people shared with the Israeli people in the aftermath of 7 October, Hizb ut-Tahrir boasted of its euphoria on the news of this appalling and tragic loss of life.

There is no place on Britain's streets for vile anti-Semitism. There is no place on Britain's streets for those who incite violence and glorify terrorism. There is no place on Britain's streets for Hizb ut-Tahrir. This terrorist group peddles hate, glorifies violence and is hostile not only to our values but to the common sense of humanity. As the noble Lord, Lord Polak, mentioned, there is nothing new about its divisive and poisonous rhetoric, which has been widely recorded for over two decades in the UK, long before the horrific attacks of 7 October. Organisations such as the Community Security Trust, the Antisemitism Policy Trust and the Union of Jewish Students have long raised serious concerns about Hizb ut-Tahrir's anti-Semitism, alongside its misogynistic and homophobic hate speech, which provides a channel for extremism. We have already heard that that is why previous Prime Ministers, Home Secretaries and Security Ministers have considered proscribing Hizb ut-Tahrir, but its activities were not recognised as sufficient under the definition of terrorism in Section 3 of the Terrorism Act 2000 until now.

Given for how long these matters have been debated and considered, I would be grateful if the Minister could answer some questions when he responds. To start with, does he think that there are lessons to be learned regarding the length of time it has taken to proscribe this organisation? Does he believe that the current

proscription process is robust enough to counter threats to our national security, and can he say when it became a proportionate response in this case as well as in others? Can he say whether other bodies, as we have heard, are under consideration for proscription, given the various global threats we face? Is the speed of decision-making up to the task? In particular, and he will know that we have asked for this, does he agree that a bespoke proscription mechanism for state-sponsored organisations is now required—something that, as I say, His Majesty's Opposition, along with others, have called for?

Countering threats to our national security requires joined-up government working, but the counter-extremism strategy has not been updated since 2015, with important elements of policy around community cohesion now the responsibility of the Levelling-Up Secretary. Given the significance of these matters, can the Minister tell the House when the Government will bring forward a new definition of hateful extremism? Can he confirm whether his department will update the counter-extremism strategy, as my right honourable friend the shadow Home Secretary has called for?

To conclude, proscribing Hizb ut-Tahrir is the right thing to do for our national security. For too long, the public have been exposed to its extremist ideology, its glorification of terrorist activity and its core aim of overthrowing our democratic system of government to replace it with an Islamist theocracy. If left alone, extremism can and will spread insidiously and spread deceit deep into our national conversation. No Government must ever relent in their determination to ensure that we are always one step ahead of those who seek to harm or to undermine our way of life. We must always be on the side of the public we seek to serve and protect. That is why we strongly support the Government's actions in taking forward the proscription order before us.

**Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con):** My Lords, I thank the three noble Lords who have contributed to the debate. I would very much like to associate myself with the remarks of the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, thanking our security services and our police forces, and those in government—many of whom are, as noble Lords will be aware, in the Home Office—who are very engaged in this subject, and who keep us safe.

I shall do my best to address as many as possible of the points that have been made. If I miss anything, I will, of course, commit to write—and just to reassure the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, I can say that a letter is on its way.

I shall briefly give the House some key facts, in terms of the number of organisations proscribed in this country. There are currently 79 proscribed terrorist organisations, in addition to the 14 Northern Ireland-related terrorist organisations that were proscribed before 2000, and 38 terrorist groups have been proscribed since 2010—a very depressing statistic indeed, as the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, noted. The most recent proscription order came into force in September 2022, when the Wagner group was proscribed. I think all the noble Lords here participated in that debate.

Of course, the Government will always consider the full range of powers available to tackle threats on our soil or against our people and interests. We will continue

[LORD SHARPE OF EPSOM]

to make use of our counterterrorism powers, including the proscription tool, where appropriate, to tackle the modern threats we face. The work on that is ongoing. I acknowledge the bespoke proscription tool for state threats, as asked for by the noble Lord. Obviously, I cannot comment on that, but the National Security Act, which came into force last year, provides robust powers to deal with the complex state threats that the UK faces in a broader context. I am aware of his ongoing interest in this, and I am sure I will continue to engage in discussion with him about it.

The barriers for proscription, and the qualifications and tests, are robust. As I said in my opening remarks, they are governed by the Terrorism Act 2000, and it might be worth going through them for the record. The Home Secretary may proscribe an organisation if he believes it is concerned in terrorism, and this means that the organisation

“commits or participates in acts of terrorism ... prepares for terrorism ... promotes or encourages terrorism (including the unlawful glorification of terrorism); or ... is otherwise concerned in terrorism... If the statutory test is met, there are other factors which the Home Secretary must take into account when deciding whether or not to exercise the discretion”.

Those factors include

“the nature and scale of an organisation’s activities ... the specific threat that it poses to the UK ... the specific threat that it poses to British nationals overseas ... the extent of the organisation’s presence in the UK; and ... the need to support other members of the international community in the global fight against terrorism”.

The Home Secretary will exercise his power to proscribe only after thoroughly reviewing the available evidence on an organisation. This includes information taken from both open sources and sensitive intelligence, as well as advice that reflects consultation across government.

That brings me to the question asked by my noble friend Lord Polak, which is: why has it taken so long? I have explained how the Home Secretary must believe that an organisation is concerned in terrorism and, as the House has heard, since the 7 October attack HuT has promoted and encouraged terrorism, and celebrated and praised the 7 October terrorist attacks by Hamas, including in an article that referred to the killing of Jewish tourists by an Egyptian police officer, which I referred to in my opening remarks, as a simple example of what should be done to the Jews.

Elsewhere, HuT has frequently referred to Hamas as the heroes of Palestine, in articles on its website. As has been noted, it has a long history of praising and celebrating attacks against Israel and attacks against Jews more widely. This vile anti-Semitism cannot be decoupled from the statements recently attributed to HuT encouraging and promoting terrorism. But of course, the facts changed after 7 October. I think that explains the decision to act now. When the facts change, we change our minds.

On religious communities, obviously I agree with all noble Lords that the growth in anti-Semitism is extraordinarily concerning. A number of my friends are affected by it and have said that they are now afraid to walk the streets in certain circumstances.

6 pm

**Lord Polak (Con):** Exactly on that point, I pay tribute to the Government because for a number of years they have helped to fund the security of our schools and synagogues, and so on. Noble Lords might not realise that, to get into a synagogue to pray, one has to go through security—that is here in Britain, in 2024. After 7 October, the Government gave the Home Office another £3 million towards this. Just so that noble Lords understand, just days after 7 October my daughter called me and asked, “Dad, do you love your grandchildren?” I said to Natasha, “What’s this question?” She said, “Should we send them to school?” That is a Jewish, state-aided school in Finchley, north London. They were scared to send their kids to school here in Britain. That is just to get over to noble Lords that this is the problem, but I am grateful to the Government for their support.

**Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con):** I thank my noble friend for his personal perspective, which—I think I can safely speak for the whole House—we obviously regret very considerably. That just amplifies the point I was making that some of my friends have expressed to me that they are also afraid, in certain circumstances, to walk the streets of the capital in particular, although I imagine that that applies across the entire nation. I personally think that is disgraceful.

However, I thank my noble friend for pointing out that the Government have made significant efforts to protect the Jewish community. The Jewish community protective security grant provides security measures, such as guarding, CCTV and alarm systems at Jewish schools, colleges, nurseries and some other Jewish community sites, as well as a number of synagogues. The JCPS grant is managed on behalf of the Home Office by the Community Security Trust. In response to the Israel-Hamas conflict and reports of increased incidence of anti-Semitism in the UK, the Prime Minister has announced an additional £3 million of funding for the Community Security Trust—which my noble friend referred to—that will provide additional security at Jewish schools, synagogues and other Jewish community sites. This brings total funding for CST through the Jewish community protective security grant to £18 million in 2023-24. The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement confirmed that protective security funding for the Jewish community will be maintained at £18 million in 2024-25. So I thank my noble friend for his thanks. Obviously, the Government are very alive to the fact that we need to do as much as we can.

On the question about the statistics on anti-Semitism, I will have to write on that—I am afraid I do not have them to hand.

It would be wrong not to highlight also what is being done to protect Muslim communities, who obviously are also affected by events in the Middle East. We recognise that the developments there can impact British Muslim communities, and they lead to a rise in community tensions. The Government have made an additional £4.9 million available for protective security at mosques and Muslim faith schools this year and the next. That brings total funding for UK Muslim communities to £29.4 million for both 2023-24 and 2024-25. We have also extended the deadline for the protective security



for mosques scheme, and invite mosques and Muslim faith community centres to register for protective security measures by 18 February 2024. The protective security for mosques scheme provides physical security measures such as CCTV, intruder alarms and secure perimeter fencing to mosques and associated Muslim faith community centres. Guarding services for both mosques and Muslim faith schools will become available early this year.

My noble friend did not surprise me by asking about the IRGC. There is obviously significant parliamentary media and public interest in potentially proscribing the IRGC. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords have discussed this subject on a number of occasions, with the House of Commons unanimously passing a Motion in January to urge the Government to proscribe. The department keeps the list of proscribed organisations under review and, as noble Lords will be aware, our policy is not to comment on the specifics of individual proscription cases. I am therefore unable to provide further details on this issue in particular. Ministers have previously confirmed to the House that the decision is under active consideration, but we will not provide a running commentary. However, I think I can refer to the most recent public position on this, which was a comment from the current Foreign Secretary on the proscription of the IRGC. In an interview with the *Telegraph* on 23 December, the current Foreign Secretary said:

“The move you’re talking about is not something that either the intelligence agencies or the police are calling for. So I think our stance is the right one”.

That is the latest information on that subject, but I am quite sure that we will return to it.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, asked me what is happening with the counterextremism strategy. The Government, obviously, remain focused on disrupting the activities and influence of extremists, supporting those who stand up to extremism and stopping people being drawn into terrorism. We keep our response to extremism under constant review to ensure that it is best placed to tackle the evolving threat.

Building on the foundation set by the 2015 counterextremism strategy, we have scaled up our approach to disrupting groups who seek to radicalise others in order to focus on those who pose the biggest threat to our communities and our security. The Government’s focus is to use existing mechanisms to analyse, prevent and disrupt the spread of high-harm extremist ideologies that can lead to community division, and to radicalisation into terrorism, particularly those that radicalise others but deliberately operate below counterterrorism thresholds. Where there is evidence of purposeful actions that are potentially radicalising others into terrorism or violence, proportionate disruptive action will be considered.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, asked me about investigation and prosecution of offences. He will be aware that that is an operational matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. But His Majesty’s Government are working with operational partners to

support their management of terrorism offences, particularly in the context of the ongoing crisis in Israel and Gaza, and we will continue to do that to realise the disruptive benefits of this proscription swiftly.

I do not have access at the moment to the Foreign Office guidance for Lebanon. I will find out what it is and come back to the noble Lord, Lord Purvis.

In conclusion, the security of our communities is the Government’s foremost priority. The effort to counter and contain terrorism is complex and relentless. When action is needed, we will not hesitate. This is why we have brought forward this order, which I commend to the House.

*Motion agreed.*

### **Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill [HL]**

*Order of Consideration Motion*

6.07 pm

*Moved by Lord Sharpe of Epsom*

That the amendments for the Report stage be marshalled and considered in the following order: Clauses 1 to 13, The Schedule, Clauses 14 to 31, Title.

*Motion agreed.*

### **Immigration Act 2014 (Residential Accommodation) (Maximum Penalty) Order 2023**

### **Immigration (Employment of Adults Subject to Immigration Control) (Maximum Penalty) (Amendment) Order 2023**

### **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (Amendment) Order 2024**

*Motions to Approve*

6.07 pm

*Moved by Lord Sharpe of Epsom*

That the draft Orders laid before the House on 15 and 27 November 2023 be approved.

*Relevant documents: 5th and 7th Reports from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee. Considered in Grand Committee on 16 January.*

*Motions agreed.*

*House adjourned at 6.08 pm.*



# Grand Committee

Thursday 18 January 2024

## Arrangement of Business Announcement

1 pm

**The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Lord Haskel) (Lab):** My Lords, if there is a Division in the Chamber while we are sitting, this Committee will adjourn as soon as the Division Bells are rung and resume after 10 minutes. Does the noble Lord, Lord Evans of Rainow, wish to make a statement?

**Lord Evans of Rainow (Con):** My Lords, for those noble Lords who were not at Question Time, I should say that the noble Lords, Lord Kennedy and Lord True, reminded the House of the time limits in speeches, so I also respectfully remind those participating here today of that. In this debate, the noble Lord, Lord German, has 10 minutes, the Minister has 12 minutes, and I am afraid the rest of you have four minutes, so please try to keep to the time.

## Refugee Integration Question for Short Debate

1.01 pm

Asked by **Lord German**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the current pathways for newly recognised refugees to integrate and establish themselves in the United Kingdom.

**Lord German (LD):** First, I thank all those who have put their names down to speak in this short debate and cover an area that is somewhat neglected but of great importance to all of us. This debate is about people who have the legal right to be in the United Kingdom: people whom our Government have decided require our protection. No matter how they arrived or which country they are from, they should all receive the support they require to establish themselves in the United Kingdom. It is in the interests of the United Kingdom as a whole that we harness the skills and talents of our new residents; it is also our duty as serious members of the international community to give refugees every chance to flourish, as they have suffered persecution and fled their homelands.

Refugees are a wide-ranging cohort: professionals; academic; medics; engineers; university students; men; women; children and young people. There will be those without schooling in their home country, those suffering physical and mental ill-health from the impact of trauma they have experienced, those with years of work experience, those starting out in the world of work, those with digital skills and those without, and adults caring for family members. Support therefore needs to reflect this range of needs.

The ability for refugees to establish themselves and flourish in the United Kingdom is crucial to their well-being and future prospects and those of their families, and to the strength of our communities. It is

also crucial that they can begin swiftly to contribute to the economy of our country. This is in their interest but, crucially, it is also in our interest. As recent arrivals to the United Kingdom, they require support to thrive as we all would if we were attempting to navigate life in a new country. The support they require reflects the huge range of refugee profiles. Refugees are often resourceful, entrepreneurial, skilled and resilient. They want to be self-sufficient and to make a good life for themselves in the safety that the United Kingdom offers. I was pleased that, at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva last month, Foreign Office Minister Andrew Mitchell committed to:

“Continued support around the integration of refugees in the United Kingdom”.

What is the reality of the current situation? In 2019, an Oxford University study found that 84% of refugees reported that they did not have sufficient English language ability to get a job. The study found that refugees in the United Kingdom are four times more likely to be unemployed than people born here and earn about half the amount per week that UK nationals do on average. This is despite high levels of qualifications and skills: about half of all refugees have a qualification equivalent to a UK A-level and above. For example, 38% of refugees from Syria living in the United Kingdom have a university degree.

Non-EU migrants moving to the UK seeking asylum have a higher unemployment rate and a lower employment rate than other migrants. Differences in health status, especially mental ill-health brought on by trauma, are probably one of the dominant factors that explain these differences. Asylum seekers and migrants who are employees earn less and work fewer hours than UK-born workers and other migrants. Among those who are in employment, refugee migrants are more likely to be in self-employment than UK-born people and other migrants.

Last week I visited ACH in Bristol, a refugee-led support body. I discovered that, on average, it takes nine months for a refugee to obtain employment after they receive their refugee status. Clearly, that time gap needs to be shortened as best we can. We need to address the underemployment of refugees and the fact that they find it very difficult to access work that matches their skills, qualifications and work experience. Refugee talent is being wasted and, as a result, the UK is losing out. Refugee employment support needs an element of long-term progression, not ceasing at the first job that these people get in the United Kingdom. This must be reflected in language and training support that can fit around work hours.

The current provision that we have in this country falls into three broad areas. First, there is signposting from migrant support and help from third-sector organisations such as the Refugee Employment Network, and small loans are made available for short-term needs. Secondly, we have the Refugee Employability Programme, which started in September 2023 and lasts two years so it is difficult to know what its outcome will be. However, it does not include housing support, and only one of the contractors is in the third sector. I hope that the Government have learned the lesson from the now scrapped rehabilitation of offenders scheme, where they put large private sector companies

[LORD GERMAN]

in place and then had to remove them and scrap the whole system because it could not deliver locally through local partners. What efforts is the Refugee Employability Programme making to match business needs and the skills deficit in the workforce with refugee skills? Why does the programme not include a housing element, as was the case with the refugee transition outcomes fund? What lessons are being learned from Operation Warm Welcome's attempt to connect employers with refugees?

The third area is the refugee transition outcomes fund that I just mentioned, a pilot fund which finishes in March 2024, having started in 2022. It was focused on jobs and training but also included housing and integration support. In replying, will the Minister provide us with more information on the lessons learned from this programme? Will it now be rolled out across the country? Will it be seen as an addition to or expansion of the Refugee Employability Programme?

Accessible English language training is key to refugee integration. What plans do the Government have to increase availability of English language classes to ensure that they are accessible around work and caring responsibilities? The STEP Ukraine programme provided a strong model for making that happen.

In the Chamber on 18 December, a Home Office Minister—the noble Lord, Lord Sharpe—was asked about the current challenges for refugees in moving from asylum support to mainstream support once they get their legal status. He said that

“most of the people we are talking about have been in this country for a very long time, and one would hope that they at least had some English”.—[*Official Report*, 18/12/23; col. 2039.]

We cannot live on hope; we need intent to solve this issue. At the very least, we must not produce policy which effectively makes it harder for refugees to progress in the United Kingdom once they get legal status.

My visit to Bristol last week demonstrated how difficult it is to manage these top issues of finding a home, language training and a pathway to work. The competition for rented accommodation is huge, and landlords will often take the easier route of agreeing a tenant who does not have the need for background checks on status. Language training was available from local colleges, but the waiting lists to get on them are very long indeed. Consequently, the jobs that people found provided no progression route to match their skills and qualifications.

Thankfully, there is a wealth of good practice to build on. I was pleased to hear of ACH's new programme, working with the regional hospitality sector to provide jobs with progression opportunities. I must tell noble Lords that I was even more pleased to meet Nesrin, a former refugee who now has a successful catering business, *Nessi Cuisine*—I recommend it. We need a national refugee integration policy framework to help to integrate refugees and reap the benefit of their contribution to our society and our economy, a framework with a focus on the needs of this cohort. Such a policy must be delivered locally, bringing together the full range of providers—business owners, language training providers, local jobcentres, community developers, landlords, local authorities—as well as the refugees

themselves. No one size will fit all, but a non-silo policy solution with funding streams attached would meet the diverse needs of tailor-made provision.

My major ask of the Government today is whether they accept the need for a policy framework, negotiated with Wales and Scotland—they also have major powers in this space—and that will stand the test of time. If so, what would that look like? It is in all our interests that we improve the journey to integration and that we celebrate the contribution that refugees can and do make to our communities and to our economy. It would be foolish not to do so.

1.11 pm

**Lord Jackson of Peterborough (Con):** My Lords, I welcome this debate. There is a temptation, when focusing on specific granular issues such as housing and benefits, to ignore the wider context, which is whether we, as legislators, are discharging our obligations and duties to all British citizens to protect our borders and safeguard our people.

No one voted for record levels of unassimilated, irregular immigration or mass controlled immigration, and no one voted for this House to seek to frustrate the Government's mandate to properly limit and control immigration. No one voted for a foreign legal entity to undermine our sovereign Parliament in so doing. Our asylum and immigration system is a shambolic mess and an embarrassment—and a costly one, at that. I urge noble Lords to look at Iain Martin's column in the *Times* this morning about the human consequences of the mistakes that are being made. The international legal regime is outdated and in need of urgent review, as the Foreign Secretary stated in the House on Tuesday, when he said that it was a law “written for another age”, in specific reference to the 1951 refugee convention.

We as a country—the British people—are decent, warm, tolerant and generous. You need only look at the various schemes over the last number of years: we have welcomed 20,000 people under the two Afghanistan schemes, 185,000 under the Hong Kong partnership, 270,000 under the Ukrainian families schemes and 22,000 Syrians between 2014 and 2021, and that is not to mention 22,000 Vietnamese and Ugandan Asians between 1972 and 1974. There is an argument, however, that integration has failed. Diversity is a shibboleth, a cult that means that a shared sense of community cohesion, values, principles, beliefs, social tenets and a unity in belief in our country are often dismissed and ignored.

In the wider context, I have some specific questions for the Minister. Why has the refusal rate for asylum seekers decreased precipitously since 2010, from, for instance, 88% in 2004 to 24% now? Why are we granting asylum to many more people who passed through safe countries which have much higher refusal rates, such as France and Belgium? How many cases are currently in the asylum seeker caseload? What is our strategy for the 41,000 who are subject to removal and have not been removed?

For all that, I have a positive spin on where we are at the moment. I welcome the *Integrated Communities Action Plan*, the *New Plan for Immigration: Policy Statement* and the Refugee Employability Programme

because it is our duty to support law-abiding, decent asylum seekers to become good British citizens. We need to bring back integration from the devolved Administrations. We need a robust template for citizenship ceremonies focusing on British history, culture, values and beliefs. We need to put more money into removals and to speed up the process, particularly the appeals process. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord German, that we need to look at more work with civil society to give asylum seekers skills, work preparation and language skills not to work before their application is determined but to volunteer and receive support as putative British citizens. We certainly need to expand the social impact bond models beyond the four pilot schemes that we have now, with clear targets and demonstrable objectives.

Millions of people want to come to Britain for a better life, and that is laudable. We have a right to choose which ones we accept, but we also have an obligation to help them to be good, honest, patriotic British citizens.

1.16 pm

**Lord Green of Deddington (CB):** My Lords, I agree broadly with much of what the noble Lord, Lord German, said, but it is no surprise that I will take a slightly different approach because I also agree with quite a lot of what the noble Lord, Lord Jackson, said.

There is a prior phase before we get into how we handle refugees, and that is the main point of this debate. We need much more confidence among the public that applicants for refugee status are genuine and, if they are not, that they will be refused and removed. The second part of that is, frankly, very weak at the moment. We have to convince the public that the number is satisfactorily under control. I suspect that there is growing public concern on both counts. The public are aware that roughly 75% of applicants are relatively young men who have nearly all destroyed their documents and who have nearly all—certainly those who cross the channel—come from a safe country. We cannot focus on the treatment of genuine asylum seekers unless we take account of this public feeling, which is strong and well based.

By way of illustration, I shall address one group of applicants on which the Government seem to be making a serious mistake. I refer to the so-called streamlining of applications from six Middle East countries announced on 23 February 2023, namely Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. I know most of those countries and have served in three of them. In the past five years, about 23,500 applicants and dependants from these countries have been granted asylum, but thousands of these applicants are now having their applications processed on paper and the “vast majority” are given the green light to stay in the UK without an interview. It is extraordinary. What is the reason? It is that their grant rate in recent years was 95% or higher. The system cannot be working effectively if it gives 95% approval to any group of people. What message does that send to their compatriots at home and how much does this matter?

A glance at the United Nations population statistics will show that the number of males aged between 20 and 39—the likely age group—from these six countries

comes to a total of 23 million. Obviously, they are not all coming, but the word will spread rapidly, especially as all these countries are in chaos and many people in them live in poverty. It is surely only a matter of time before the numbers start to rise sharply.

This is just one example of the Government’s frankly limp and short-sighted policies in this field. The costs are enormous. Robert Jenrick, until recently Minister responsible for all this, has just said that it costs £500,000 to integrate and support one migrant. I put to the Minister that, if the Government are serious about pathways to integration—I hope that they are and I suspect that everyone here is—they will first need to get a grip of the process and to constrain the numbers.

1.20 pm

**Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Afl):** My Lords, it is absolutely right that we have the aspiration of fully integrating all those granted refugee status into UK life. I appreciate the application of thinking of the noble Lord, Lord German, about how we can do that, how they can provide for themselves and settle in, and so on. But, however short this debate is, we cannot ignore a broader political context and the contemporary problem of cultural integration.

Whether we like it or not, the status of refugees has become tarnished in the eyes of the public, discredited by the loss of faith in the process of determining who is legitimately here and the loss of control of our borders. The catastrophic backlog in assessing asylum claims means that there are worries that some are arriving in small boats, being waved through and so on. That causes resentments, which is not a good plan for integrating people. We have to be honest: integrating new refugees when the public are sympathetic to them escaping horrendous wars and brutal regimes is one thing, but it is different if they have a suspicion of status. There is a difference between integrating new refugees into a dynamic and self-confident country with a generous invitation to become part of British society and today’s reality, which is a combination of a polarised society, economic stagnation and all sorts of toxic things going on. We have failing public services, councils on the brink of bankruptcy and a housing crisis affecting all British citizens, so we cannot expect this to be all smooth sailing.

We need to take a step back. I refer noble Lords to recent events in Ireland over the last week or so. On Tuesday, Mayo County Council unanimously, in a cross-party resolution, passed a motion calling on all council staff to cease co-operation with the department of integration—aptly named for this debate. The issue is about housing asylum seekers and agreed refugees in the county. Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil councillors declared that non-co-operation would continue until “an agreed strategy is put in place to properly co-ordinate the provision of additional services for the communities hosting refugees”.

This comes after violent clashes between the gardaí—the Irish police—and protesters outside a hotel in Roscrea in County Tipperary on Monday night, again in relation to housing asylum seekers and refugees.

It was interesting that Mayo councillors emphasised that, as much as anything else, they were acting to ensure that refugees would not be blamed for the

[BARONESS FOX OF BUCKLEY]

scramble for scarce jobs, services and housing. They do not want scapegoating. As one councillor noted, the Irish state could be seen as discriminating against those already living in County Mayo, including migrants and earlier refugees who have been based there for years, sometimes decades. Such sentiments are reflected here in the UK.

Many people from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds feel uneasy about how best to integrate refugees here and about whether there is enough to go around. Perhaps even more challenging is the issue of cultural integration. Historically, refugees from all sorts of ethnic and religious backgrounds interacted and forged common bonds in British society. However, we have a problem with what the newly ennobled noble Lord, Lord Cameron, when Prime Minister, once called the doctrine of “state multiculturalism”, which splinters society into different cultural blocks, often competing identity groups, living parallel lives. This official policy has undermined national identity and fuelled disunity, all in the name of diversity. I fear that it will be the greatest threat that we have to properly integrating any new refugees.

1.24 pm

**Baroness Neuberger (CB):** My Lords, I declare an interest as chair of the Schwab & Westheimer Trust helping young asylum seekers and refugees access higher education and as a member of the Woolf Institute’s Commission on the Integration of Refugees—directly relevant. I also declare an interest as chair of University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This is particularly relevant with UCLH, because it hosts the RESPOND team, an integrated asylum seeker and refugee service, which has been so successful in treating asylum seekers and refugees, under the leadership of the amazing Dr Sarah Eisen, that it was highly commended for a *Health Service Journal* award last year.

Asylum seekers and refugees face multiple barriers in accessing health services, and a direct outreach service can work wonders. Sadly, the main outreach service is closed at present, due to funding and commissioning issues, but this work is directly relevant. The Woolf commission’s report will be launched in March and is likely to recommend that the NHS collaborate with the third sector to carry out joint strategic needs assessments to understand the composition and needs of local asylum seeker and refugee populations. Those needs assessments should then be used to plan, develop and provide integrated care systems that are relevant, inclusive and responsive to any issues relating to community cohesion, as the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, just talked about, or to address health inequalities—exactly what RESPOND was set up for.

A further recommendation from the Woolf report is likely to be around the employment of refugees and indeed of asylum seekers while awaiting decisions. Once again, University College Hospital has tried to help, and not purely for moral reasons. Staff shortages are such that it makes no sense to have qualified health workers in our asylum system or newly accepted as refugees who cannot work with us. We started back in

March 2022 in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University and recruited a mere four refugees. Two have since passed their OSCE, a test of professional competence required of anyone trained in another country who wishes to work as a registered nurse in the UK, and are now working with us, while two are finalising their training. It takes ages, as the noble Lord, Lord German, said, and it is expensive. However, this is exactly what we should be doing nationally on a far greater scale. It may be expensive to have such a system, but it is much more expensive if we cannot recruit at all. We have skills shortages while there are refugees who could fill the gaps and want to do so, but at present it is unbelievably hard to get into the NHS system, either as staff or as a patient, if you are an asylum seeker or even a refugee with status.

Can the Minister give us comfort that the Government are looking at this? Will they make it easier to work in the NHS as an asylum seeker or a refugee? Will they now fund outreach to asylum seekers and refugees from within the NHS to help deal with appalling illnesses and address shocking health inequalities? It is quite clear what should be done; the question is whether the Government will make it easier to do so.

1.28 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Durham:** My Lords, I declare my interests as laid out in the register.

Successful integration into life in the UK is critical for refugees to rebuild their lives, enabling society to benefit from the valuable skills that they bring as a gift to this country. However, current policy makes integration difficult, leaving them with very little support, particularly in the early period.

My friend the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London raised the 28-day move-on period in this House last month and in a letter to the Home Office with other faith leaders. I echo her concerns. Current policy gives refugees 28 days from the issuing of a biometric residence permit until they can no longer access asylum support and accommodation. In practice, refugees are often given much shorter notice to find accommodation and means to support themselves.

Last week, I witnessed this in the north-east, when a refugee, whom I have known for some years, was given a matter of hours by the Home Office to find new accommodation—he has just recently been given his status. As a male whose family has not yet joined him in the UK, he was not considered a priority for housing, so private rental was his only option. He is in full-time paid work as a social carer. Fortunately, the local authority agreed to provide a week in a guest house as he found a more permanent solution, but he was left in need of a guarantor, a deposit and a first month of rent. Had it not been for the generosity of local connections that he had made, plus the willingness of the local authority and charity sector to provide support and guidance, it would have been a very different story.

The 57% of refugees who end up sleeping rough, or in a hostel or night shelter, when they leave asylum accommodation are not as fortunate. Those who need to access universal credit when granted refugee status must endure the five-week wait for their first payment.

Considering that the move-on period is 28 days yet the wait for a first universal credit payment is five weeks, how will the Government prevent those who have recently been granted refugee status but not yet found employment experiencing homelessness and destitution? Will they extend the move-on period to 56 days, so that it is compatible with the universal credit processing time or, as a minimum, correctly and clearly implement the current policy to ensure that all refugees truly have 28 days from receiving their BRP to leave their asylum accommodation?

I commend the Government for adopting community sponsorship as a safe and legal route to the UK. Community sponsorship has proven to help refugees to successfully integrate much more quickly, with the sponsoring communities providing wraparound support. I ask the Government what plans they have to upscale and promote this scheme, so that more refugees can integrate into life in the UK.

Refugees, when seen as a gift not a problem, have so much potential to contribute to our communities and economy. It is vital that newly recognised refugees receive the support they require with housing, employment, language skills and building social networks. Only then can they successfully integrate, rebuild their lives and fully contribute to life in the UK, which is exactly what they want to do.

1.31 pm

**Lord Carlile of Berriew (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord German, for raising this very important question before your Lordships. I support what he said in his excellent opening speech. I am glad that we are able to concentrate on a question that does not deal with the chaos of how refugee applicants arrive in this country. It is about what happens to people whose status as refugees is recognised; therefore, they are to be integrated.

Like my noble friend Lady Neuberger, I declare an interest as a member of the Woolf Institute's Commission on the Integration of Refugees. It is a large commission, which has taken a vast amount of evidence. Its members are politically diverse and apolitical too. Some have lived experience. When it reports in March, I hope that the Government pay close attention to its recommendations. Given that we are in 2024, I hope that all political parties look closely at its provisions.

The Woolf Institute's commission has taken a vast amount of evidence and it is becoming clear that your Lordships' House and the other place do not have real visibility of what is happening with the integration of refugees. We need to introduce a new and much stronger governance process and a better and more clearly devolved structure for how refugees are dealt with, in the attempt to integrate and establish themselves in the United Kingdom.

My fervent belief—as a child of refugees—is that there is no real hostility to refugees in this country. Refugees who come here, work and participate in their communities are welcome. It is often the fault of us in this place that hostility arises. We need to move away from that situation by improving the governance of the refugee system.

How do we do that? I will give a couple of examples. First, we need a clearer statement of the strategy and goals for national refugee integration. Producing such a document is not rocket science. Secondly, we should ensure that we use those who are best at it already and give them the opportunity to improve what they do. Revising and upgrading the roles of strategic migration partnerships, as the key vehicles to implement the integration strategy, is absolutely essential. I used the word “devolved”; we should take into account the extremely important roles to be played by the devolved Governments, local authorities, the private sector and third-sector organisations, such as the many charities involved in this work.

To ensure that the work is done properly, in the coming years we should not face the sort of debates that we have had in the past couple of years about refugees and how they are integrated. To avoid that, we need a much stronger demonstration to Parliament of how these policies have been administered. I have a feeling that the Woolf Institute's commission will suggest the implementation of a recommendation for an independent reviewer of how the refugee system works, so that there is a living instrument that deals with issues as they arise and reports independently to Parliament on the integration of refugees. Genuine refugees should—like my own parents, who were very successful refugees—have the opportunity to become full British people without losing their original national identities and ideas.

1.36 pm

**Baroness Hamwee (LD):** My Lords, I thank the organisations that sent us briefings; the material gets read even if one cannot refer to it in detail. I declare an interest as a trustee of the trust mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Neuberger, which supports young people in higher education. The students I have met show an impressive intention to progress to worthwhile careers. They are the catalysts for renewal and innovation in our nation.

I do not like the word “integrate”. It suggests a one-way activity when it should be reciprocal because integration is valuable and enriching to the host nation. A charity in south-west London, Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, uses the strap-line “Supporting diversity, challenging adversity”. Differences are valuable—societies are not static. As the noble Lord, Lord Carlile, said, several of today's speakers—three of us sitting in a row—need look back only one or two generations of our own families. The noble Lord, Lord Jackson, used the description

“decent, warm, tolerant and generous”

of the British people. I agree, but will some of those who have benefited who are or have been in senior positions apply that? Would that the Government themselves showed leadership in acknowledging the benefits rather than scapegoating immigrants and, particularly, asylum seekers. All that does is stoke fear and hostility. I am sure we will hear from the noble Lord, Lord Gascoigne, about the positives, but I suspect not where there are shortfalls, nor where there is a lack of a holistic approach, which means that refugees are perceived as a burden.

[BARONESS HAMWEE]

My noble friend focused on the failure to align immigration policies with the UK's economic needs, and other points that I now might be able to go through rather quickly—I did not expect him to be able to do so. The first is employment. Restrictions on asylum seekers undertaking volunteering, never mind working, deprive them of social connections, which are part of integration, as well as experience and dignity. I will canter through some other issues. Language is essential for a rounded life, and essential for a refugee to practise his or her profession and use his or her skills. Some of the language tuition needs to be work-related.

The right reverend Prelate referred in some detail to the issues around accommodation, which is an essential foundation for so much else. Like him, I ask the Government to think again about the move-on period—both the formal period and the procedures that apply so that 28 days is now largely a fiction. What is needed is 56 days, to align with applications for universal credit and with the Homelessness Reduction Act. It is said that if nothing else changes, universal credit advance payments will have to become the norm. The right reverend Prelate referred to problems with private rented accommodation.

More safe and legal routes would put the UK in a better position to welcome refugees. They would also put refugees in a better position not to be driven underground but to contribute to and become part of our society and communities—to everyone's benefit.

1.40 pm

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord German, for bringing this important debate forward today. I also thank my colleagues in local authorities across the country, faith leaders and their communities, and the voluntary and community sector for their exceptional efforts in this regard. In all the light and heat of the Government's current chaotic and crisis-ridden approach to asylum seekers and refugees, it is too easy to overlook the fact that at the heart of this issue are people and communities here in the UK, and people who arrive in our country, often traumatised and persecuted, seeking refuge and the security that we take for granted.

Local authorities and the voluntary sector have done an outstanding job in attempting to support refugees into accommodation, supporting their mental health and welfare needs, providing access to English classes, and giving employment support and assistance with registering for benefits as well as cultural awareness support to enable people to build new lives in the UK. However, both our own excellent briefing from the House of Lords Library and the outstanding briefing from London Councils set out that there are still significant issues. The current lack of co-ordination, the failure to ensure that adequate time periods are in place for refugees to access employment, accommodation and benefits, and the constant changes of system and inconsistent time periods between refugee support and housing law are causing considerable distress. There are increases in rough sleeping and exceptional pressures on housing departments, which were already buckling

under the demands for emergency and temporary accommodation due to the failures in the housing market.

The Government's climbdown on asylum accommodation cut-off dates was followed by a huge increase in homelessness rates among new refugees. Are the Government considering how they may help by boosting homelessness prevention funding and/or discretionary housing payments? The chaos engulfing our asylum system, which has kept people in Home Office limbo for longer and longer, will not be solved by forcing refugees out of accommodation and on to our streets. What is being done to ensure that move-on periods from asylum-seeker status to refugee status align with homelessness legislation, universal credit application periods and access to essential health support, including for mental health? All those issues were mentioned by previous speakers in this debate.

Can the Minister outline how the Home Office and DLUHC will work together and with other departments to introduce the cross-departmental strategy, referred to as a national refugee integration framework by the noble Lords, Lord German and Lord Carlile, to ensure that newly confirmed refugees are able to secure housing, employment and support with health issues, including mental health, so that they can go on to build an independent life in this country? Can the Minister tell us how many refugees have been able to access the Refugee Employability Programme, and how its success is being monitored and assessed? What work is being undertaken to understand what works best in terms of outcomes for refugee integration?

It is in the interests of the settled people and communities across the UK, the very vulnerable refugees at the heart of this issue and the hard-working councils and agencies working in the front line to get this resolved, so can we please have closer co-ordination between and within departments and with those on the ground, without any further delay?

1.44 pm

**Lord Gascoigne (Con):** My Lords, like others, I thank the noble Lord, Lord German, and all who have contributed today. As he said, the debate has been well attended, which is a credit not just to him for securing the debate but to all noble Lords who are concerned about this issue and how we work together to integrate refugees further.

As has been clear, the debate is important, and I assure noble Lords that the Government approach this task with the seriousness and care that they would expect. We seek to support and help refugees as they begin their lives in the UK in a number of ways, and I will set those out before I respond to some of the other specific points that have been raised.

First, all those who have been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection in the UK are granted immediate access to public services—as we have discussed, this includes education, healthcare and the benefits system—as well as to the labour market. As has been said, these provisions are there to help foster integration and self-sufficiency, so that refugees can provide for themselves and their families, as well as make a positive contribution to the economy and society.



As has been noted by your Lordships, and as I think we all agree, employment can be and is an important step on the path to integration. There is the obvious financial benefit from earning an income and becoming self-sufficient in the longer term, but there are also opportunities to engage with others, expand social networks and learn and practise speaking English. That is why those granted refugee status have immediate and unrestricted access to the labour market.

Points have been well made about how refugees can sometimes face additional barriers to labour market participation, which is why the Government are funding the delivery of a bespoke support package to help refugees to overcome these barriers and move into work. The Home Office recently launched the Refugee Employability Programme in England, which is focused on increasing employability prospects for refugees through the provision of tailored employment support, integration support and English language training. The noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, asked a number of questions about departments working together. I hope she sees where they do so; this is one area. Officials also work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that all those whom we resettle or whose refugee status is recognised are aware of and receive the support to which they are entitled.

As your Lordships raised, the ability to speak English is key to helping refugees integrate, as well as to breaking down barriers to work and career progression. That is why English language training is a fundamental element of the support available under the new Refugee Employability Programme. The Department for Education in England funds English for speakers of other languages through the adult education budget. All refugees and those granted humanitarian protection are eligible for full funding for ESOL if they are unemployed and looking for work. I will come back later to some of the other specific points on education.

Once granted asylum, individuals must transition to mainstream services from the support and accommodation provided while their asylum applications are processed. The Government currently have in place measures that ensure that an individual granted asylum remains on asylum support and in asylum accommodation for 28 days from the point of the biometric residence permit being issued. We recognise the importance of a biometric residence permit to obtain onward support; it allows newly recognised refugees to integrate and establish themselves. We are working to ensure that BRPs are issued within five to seven days of the initial decision. However, individuals should make plans to move on from asylum support as soon as they are served their asylum decision, regardless of when their BRP is issued. In most cases, this is in advance.

Early in this period, Migrant Help, which is contracted by the Home Office to support newly recognised refugees, will also provide support and advice on how to access services and where to get assistance with housing.

We recognise that the number of individuals moving on from the asylum support system is adding pressure on local authorities and their housing allocation capacity. The Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are working closely on this and have been regularly engaging with local authorities to ensure that they are supported as well. There are a

number of improvements in train to ensure that local authorities receive early notification of those being granted asylum and leaving Home Office asylum accommodation. Following notification of an asylum decision being made, accommodation providers will notify local authorities within two working days. We are working with providers to ensure that this is applied consistently and in a timely manner across all areas. We are also working to ensure that individuals are offered support from Migrant Help or other partner organisations when they receive a decision on their asylum claim.

I will try to address the very good points that have been made. Forgive me; there are some that I may have missed. I will do as much as I can and, if I am unable to answer them, I will write.

The noble Baroness, Lady Neuberger, spoke about asylum seekers not being able to work while they await the decision. I completely understand the point, which has been well made by many others not just in this debate but in previous debates, especially in the Chamber. We do not want to be in a position where we create pull factors. It would be an incentive for asylum seekers to enter our system if we were to go down that route.

Your Lordships made a number of points about grant rates, specifically on what the Government are doing to clear the backlog and on the checks. I assure your Lordships that rigorous checks are made on claims before and when decisions are made. My noble friend Lord Jackson asked about the grant rate compared to the European Union. Obviously it is not always possible to give a direct comparison. For example, there is a mix of nationalities, protection needs, operational resources and policy decisions. Currently there are a large number of applications with ongoing conflict. The department is prioritising older claims, children, those in support and those with extreme vulnerability.

The noble Lord, Lord German, asked about the RTOF and the pilot. The evaluation is ongoing, I am afraid. Once it has come to its conclusion we will write to him with further details once we have learned those lessons.

The noble Lord, Lord Green, asked about tracking the 90% who pass through safe countries. I assure him that our system is robust and that rigorous checks are made on that.

The noble Lord, Lord Carlile, asked whether the Government will take heed of the recommendations of the Commission on the Integration of Refugees. We look forward to seeing its report in due course, and I assure him that we will consider it carefully. I am sure it will be discussed in detail in the Chamber at some stage.

The noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, and others asked about the support and close working with other departments. As I said, there are a number of occasions where departments work together, which we will obviously continue to do. To be clear, it is not just the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but the DWP and the DfE.

The right reverend Prelate mentioned his right reverend friend the Bishop of London, and my understanding is that there is some outstanding correspondence and that one of the Home Office Ministers has since written. I spoke to the Minister this morning, and he

[LORD GASCOIGNE]

wanted me to pass on that he is aware that there needs to be a response to that. He is happy to have the conversation once he is in a position to do so. I assure noble Lords that the department is on it and they will meet.

There were a number of other issues—I have written them down—but, in the interest of time, I will just thank the noble Lord, Lord German, again for raising this debate, and all those who participated in the debate. I hope one of the things we can take away is that the Government recognise the importance of supporting refugees towards integration. It is certainly not the case that we see them as a burden, as was said; we do not. We continue to explore how refugees can be supported towards integration more effectively and how to improve their outcomes. That is why we have been testing a different model of support through our recent refugee transition outcomes fund pilot, as mentioned, and it is why this programme and the new Refugee Employability Programme are being evaluated. This is so that learning can be captured and can inform policy developments in this space.

**Lord Jackson of Peterborough (Con):** Will the Minister address, possibly in writing, extending the social impact bond projects and the learning from those? On a comment from the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, will he look again at the government policy on volunteering to enable better integration of asylum seekers through not work but volunteering?

**Lord Gascoigne (Con):** I apologise—the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, and others also made that point about integration. I assure my noble friend that I will write on that.

**The Lord Bishop of Durham:** Will the Minister write to me about community sponsorship? He was meant to hit that out of the park for six as a positive, and he did not.

**Lord Gascoigne (Con):** I thank the right reverend Prelate. I will write, and I apologise profusely—there are a number of other issues that I have not had a chance to address.

In conclusion—I say to the Whip that I am conscious of time—it is in refugees’ interest and that of the country as a whole that they are able to adapt to life in the United Kingdom, build rewarding and happy lives here, and contribute to society.

1.57 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Religious Education in Schools

### *Question for Short Debate*

2 pm

*Asked by Lord Harries of Pentregarth*

To ask His Majesty’s Government what steps they are taking to improve the quality of religious education in schools.

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB):** My Lords, the 2023 report by Ofsted on religious education could hardly be more damning. It said that, in too many schools, RE was of “poor quality” and “not fit for purpose”. Ofsted suggested that, as a subject, RE was “undervalued” and often considered as an “afterthought” by schools. It argued that the “lack of clarity and support”

from the Government made the schools’ job “harder”. This is not a new situation but one that has been known for many years and, despite some input by government, the situation has continued to deteriorate.

Religious education is education. It is not propaganda. It is simply basic to any understanding of what it is to be a citizen of our society in the world today. First, it is impossible to understand the literature, art, music, history or political values of this country and Europe without some basic knowledge of the Christian faith and the Hebrew scriptures on which it was built. It should be general knowledge in our culture as to why we have Christmas and Easter, for example, but polls indicate a widespread ignorance. Teachers of literature in universities are appalled at the lack of any kind of knowledge of the Christian faith that permeates so much of what students will study. Then, in our plural society in which Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, for example, are so widely present, religious education should give people the mindset to begin to enter into the narrative of other worldviews. It goes without saying that, in a world of conflict such as ours, where religion is so often a factor, this is more important than ever.

I am delighted that a number of my humanist friends will be speaking in this debate, but I stress to them that what we are talking about is education, not propaganda. Most young people today say, apparently, that they have no religion. This makes it all the more important for them actually to know something about what it is that they say they do not believe. Religious education is therefore essential for understanding both our own society and the world in which we live. Why have successive Governments allowed it to be so marginalised for so long?

At the moment, the major responsibility for RE lies with local authorities and SACREs. Some of them take this responsibility seriously but, in others, very little has been done. In August last year, a survey of LA funding to SACREs found that five authorities declared no spending on RE at all, and a further 34—39 in all, or 31%—stated they do not spend any money supporting RE in schools. Some authorities allocated sufficient funding for a proper review of the agreed syllabus in a timely fashion, but 21 authorities had a syllabus from before 2017—over five years old.

SACREs have, on the whole, worked well as enablers of co-operation and community between the different faith communities, but they have not been able to bring about the radical improvement in RE that has been shown to be needed for many years now. The time has come for much more direction at a national level. I agree with the Religious Education Policy Unit that there should be a properly funded national plan for RE, which should include a national curriculum. A national curriculum is used as a benchmark for standards in other subjects and, if academies do not choose to

follow it, they must provide a curriculum that is similarly broad and ambitious. The present situation, where responsibility lies at a local level, means that there is no standard available to the Government to challenge weak or invisible RE provision.

The present situation is lamentable. In England, schools have a statutory obligation to provide RE to their students. However, according to the school workforce data, one in five schools offers zero hours of RE in year 11; this equates to around 500 secondary schools. In the absence of a national standard, the current Government have no mechanism to challenge this.

It should also be noted that no government money has been spent on RE projects in schools over the last five years—that is, 2016 to 2021. During this time, English has received £28.5 million, music has received £387 million, maths has received £154 million and science £56 million. With the Government's stated "firm belief" in the importance of RE in mind, there should be a national plan for RE on a par, at least, with the national plan for music. There should also be, as part of this national plan, the provision of teachers who are properly qualified to teach the subject and able to take part in continuing professional development; this is not the case at the moment. The Department for Education has missed its recruitment target for secondary RE teachers in nine out of the last 10 years. While the total number of secondary teachers in history and geography has risen by 6% and 11% respectively during that period, the number of teachers of RE has declined by almost 6% in the same time. The result is that pupils are now three times as likely to be taught RE by someone with no qualification in the subject than, for example, in history. Some 51% of RE lessons are taught by people whose qualification is in a subject other than RE, and RE often becomes the lesson that is filled by a teacher with a few spare lessons on their timetable.

One way in which this situation can be addressed is through the provision of more bursaries for those training to teach RE in a way that is comparable to those training to teach other subjects where there is a shortage of teachers. I welcome the Government's commitment to fund bursaries of £10,000 for trainee teachers in RE and the provision of eight-week subject enhancement courses. However, even with these measures, recruitment for this year was predicted to be 60% short of the target, and this has the further effect of putting university courses where people learn the subject under strain and creating a vicious circle of decline. Despite the sterling efforts of some schools and some SACREs, it is widely recognised that the present situation is lamentable, and it is failing to prepare pupils for understanding the key role of religion in our culture and history and its importance for good community relations in the modern world. What is happening now in RE is professionally unacceptable.

I am grateful to the Library for its briefing and to the Religious Education Policy Unit for its recommendations, which I follow, on the whole. Finally, I will press the Minister on whether she agrees that: first, we need a properly funded, clear national plan for RE and that it can no longer simply be left to SACREs, and this plan should include a budgetary provision at least comparable to other subjects that

need a boost, such as music; secondly, this plan should include what is expected from the syllabus and that what happens locally should be judged by this benchmark; and thirdly, that RE should be taught by people who have qualifications in the subject and who are given regular opportunities to enhance their professional skills, and that more bursaries and more money for enhanced professional training should be made available to this end. I beg to move.

2.08 pm

**Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab):** My Lords, I am delighted to be part of this debate. The noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, is to be thanked for yet again bringing it to our attention; it is as lamentable as he has said. The two of us have contributed to "Thought for the Day" for many years, and we both know how to tailor our remarks to two and three-quarter minutes. I feel quite at odds with him in this debate where he has 10 minutes and I have three.

I have counted, throughout my time as a Methodist minister, the number of years I have spent in the governance of schools: it amounts to well over 40. These have included every kind of secondary school that you can imagine—voluntary aided, academies, state sector, comprehensives, private schools too—and the shaping of a university at Roehampton where our denominational input was of some use. Over this time where I have been involved practically in this way, the situation has become ever more dire.

Since it is required of the education that we offer to our young people that the spiritual and religious be part of what a good education is considered to be, that raises all kinds of questions. I wonder, for example, why between 2016 and 2021 no government money was spent on RE projects in schools. I hope the Minister knows why or where it has been hidden for future use. When in September 2023 a joint letter was sent by the Religious Education Council to the Secretary of State, Gillian Keegan, pointing out a shortfall in this area, within a month it was discovered that the initial teacher training bursary was to be reintroduced for September 2024 entrants. Why did it have to be reintroduced? Why was it not there in the first place?

I know that the way that we look at and feel about religion varies from person to person and that it can produce great difficulties, because people feel that those with religion want to have an angle on the educational curriculum of a school to introduce and emphasise the things that are important to them. I do not think that is the case. I am a member of the British humanist society and its APPG here for the simple reason that I, like they and all religious people, believe in the humanum and that it is our duty, wherever our values are to be found, to seek the well-being of humanity at large. I certainly do not want religion to be categorised as simply renegeing on its promises or undermining its commitments.

With those brief words—my one "Thought for the Day"—I can now leave the field open for others.

2.12 pm

**Lord Storey (LD):** My Lords, I have an interest in this issue as a former head of a Church of England school. Before the introduction of the national curriculum,

[LORD STOREY]

RE was the only subject that schools had to teach by law; the rest of the curriculum was left to schools—heady days, one might think. Since then, much has changed; indeed, our society has changed too and become a very different place. We are a very successful multicultural and multifaith society, and two-thirds of young people and more than 50% of people as a whole are non-religious, and an increasing number have humanist values and beliefs.

It is important that children and young people understand different faiths and those of no faith. That has to be taught and available through our school system, with teaching of the highest quality—not the prevalent “pass the parcel” to see who will do it.

The figures, as we have heard, speak for themselves. Of our schools in England and Wales, 25% use teaching assistants to deliver the subject, while 20% of RE teachers have received no training and only 63% of teachers feel confident in teaching the subject—a worse situation than three years ago. In 30% of schools, RE is funded less than any other subject taught, and in 28% of schools no funding at all is provided towards the teaching of RE. One in five schools does not offer RE in the curriculum in year 7—they are breaking their statutory responsibilities, by the way—while 27.4% of academies which are not faith-based schools do not even teach RE. Is that part of academies’ right to choose their own curriculum? Perhaps the Minister could explain. Some 31% of schools spend less than the designated time teaching RE—again, a worse situation than three years ago.

Increasingly, therefore, fewer qualified teachers are teaching the subject; less money is spent on resources; less time is used to teach it; and, in many academies, it is not taught at all. Perhaps the Minister could tell us what the Government are planning to do and whether the time has come to take an honest and open-minded look at faith and non-faith education in our schools.

Let me end on a positive note. The Open University, in collaboration with a range of UK and international partners, has developed an exciting initiative in religious, civic and historical education for young people aged 13 to 18. They are encouraged to think outside the box about their own experiences of religious diversity, tolerance and intolerance. The creative process means working together and developing skills such as teamwork, empathy, curiosity and imagination, critical thinking and making “docutubes”, which are short films. Perhaps the Minister would look at this exciting project and its possible use in schools.

2.15 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Durham:** My Lords, I declare my interests as in the register. Our modern society today is rich in diversity with varying cultures, religions and beliefs. Religious education gives young people an understanding of different world religions and beliefs, in a world where 70% of people affiliate themselves to a religion. It gives pupils an opportunity to explore their beliefs, enabling them to think critically and discuss belief systems in a non-offensive and non-discriminatory manner. However, RE is too often seen as inessential, with Ofsted stating, as was said earlier, that

“schools often consider RE as an afterthought”.

When current global conflicts have roots in religious histories, and with increases in faith hate crime in Britain, the provision of high-quality RE is crucial to creating a more respectful and tolerant society. Faith hate crime often comes from a lack of understanding, and it will not be eradicated when citizens lack knowledge of the beliefs of those alongside whom they live and work. I note the Government’s decision to omit RE from the English baccalaureate; will they reconsider this—it was disastrous—and include RE?

Despite the statutory requirement to teach RE at all stages, there are no clear expectations around RE provision regarding the breadth and depth of the syllabus. This results in the teaching of RE in many schools simply being inadequate. The *National Content Standard for Religious Education in England*, produced by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, gives syllabus providers clarification and a benchmark for excellence in RE. Will the Government endorse the document and use it to raise the standard of RE provision across the country?

RE provision is further declining due to the lack of teachers qualified to teach the subject at a high standard. I appreciate the plans for bursaries for those training in the 2024-25 academic year, but I am concerned that these measures do not go far enough with—as already stated—51% of RE lessons in secondary schools taught by teachers who predominantly teach another subject and one in five schools reported to offer zero hours of RE teaching in year 11. How will the Government further ensure that an adequate number of teachers are qualified to teach RE well?

Religious education has the potential to be a vital component in addressing discrimination in the UK and creating a more understanding society. I urge the Government to ensure that RE is considered not as an afterthought, but as an essential part of education, equipping young people to live and engage in society today. The vision for education is to produce the best human beings possible. Surely RE has a vital part to play in that process.

2.18 pm

**Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick (CB):** I am grateful to the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for making us have this debate and for the context he set out. I declare up front that I was an RE teacher between 1980 and 1986. Those were what the noble Lord, Lord Storey, called the “heady days” when we could decide exactly what we taught, and it was straightforward Christianity in my day—but in my latter years, a bit of something else was added for context.

I thoroughly enjoyed my six years of being a religious education teacher. I loved that I was able to inspire a transformation of attitudes and mindsets in a school in west London that, if Ofsted had existed, would have been closed down as a failing school; I do not mind admitting that. It was a school that did what we used to call CSEs, because the brightness level was somewhat dim there.

I remember a phrase that went round at that time, the 1980s: “Those who can’t, teach. Those who can’t teach, teach RE”. As an RE teacher, that made me feel

that I was at the back end of the bottom of the bucket, but I loved those six years. I loved them, to be candid, because I was able to transform the energy and engagement of less academic students, so that RE became—to be honest about it—the single most pursued and sought-after subject at CSE, which was the GCSE equivalent, for 13 to 16 year-olds. The school in which I was teaching even introduced an A-level in the subject.

How was that possible? There is a distinguishing characteristic to RE that has been substantially and consistently ignored: it has to come from a living and vibrant commitment to faith. Whatever the faith, it had better be dynamic, realistic, passionate, personal and meaningful. We all know well from our school experience—we have all had it—that it is not so much the subject but the teacher that turns us on. If we could invest in bringing forward people of calibre and character, energy and enthusiasm, faith and distinction, RE would be changed.

It is not so much about pushing teachers on but about letting hearts and souls come out. When I went to that school, I was offered £400 to support 900 children in my first year. I raised £2,600 from a network of friends to support the curriculum of the whole school, because I really believed I had an important opportunity that we should pursue.

I ask the Minister, when she responds to all the fine points that have been raised in this debate so far, to tell us the extent to which the Government agree that vibrant commitment and understanding of the role of faith in today's society—let alone understanding of the context of our troubled world, particularly areas of the Middle East—is so essential for our children that we had better get enthusiastic people in to the job.

2.21 pm

**Lord Parekh (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my good friend the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries of Pentregarth, for securing this debate and introducing it with characteristic eloquence. The three minutes I have do not really allow me to say anything significant so I will make three quick points of criticism of religious education as it is practised in our schools.

First, it is not properly thought through or carefully organised; it is taught by teachers who are not properly trained and who do not have sufficient time; and there is no careful planning or organic build-up from one year to the next. That is one simple criticism that I wanted to start with.

The two other criticisms are far more significant. It is not clear why we want to teach religious education. Is it to fill time? Is it to deal with undisciplined children? Is it to placate religious people? Why is religious education part of our curriculum? I do not think that many people who insisted on this have really given it thought.

We have not realised that it is not concerned with being a good citizen. A citizen has no religion; only human beings have. It is concerned with how to make somebody a decent human being so that his humanity inspires citizenship in all that he does and is. We want to teach religious education to give him a better grasp of civilisation, in the composition of which religion

has played an important part; to make him a better human being and to get him to appreciate the countless advantages and disadvantages in being religious. Religion has been a force for evil as well as good. We have seen both. When it has been a force for good, it has been concerned with ecological issues, human brotherhood and emphasising human finitude—that human beings cannot be the lords of the universe. They are the sorts of things that religion should be teaching.

The third question is: what is taught? When you say we teach religious education, what is that? Is it teaching religions? What does that mean? Does it mean teaching the history, or the moral values? No, that is morality. What is distinctively religious about religious education? Here, many of us tend to lose sight of the fact that religion is ultimately concerned with spirituality, which is neither moral nor religious. I can be spiritual without having to believe in God—lots of people are. I can be deeply moral without being religious. In other words, spirituality has a distinct space in human life, and religious education should cultivate this and the ability to sensitively appreciate the spiritual aspect of life. Religious education, as we teach it, does not seem to do so.

2.25 pm

**Lord Warner (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interest as a member of Humanists UK and a former chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on humanism.

I agree with much of what the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, said, but I believe the problems on this issue are more fundamental. The UK population's commitment to religion has seriously changed since my teenage refusal to chant the Lord's Prayer in school assembly. In 2021, the British Social Attitudes survey revealed that 53% of the population had no religion. Only 12% said they were Anglicans, with young people making the biggest shift to secularism: 68% of 18 to 24 year-olds belonged in no religion, with just 18% saying they were Christians. Only 0.7% were Anglicans. Church of England support among young people is in free fall, with no evidence that this shift will be reversed. The 2021 census points in the same secular direction.

Yet the Church hierarchy, Parliament and educational policy-makers seem unwilling to recognise this new reality. This House still insists on starting proceedings with Anglican prayers, and we still have 26 Anglican Bishops here by right. As a House, we badly need to face up to the implications of this fundamental population shift to secularism. It calls into question both the state's funding of religious schools and the curriculum and practices of non-religious state-funded schools. There is now no justification, in my view, for compulsory daily acts of Christian worship in the two-thirds of state schools in England and Wales that are not Church schools. There are big question marks over the way in which religious belief is taught in these schools, and curriculum change is inevitable.

I appreciate that tackling the issue of Church of England schools is difficult but, even without tackling this contentious issue, other—quite major—reforms are possible. We could and should abolish compulsory acts of Christian worship in schools, and we should

[LORD WARNER]

move to teach an independently devised and more broadly based national education curriculum, as others have suggested, on faith and non-faith beliefs. This House might like to set an example by changing some of its own religious practices.

2.28 pm

**Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Aff):** My Lords, we live in a period in which Jewish schools have had to ramp up security to protect their pupils, and religious symbols of Judaism are being hidden by students in fear in non-Jewish schools. My question is: given that religion and politics have got very messy, who would be an RE teacher dealing with such fraught difficulties? Over the last few days, the front pages had the story of Michaela Community School, led by Katharine Birbalsingh, whom I admire but others do not—she is certainly controversial. Of all things, the school has been taken to court by a pupil for banning Muslim prayers. The head teacher had basically said, “We shouldn’t be divided by religion. We should have no prayers”. I was fascinated that one of the things the teacher said was that some pupils were being intimidated by their peers for not being religiously pious enough, and it was a kind of bullying.

There is a poisonous atmosphere out there. Even the question of whether we live in a Christian country is rather more awkward than one would think. I loved the explanation given by the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, of religion as education and knowledge, and I totally agree with him on that, but many British institutions seem embarrassed by the western Judeo-Christian tradition. Its accomplishments are more likely to be labelled as white privilege than as the repository of positive values and virtues.

Instead, in recent years the new religion is diversity and inclusion, which has incentivised faith groups to adopt politicised cultural religious identities and has proved a recipe for stirring up divisive tensions and encouraging group grievance-mongering and offence-taking. We should not forget that a schoolteacher from Batley Grammar School is still in hiding, in fear for his life, for the blasphemy of showing pupils an image of Muhammad in a religious studies class. He had no support from politicians or trade unions, was labelled Islamophobic and was told he was making a fuss about nothing, although the Parisian teacher Samuel Paty was decapitated for a similar offence of showing cartoons of Muhammad. We have to admit that this is difficult.

I shall finish with the Reverend Bernard Randall, who lost his job at a Christian school—Trent College in Derbyshire—because he delivered a sermon expressing approval of mainstream Christian teaching on marriage, biological sex and gender, and the head teacher reported him to Prevent. That bodes badly for RE teachers. I would avoid it like the plague. We have to be honest that it is more difficult than it sounds by just paying bursaries.

2.32 pm

**Baroness Meacher (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for tabling this Question for Short Debate. This is an incredibly important

issue affecting all children, and currently it is failing. He will not be surprised that I approach this subject from the perspective of non-religious children, whose beliefs are not recognised at present in RE. When the UK was overwhelmingly religious and Christian, the treatment of RE with that focus was completely understandable. The noble Lord, Lord Warner, has described the incredible decline in faith among young people. More than two-thirds describe themselves as non-religious. If RE is to be relevant to all children—and I want spiritual teaching as well as non-spiritual teaching to be relevant to all children—the Government’s first step should be to issue guidance making it clear that RE needs to be fully inclusive of non-religious worldviews. Indeed, the subject needs to be renamed “religion and worldviews”.

Last year’s Bowen judgment in the High Court provided legal clarity about the need for the subject to be objective and pluralistic and to include humanism within it. Indeed, since the Fox judgment of 2015, the subject has been required to be fully inclusive of humanism. In May 2023 a High Court ruling found that it was unlawful for Kent County Council to refuse to accept a humanist pupil as a member of an RE group. The Bowen judgment makes it clear not only that syllabuses must include humanism but that humanists must be included within RE. This is necessary in order for the UK to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights. That convention provides for non-religious worldviews to be read into most instances where religion is used in current law. As important as the legal requirement is the impact on children of an inclusive approach to RE. This enables children with belief to understand those who do not have a belief, and vice versa. Surely that is important for community cohesion.

I applaud the 2018 Commission on Religious Education chaired by the Very Reverend Dr John Hall, the Dean of Westminster. A core recommendation of that commission was the reform of RE to make it more inclusive. This reform is also the policy of the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education. This is the reform that the RE profession wants.

In conclusion, all faith schools should provide inclusive RE as an option on request but, most importantly, the Government need to legislate to reform the subject entirely, change its name to religion and worldviews, bring it within the national curriculum and ensure adequate funding for the subject. I support RE but want it to be broader.

2.34 pm

**Baroness Garden of Frognal (LD):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure to speak in this debate secured by the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries. His contributions to “Thought for the Day” are always enlightening—as are those of the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths—and start the day in a really good way. I hold him in great admiration and affection, particularly so after he gave a moving tribute to my husband at his funeral 16 years ago. He has written any number of books on religion and ethics but also on defence, literature and the arts—a veritable polymath, but also a very senior member of the Church of England. He was a founder member of the Oxford Abrahamic Group, bringing

together Christian, Muslim and Jewish scholars, so his wish to improve religious education in schools is not confined to Christianity.

As we have heard, RE is a compulsory subject in schools, but you would not always know that. It can be taught by teachers who have no religious education themselves. It can be passed from pillar to post, with no one teacher taking responsibility. This is not exactly a new issue. Many years ago, I taught French A-level at a convent where one of the set texts was Flaubert's story of Salome and the beheading of John the Baptist. My convent-educated and bright sixth-formers had never heard of John the Baptist. When I asked what they studied in their RE lessons, they said social issues, such as drug-taking, poverty and war, but not, it appeared, the Bible. My class therefore ended up doing more RE in French A-level than they did in RE. Luckily, they had heard about Jesus and knew about Christmas and Easter and that Catholics went regularly to Mass but, even in a convent, the Bible was a mystery.

As the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, has mentioned, when Damian Hinds was heading the DfE—how transitory Education Ministers have been—he initiated the £10,000 tax-free bursaries to attract teachers into RE, but the standing committee on RE reports that little progress has been made. If there are so few specialist teachers, it is scarcely surprising that the subject is woefully taught.

RE lessons should be a place for exploring the great world faiths, ensuring that students have a moral compass. I agree with the comments that they should also encompass the other aspects of humanism. Bible stories should be part of general knowledge, quite apart from the value of learning about goodness and sacrifice and understanding religious diversity, toleration and peace. There should be open, in-depth discussions of faith, so that all students, whether from faith families or not, can learn what religion means to practitioners and how important it is to be tolerant of those whose beliefs are different from one's own.

In our own communities, we see great division through religion, so it has to be good when Christian, Jewish and Muslim places of worship open their doors and welcome all to experience their forms of worship. To know is to understand and not to fear. But this will not be helped if children start life with no knowledge of religion. Can the Minister therefore say what consideration has been given to encouraging schools to work with local churches and faith groups to find people of religion for these lessons, and what plans do the Government have to ensure—as we are all calling for—that we have qualified teachers for this compulsory subject?

2.37 pm

**Baroness Twycross (Lab):** My Lords, this has been a most interesting and varied debate, and I join others in commending the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, for securing it. I cannot claim to have his knowledge, or the knowledge displayed by many speakers, including my noble friend Lord Griffiths, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham and the noble Lord, Lord Storey, or indeed the teaching experience

of the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, and the noble Baroness, Lady Garden. However, we can all agree, whatever our level of expertise, on creating an education system that delivers for all children. We can get the core subjects such as maths, English and the sciences right, with expert teachers in the classroom, but our education also needs to be broad enough to ensure that children develop the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed at school and into employment and adult life—and that includes religious education. As the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, put very succinctly, we clearly need this for an understanding of literature, and I say that as somebody who studied literature at university.

Our communities in the UK reflect the rich religious diversity of our population, but also include people without faith, such as humanists, as referenced by my noble friend Lord Griffiths, who also choose to have a value-led approach to how they live their lives. My understanding was that humanism should be included in RE in schools, and I would be grateful for clarification on that from the Minister when she sums up.

Children today are growing up in a far more diverse and increasingly secular society than the generations before them. As the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, said, RE is fundamental to both a knowledge of our country's Christian heritage and values and an understanding of other worldviews. It is hugely important that those of different faiths or no faith understand and respect each other. As many noble Lords, including the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, said, we have an increasingly polarised society. This debate is set against the context of conflict in the Middle East and the backdrop of a rise in hate crimes targeting people of particular faiths. We must work to counter hatred, intolerance and bigotry. Good RE teaching can and does contribute to this, and I want to make sure that we do not lose sight of the excellent work done by many RE teachers.

Given that RE is compulsory to offer in schools but is not part of the national curriculum and that parents can withdraw their children from classes, having high-quality and diverse teaching is clearly key to encouraging them not to do so. It should also not be the afterthought, as mentioned by a number of noble Lords, that Ofsted has found it to be in the school timetable. Does the Minister have specific numbers relating to how many children do not take part in RE where it is offered?

What is being done to end the postcode lottery when it comes to religious education in schools? As noted by many noble Lords, some students receive far more comprehensive and specialist teacher-led religious education than others. I would welcome the Minister's views on what more the Government can do to reverse the apparent decline in the number of specialist RE teachers and in RE teaching and on the many other questions raised in this debate.

2.40 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries of Pentregarth, on securing this important debate on religious education and in true "Thought for the Day"

[BARONESS BARRAN]

style on expressing his thoughts so eloquently. I also thank noble Lords around the Room for their insightful contributions throughout the debate.

As many of your Lordships have mentioned, it is vital that our children receive high-quality religious education. In a society where, according to the 2021 census—as was noted by the noble Lord, Lord Warner, and the noble Baroness, Lady Meacher—there has been a significant shift in the religious demographic in recent years, it is as important as ever for our children to gain knowledge, understanding and tolerance of a wide range of religious and non-religious beliefs.

As the noble and right reverend Lord set out, religious education is a truly unique subject which has personal, social and academic benefits. The noble Lord, Lord Parekh, asked why we teach religious education and what the point of it was. Other speakers have perhaps answered some of that already but, certainly from the Government's perspective, when done well, religious education can develop children's knowledge of British values and traditions, help them better understand those of other countries, and refine their ability to construct well-informed, balanced and structured arguments. It provides opportunities for pupils to engage with questions of belief, values, the meaning and purpose of life, and issues of right and wrong, and to do so—picking up on the spirit of what the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, said—in a respectful and safe environment.

Knowledge of world religions is also valuable in supporting our children to thrive in our own multicultural society as well as in terms of Britain's relationships with other countries. It is important that we all understand the values and perspectives of those who live around us as well as of those with whom we wish to conduct business or build diplomatic relationships overseas. The Government are committed to ensuring that RE delivers on all this, which is why it remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools in England for each pupil up to the age of 18. As we heard powerfully from the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, we also need teachers who bring great passion to the subject. In addition to the noble Lord, I want to thank a teacher from the West Country who sent me his thoughts ahead of this debate having seen an RE teacher. I am very grateful for his views.

Teacher recruitment and retention are crucial to every curriculum subject. As we have heard, teachers who are specialists in their subject are key to maintaining standards. The department is driving an ambitious programme to transform the teacher training process. Specifically in relation to recruitment, we are focusing on how we do our marketing, support prospective trainees and use more real-time data and insight from our new application process to boost recruitment where it is needed most.

A number of noble Lords, including the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham, questioned the level of recruitment to RE teaching posts. As your Lordships set out, in the academic year 2023-24, 44% of the recruitment target for RE was reached. This is lower when compared with recent years, although it should be noted that the target increased by more than 45%

to 655. There is work to be done here and the Government recognise that initial teacher training recruitment remains challenging due to the competitive graduate labour market. Therefore, we were pleased to announce that the department will again be offering a £10,000 bursary for RE trainee teachers starting initial teacher training in 2024-25, which we hope will incentivise greater numbers to apply.

We also continue to offer eight-week subject knowledge enhancement courses, or SKEs. Currently, in the 2023-24 academic year, a subject knowledge enhancement course is available for candidates who have the potential to become an outstanding teacher but need to increase their subject knowledge. Those courses are available in nine secondary subjects and primary maths. They include an eight-week course in religious education. All these courses can be undertaken on a full-time or part-time basis but they must be completed before qualified teacher status can be recommended and awarded. Eligible candidates may be entitled to a bursary of £175 per week to support them financially while completing their course.

The noble Baroness, Lady Fox, highlighted some of the pressures that RE teachers in particular face. Of course, once recruited, teachers should feel supported in their role. By its very nature, religious education can contain contentious and sensitive content, not least in the context of current world events, and pupils' curiosity can rightly lead to challenging questions and comments. That links back to the fact that teachers who are teaching RE need to feel confident in their knowledge and their ability to deal with these challenges and that they are supported by a great curriculum and appropriate and accurate materials.

The noble Baroness, Lady Meacher, asked whether non-religious world views are being included in the RE curriculum. She referred to the recent court rulings which have made it clear that religious education should include the teaching of non-religious world views. Non-religious world views are already an integral part of the department's religious studies GCSE and A-level subject content specification.

The noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, and other noble Lords stressed the importance of having a strong curriculum. To assist in this, Oak National Academy is in the process of procuring curriculum resources for religious education which will mean that high-quality lessons are available nationwide, benefitting teachers and pupils where schools opt to use them. They will begin to be available from autumn this year and will be fully available by September 2025.

The noble and right reverend Lord also asked whether the Government intended to introduce a particular national plan for religious education. We currently have no plans to do this nor to revisit the recommendations made by the Commission on Religious Education. Our policy remains that curricula should be determined locally, whether through locally agreed syllabuses or by individual schools. Obviously the Oak resources I referred to will be available to all.

Having said that, the Government also welcome the work that the Religious Education Council has done to assist curriculum developers by publishing its *National Content Standard for Religious Education in England*.



This is not a curriculum in itself but, without specifying precisely the content that schools should teach, it provides a non-statutory benchmark against which syllabus providers and others can choose to inform or evaluate their work.

That links to the question from the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, about dedicated expenditure on religious education in schools. The Government's stance remains that we trust schools to judge how to use the funding that we give them. We trust their judgment and we give them autonomy to decide how to use that funding. On the question from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham about whether we are planning to include religious education in the EBacc, I think he knows the answer: there are no current plans to do so.

The noble Lord, Lord Storey, and the noble Baroness, Lady Garden, both talked about the number of schools failing to comply with their duty to teach religious education. As your Lordships pointed out, schools that are not teaching RE are acting unlawfully or are in breach of their academy funding agreements. In answer to the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, we do not monitor each school's compliance with the duty to teach RE any more than we do for English, maths or any other subject. If there are concerns that a school is not teaching RE, they can be raised via the school's complaints procedure. If they are not resolved, they can be escalated to the department.

In concluding, I restate the Government's commitment to ensure that every school is fulfilling its statutory duty to deliver RE. It is mandatory now and there are no plans to change this. It is the right of every child to receive a well-rounded, comprehensive and high-quality religious education. We recognise some of the challenges that your Lordships have pointed out, but I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, about the importance of "humanum", of developing the human, which all our schools strive to do, every day.

2.53 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## National Immunisation Programme

*Question for Short Debate*

3 pm

*Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick*

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to accelerate the adoption of new innovative vaccines by the National Immunisation Programme.

**Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab):** My Lords, I was delighted to secure this debate as it is a subject of significant importance and one in which I have a close interest. Noble Lords will be aware of my particular interest in RSV, on which I had a Question only yesterday. But this is more about the global issue of which vaccines can get accelerated on to the national immunisation programme.

Undoubtedly, vaccines have contributed significantly to health and prosperity around the world ever since the pioneering work of Edward Jenner, who developed the world's first vaccines for smallpox. The World Health Organization has said that vaccinations are

"one of the best health investments money can buy".

Vaccines are critical to the prevention and control of infectious disease outbreaks, and they underpin global health security.

The Covid-19 pandemic imposed enormous pressure in 2020 and 2021, and it showed the importance of having robust plans and systems in place to address emergencies. Despite some setbacks, what both the UK and other countries achieved was remarkable. The pace at which vaccines were developed, manufactured and rolled out to patients was excellent. It was good that government, industry and the NHS came together to collaborate in order to accelerate existing timetables, taking months rather than years to get the job done.

I welcome the recently published *NHS Vaccination Strategy* and its emphasis on improving uptake rates and optimising the quality of the delivery of clinical trials. However, the strategy focuses on the better rollout of existing vaccines but does not include what more can be done to ensure that the UK has in place the right infrastructure for approvals and delivery, in order to enable new vaccines to reach patients as quickly as possible. I believe this is a mistake: we should focus on both. Put simply, we must improve the delivery of existing vaccines and spend existing money more effectively and efficiently in order to get new vaccines to patients more quickly and effectively. In fact, I received briefings this week from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society about the value of community pharmacies—their work had already been seen in the rollout during Covid-19—and how they can be used in this new deployment.

I was delighted recently to chair a round-table discussion with key stakeholders, hosted by GSK in your Lordships' House on 19 October. It looked at this issue, lessons learned from Covid and how they could be applied to the national immunisation programme as we move forward. That discussion was very timely, following the Health and Social Care Committee's report on vaccination, in which it said:

"It would be incredibly disappointing to reach a point where the vaccines themselves were ready but the infrastructure to approve and deliver them was still some time away".

Our round table concluded many things, such as that quicker availability and increased uptake of vaccines would lead to a healthier nation, which in turn would have direct and immediate benefits for our economy.

Rather than looking at vaccines as a cost, we should see them as an investment. Recent studies have shown that the return on investment for vaccines can be as high as 14:1. Slow and low uptake of vaccines can cost the NHS money and soak up valuable resource. Each month that vaccine rollout is delayed means more patients attending general practice and A&E, and being there for hours on end, as well as more patients being admitted to hospital.

[BARONESS RITCHIE OF DOWNPATRICK]

Working together, the Government, the NHS and industry can deliver a first-class national immunisation programme that gets new vaccines to patients as quickly as possible and delivers significant financial, operational and economic benefits. At a time when the Prime Minister has said that reducing waiting lists is a key priority for his Government, we must not forget the role that vaccines can play in helping to deliver this. I hope the Government are listening and will act. I am happy to share the round table's report and its key recommendations with Members of your Lordships' House, but we must turn words into action. We should be ambitious for patients, because we want to deal with all the health implications. We also want to address the new diseases that have not been subject to vaccines and could be readily dealt with.

We need a clear commitment from the Government to accelerate the NIP, and a clear and timetabled plan to achieve that. We need a commitment to work with industry and other stakeholders to deliver that plan. We must not let capacity or capability determine the speed at which vaccines enter the programme. That will mean a commitment to resourcing the JCVI adequately, and we need to improve JCVI horizon scanning and the liaison with industry. As we did during Covid-19, we should also establish a single front door to help industry navigate across government on routine vaccines.

I have some questions for the Minister. Will he give concrete commitments today to ensure the acceleration of the NIP, with a clear and timetabled plan to achieve it, and to work with industry and other stakeholders to develop that plan? If such commitments are given, can the Minister provide us with the timetabled plan, including an indication of the resources—staff and money—to deliver it? I know that there are many competing priorities for the Government, but there are also many for the National Health Service, not least the need to keep people well. However, these recommendations are all based on valuable lessons learned during Covid. I therefore seek your Lordships' support for delivering them, as they will benefit patients, the NHS and the economy.

The UK built a world-leading vaccine development and deployment system during Covid-19 that enabled it to be at the forefront of global pandemic efforts. It is vital that the lessons learned during the pandemic are built on, to ensure that the UK has the right infrastructure in place for the approval and delivery of new vaccines on to the NIP, reaching patients as quickly as possible. We have the proven wherewithal to do it through the NHS and all the associated bodies.

Finally, when will the acceleration and accompanying works for NIP take place, and when will the funding be in place? I look forward to the Minister's response and the contributions of other noble Lords on this very important issue, which impacts right across the UK. It relates specifically to NHS England, but I come from Northern Ireland, where this is a devolved matter. I am sure Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would like to do the same and see these approvals on to the national immunisation programme. It is vital for our health, our economy and our society.

3.09 pm

**Baroness Twycross (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Ritchie for securing this debate. I declare an interest as the chair of the London Resilience Forum and vice-president of the Encephalitis Society, a charity that advocates the use of vaccines for prevention of encephalitis.

Like my noble friend, I feel very strongly about vaccination and access to it. I would not normally use my own life story to back up a point in a debate but it feels appropriate to do so on today's subject. As a teenager, I got mumps. It was very mild and nobody was particularly concerned. In those days it was treated as another childhood sickness that it was helpful for children to pick up at some point. The routine vaccine was introduced just a few years later as part of the MMR suite of vaccines, but it was not available at that time. Over the course of the few weeks after my mild dose of mumps, I became increasingly ill, and after several weeks of acute illness I was diagnosed with viral encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. I am one of the lucky people who has contracted encephalitis but had a good recovery, with very few lasting effects. In the worst-case scenario, encephalitis can kill or cause brain damage or severe long-term disabilities.

Had MMR been available to me as a child, I would not have had this serious illness, which severely impacted my health throughout my teenage years and into my early 20s. Childhood vaccines save lives, limit disabling side-effects and prevent serious illness, but we do not yet have all the vaccines available that could do this.

We know that chickenpox can also lead to viral encephalitis or other complications, including death. I am delighted that the JCVI now recognises the life-saving potential of the varicella vaccine. I pay tribute to all those who have been campaigning on this issue over many years, including Professor Benedict Michael from Liverpool University, to whom I had the pleasure of speaking about this issue earlier this week. As noble Lords are probably aware, the varicella vaccine is routinely used in other countries, such as the USA, where it has been part of a suite of childhood vaccines since the 1990s. Other developed countries use it, including Italy and Israel. As the chair of the JCVI, Professor Sir Andrew Pollard, has said:

"Adding the varicella vaccine to the childhood immunisation programme will dramatically reduce the number of chickenpox cases in the community, leading to far fewer of those tragic, more serious cases".

I understand that one of the arguments used previously against the introduction of the varicella vaccine has been a general belief in the UK that having some chickenpox circulating in the population provides greater immunity to older people at risk of shingles or shingles encephalitis from the virus. We should have evidence-based medical interventions. There is no evidence of higher rates of shingles or shingles encephalitis in older people as a result of childhood vaccination against varicella over the past 30-plus years in the States. Now that older and more vulnerable people are routinely offered a vaccine against shingles, which I welcome, this herd immunity argument should be discarded as the outdated argument that it is and confined to the past. Does the Minister agree with this position, and that chickenpox

parties, which, shockingly, still take place, belong to the Victorian era and should also be confined to the past?

Can the Minister tell us whether and when the Government are planning to introduce the varicella vaccine? If he cannot, can he say when the Government are likely to take a decision on this issue? If the vaccine is added to the suite of childhood diseases that parents and guardians are encouraged to take up on behalf of children, how will the Government increase public health messaging to ensure that they understand exactly why this is needed?

Tragically, it is not just new vaccines that require public health messaging. In recent days we have heard of measles outbreaks in the West Midlands. We know that vaccine take-up is not uniform across social demographic groups. Can the Minister say how the department is addressing this and making sure that the current outbreak does not disproportionately impact specific groups?

Regrettably, the false claims about MMR are still causing vaccine hesitancy among some parents, and a whole generation of children, who are now young people, are undervaccinated. I raised the low take-up of MMR in London with the Minister last year and am grateful for his response at the time. I was pleased to hear from the UKHSA in London about work that is being done to ensure that MMR vaccines are available to students.

I appreciate that the Minister may not have this information to hand, but will he commit to looking into this work to ensure that this type of initiative is taking place across the country? Are there similar initiatives for other groups of adults who may have missed out? Will he commit to making sure that every effort is made to push back on the continued false claims or rumours about the MMR vaccine?

My noble friend mentioned the RSV vaccine. As noble Lords will be aware, this virus is the major cause of babies and young children having to be admitted to hospital, with more than 33,000 admissions every year, including 20 to 30 avoidable and tragic deaths of otherwise healthy children. Can the Minister commit to a timeline for introducing the vaccine for this age group? We know that RSV affects older people too and leads to an estimated 175,000 GP visits, 14,000 hospital admissions and 8,000 deaths among people aged over 60 in the UK every year. These are not insignificant numbers.

The House of Lords Library Note helpfully outlines the range of vaccines currently available. Missing from this list is the Covid vaccine, which over the past few years has saved innumerable lives and reduced the already frightening number of people suffering from long Covid. We know from recent reports that by June 2022 only 44% of the population had taken up their recommended number of jabs and boosters. In the early stages of the vaccine programme, a huge amount of cross-sectoral effort went into tackling disproportionate uptake in the face of considerable organised disinformation about the vaccine. What learning have the department and the NHS taken from that effort during the pandemic? How can and will that be applied to ensure that take-up improves to prevent future

serious impacts of Covid, where possible, including preventing avoidable deaths? Will the Minister tell us when we will know what the long-term plans are for continuing to offer Covid vaccinations as part of a suite of vaccines offered to older and vulnerable people? Are the Government planning to include vaccines against RSV for these groups? Returning to the Covid vaccine, I ask: will the Government allow and perhaps encourage the commercial provision of Covid vaccines in future, as is the case with the flu vaccine, which is readily available in pharmacies?

My final point is on investment in science and technology. I think we are all proud of the groundbreaking work of British scientists in the fight against Covid. It was an unprecedented achievement in terms of the speed of the development and delivery of a new vaccine, as my noble friend Lady Ritchie stated. Can the Minister say what planning the department is undertaking to ensure that we use this generation's success to inspire the next generation of epidemiologists and what investment it is planning to do this? How is he working with colleagues in other relevant departments to ensure this is possible? As I am sure noble Lords have gathered, this is an issue I feel very passionately about. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to this debate.

3.18 pm

**Lord Allan of Hallam (LD):** My Lords, I am extremely grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, for both the opportunities she has provided us with to debate vaccination this week. The bulk of my remarks will follow closely the comments made by the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, but first I want to follow up on the RSV Question yesterday. The Minister's Answer made me rather more nervous than reassured. I asked who was going to be responsible for the RSV vaccination programme and he described a landscape in which there are different teams dealing with infants, children, old people and so on. I do not want to be mean to the Minister because I know he is struggling through a cold while turning up to debate these issues and I am hesitant to correct him, but I wonder whether the correct answer actually is that Steve Russell, the chief delivery officer of NHS England and the person responsible for vaccination screening, is the person whom we should praise if the RSV programme is rolled out well or hold accountable if it is not. It seemed to me as I looked at it that Steve Russell may be the name I was looking for as the single responsible owner for that programme.

In terms of my broader comments, there are three areas that I want to touch on. The first is access to vaccination and immunisation records where any individual wants to understand what they or their children have had and where the gaps are. This still leaves a huge amount to be desired. Again, we saw an example during Covid of how this can work well. Everybody had an immediate interest, not least related to travel and access to facilities, in getting hold of those records; we produced them in double-quick time, and they are still there today. However, if you go beyond that and try to find your broader vaccination and immunisation records, it is a mess. I went online to look for it and found Connected Nottinghamshire,

[LORD ALLAN OF HALLAM]

which helpfully offered some advice. That advice is multiple screenshots saying go into the NHS app and click on “consultations and events” or “medicines” and various other routes through, and they all basically end up telling you to go back and ask your GP. That is a super inefficient use of a GP’s time.

We have done all this work with the NHS app—take-up was boosted dramatically though the Covid vaccination certificate programme, we have invested a huge amount in it, and we now have medical records accessible through it—but, unless the Minister can correct me, it seems that, in most of the country, if an individual says, “I want to see what vaccinations I have had and what is missing”, they will not be able to do that. There is no simple, straightforward way to do it. I hope that the Minister can talk about whether the Government have a programme to enable that to happen, as it seems a very basic and fundamental thing. Knowing that information can help to boost take-up rates, which is what we are looking for. If people can see the gaps, they are much more likely to try to fill them.

The other part of that is integration with other sources of vaccination and immunisation. Obviously, there are travel vaccines, most of which are, correctly, not offered by the NHS; they are seen as a voluntary thing that individuals should pay for. However, if they have paid for a travel vaccine, there is an interest for the individual and a broader public health interest to make sure that that is integrated into their medical records. That is not the case today. There may also be workplace vaccinations. A lot of workplaces offer flu programmes. Other noble Lords may have had this experience: I took up the flu vaccine here, at our workplace, and was then pinged every few weeks by a reminder from my GP practice to come in for a flu vaccine, and I would go back to it saying, “I’ve had it”, and it would say “We don’t know that you’ve had it”. There is clearly a lack of joined-up connection there. This year, I went to have it done by the GP just to make sure I did not get those reminders every week. If workplaces have gone to the trouble of putting in place vaccination programmes, the least that we could do is to integrate those into NHS records. There are models, such as Patients Know Best, that allow you to integrate your own personal health data, and I hope that the Minister can indicate that there is some work going on in government to make sure that we follow that kind of model and bring this all together.

The second area that I am interested in is around invitations to participate in programmes and how those information flows work. Again, Covid was a model of clarity: you knew what you were getting and why you were getting it. The invitations went out to people using lots of modern channels, which made it very easy. People learned the language of Covid vaccination—“Are you getting a Spikevax or a Pfizer?”—but it was a very rare and exceptional situation. If you look back at the norm, the norm is that it is very confusing. The NHS produces a nice chart of all the vaccinations that you will get, but it uses jargon and abbreviations. I understand why—those are the accurate terms—but, for an ordinary person coming across this,

they really are not very clear about what they are getting, why they are getting it and why it is important for them.

Again, I do not think that this is just in the area of vaccinations. I cite my personal experience: I got a text message from my practice asking if I wanted to come in for AF screening. As I am a health spokesperson in this place, I thought “I should know what AF is”. I looked it up and it stands for atrial fibrillation. If it had sent me a message that said, “We want to check that your heart is ticking over as it should; please pop in”, it would have been a lot more attractive than one asking if I wanted to come in for AF screening. I think most people will not have bothered to look it up and decide whether they should have it. I hope that the Minister can say who is looking at both the language of and the distribution channels for all these invitations for vaccinations and immunisations to make sure that they are optimised. To people working in the tech sector, this is known as UX—user experience—and they understand that changing the language on something changes the click-through rate dramatically. Similar discipline is needed here to make sure that all the invitations to vaccinations and immunisations are optimised for the target audiences and make them as likely as possible to click and to go and get that vaccination.

There is a generalised problem with distribution channels in the NHS that each screening programme has its own systems for call and recall, and they are not co-ordinated or joined up. If we want take-up of screening, vaccination and immunisation, the least we can do is to join up those programmes, have consistency around language and channels and some kind of pattern and schedule so that people understand what they are being invited for and when. I hope the Minister comments on consistency and co-ordination.

The final area on which I will touch is that of risk. This again follows the comments of the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, and this is critical to take-up. MMR showed us how this can go off course. People weighed a risk that turned out to be false against a genuine and much more significant risk of suffering from a real disease. The noble Baroness’s personal comments showed us just how important it is that people take up these kinds of vaccinations. The result was a situation in which children have been harmed and not benefitted, which is still ongoing today. There will be children catching measles now, some of whom will, sadly, have very serious complications, essentially because of a false assessment of risk: the risk of MMR against the so-called, supposed risk that people presented on the other side. In some ways, this is comparable to people switching to driving every time there is a train crash. The data is clear: the train is safer than the car at all times. People often react to a single incidence of a problem. With a vaccine, as we saw with Covid, there will be somebody who has a heart attack following a vaccination, but that does not mean that the risk of not having the vaccination is better than the risk of having it. It just means that one person, sadly, had a heart attack.

There is a lot to be done on communicating risk. We need continually to help people to understand the rationale for each vaccination programme, not just the

new ones but existing ones, as MMR has shown. I would be interested in understanding what the Government are doing to address this challenge, particularly considering the different levels of trust that different messengers have. We all understand that doctors, for example, are far more trusted than politicians like us. Pharmacists have a very trusted role within the community. We need to think carefully about how we communicate risk and use the most trusted sources.

I again thank the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, for this opportunity, and I hope that the Minister will refer to the points I have raised, perhaps in writing, to spare his voice, if he cannot respond to everything verbally today.

3.27 pm

**Baroness Merron (Lab):** My Lords, I add my congratulations to my noble friend Lady Ritchie, who is as we all agree a great champion for better health through greater take-up and availability of vaccines and immunisation programmes. She rightly described them as a sound investment by the NHS, and I certainly agree.

There are two main issues at play: first, the failure of already approved and recommended drugs to be included in the national immunisation programme and, secondly, the number of factors that have slowed down how long the whole process takes. It potentially takes around a decade to pass through every stage of trial and approval and two years or more for a new vaccine to reach patients post regulatory authorisation.

I am sure that we all want vaccines to be available to patients quicker and to see full account taken of patient safety and cost effectiveness. It seems to me that the way forward is to emphasise systemic options to improve availability without sacrificing the necessary safeguards.

Like other noble Lords, I am grateful to the many stakeholders who have conveyed their views to me on how to accelerate the adoption of new innovative vaccines by the national immunisation programme. Their main suggestions for tackling these damaging delays focus on ensuring that the overall system works better while adapting to additional risk, perhaps in extraordinary circumstances, such as those we saw in the Covid pandemic.

But it bears pointing out that this is against the backdrop of a step in the wrong direction, which we have heard about, such that, due to a decade of declining rates of uptake of the MMR vaccination among preschool children, for example, the UK no longer has the status of having eradicated measles, according to the World Health Organization. This is borne out by Steve Russell, whom the noble Lord, Lord Allan, referred to; he is the chief delivery officer and national director for vaccinations and screening at NHS England. He highlights a decline in vaccination-programme uptake, particularly for childhood vaccinations, in the foreword to the NHS England strategy.

I thank my noble friend Lady Twycross for bringing before us the importance of childhood vaccination. She brought it into focus by sharing her own story, for which I am sure we all thank her, but her call for evidence-based intervention and for ensuring coverage

by immunisation programmes surely must be heeded. It would be helpful to hear what discussions continue to take place across government about tackling misinformation and disinformation about MMR and other vaccines, which we obviously still see proliferating on social media.

I will put a few points to the Minister about the much-needed improvement of the UK's performance in immunisation development and delivery. We heard from my noble friend Lady Ritchie about the GSK-hosted round table, which she kindly chaired. I noticed that she described the response during the Covid-19 pandemic as "remarkable" and I endorse her comments. That response magnified the value of vaccines to individuals, health systems, society and the economy, and it is absolutely vital to embed the lessons that were learned before they are lost, as she said. So I amplify the points made by my noble friend, because it would help to hear from the Minister about what lessons the Government have learned from the pandemic, what assessment they have made of the potential value of each of those lessons and what steps are being taken, at the very least, to assess the potential benefits from continuing in that manner, but ideally to take action to embed in the system all the good practice from which we have learned.

Within this, I echo the call for pharmacies to be complimented for rising to the challenge during the pandemic. They continue to play an increasingly key role in providing advice and healthcare, including convenient and accessible vaccination services. Does the Minister consider that community pharmacies can play an even larger role in immunisation programmes by expanding the range of vaccines that they can offer, including those for shingles, RSV and pneumonia? What steps are being taken to marshal the forces of community pharmacies and expand their potential as community well-being hubs?

The second point is a predictable issue with a bearing not on safety but on bureaucracy. I am aware of the potential complexities, but what steps are the Government taking to explore the adaptation of funding mechanisms to expected new programmes in order to avoid delays and issues because of the constraints of rigid envelopes and complex approval processes? What are the general steps in the areas of improving resourcing, co-ordination and process across regulators and health-technology assessment bodies?

There is an increasing focus on the role of vaccination in fighting AMR. The JCVI has shown some willingness to consider its impact in its value-assessment criteria. I suggest to the Minister that this could be an interesting development. Given that it is newer science, it would be interesting to hear from the Government what assessment they have made of the AMR-reduction benefit from vaccines and whether they are taking any steps to explore how it can be harnessed further.

With further reference to the JCVI, I want to raise the suggestion of evolving its work to better enable the adoption of innovative vaccines. Broadly, it is important that the JCVI is continuously looking ahead. Can the Minister indicate how the Government are working with JCVI to ensure this mode of travel?

[BARONESS MERRON]

I was very interested in the argument put forward by Policy Exchange that a busy pipeline of new vaccine technologies in the coming years, including a growing number of therapeutic as well as preventative candidates, coupled with a concerning decline—as we have discussed—in the uptake of key programmes such as MMR, necessitates a fresh look at the architecture and delivery model for vaccine development and deployment. Policy Exchange’s key recommendations on delivery include boosting ministerial oversight—I am sure the Minister will have a view on that; expanding the role for community pharmacy, which we have talked about many times in our Chamber; creating a new workforce model; and piloting a local delivery model called a “vaccine collaborative”. The positive and overarching principle behind those suggestions is that of extending care further into the community. It would be helpful to get a sense of the Government’s ambition in this area and the steps they are taking to move beyond traditional delivery mechanisms to make this improvement.

As I said at the beginning, we all want an improvement in the UK’s performance in immunisation development and delivery. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

3.37 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Markham) (Con):** I too thank the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, for allowing us to have this debate today. To my mind, this is the right way to do business—for want of a better word. We have smart people who know about the subjects as well as people who have personal experience, and we are having a good conversation about how we can learn the lessons from the situation, make improvements and make sure that we are up to speed with the latest that is going on. Again, I thank the noble Baroness and all the contributors to this debate. I hope that I respond in the right vein.

As many have mentioned, we have a good track record in terms of the standing of the immunisation programme. NIHR is a fundamental piece of that. As mentioned on a few occasions, the horizon scanning by the JCVI is obviously a key part as well. I want to talk later about some of the Covid dividends that I am starting to see in terms of point-of-care medicines, with Moderna and BioNTech using messenger RNA. That goes right to what the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, said about the need to look at the new delivery mechanisms.

The JCVI is key to it all. This debate gave me the opportunity to understand more about the process that it goes through in trying to do that horizon scanning and make sure that we understand what is coming through in the pipeline, what differences it will make and how we evaluate that quickly. We have also commissioned the National Immunisation Schedule Evaluation Consortium to undertake policy research, going upstream even further, looking at the use of different vaccines and schedules.

As I mentioned before, probably the best thing we are doing in terms of the heritage is putting in place the new agreements, which I very much call a Covid

dividend, knowing that we will be spending hundreds of millions a year on Covid vaccines for the foreseeable future. Let us make a benefit out of that necessity and get both BioNTech and Moderna to invest in the infrastructure in the UK so that we can do more of this research going forward. That is what I mean by the Covid dividend, as the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, mentioned. It means looking at the point of care for some cancers, which is particularly exciting. It looks at a person’s particular cancer and cells and then alters and gives personalised treatment. I am sure we are all familiar with some of this. The beauty is that a person’s own body attacks the affected cells, without the blunt instrument of chemo, which kills lots of cells around the cancer as well.

The challenge—this goes right to the point made by the noble Baronesses, Lady Ritchie and Lady Merron, who asked how we deliver and whether the infrastructure is right for doing these sorts of things—is that all of our sudden you are moving from a model of mass production of vaccines in a big factory to individual, tailored creation of vaccines, and often some of the substances are very unstable. In one example I was given, you have only 20 minutes to use it. In that environment, you need to look much more at the real point of care and have a point-of-presence delivery that is not a big factory but where the capability is very close to the patient, whether in a GP or hospital environment, to produce and then deliver those sorts of drugs. In terms of our main learnings, that will be a major dividend from Covid and will transform the whole way in which we deliver our medicines. I hope that, in time, we will see the replacement of chemo in a lot of places with much more specific, delivered medicines.

As I said, I will write about anything I may have missed—as noble Lords will be able to hear, I am very croaky, and I have another debate after this one. In reply to the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, I would indeed be interested in hearing the GSK results from the round table. I hope that I have given some reassurance on the infrastructure, but I will give more detail on that as well.

The key point is that, while we can talk about all the sexy stuff in terms of the innovation and treatments, the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, from her own experience of issues around MMR, really shows the importance of this. As I mentioned in the debate the other day, I spoke to Chris Whitty specifically about this. It is the most infectious disease out there. We all got used to R rates of 1.1 and 1.2 during Covid. That is a really big R rate, where you know it will be exponential. Noble Lords heard me mention that the R rate on measles is 13, which is massive. One in 1,000 people suffer from brain damage from it, so I completely agree with the noble Baroness that the idea of chickenpox parties is very outdated. I remember them from my childhood. I know that they are reviewing the chickenpox vaccine as we speak.

As I said, we are gearing up on the RSV process. The tender is going out as we speak, and we are looking at delivery this autumn. As I mentioned the other day, it is a different process depending on whether it is for maternal or baby use, or for the over-75s, but we are going through that process.

I will come on to some of the other questions. Thank you for the research; I agree on Steve Russell. The main point made by the noble Lord, Lord Allan, was about user-friendliness. I had my own experience of this when, knowing that I had these debates coming up, I asked the team to get me a schedule of everything that the JCVI has approved. They gave me a list of all these vaccinations, and I had to go back with my tail between my legs and ask, “Can you tell me what all these things are for?”. The noble Lord mentioned AF—I like to think that, similarly, I know quite a few of the abbreviations these days, but I needed them to give me the Noddy guide. The language for those using the app is vital. It is a critical piece to help inform people, especially when they are looking at their records. As the noble Lord is probably aware, the records are currently forward-looking: we need to start getting them to go back historically, and that is something I see a real utility in; it is not there today but it needs to be. The beauty of that is it can be optimised for the target audience. On the question of how we increase uptake in those hard-to-reach areas—as the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, mentioned—the most effective way of doing that to date has been ringing up the parents of under-5s, and then moving on to under-11s and under-25s. Doing that through the app will clearly be more effective in terms of time and money, so that must be the way forward.

The role of community pharmacies is a vital part of delivering point-of-care medicines. I was really interested to hear on one of my trips that GPs in America are really struggling as a profession these days. They cannot recruit them; I asked why not, and they said the problem was that many of the routine things that GPs were making money from had been mass-industrialised by the likes of CVS and Walgreens. This really resonated when the noble Baroness mentioned the app; we need to make sure these vital medicinal and well-being hubs are thriving, and that we do not repeat the American experience. That is why Pharmacy First is a very positive thing for promoting community pharmacies as a place for patients to get care and as a way of improving the finances and commercial viability of these places that I see as key assets.

The question about the AMR benefits of these vaccines was interesting; I do not know the answer off the top of my head, but I will take it away and try to come back with a detailed answer. To conclude—

**Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab):** I thank the noble Lord for giving way. In the fullness of time—I know time is short today—could he give some thought, along with his ministerial colleagues, to the acceleration of the NIP programme so that it is possible to get other vaccines on to it, because of the infrastructure, the funding, the investment and the staff in it, so that we can use the good practice we have to benefit our economy, health and patients generally?

**Lord Markham (Con):** Yes, I must admit that I need to write to the noble Baroness on the NIP programme because I do not have the detail, but I undertake to do that.

In conclusion, I thank noble Lords; these informed debates have real value. I will take up those points about the use of clear language and acronyms, and make sure that we are accelerating those basic vaccines, which is a vital part of this.

3.49 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Dementia

### Question for Short Debate

4 pm

*Asked by Baroness Browning*

To ask His Majesty’s Government how they plan to create a parity of esteem between health and social care to address dementia.

**Baroness Browning (Con):** My Lords, I declare my interests as co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia and as an ambassador of the Alzheimer’s Society. I bring this debate to the House today because dementia affects 944,000 people in the UK, or one in 11 of those over the age 65, and the number is predicted to reach 1.6 million people by 2040. It is the leading cause of death in this country.

Dementia is an umbrella term for a number of conditions, the most prevalent of which is Alzheimer’s. Symptoms include memory loss, behavioural change, motor function loss and visual processing issues, among many others. It is degenerative and terminal and, as of now, there is no cure. All stages of the disease have a need for both social care and healthcare, from diagnosis to death. Ironically, diagnosis is still a long wait in many parts of the country. Unfortunately, we do not know how long people are waiting because the data is not collected. I will say more later about end-of-life care.

It is essential that these two services—health and social care—work in tandem and are resourced to enable them to do so. This will avoid the historic tension of buck-passing of responsibility, excessive delays in support and letting down both the patient and their carers. I know that many Members of this House have first-hand experience of caring for people with dementia—I do myself. To give a real feel for what this is like, I commend the current ad on our screens from the Alzheimer’s Society called “The Ultimate Vow”—noble Lords may have seen it—which portrays Laura and Adam, a married couple on their dementia journey. It is very moving and also very accurate.

Today, I would like the Minister to address healthcare and social support as of equal value and inseparable. That requires not just parity of esteem between them but a reorientation of systems away from siloed professions and a focus on care in hospital. Shockingly, NICE reports that one-quarter of hospital beds are occupied by people with dementia, often due to emergency admissions for avoidable reasons such as falls and urinary tract infections. I therefore say to the Minister that there is no more compelling reason for hospital at home, including residential care homes, than this group of people, and I add that that should also apply to hospice at home. Decades of failure to plan and resource services adequately to enable personalised care for a condition as complex and as common as

[BARONESS BROWNING]

dementia is long overdue. Starting from diagnosis, all patients should have a care plan, which clearly will need reviewing as things change, for change they will, becoming more challenging over time. In six years of caring for my husband with Alzheimer's, nobody ever suggested a care plan. The one that I had was one that I devised in my brain. Care plans should apply to everyone, including those who are self-funding.

Less than 65% of people with dementia have a formal diagnosis—a figure we simply would not tolerate for other conditions. We are not talking just about people with memory lapses; at all stages of the pathway trained staff are essential. I welcome the Government's recent announcements of funding for social care training. Only 45% of the social care workforce have a record of dementia training, but please do not forget healthcare: district nurses receive good training, but training for hospital ward staff, even those on some geriatric wards, requires improvement, particularly on caring for people at the end of life. Some 30% of people with dementia do not die in their normal place of residence. Aside from the disorientating activity of an open ward or an A&E department, we should think twice about admitting anyone with advanced dementia into hospital unless there is a real medical imperative. Neither nurses nor healthcare workers are properly trained to provide palliative care for dementia patients. They certainly cannot provide the one-to-one care necessary. I know that my noble friend will have noted my earlier request for hospice at home for dementia patients.

There are more ways that we need parity and integration, and the establishment of integrated care systems in England provides some hope of a mechanism through which they might be achieved. There is no specific mandate for them to focus on dementia, but they are required to commission on local need.

The APPG on Dementia published a report last month entitled *Raising the Barriers*, which proposed local dementia strategies for each area, a named dementia lead in each integrated care system and a dementia steering group. Is this special pleading? Yes, it is and I make no apologies for it. The scale of dementia nationally is going to increase and, while we all hope that medical science will one day alleviate this challenge, this is today's challenge and tomorrow's and the day after's. This would be a huge move forward, combining health, social services and the voluntary sector.

Can the Minister say what the rules are for the decision-making of integrated care systems being made publicly available? Recently, owners of care home providing for people with dementia expressed concern to me about the transparency of decision-making, particularly on the transfer from hospital to residential care for the first time.

So far, I have not mentioned the cost to the patient or their carer. We have had many debates in the House about personal expense to the individual. The Alzheimer's Society estimates that two-thirds of the annual cost of dementia, reckoned at £34.7 billion, is paid for by people with dementia and their families, either in unpaid care or in paying for private social care. In addition, care providers often charge an extra premium because of the complexity of dementia, adding 15% to costs.

Additionally, support such as NHS continuing healthcare, including for complex health needs, is not easily obtained for dementia.

I realise that the much-promised reform of social care will be the catalyst that makes the financial cost to the individual more bearable, but that is now deferred until 2025. In the meantime, there is much that can be done to bring parity and fairness to the lives of dementia sufferers and their carers. I hope that the Minister finds constructive suggestions in our contributions to this debate that he can take forward. I am grateful to all Members here and to the Alzheimer's Society and the House of Lords Library, which provided briefings in preparation for this debate.

4.08 pm

**Baroness Pitkeathley (Lab):** My Lords, I give my thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, who, against convention, I should call my noble friend, because we have worked together on these issues for many years. I thank her not only for securing this debate but for hitting the nail on the head when it comes to the situation between health and social care. That lack of parity of esteem is at the root of all the problems she outlined.

Although a health condition and the biggest cause of death in the UK, dementia receives most attention through not the NHS but social care, which has always been the poor relation—the tail-end Charlie—vis-à-vis the NHS. That did not matter in 1948 when it was set up, because we all died much earlier, but as we grow older, with greater incidence of dementia and other comorbidities, it matters hugely. It matters for diagnosis—the noble Baroness mentioned the long waits—or the absence of any diagnosis at all. It matters for services, both the access to services suitable for dementia patients and their carers, and the quality of the services. We heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, about the lack of training of many people who provide those services. It also matters for access to medication, because we hear about the postcode lottery of what dementia medication is available.

Of course, its effect is nowhere more significant than it is on the biggest providers of care for those with dementia: not the NHS or social care but their own families—the spouses, sons, daughters and friends—who are often locked into an intolerable situation by the care they provide, however willing they are to undertake it. They suffer financially—we heard about the enormous costs of care—and they suffer physically, as their physical and mental health is at risk. Three-quarters of all carers report damage to their health as a direct result of their caring. They lose financial security and end up in poor health and often isolated, since their social circle shrinks dramatically. If there were more parity, we might be able to focus more on preventive services for dementia sufferers and their carers. There is no cure, but the progress of the disease can be slowed, or its onset delayed, by such things as exercise, group activities and interest groups—just the sort of things that are cut in times of austerity.

I hope the Minister will assure the Committee that the Government are committed to providing diagnosis and support at the earliest possible stage, and that they will shortly publish a long-term workforce strategy,



such as the NHS one, for the social care workforce. I remind your Lordships that one in three of us will get dementia—that is seven people in this Room. We owe it to ourselves as well as future society to make it a priority.

4.12 pm

**Baroness Greenfield (CB):** I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, for drawing attention to this timely and important issue. I am a neuroscientist working on brain mechanisms that underlie dementia and, accordingly, I declare an interest as the founder and CEO of a biotech company, Neuro-Bio Ltd, which is developing a novel approach to the diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer's disease. From first-hand experience, I can speak to the importance of strengthening the dementia research landscape. It is only by increasing resources for research that we will ever be able to realise if not a cure then, very plausibly and at last, a truly effective treatment. I thank the Alzheimer's Society for its assistance in preparing these remarks on the situation in the UK, where, as we heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, some 900,000 people are already living with dementia, a figure expected to rise to 1.6 million by 2040. As we also heard, one in three of those born today will develop the condition in their lifetime.

Yet combating this devastating disease is still not seen as the political priority it needs to be, and it has been historically underfunded. For example, just 31p is spent on dementia research for every pound invested in cancer research. That said, we should welcome the launch last year of the Government's £95 million commitment to the Dame Barbara Windsor dementia mission, but we now need to see a delivery timeline for this funding, and we urgently request further detail about how the Government plan to invest the money.

But it is not just about the money. The APPG on Dementia, of which I am a proud member, released in 2021 a report entitled *Fuelling the Moonshot*, which found that people affected by dementia feel a sense of empowerment from being involved in research, but also that patients are often unaware of the opportunities to take part. This has to change—action must be taken to improve participation in, and access to, clinical trials. Recent investment in research is welcome, but it will be wasted without increased participation in these studies.

Moreover, any consideration of those living with dementia also needs to include the carers. This is where social issues should be given equal attention. In 2011, I gave a lecture tour on behalf of Alzheimer's Australia, and I still vividly recall a conversation with a husband who had been caring for his wife, to whom he had been married for many decades. In the early hours of one morning, when he was changing her incontinence pads during a bout of diarrhoea, she, the love of his life, just stared at him, questioning who he was. It was then, he said, that he snapped. This gentleman described his situation as a "living death", which is a phrase that I have heard repeated by other carers of those with dementia. Often, those closest undergo all the experiences of bereavement, no longer able to share memories with a very special individual who none the less is still breathing. The big difference is that society does not accord them the time and support it would to those grieving an actual death.

We need more resources for research, action on optimising clinical trials and wraparound support for the carers. Indeed, as highlighted in this debate, we need parity in health and social care. Dementia presents the biggest unmet clinical need of our time. Let us work towards a future where we are no longer haunted by the spectre that perhaps, one day, we will ask our spouse who they are, or that they in turn will describe their life with us as a living death.

4.15 pm

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend for tabling this debate. As well as having family experience, I also served on the Joint Committee on the Draft Mental Health Bill.

Lack of parity has created complex administrative processes for practitioners, patients and families. It is clear to me, from having two elderly relatives needing support, that you risk not getting the best outcome if you do not understand the system and are not able to advocate for them. With the first relative, we had the baptism of fire of continuing healthcare assessments. Putting aside the obvious distress to the patient and relatives caused by these meetings, there is also the time off work and lost income. The typical cast at these meetings would be the nurse, manager and staff of the nursing home, the discharge team from the hospital, social workers, patient and relatives. Meetings last one to two hours, plus travel time for the professionals, of course, as they have to take place in the nursing home. They may also need to be repeated or paused as the patient may be in and out of lucidity or competence.

The amount of resource gobbled up by these meetings was remarkable, and we had three attempts at it. Often the agenda seemed not to be about nursing care requirements, just whose pot of money it would be coming from—it is all taxpayers' money, of course. Can my noble friend the Minister outline what assessment has been made by the Government of how much the process of continuing healthcare assessments is costing the NHS? If there was the parity outlined by my noble friend Lady Browning, this resource could of course be saved.

By the second relative, we were no longer newbies but, in that case, we bumped into the Mental Health Act. Some forms of dementia include mental health symptoms, such as delusions or hallucinations. My relative, who had such symptoms but had not yet been diagnosed with dementia, consented to going into a secure mental health hospital. I was quite affronted when a friend who commissions local authority services said to me, "Shame they consented and weren't detained under the Mental Health Act". Later, when I was on the draft Bill committee, I knew what he meant: Section 117, on aftercare. Although not automatic, it includes accommodation and can include all your care, hence the *Times* newspaper headline back in 2014: "The 'secret' law that means dementia care can be free". It is not means-tested and you do not have any more continuing healthcare assessment meetings.

Can my noble friend the Minister outline whether there is data on how many people with dementia are detained under the Mental Health Act without any pre-existing history of disease? Also, is he aware of the anecdotal reports of clinicians now feeling under pressure

[BARONESS BERRIDGE]

to detain people when relatives know that it will not alter the care but could save them tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds? Are we at risk of this coming to be seen like the EHCP situation, where relatives know that the Mental Health Act will lead not only to the best care but to the taxpayer funding it? More importantly, is this adding to the pressure on NHS mental health beds?

Nothing that I have said detracts from the amazing care staff, who were often as bemused as we were by this not so wonderful world of administration and bureaucracy. Surely there must be a better, kinder and more efficient system.

4.18 pm

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, for initiating this debate. I look forward to the day when this debate is held in the main Chamber.

Losing a loved one while they are still alive is a particularly gruelling experience and any assumptions that one makes about diagnosis and care turn out to be wrong. For example, I had assumed that hospice care took place in hospices. I am not criticising the hospice movement, far from it; its development of care at home, particularly in London, is quite remarkable, and I pay tribute to St Christopher's Hospice for its invaluable support to me. I had also assumed that there was a system; I was wrong again.

In the short time available, I will concentrate on diagnosis and a social care workforce strategy. As has been said, more than 250,000 people live with undiagnosed dementia in England alone. We have one of the lowest per capita ratios of MRI, CT and PET scanners in the OECD, behind Russia, Slovakia and Chile. Recent effective disease-modifying treatments are not yet approved or commissioned in our country, but, even if they are approved, they require early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and, at present, only 2.2% of people receive the tests in the diagnosis process. Will the Minister tell us what steps the Government are taking to invest in diagnostic infrastructure for dementia? The Alzheimer's Society has said that improvements in diagnosis should be part of a major condition strategy between the NHS and the Government to put in place a funded plan to improve rates beyond the national ambition of 66.7%, if possible. What plans do the Government have for a major conditions strategy?

My second point is about a social care workforce strategy. The care workforce pathway is a welcome step to improve career development and increase access to training, but it falls far short of a comprehensive long-term social care workforce strategy providing a trained workforce. There are 152,000 vacancies in the adult social care workforce, with 390,000 leaving their care jobs annually. Only 45% of care staff are recorded as having any level of training in dementia, and training is not mandatory. The Alzheimer's Society has called for a minimum mandatory level of training in dementia for all care staff to tier 2 of the dementia training standards. Can the Minister say when a long-term social care workforce strategy might be available?

The Office for National Statistics identifies dementia as the UK's biggest killer, with one in three people due to develop it. Why is it not on the front pages of newspapers? Why is it not a political priority? Why does it have the same level of obscurity that cancer had 50 years ago? Perhaps it is reduced to individual human misery and dread for the future, and those affected do not have the resilience to force the pace. Does the Minister think that the Government have any responsibility for this?

4.22 pm

**Lord Warner (CB):** My Lords, I share the views of the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, on parity of esteem, but my contribution will concentrate on the problems caused by a failing NHS and a failing adult social care system. It is very difficult to achieve parity of esteem between the two services if both are failing and both are trying to shift costs to someone else.

I declare my interest as a member of the three-person Dilnot commission on social care funding. Our 2011 report had cross-party support and was accepted in principle by the coalition Government. For less than £2 billion, we demonstrated that it would be possible to cap at £50,000 individuals' lifetime liability to pay for adult social care. This would have made a real difference to people with dementia. Despite legislation to implement our proposals, successive Chancellors from George Osborne onwards have deferred implementation. Jeremy Hunt has now achieved what his predecessors achieved by deferring the introduction of any form of cap until at least October 2025.

This is only part of a very sorry social care saga. Successive Governments since 2010 have allowed the funding of adult social care to decline relative to the funding of the NHS, increased service demands and the true cost of care for our ageing population. This approach has reduced NHS capacity, with more elderly patients admitted to, and staying in, hospital for longer because of the absence of social care. Governments have relied on council tax increases and occasional government handouts, rather than thinking through the funding of the social care system—even though one Prime Minister said that he would fix social care within a year; guess who. Whatever glowing account the Minister may give of the Government's track record on social care funding, the really accurate assessment of that funding is set out in the King's Fund contribution to the Library evidence for this debate.

Asking the NHS to do more for dementia patients in its current state is totally unrealistic. I am afraid that it is a failing institution in many parts of the country: it has not met its main access targets since before Covid, it has a backlog of about 7 million patients awaiting treatment and it is as short of staff as the adult social care system. It is totally impossible to think about making huge changes to improve services for dementia if we cannot repair the basic structures of the NHS and the adult social care system.

4.25 pm

**Lord Weir of Ballyholme (DUP):** My Lords, as both a member of the APPG and formerly a carer for my late mother, who suffered from vascular dementia, I welcome this debate and thank the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, for bringing it forward.

We are facing a tsunami of additional care needs in this country as a result of dementia, and it will require a step change from government, of what whatever political complexion. A myriad of solutions is required—some of them have been outlined today—but the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, was right to highlight a key component: parity of esteem between healthcare and social care.

Some of the implications of that lack of parity at present can be seen. It has been mentioned already that 45% of the social care workforce does not have direct training in dementia. The number of vacancies within social care is estimated to be 192,000, because there is a difficulty with both recruitment and retention of staff. The implication for individual dementia patients and their families across the country is a postcode lottery where both the quantity and the quality of care are deeply variable. For many of those families, the gap in what can be provided to them means that what they get simply does not cover the needs of the individual patient, and, somehow, they have to cope both financially and from a caring point of view to fill that gap.

If we can meet this issue of parity, there are a number of benefits. First, in many ways, we are facing an even greater difficulty than the official estimates of numbers show. Fortunately, we are beginning to see some solutions. New drugs are likely to appear in the near future, and they will at the very least slow the progress of dementia. That is a very good thing—it will mean that people live longer—but the implication of it is that, ultimately, we will probably have a lot more people with dementia. It will also shift the pressures from healthcare directly and to a much greater extent on to social care.

Secondly, parity will act as a driver for a much more joined-up approach to tackling dementia. In Northern Ireland, healthcare and social care have always been under one department and one system. That is not necessarily a panacea, but no one in Northern Ireland would try to disaggregate those two elements—it is perhaps one of the rare occasions when the rest of the country could learn something from Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, as indicated, parity would have major financial implications for the country's healthcare. Too many people are unnecessarily in hospital and too many are not only admitted to hospital when they do not need to be but bed-blocking because there is nowhere to place them. Most of all, it will increase choice for families. For many who have dementia, being in hospital or in a residential home is either a choice they make or, from a practical point of view, there is not really an alternative. However, on many occasions, it has been forced on people because they do not have the choice.

Dealing with the issue of parity between healthcare and social care will be a key driver in ensuring that we can look after those with dementia and their families to meet the needs not just of now but of the future.

4.29 pm

**Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab):** My Lords, I welcome the ability to participate in this debate and I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, on securing it. I wanted to participate in it as I have family members and political colleagues who, sadly, have either died as a result of dementia or are currently

living with it. For me, one of the keys is diagnosis and the need for greater levels of investment in diagnostic tools and then medicine to slow down the progression of the illness.

More than a quarter of a million people are living with undiagnosed dementia in England. More than one-third of people with dementia in England and Northern Ireland do not have access to a diagnosis and, therefore, to the vital care and support it unlocks. Like the noble Lord, Lord Weir, I am a member of the APPG. We readily know the problem in Northern Ireland, and I agree with him that there is definitely a measure of equality in the integration of health and social care.

Part of the problem to do with diagnostic tools is the lack of magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography scanning capacity in the memory assessment pathway, and lack of positron emission tomography scanners for accurate diagnosis of dementia subtypes. We have one of the lowest per capita ratios of these scanners in the OECD; we are behind Russia, Slovakia and Chile. Can the Minister advise on what steps the Government are taking to further invest in diagnostic infrastructure for dementia?

Furthermore, with the Government's proposed reforms to the MHRA, cutting-edge medicines could be made available in the UK much more quickly than previously. This includes drugs such as lecanemab and donanemab—the first drugs proven to slow down the progression of Alzheimer's disease. This means that the NHS must also be supported to prepare for this prospect. I therefore ask the Minister to provide details on what steps the Government are taking to prepare the NHS to deliver ground-breaking treatments such as those already mentioned. There is also a need for an adequate long-term social care workforce strategy, which has already been referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Browning.

I look forward to the Minister's answers. I hope that he will be able to provide a pathway to better investment in diagnostic tools and the provision of medicine to slow down the progression of dementia.

4.33 pm

**Baroness Murphy (CB):** My Lords, like the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, I am proud to be an ambassador for the Alzheimer's Society. I spent my entire working life as a psychiatrist, working with older people who mostly had dementia and depression.

The situation has got a lot worse in both health and social care since I started working in it. The situation in the health service is appalling, in that they have no training with dementia, and that has not improved. In fact, most people in the health service have no idea what social care is. Indeed, if you asked most of the ladies and gentlemen in our main House, they would not have a very good grasp of what social care is either.

First, we need a total rethink around how we educate the general public about what this disease is about and how it imposes costs on society. The phrase "parity of esteem" is all very well and I like it—it started as a funding phrase in the United States—but almost all

[BARONESS MURPHY]

the real costs of dementia in this country fall on social care services and on families. At the moment, the estimated cost is £27 billion. Of that, a good 80% is spent by families and social care.

It is not the severity of dementia that demands care; it is the activities of daily life. There was a lovely, elegant piece of research in Denmark looking at what factors of dementia require care from others, and they are always the activities of daily life. That is what social care is and where we should put most of our money.

I do not agree that more MRI and PET scanners would make a jot of difference to diagnoses because a diagnosis is usually made by the family or home carers before they get anywhere near. I know it is nice that we can now diagnose; I had a lecture called “150 Types of Dementia”, which went down a bundle at Queen Square I can tell you. The reality is that half a dozen are interesting, and there are some more that we are starting to understand better, but that is not the issue. It is about very basic care. The drugs will not be around for a long time yet. The ones we have now are nowhere near fruition in terms of clinical service to all the patients who need them.

I back up what my noble friend Lord Warner said about the need to fund both organisations—health and social care need to be integrated to deliver this service—but we are a hell of a long way off.

4.36 pm

**Lord Allan of Hallam (LD):** My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, for this debate. There are some repeated themes to our questions and debates that we need because these are complex challenges affecting millions of people that require a hard slog and real attention to detail. I have learned a lot about the specific challenges and solutions from all the speakers in the debate.

I will first return to some of the issues raised in the Oral Question on social care today. The noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, rightly flagged it is not just the number of care workers, but their skills, which are quite different for carers who have to deal with people with dementia. I hope the Minister will talk, as he did earlier, about the Government’s intention to upskill care workers.

On the numbers, it is important that much of this care will be delivered in the home, over the long term, yet the skills care data shows that vacancy rates are higher in the domiciliary sector than in care homes. They are still running at over 10% and are barely improving. Does the Minister agree that we need to make social care roles more attractive, which must involve decent salaries that increase as skill levels increase? Is he concerned about the acute problems in the domiciliary sector? The numbers suggest that the Government’s actions to date have not had the same effect there that they may have had in care homes.

Another key issue that I want to raise is around long-term conditions generally and specifically dementia. There is a lot of discussion about who pays for these services and which budget they come from. The noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, highlighted this with a very graphic example. The questions are about who pays,

where the budgets sit and, critically in this area, self-pay, which was referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Warner. These questions are still wide open; they have not been resolved. No one can say, hand on heart, that they understand what the long-term path is when someone has a diagnosis, who is going to pay for their care and how that will be resolved over the long term.

The split between the NHS and local authorities has long been recognised as an issue. Integrated care boards have been highlighted as the solution that bridges that divide. Can the Minister say how this is going for dementia services? Are there now examples of real pooling of resources for patient-focused services, which is the promise of the integrated care board? The noble Lord, Lord Weir, talked about the example of Northern Ireland, and my fear is that people are already queuing up to see the integrated care boards fail and that they will be booking another reorganisation of the NHS in England.

The example of Northern Ireland given by the noble Lord, Lord Weir, was very telling: he said that no one would go back. I hope that we do not go back; I am not wishing for that outcome. However, unless we see real pooling of resources, real patient focus and a genuine overcoming of this crazy divide where some public money is in Pot A and some in Pot B, we will not have made the progress that we needed. I hope the Minister agrees that dementia services in particular are a prime example of a test case on whether ICBs can deliver the promise that was in the legislation.

4.39 pm

**Baroness Wheeler (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, for this debate and for giving us the valuable—if nowhere near long enough—opportunity to shine a spotlight on many key issues that were at the heart of the scrutiny of the social care cap provisions of the Health and Care Act. In particular, I note its impact on people with dementia and our concerns about how NHS continuing healthcare operates arbitrarily with regard to people receiving free care or having to pay for it themselves, as well as how we move towards genuine parity between the NHS and social care and how good social care is vital for people with dementia and their carers. The current social care system is just not set up to meet these needs.

I have three points. First, on carers, the 60% of people with dementia drawing on care at home are being cared for by their spouses and relatives—mostly unpaid carers, as my noble friend Lady Pitkeathley again reminded us. As a carer myself, I meet many unpaid carers locally who are daily, for 24 hours, looking after loved ones at various stages of dementia, most of them with breaks of only a few hours a day or a week. The carer role is often rewarding, but it is also relentless for many. We urgently need a comprehensive national carers strategy, and I look forward to the Minister’s explanation of why we do not have one.

I turn, secondly, to care costs and the devastating impact of the financial costs for those living with dementia and their families—an average of £100,000 is spent by individuals over their lifetimes. Despite extensive modelling at the time of the 2022 Act showing that just 19% of people with dementia would reach the

care cap, and despite the disproportionately detrimental impact on dementia sufferers in some of the poorest parts of the country, it would have made a start as part of a wider package of reforms that Labour argued for. Instead, the new reform money has been allocated largely to propping up the existing social care system. What action are the Government taking to tackle the staggering care costs faced by individuals with dementia in the absence of the care cap implementation? Can we please be updated on the Government's plans for social care charging reform?

Thirdly, on NHS continuing care, the excellent Lords Library briefing reminds us of the CHC's ill-defined primary health need assessment criteria and the huge inequities in the current system, particularly relating to the funding—or lack of funding—for care costs for dementia, either in the home or in care homes. The Alzheimer's Society has pointed out that NHS England's stats do not record diagnostic details, so there is no way of knowing how many people with dementia receive CHC or have been turned down. There is also no way of making assessments or comparisons from which transparent criteria could be developed. There are also huge geographical variations in the length of time taken to assess claims and handle appeals. Can the Minister update the House on what work is being undertaken to improve the transparency of CHC processes, procedures and decision-making, and also to address the urgent problem with assessing the eligibility for CHC of people with dementia?

Noble Lords' priorities for dementia today have focused on urgent improvements to diagnostic rates, speeding up the introduction of vital modifying drugs to help slow down disease progression, investment in the dementia diagnostic infrastructure, and rebuilding the workforce and addressing the 152,000 vacancies in the adult social care workforce. This needs to be a fully comprehensive plan that is fully integrated with the NHS workforce plan if we are to avoid exacerbating the already chronic social care workforce crisis that we have.

4.43 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Markham) (Con):** I add my thanks to my noble friend Lady Browning not only for bringing this debate but for her commitment generally in this area. I also thank all noble Lords for their contributions. These sorts of debates are always a pleasure, and one thing I have learned in the almost 18 months that I have been involved in the Lords is that it does not matter what the subject is; you always find expertise and learn about colleagues' experience, such as that of the noble Baronesses, Lady Greenfield and Lady Murphy. I always find having the power of that knowledge around the table a real asset for the Lords and a real contribution to these types of debates.

My noble friend Lady Browning quite rightly said in her introduction that the statistics are gobsmacking, if I can use that word. I note the fact about one in 11 of those over 65. The one that really resonated with me—noble Lords have heard me mention it many times—is the fact that 25% of our beds are occupied by people with dementia. There is a real feeling that

not only is that not the right place for them but it is not a good use of money. I therefore totally agree with that sentiment.

We see virtual wards and hospices at home as part of the answer to this. I have seen some good technological advances: at the light end of the scale, for want of a better word, we could look at people's electricity usage, for example, and start to learn their patterns. For a lot of people, there is a surge at 8 am when they put on the kettle, so if that surge suddenly is not there, that is an early warning that perhaps there should be a call because something is wrong. There are also motion detectors around the house to start to understand their patterns. To my mind there is a spectrum of those sorts of virtual wards from the very heavy intervention ones to just trying to make sure that people are generally fine and going about in their normal way or, if they are not, it can be an early warning.

I will come on to staffing, but a key part of that in the home is dom carers. It is a point that the noble Lord, Lord Allan, made well. We have made a lot of progress in what we are trying to do with career progression, but I want to be assured that we have really got this area right.

My noble friend Lady Browning mentioned the fundamental need for a care plan in all that. In preparing for this, my noble friend Lord Evans said that that was what he needed in his recent situation with his mother. That is what ICSs should be starting to do now. I take the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Allan, that there is probably no better example of trying to learn how they are working than using this as a case study. My general experience of ICSs—of course it is early days, even now I think we are only 18 months or so in—is that, as ever with these things, there are some very good examples and probably some which need to do a bit more work. I am quite happy to take that away to try to find some test cases that we can try to learn from. The NHS has set out best practice guidance that it expects all ICSs to follow. My understanding, which I will check on, is that part of that is having a dementia lead, which my noble friend Lady Browning mentioned.

As the noble Baronesses, Lady Ritchie and Lady Donaghy, and other noble Lords mentioned, diagnosis is key. The target is two-thirds. We are getting quite close to that, but we have been behind, so there has been an investment of £17 million to catch up. I accept the point about whether two-thirds is enough and whether we would accept that in other areas and let one-third go undiagnosed, but step one is making sure that we hit that two-thirds.

The noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, asked what sort of resource we are putting behind this. CDCs already have the equipment, in terms of scanners, and the ability to do that, but I accept the point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Murphy, that it is probably more about the people. It is less the equipment than making sure that people are trained to do that. I will come on to staffing later, but I take that basic point.

What is the point of diagnosis? First, it is to make sure that people get the right care. Secondly, it is so that we can start to deploy some of these new treatments. Again, it is great to have the expertise of the noble

[LORD MARKHAM]

Baroness, Lady Greenfield. In answer to the question from the noble Baroness, Lady Ritchie, we are expecting NICE approval of the drugs to slow dementia down in early summer, and we expect to then roll that out during the summer period. However, we all know that they are only on the nursery slopes, and that is why there is a commitment to research of £160 million per year.

To fuel the moon shot, I am really excited about the power of the data that we own. I was recently on a fact-finding mission to Boston and they were talking about a major \$250 million investment that a private venture group had made into the 9 million hospital records in Mayo Clinic. They were saying, “You don’t realise what you have in the UK. You have 50 million records in England, and you have primary care as well”. The whole problem around dementia is that we do not know what we are trying to tackle, in terms of the early causes. The reason we were so good at tackling Covid was that we knew exactly what we were going after. Right now, in things such as dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, it is still a case of shots in the dark.

However, regarding the 50 million records we have, if we look at people who have dementia today, wind back 15 years and ask what they were visiting their GP about then, and throw that all at AI, we can get some of those early-warning indicators. I know some of the anecdotal ones. For instance, as mentioned, urinary tract infections are often an early indicator of dementia because people do not understand that they are there. Throwing all that at AI and making sure that that data exists is a real way to fuel the moon shot so that we know where we should be putting our research efforts to try to find treatments.

On the funding of social care, as I said, the £8.1 billion investment over two years is a major investment. I learned a lot from my noble friend Lady Berridge. I did not realise that being committed under the Mental Health Act is a main way to get there. On the question from the noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler, about CHC transparency, I do not know the answer off the top of my head, but I will come back on that because it is a good point. As ever, I will try to come back and cover it more fully in writing.

The reform plans that we have announced are about making sure that we have the proper staffing to do this. As I mentioned in answer to the earlier Question today, we are starting to turn a corner, although it is early days. On career progression and training, I believe that what we announced last week is a key part of

making this a real profession that people will want to stay and progress in. I agree with the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Allan, that paid progression has to come along with those qualifications; otherwise, you will not get people wanting to enter it.

I understand, as a few noble Lords have mentioned, including the noble Baronesses, Lady Wheeler and Lady Pitkeathley, that the role of the carer is vital and often overlooked. As noble Lords know, I have had personal experience of that as a carer. Quite honestly, all I can say is that we are making some early steps in trying to get some of the funding, but I freely accept, from personal experience, that there is a lot more that could be done in that space.

I have tried to give a flavour—before my throat totally gives way—of what we are trying to do in this area. As ever, I will respond fully in writing, but I hope there is an understanding from the Government’s side, as echoed by all noble Lords, that this is something we do take seriously.

**Lord Warner (CB):** I am sorry to test the Minister’s vocal cords, but he mentioned that there was good practice guidance issued to ICSs. My experience as a Minister is that the department is extremely good at sending out guidance but extremely bad at checking whether anyone ever follows it. What arrangements has the department got to see if that good practice guidance is put into operation?

**Lord Markham (Con):** The noble Lord makes a very good point, and it is one I have some personal experience of as well. The hope, when setting up 42 ICSs, was that this would be the right size for them to pool resources and take a holistic view, and that 42—while still a lot—would be a manageable number. As Ministers, we have divided those up into seven each that we can get to know, and live and breathe and understand; we also have dashboards that we can use to monitor progress in these areas. That is the way we plan to do that. I freely admit, again, that it is early days; I accept the noble Lord’s point that you can give out guidance until you are blue in the face—and they will receive a lot—but it is the follow-up that really matters.

I thank the noble Baroness again for the debate. I hope there is a feeling that we understand and that we are trying to give the parity of esteem that this deserves, and I look forward to following up more thoroughly in writing.

*Committee adjourned at 4.56 pm.*