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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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# HOUSE OF LORDS

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The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

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

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# House of Lords

Thursday 29 April 2021

*The House met in a hybrid proceeding.*

12 pm

*Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Rochester.*

## Arrangement of Business

*Announcement*

12.06 pm

**The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler):** My Lords, the Hybrid Sitting of the House will now begin. Some Members are here in the Chamber, others are participating remotely, but all Members will be treated equally. Oral Questions will now commence. Please can those asking supplementary questions keep them brief and confined to two points; and I ask that Ministers' answers are also brief. As this is the last time that I am doing Questions from the Woolsack, let me say that I expect everybody to be on their best behaviour.

**Noble Lords:** Hear, hear.

## Leaseholders and Property Management Companies

*Question*

12.07 pm

*Asked by Lord Kennedy of Southwark*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of the law in respect of the responsibilities of (1) leaseholders, and (2) property management companies, for the upkeep of communal areas in blocks of flats.

**Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and, in doing so, I want to say that I am so proud to be able to ask a Question on your last day, Lord Speaker. You have been an exceptional Lord Speaker; thank you so much.

**The Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Lord Greenhalgh) (Con):** The Government are committed to promoting fairness and transparency for homeowners and ensuring that leaseholders are protected from abuse and poor service. Following Law Commission reports on enfranchisement, right to manage and commonhold, the Government are taking forward a comprehensive programme of reform to end unfair practices in the leasehold market. We are also considering the recommendation from the independent working group on property agents, chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Best.

**Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, I refer the House to my relevant interests as set out in the register. Does the noble Lord accept that, in many cases, leaseholders are trapped, paying expensive fees to management companies for the care and upkeep of communal areas or the property that they live in, and that the provisions that enable fees to be challenged and management companies to be replaced are not fit for purpose and need to be radically updated to place real control and choice in the hands of the leaseholders?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, we believe very strongly that any fees and charges should be justifiable, transparent and communicated effectively and that there should be a clear route to challenge or address things if they go wrong. That is why we commissioned the noble Lord, Lord Best, to do his report.

**Lord Young of Cookham (Con):** My Lords, on 5 January, when I described leaseholders as "a relic from a feudal age", my noble friend replied:

"There is no doubt that in this country we are unique in having leasehold. We need to focus on reform, which will take this forward to a position similar to that in Scotland or on the continent, where people are co-owners of their property."—[*Official Report*, 5/1/21; col. 9.]

Is legislation on its way so that everyone can benefit from my noble friend's ambition?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend knows that the Government wish to extend the benefits of freehold ownership to more homeowners; that is why we are establishing a commonhold council to prepare homeowners and the market for the widespread take-up of commonhold. We share that same drive and ambition to change things.

**Baroness Wheatcroft (CB) [V]:** My Lords, too many property managers and owners have taken advantage of tenants by imposing unreasonable service charges, and often trading with linked companies, so I appreciate the Government's commitment to finding a clear route to challenge for leaseholders. But what about people who live in sheltered housing—the vulnerable people who really are not able to look after themselves when confronted with an unreasonable agent making outrageous demands?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, the Government are considering under what circumstances fees and charges for leaseholders and for people in sheltered housing are justified and whether they should be capped or banned. That will form part of our response to the review by the noble Lord, Lord Best.

**Lord Berkeley (Lab):** My Lords, can the Minister give the House any indication of progress on the leasehold reform issue? The recent White Paper was welcomed by many people, including my friends on the Isles of Scilly who feel that they are very badly treated. How many of the recommendations in that White Paper might appear in legislation soon?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, we are starting off with a two-step approach to reform. A ground rents Bill will be announced in the Queen's Speech. It will take approximately a year to prepare the wider reform proposals around enfranchisement, right to manage and other matters covered by the Law Commission.

**Baroness Bowles of Berkhamsted (LD) [V]:** Last night, the Government refused yet again to amend the Fire Safety Bill to protect leaseholders from charges levied for the replacement of defective fire-resistant cladding. I repeat my noble friend Lady Pinnock's concluding question:

"if it is not the right Bill, where is the Government's Bill ... that will keep the Government's pledge that leaseholders would not have to face the unaffordable consequences of fire safety defects?"—*[Official Report, 28/4/21; col. 2371.]*

That seems already to be a broken promise. How will the Government now stop bankruptcy proceedings and loss of homes?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, the Government have already put an unprecedented sum of money—over £5 billion—on the table to support the remediation of unsafe cladding. We made it very clear that the steps that we are taking can be covered without statutory intervention.

**Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP):** My Lords, I declare my interests as in the register. If a company knowingly supplies substandard goods and dozens of people die because of it, but the company walks away with billions of pounds of profit without renovating or replacing all the other substandard products that they have already put in place, is that just good business practice?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** Clearly not, my Lords.

**Lord Flight (Con):** My Lords, is there evidence that property management companies are more effective than leaseholders in managing the upkeep of communal areas? Does there need to be the same redress route if the freeholder also acts as the property manager? Can the Minister advise whether the Government intend to bring forward legislation to extend the requirement of membership of redress schemes to freeholders where no managing agent is employed?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My noble friend will know that there are various reasons leaseholders may exercise the right to manage, and the Government are committed to simplifying the process. I point out that many right-to-manage companies choose to employ a managing agent. In response to his second point, the Government intend to require freeholders of leasehold properties who do not employ a managing agent to join a redress scheme, and we will bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows.

**Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB) [V]:** My Lords, I declare my interest as listed in the register. Is the Minister aware that, in order to get the necessary certification for electricity, gas or water, for example, landlords are required to get services tested? I have

heard many examples of deficiencies being exaggerated, and then quotes being given to remedy the situation that are vastly disproportionate—engineers have proved this later. I worry that many innocent people may not realise this is happening.

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, I am aware that there are sharp practices across the board. But, by law, service charges and other charges have to be reasonable, and costs have to relate to the work or services undertaken, which need to be of a reasonable standard. We will take the noble Lord's point and advice to see how we can address that issue.

**Baroness Thornhill (LD):** My Lords, the housing complaints resolution service was proudly announced in January 2019 as a portal system to overcome what James Brokenshire, the then Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, called the "complicated and bureaucratic system" we have currently. Could the Minister update us on progress? Will this new body have new powers to enforce decisions in court by statute, or will it be a crocodile with rubber teeth?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, this is clearly a wide-ranging question that raises all kinds of issues. I will have to write to the noble Baroness on the progress of that matter.

**Baroness Gardner of Parkes (Con) [V]:** My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. Given the growth in short-term lets since the changes in legislation in 2015, most of which are beyond the permitted 90 days per year, could the Minister look at whether landlords and management companies can be given the power to charge more to those letting short-term in order to reflect the additional usage of communal areas, given the high turnover of their short-term let properties, which is otherwise unfairly borne by long-term block residents who do not get any of the benefits from the higher rent?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, I am not sure that you can charge differentially because of the extent of a letting period. I know managing agents will seek to maximise their percentage within the market structure, but the law means that you have to justify what you charge.

**Lord Mann (Non-Aff):** Local authorities have had a tendency to sell off their least desirable, most dilapidated small blocks of flats to private individuals, who then get managing agents and leave tenants in the worst poverty and the worst conditions. Does the Minister have a solution to the conundrum of how impossible it is to ever get those communal areas repaired?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, we recognise the importance of having an overarching system of regulation and having it reviewed, which is why the noble Lord, Lord Best, is looking at that matter. There is also the Cambridge University review, looking at specific fees and charges, to which the Government will respond, taking into account the very scenario that the noble Lord paints.

As I have finished on time—I know that that is important to the Lord Speaker—I just want to say to him, what an amazing Lord Speaker you have been. In my first year in the House, I have really enjoyed your astute chairmanship.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler):** That is very kind of you; thank you. All supplementary questions have been asked—congratulations to all concerned. We now move to the next Oral Question.

### **Covid-19: Syria** *Question*

12.17 pm

*Asked by* **Baroness Cox**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the humanitarian situation in Syria; and what steps they are taking to initiate the lifting of sanctions on that country

**Baroness Cox (CB) [V]:** My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper. In doing so, I echo the words of appreciation for the Lord Speaker.

**The Minister of State, Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park) (Con) [V]:** My Lords, Covid-19 continues to pose a particularly significant threat in Syria. The UK is working closely with the UN and partners to adapt our humanitarian response. We are also supporting the UN-led political process, which the Syrian regime must engage with seriously for sanctions to be lifted. UK sanctions are carefully targeted at specific sectors and individuals to minimise their impact on ordinary Syrians, and these are regularly reviewed.

**Baroness Cox (CB) [V]:** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for his reply, but does he acknowledge that, despite the United Kingdom's efforts to implement smart sanctions with humanitarian exemptions, it has become impossible for millions of civilians to obtain food, medicines and life-saving medical equipment, causing widespread, avoidable suffering and death, greatly exacerbated by Covid? Will Her Majesty's Government therefore accept advice from the United Nations experts and in-country aid workers, who emphasise it is now a matter of the greatest urgency to lift economic sanctions immediately?

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, the Government will report to Parliament on UK sanctions regimes annually. If the UK determines that it is no longer appropriate to maintain an autonomous sanctions regime, the regime will be changed or removed. Periodic reviews will take place every three years under the Act. The UK-Syria sanctions are carefully targeted at specific individuals, entities and sectors. The UK and its partners take all possible steps to mitigate any wider impact of sanctions on Syrian civilians; for example, food, medicines and medical equipment are not subject to UK sanctions, and additional exemptions are available for humanitarian reasons.

**Lord Touhig (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, I join colleagues in wishing you, Lord Speaker, a very good and happy retirement, although I do not think you really plan to retire.

The complex sanctions regime imposed on Syria has exacerbated the situation, hampering the ability of NGOs to deliver essential aid. On top of this, increased levels of banking de-risking are preventing NGOs receiving funds for their programmes, resulting in the suspension of life-saving activities, including providing Covid-19 vaccines. The consequences for these vulnerable people are too terrible to describe. Children in particular are suffering. Surely, Her Majesty's Government can do something about this.

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, our priority clearly, is to end the conflict in Syria through a negotiated political settlement. We believe that only an inclusive, non-sectarian Government can unite the country and protect the rights of all citizens. We have been one of the largest bilateral donors to the Syrian crisis; we are at the forefront of humanitarian response, focusing on helping those most acutely in need. So far, we have committed more than £3.7 billion in response, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. We will continue to provide whatever support we possibly can. We want an end to this appalling situation, which the noble Lord rightly describes in extremely powerful language.

**Baroness Northover (LD):** I too thank the Lord Speaker. What impact assessment has been made of the UK cut in aid to Syria and UN agencies operating in Syria? If that has not happened, why not?

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, I cannot talk about individual projects; I can say that the UK remains one of the largest humanitarian donors to the Syria crisis. As I said, we have committed more than £3.7 billion since 2012. We have supported millions of people, providing food, clean water and healthcare, and our funding will continue to do so. However, in relation to specific programmes, I fear that all I can say for now is that FCDO programme managers are working with suppliers and delivery partners to work out the precise implications for every programme.

**Baroness Helic (Con) [V]:** My Lords, more people are displaced from Syria than from any other country in the world. Syria's neighbours alone host more than 5 million Syrian refugees. We rely on them to do this to avoid a repeat of the mass movement of Syrian refugees that we saw in 2015 and to prevent even worse humanitarian suffering. Does my noble friend see any risk that cutting Britain's aid to Syrian refugees this year could seriously affect the ability of Syria's neighbours to continue bearing the burden of the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly if other countries follow Britain's example and cut their overseas aid?

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, it would be a great thing if other donor countries followed our example of how much we have invested in Syria. We are investing enormous sums in an appalling humanitarian crisis. Over half the pre-war population is displaced from their homes and millions of people are

[LORD GOLDSMITH OF RICHMOND PARK] in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. We have spent at least £1.96 billion to support the probably more than 5.5 million refugees in the wider region, addressing immediate humanitarian need, providing quality education to children, creating opportunities and providing shelter. We continue to support the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to cope with a protracted refugee presence in a whole manner of ways.

**Lord Green of Deddington (CB) [V]:** My Lords, I have been following events in Syria for more than 50 years. The current regime can indeed be brutal, but it is no worse than any likely alternative, and it is at least firmly opposed to Islamic extremism. It defeats me what the real policy of the Government is in this, but my noble friend Lady Cox is absolutely right—all the Syrian people, whether supporters of their Government or not, are suffering severely from our sanctions, greatly exacerbated by Covid. These sanctions are not smart, so will the Government now review them? They have become inhumane, indeed shameful, in their effect.

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, our goal is simply—although the means are certainly not simple—to end the conflict in Syria. We want to do that through a negotiated political settlement. The UN-led Geneva process between the Syrian parties, mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2254, remains the forum for reaching a lasting political settlement and UN special envoy Geir Pedersen has our full support. UK sanctions send a clear message to the regime and its supporters that we will not stand by while they continue to commit serious human rights abuses. They are designed to hold perpetrators to account and prevent those targeted entering the UK, channelling money through UK banks or profiting from our economy. They are highly targeted, surgical, forensic sanctions, designed to prevent those responsible for these atrocities benefiting in any way from access to our system here in the United Kingdom.

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, for once this week I totally agree with the Minister: the regime over the past decade has committed some of the most horrendous human rights violations and it is important that the international community unites to ensure that it cannot act with impunity. Last month, Secretary-General António Guterres called for stronger action. What is the noble Lord's response to the Secretary-General's call?

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, in response to this and previous questions, the UK intends to maintain its sanctions regime. We believe it works and that it has an impact. The UK has no plans, therefore, to initiate lifting sanctions unless and until the Assad regime and its supporters' violent suppression of Syria ceases and the Assad regime meaningfully engages in the UN-led political process. Our priority is to end the conflict, and the sanctions are, we believe, carefully targeted against the regime—against Assad, his family, his armed forces and business cronies. As I mentioned, there are extensive exemptions,

including on humanitarian grounds, but we need to be cautious because Assad would likely misuse any additional funds that reach the regime, and we know that.

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (LD) [V]:** My Lords, 15 March was the 10th anniversary of the start of the civil war in Syria that has resulted in the deaths of 500,000 people. The pandemic could not have struck a more vulnerable people. Resolution 2565 from the Security Council the other day directed the global distribution of vaccines. What contribution has the UK made to this? How has the Russian Putin-Assad discussion on vaccines affected the situation?

**Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con) [V]:** My Lords, the noble Lord is right: Covid-19 is having a massive impact on the humanitarian response to the needs of approximately 13 million people across Syria who rely on continued access to life-saving services and humanitarian support. The fragile health system is struggling to deliver assistance after all these years of horrific conflict. Some of the highest-risk individuals are internally displaced persons in camps or detention centres in conflict areas and we are working closely with the WHO and other humanitarian partners to support scaled-up testing capacity in Syria. Our funding has allowed rapid response teams and medical staff to help limit human-to-human transmission, educate communities on keeping safe and ensure that health services can, frankly, keep going. UK aid is providing access to health services and medical supplies, improving shelters so that people displaying symptoms can isolate, and much more besides. This is a priority for the UK Government.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler):** I have to say that Ministers as well as ordinary Members must be short. The time allowed for this Question has elapsed. We come to the third Oral Question.

## Office for Health Promotion *Question*

12.28 pm

*Asked by Lord Moynihan*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have for the new Office for Health Promotion to take over responsibility for co-ordinating and leading efforts to improve the health of the nation in (1) tackling obesity, (2) improving mental health, and (3) promoting wellbeing and an active lifestyle through affordable access to sport, fitness and recreational facilities.

**Lord Moynihan (Con) [V]:** My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and reinforce all the plaudits rightly directed at our outstanding Lord Speaker.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con):** My Lords, we are redoubling our efforts on obesity, mental health, well-being and other aspects of prevention. That is why the Office for Health Promotion will operate from within the Department of Health and

Social Care. It will be directed by the professional leadership of the CMO and it will drive forward our prevention strategy. It will focus on reducing health inequalities and its approach will be proactive, predictive and personalised interventions.

**Lord Moynihan (Con) [V]:** This welcome government initiative has the potential to lead on vital cross-departmental work to improve physical and mental health, well-being and active lifestyle measures for all ages. Does my noble friend agree that this agenda deserves a well-being statement and budget from the Treasury, as in New Zealand? Given the critical importance of the nation's health and the widespread interest shown in this Question, will my noble friend accept a request for an online meeting involving interested Peers and officials appointed to the OHP?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, I absolutely endorse my noble friend's points. This is an extremely important agenda which we are getting behind in a very big way. I also completely acknowledge and recognise the enormous amount of interest from noble Lords in this agenda; we have taken a number of Questions on this and I celebrate the fact that noble Lords have as much interest as they do. I would be very glad to arrange such a session as my noble friend suggests.

**The Lord Bishop of Carlisle [V]:** My Lords, I too echo all the appreciative comments made about the Lord Speaker. Does the Minister agree that any interventions to address obesity must take account of the complex relationship between mental health and obesity? For example, people who are obese have a 55% increased risk of developing depression over time, and people living with depression have a 58% increased risk of becoming obese. Can we ensure that attempts to remedy one problem do not exacerbate the other?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** The right reverend Prelate makes an extremely valuable point. He is spot on; these comorbidities are related and dealing with them is complex. It is possible to exacerbate one while trying to cope with another. That is one reason why we are putting so much investment into the cross-governmental effort and why this agenda will be led by a cross-departmental ministerial board, to ensure that that kind of co-ordination happens.

**Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con) [V]:** My Lords, as the country and the NHS emerge from crisis mode and we understand better that we were disproportionately hit because of the country's general poor health, I urge the Minister to ensure that the Office for Health Promotion will focus on helping and supporting individuals attain a healthy lifestyle. Will he confirm that, despite what I know to be intensive lobbying, the Government will not water down proposals in the obesity strategy on, for example, advertising on social media and before the watershed and will stick to calorie labelling for alcoholic drinks, restaurants and other food outlets?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, as my noble friend knows, the publication of the consultation on advertising is due soon, and I look to it very much. She is entirely

right that obesity, seriousness of illness and death from Covid are clearly related; this has been a wake-up call and we are stepping up to the challenge as of now.

**Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (CB):** My Lords, the Royal College of Nursing has called for a substantial increase in the number of school nurses to ensure the monitoring and promotion of healthy lifestyles for pupils, so that they are better prepared for learning after substantial absences associated with Covid-19 lockdowns. Can the Minister outline how the Office for Health Promotion will work with the Department for Education to co-ordinate and lead improvements in children's health, including in school nursing reform?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, I am grateful to the Royal College of Nursing and the noble Baroness for that extremely constructive and thoughtful suggestion. That is exactly the kind of cross-government, inter-departmental suggestion that the OHP will focus on. I will be glad to take that to the OHP and make it clearly.

**Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab) [V]:** Does the Minister agree that, whichever office is in charge of it, any successful obesity strategy must engage with the so-called hard-to-reach groups in society? As many play the National Lottery, scratch cards and so on, will the Government consider how this link might be used to incentivise and reward players for moves to better and healthier eating, drinking and exercising? As the National Lottery franchise will soon come up for renewal, will the Government consider changing its remit so that it is more focused on health than at the moment, or even consider taking a stake and creating a public/private partnership with a focus on not just cash prizes but better health rewards for the nation?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, Covid has been an extremely important educational experience; we have backed off from using the idea of "hard to reach". Instead, we try to be much more effective at making ourselves approachable for the kinds of people the noble Lord talks about. He is entirely right that the levelling-up agenda means nothing if it does not mean levelling up health outcomes; we are very focused on addressing the kind of health inequalities he refers to. That will be a central mission of the whole project.

**Lord Scriven (LD):** My Lords, I declare my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. The public health grant to local authorities is 20% lower per head in real terms than it was in 2015-16. Restoring spending per head to this level would require an extra investment of £1 billion. How can poor health prevention and promotion of well-being be achievable and sustainable with such reductions in local public health funds?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, local public health resources have made a huge contribution in the last year through Covid. I pay tribute to those in local public health who have contributed so much during the pandemic. The grant to local authorities is slightly beyond the scope of the Office for Health Promotion, but the noble Lord's point is very well made.

**Baroness Sater (Con) [V]:** My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. I warmly welcome this new and important government initiative to establish an Office for Health Promotion, leading national efforts to improve the public's health, particularly through promoting physical activity. Given that we know that physical activity can lead to better health and well-being, has my noble friend had any discussions yet on how the promotion of physical activity will be measured, to help ensure that these improved health outcomes can be achieved?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, there is already considerable co-ordination between the department, DCMS and DfE on exactly that. I highlight the money that has gone from the tax on soft drinks to contribute to funding outdoor activity in schools, which has had an enormous impact. My noble friend is entirely right that physical activity is linked to better health outcomes; that is why it will form part of the agenda for the Office for Health Promotion.

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** My Lords, the policy paper does not reference the measures proposed in the childhood obesity plan and the recent *Tackling Obesity* strategy released last July. I hope that omission is not significant. Can the Minister confirm—I was slightly concerned by his response to the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin—that the ban on online adverts for foods high in fat, sugar and salt has been watered down? In awaiting the consultation from the advertising industry, is that a “whether” or a “how”?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My Lords, consultations are there to have an honest conversation. It would be wrong for me to try to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation from the Dispatch Box.

**Baroness Bull (CB):** My Lords, the Government have pointed to Singapore's health promotion board as a model, citing its digital public health schemes such as the national steps challenge or the “Eat, Drink, Shop Healthy” challenge. Is the Minister aware of the risks that gamification and incentivisation of what for many of us are healthy behaviours present to people living with eating disorders? With its responsibility for both obesity and mental health, will the office ensure that eating disorder experts are always involved in planning obesity interventions so that the complex relationship between the two is taken into account?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** I completely take the point of the noble Baroness. We are extremely conscious of the challenge presented by social media in particular to identity and sense of body image. I know that there is much liaison between Public Health England and obesity and anorexia charities about its marketing to ensure that it hits the right note. We are investing in digital technology to try to get people moving and change their lifestyles; I pay tribute to the team behind Couch to 5K, who have used apps and digital engagement to encourage millions of people to take important steps towards a more active lifestyle.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. We now come to the fourth Oral Question.

## Kickstart Scheme Question

12.39pm

Asked by **Baroness Sherlock**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to increase the number of jobs created by the Kickstart Scheme.

**Baroness Sherlock (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, I thank the Lord Speaker for his service, and I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Stedman-Scott) (Con):** I am very pleased to advise the House today that we have now approved 195,000 vacancies on the Kickstart scheme. During the pandemic and the lockdown, employers were very keen to become involved in the Kickstart programme and make opportunities available for young people, but they wanted to wait until we came out of lockdown, when their businesses could start to trade. I can say to the noble Baroness and the whole House that progress is being made day by day and the number of young people going into vacancies is accelerating fast.

**Baroness Sherlock (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, is it not the case that only 16,500 young people have actually started work? That is out of some 575,000 who are unemployed. Last June, Ministers said that Kickstart would create new jobs for a quarter of a million young people. Can the Minister tell the House two things? First, what is the new target date for getting 250,000 young people into jobs? Secondly, given that only 490 placements have happened in the whole north-east of England, what is the plan for making sure that poorer regions are not left behind?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** As I originally said, we have 195,000 vacancies and more are still coming in, so we are positive that we will create hundreds of thousands of jobs for Kickstarters. We are well aware of the difficulties associated with the north-east. We are doing a deep dive on Friday with departmental officials, and we are working at pace to secure adequate opportunities for the plan for jobs. I am confident that we will meet our target in the timeframe allocated for Kickstart.

**Baroness Drake (Lab) [V]:** Can I press the Minister on my noble friend's question? When will the Government report what direct action they are taking now to ensure they deliver equity across the regions on Kickstart placements? Sentiment is fine, but could we have the evidence of what the Government are doing to ensure equity? Secondly, unemployment of young black people started high and is rising faster than that of their white counterparts. What measures are the Government taking now to stop potential bias and discrimination in the hiring process for Kickstart jobs?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** I can confirm to the noble Baroness that each region in the country has a regional director for Jobcentre Plus completely focused on ensuring that there are equitable vacancies across the country. The noble Baroness is absolutely right to raise the issue of the BAME community and the need for us to work very hard to ensure that they are not left behind. We are encouraging organisations that work with BAME young people to take part in the Kickstart scheme, which can include acting as a gateway organisation for employers in their networks. We understand the challenges faced, and our work coaches are working hard to use the £90 million investment that we are putting in to address the disparities in youth unemployment, especially in this group.

**Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (Non-Afl) [V]:** My Lords, I encourage the Minister also to consider the 2021 cohort of undergraduates and combine their need for employment with the needs of SMEs. Would it not make sense to create paid internships of three to six months whereby those undergraduates work in SMEs and thus kickstart not just their employability but the SME sector?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** The noble Baroness suggests a very good idea. Let me be clear: Kickstart is there to help young people who are disadvantaged and at risk of being permanently excluded from the labour market. I will take the option of undergraduates and SMEs back to the department and write to the noble Baroness. At the moment, there are no plans to change the eligibility for Kickstart.

**Baroness Eaton (Con) [V]:** My Lords, vulnerable people display vulnerabilities in many different ways. What measures are in place to ensure that vulnerable people can participate in the Kickstart scheme?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** We are encouraging employers to make opportunities available for vulnerable young people. Our Jobcentre Plus work coaches are identifying those people and working with them through a support package to make sure that they are not excluded in any way from taking part in the Kickstart scheme. Of course, we have our wonderful stakeholders and partners working particularly closely with these young people, who we are working with too.

**Lord Storey (LD) [V]:** My Lords, the Minister will be aware that many unemployed young people have a particular career interest and the financial support from their family to take on an unpaid internship. This is not an option for young people from deprived communities. Have the Government considered making the Kickstart programme available to these people so they too can take an internship in their chosen career?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** I think I answered that question when I answered the question of the noble Baroness, Lady Stuart. As I said, I will take that back to the department, write to the noble Lord and

the noble Baroness and place a copy in the Library. However, as it stands, there are no plans to change the eligibility.

**Lord Farmer (Con):** My Lords, what are the Government doing to ensure that the Kickstart scheme meets the needs of understaffed sectors of the employment market which are well suited to this age cohort and therefore more likely to sustain young people's employment once subsidies end? I am thinking particularly of both large and small hospitality employers, which are struggling to fill vacancies as pubs and restaurants gear up to reopen fully.

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** We are working closely with a whole range of employers in sectors impacted by the pandemic, particularly the hospitality sector, where we have enabled employers to create Kickstart opportunities sooner than the economy might otherwise allow. We have seen a strong response from the hospitality sector, with involvement from the national academy of food and drink and major employers like Greene King offering Kickstart jobs across the country, and we will continue to do so.

**Lord Bilimoria (CB) [V]:** My Lords, over half the people who have lost their jobs since March 2020 are young people. Kickstart is a fantastic scheme to help young people and businesses prevent the scarring of long-term unemployment. Will the Minister acknowledge that although, as she said, almost 200,000 placements have been approved by the scheme, only 16,500 have actually started—as the noble Baroness, Lady Sherlock, said—because of delays caused by the third lockdown and bureaucracy? The CBI, of which I am president, is calling for a six-month extension to the excellent Kickstart scheme until June 2022 to allow many young people to participate. Will the Government please agree to this?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** I understand the noble Lord's question exactly. I am advised at the moment that there are no plans to extend the scheme, but we never know what might happen in the future. I pay tribute and thanks to the noble Lord in his capacity as chairman of the CBI, which has been an outstanding supporter and helper in the establishment of Kickstart.

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab) [V]:** Even given the difficulties created by the Covid pandemic, a 6% success rate is an abject failure. The Minister knows more than most the importance of work experience for a young person. Calling on 195,000 approved vacancies does not add up to actual jobs. If the target of 250,000 placements is not reached by December 2021, will the scheme be extended, or will the cash be grabbed by the Chancellor when he announces a new age of austerity?

**Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con):** I do understand the concern about the 16,500 placements but, as I tried to explain, during the lockdown employers have shown great commitment to involvement in Kickstart but wanted to do it when the lockdown ended. I say again to the noble Baroness that we are seeing day by day vast increases in the number of vacancies being filled,

[BARONESS STEDMAN-SCOTT]  
and we are confident that we are going to create hundreds of thousands of vacancies and place young people in them. On moving money around, I dare not get involved in that; I think I would be going a bit too far if I confirmed anything in that regard.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord Fowler):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed, and it brings Question Time to an end.

12.50 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Arrangement of Business

### *Announcement*

1 pm

**The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Fookes):** My Lords, the hybrid sitting of the House will now resume. I ask Members to respect social distancing. We now come to the House's session of Oral Questions to the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, the noble Lord, Lord Frost. There will be three Questions, with 10 minutes allowed for each, and we will proceed in the same way as for other Oral Questions.

## UK-EU Trade and Co-operation

### Agreement

#### *Question*

1.01 pm

*Asked by Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town*

To ask the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) what progress Her Majesty's Government have made towards making arrangements for the (1) scrutiny, and (2) implementation, of (a) the United Kingdom and European Union Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and (b) the Partnership Council.

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con):** My Lords, I begin by welcoming the positive vote by the European Parliament yesterday to give its consent to the trade and co-operation agreement. This puts our relationship with the European Union on a fully firm footing for the future. We can now move on to making this new relationship work and Parliament will have an important role in that, of course. We are committed to facilitating parliamentary scrutiny of this new relationship, just as we do with other international agreements.

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab):** May I give a rather belated welcome to the Minister? I have been otherwise preoccupied for a little bit. Given that the deal is now ratified, will he now start setting up the civil society forum that is also part of the scrutiny and implementation of the deal? Equally urgently, given that seafood and meat exporters to the EU face substantial new non-tariff barriers with red tape and border checks, will he ensure that reducing that drastic outcome from the deal is a high priority for the Partnership Council, of which he is co-chair?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, the answer is yes as regards the civil society forum. We are considering how it should be established and will provide an update in due course. We are engaging with civil society in the usual way on TCA implementation matters. As regards seafood and, indeed, food and drink exports of all kinds, we are very much supportive of businesses' efforts to deal with the situation that has arisen after we left the EU. We put forward a fund of £20 million for small and medium-sized enterprises to help them with this issue and are doing everything we can to support them.

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, I remind the House of my interests in the register. The noble Lord will be aware of the multiple difficulties now facing professionals in the creative industries who wish to work in Europe. If he needs reminding of the issue, perhaps I may recommend an excellent article in yesterday's *Times*, under the headline "Our actors and musicians need help with Brexit red tape". The Prime Minister indicated to the Liaison Committee on 24 March that he wanted the Government to help so, in that spirit, as we move into the next phase of our relationship with the EU, will the Government now negotiate with the EU a bespoke visa-waiver agreement for our brilliant creative industries?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, the Government are hugely supportive of our world-class creative industries, which contribute so much to the economy and to our national life. We put forward in the negotiation ambitious solutions to the issues that they faced. Unfortunately, the EU was not willing to reach agreement on them. We are now working energetically to see if we can work with our European friends bilaterally, with the aim of reducing the most difficult barriers to travel.

**Baroness Ludford (LD) [V]:** My Lords, will the Government share and discuss with parliamentarians in both Houses their plans, priorities and timetable for widening and deepening co-operation with the EU, whether on matters including mobility for professionals such as musicians—as has been mentioned—co-ordination on foreign policy issues, or easing red tape on food and seafood exports, as requested in a report today from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in the other place?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, it is inevitable that there will be quite a large number of issues to be dealt with as a result of the new relationship between us and the European Union. The noble Baroness lists some of them. We will, of course, seek to deal with some of those issues in the Partnership Council as we go forward. We raised many of them during the negotiations but it was not possible to reach agreement.

**Lord Caine (Con):** My Lords, in welcoming the ratification of the trade and co-operation agreement this week, does my noble friend, like me, find it profoundly disappointing to be lectured once again by the President of the European Commission about commitments in what is an integral part of this United Kingdom? Does he agree that the time has now come for the Commission

to engage in constructive dialogue and negotiation, rather than issuing threats, to ensure that the protocol does not work to the disadvantage of our fellow citizens in Northern Ireland?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I of course agree with my noble friend. Northern Ireland is fully part of this United Kingdom, as the protocol makes clear. I agree that the best way forward would be for the Commission to continue the dialogue that it has begun with us in the hope that we can enable the protocol to be operated in a proportionate and pragmatic way. Those discussions are under way and there is some momentum in them but, unfortunately, significant differences remain and we will need to work those through in the weeks to come.

**Lord Curry of Kirkharle (CB) [V]:** My Lords, my interests are as recorded in the register. I should like to explore with the Minister the issue of equivalence in food production standards, which have not changed since we left the European Union. Can we now assume that trade will be freed up as a consequence of yesterday's decision?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, we made clear during the negotiations, and continue to make clear, that we would be ready to agree an arrangement with the EU based on equivalence. We believe that our standards of food security and biosecurity more generally are certainly equivalent. The EU was not willing to negotiate that issue last year but we remain open to discussing that this year if it would like to change its position.

**Baroness Crawley (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, in the Minister's responsibilities for oversight of domestic transition readiness, why have so many UK government departments, including his own, not fully completed and published the common frameworks that make up the new UK internal market? It is now four months since the end of the transition period with the EU internal market, and businesses, regulators and, most importantly, consumers wish to know exactly what is happening.

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, the noble Baroness draws attention to an important issue that is central to how we operate the single market of the United Kingdom. We are in the middle of the process to which she refers but I will look into the matter and, if necessary, write to her.

**Lord Oates (LD):** Does the Minister agree that the parliamentary partnership assembly provided for in the TCA could play a critical role in ensuring that parliamentarians at Westminster and Stormont can engage with the European Parliament, which remains a co-legislator in Northern Ireland on single market issues? Given their power of initiative in both Houses, will the Government take the lead in ensuring that this partnership assembly is established as a matter of urgency, as recommended by the House of Lords EU Committee?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, we are of course very supportive of the dialogue between this Parliament and the European Parliament. We supported these provisions in the TCA. I am aware that discussions are

taking place between parliamentarians here and Members of the European Parliament in Brussels. I look forward to briefing the House in due course on how those discussions will be taken forward; it is important that they now move forward quickly.

**The Earl of Kinnoull (Non-Affl):** My Lords, on Tuesday, the European Commission issued a statement as part of the European Parliament TCA ratification process, with the Commission's TCA scrutiny undertakings to Parliament. The statement said that

"the Commission will ensure that the European Parliament is immediately and fully informed of the activities of the Partnership Council, the Trade Partnership Committee, the Trade Specialised Committees and the other Specialised Committees established by the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement".

It went on:

"The information concerns the briefing and debriefing before and after meetings of the joint bodies as well as sharing all documents pertaining to meetings of these joint bodies".

When will the Government commit to equivalent arrangements for this House?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I am aware that officials from my department are in discussion with officials from the noble Lord's committee. Our intention is that our proposals for scrutiny arrangements for the partnership council will mirror those for the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee as far as possible. This includes routine oral and written updates to committees, ministerial Written Statements before and after meetings, and the sharing of provisional agendas. We will also share meeting agendas for the specialised committees. Of course, this is a broad agreement, and many Ministers and committees will be involved in its scrutiny. We wish to take that forward in the most constructive way possible.

**The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Fookes) (Con):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. Apologies to those noble Lords still waiting.

## Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol

### Question

1.12 pm

Asked by *Baroness Hoey*

To ask the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) whether Her Majesty's Government is aware of any assessment made by the European Commission of the instability and societal problems being created in Northern Ireland by the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con):** My Lords, I am not aware of any assessment of the kind referred to in the noble Baroness's Question, but I have no doubt that the Commission is monitoring the situation in Northern Ireland closely. We are in regular contact with the Commission about the issues raised by the operation of the protocol. Those discussions have been serious and constructive; some positive momentum has been established but significant difficult issues remain.

**Baroness Hoey (Non-Aff):** My Lords, there are already serious societal difficulties in Northern Ireland. Every night, across the Province, there are dozens of—mostly peaceful—protests, with people feeling ignored and betrayed. Of course, they are not reported because they are not violent. This direct action will increase over the next few months, with the worry that there is a feeling in many communities that the only way to advance political objectives is with the threat of violence—just as the threat of IRA bombs was unfortunately used by Taoiseach Varadkar as political leverage, which led to the protocol. Can the Minister assure people in Northern Ireland that Her Majesty's Government recognise that the serious societal difficulties and instability arising from the protocol already exist, and that it is therefore unsustainable for the protocol to last much longer?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, the noble Baroness raises an important issue. In all my interactions with Vice-President Šefčovič, I drive home the seriousness of the current situation in Northern Ireland and the overriding importance for all parties of supporting the peace process and protecting the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. I encourage the vice-president to meet business and civic groups in Northern Ireland to hear their unfiltered views; I know that he intends to do that. The solution to this problem is one in which we can work with the Commission to operate the protocol in a pragmatic and proportionate fashion.

**Lord Hannan of Kingsclere (Con):** My Lords, the United Kingdom has concluded free trade agreements with 67 states, not counting the TCA belatedly ratified by the European Parliament this week. Can my noble friend assure this House that Northern Ireland will benefit in full from the provisions of those agreements?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I am happy to assure my noble friend that this Government's intention is that Northern Ireland will benefit fully from the great trade deals we have agreed and those coming in future, which we are currently negotiating; that intention is clear in the protocol. Unfortunately, because of legislation passed by the EU, Northern Ireland does not benefit from certain TRQs in the same way as the rest of the UK. This is one of the issues that we are discussing with the Commission at the moment. We are making progress on that and I am hopeful of a satisfactory resolution.

**Lord Empey (UUP) [V]:** My noble friend will be aware that, this week, considerable political instability was introduced into Stormont, in part because of the introduction of the protocol. Can he assure us that he is encouraging his counterparts in the European Union to engage with those who know something about the Belfast/Good Friday agreement? It is perfectly obvious that they do not really have a grasp on its balance and purpose. Can he also assure us that he is prepared to meet some of us to discuss this subject?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I assure my noble friend that we very much encourage the Commission—at all levels, from Vice-President Šefčovič and his team down—to engage with those who have experience of the negotiation of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and everything that followed from it. We do everything

we can to drive home the importance of protecting it as central to stability in Northern Ireland. Of course, I will be happy to meet my noble friend and colleagues to discuss this further.

**Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, when he responded to the question from my noble friend Lady McIntosh of Hudnall, the Minister repeated his response to my question on this issue last month, which confirmed that bilateral discussions with European member states were the way forward and were continuing. The Culture Secretary in Northern Ireland and Great Britain desperately needs clarity on the short-term visa issue. Can the Minister say which EU states are involved in these discussions and give us a sense of the likely timetable for their resolution?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, this is indeed an important and urgent matter. Our ambassadors and embassies are talking to member states to establish the facts around what kinds of visas and processes are required and, importantly, to get them to improve their guidance on how to apply. We are also trying to improve our own signposting to that guidance. Our rules for touring professionals are comparatively generous, of course. We hope that, out of these discussions, some member states will signal a wish to change their rules so that they look more like ours and enable this great touring activity to continue.

**Baroness Suttie (LD) [V]:** My Lords, given that the grace period has been extended, will the Government carry out their own full impact assessment on the Northern Ireland protocol? If not, why not?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, the extension of the grace period is central to managing our practical discussions with the Commission on solving the current protocol arrangements. We have published and discussed a good deal of information about the impact of the protocol. We are leading these discussions in an attempt to mitigate its impact and ensure that it is implemented in a pragmatic and proportionate way.

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, when I listen to the Minister talking about the Northern Ireland protocol, I sometimes think he has forgotten that he was part of the negotiating team that gave us it. A lot of these problems were highlighted before. Is not part of the problem the fact that, when the whole Brexit debate was going on, too little attention was paid to the impact on Northern Ireland? It seems that some progress is being made on the outstanding issues, but I want to know more. It seems that we leap from short-term fix to short-term fix when what is really needed is a commitment to making the protocol, as the Minister negotiated it, work for the long-term benefit of Northern Ireland and for all sides of the community. Otherwise, his negotiations amount to nothing.

**Lord Frost (Con):** I indeed have happy memories of negotiating the current protocol, back in 2019, when our primary task was to deal with the unsatisfactory situation that we had been bequeathed; the original backstop would have kept the whole United Kingdom in the customs union and aligned with EU law in many areas. We dealt with that in the 2019 negotiations. Our expectation then was that the protocol would be

implemented in a way that supported the Good Friday agreement in all its dimensions—east-west and north-south. That is not quite borne out in the way that it is being implemented at the moment, but we hope that, in discussions with the Commission, we will be able to improve the situation.

**Lord Moylan (Con):** My Lords, if the legal action recently initiated by the European Commission over the United Kingdom's alleged breach of the Northern Ireland protocol in March proceeds further, do Her Majesty's Government intend to submit to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice? Will my noble friend say?

**Lord Frost (Con):** We are obviously very much at the preliminary stages of the dispute settlement process to which my noble friend refers. I hope that, on reflection, the EU will agree with us that the unilateral measures that we took in March, which are the subject of this dispute, are legal, proportionate and do not require further action. If it does not, as I recall, the withdrawal agreement offers two routes for dispute settlement—normal international arbitration, or that with a role for the EU institutions—so we wait to see how and on what basis this case is taken forward.

**Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, Northern Ireland was promised the best of both worlds, but trade with the rest of the United Kingdom has reduced, not increased. Loyalists and unionists sense that they have no effective voice and that Whitehall was not honest about the consequences of Brexit. Government at the highest level must take responsibility; it must allow local politics to regain the initiative, rebuild trust with Dublin and breathe life into the British-Irish intergovernmental process. Experience shows that this requires the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to engage directly with local parties and the broader community, listening as well as being listened to, not intermittently but continuously. Is this part of the plan to deal with this problem?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, as I have noted, the situation in Northern Ireland has complex roots and it is important that all those engaging and dealing with it do so with the intention of supporting the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is of course engaging with all parties in the current situation and will continue to do so.

**The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Fookes) (Con):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. I again apologise to those not called.

## Vice-President of the European Commission *Question*

1.23 pm

*Asked by Lord Adonis*

To ask the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) when he will next meet Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission.

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con):** My Lords, I last met Vice-President Šefčovič informally, in Brussels, on 15 April. That was principally to discuss the Northern Ireland protocol. No date for a future meeting has yet been fixed, but we and our teams are in regular contact about a range of issues, regarding both the withdrawal agreement and the trade and co-operation agreement. I am confident that we will meet again soon.

**Lord Adonis (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord for meeting me and other noble Lords recently to discuss the question of an SPS veterinary agreement, which is causing such difficulties for our shellfish and agricultural exports. We discussed the possibility of an equivalence regime, which would continue until either we or the EU found it unsatisfactory because of further changes. It seemed to me that pragmatic ideas like this might be a way forward. When the Minister meets the Commissioner, might he discuss them further?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, these ideas are very much on the agenda in our discussions, although the differences between our position on the subject and that of the European Union remain significant. Nevertheless, we hope to have a constructive dialogue and see whether there is room to explore this further. As I have noted, the EU has been reluctant to move forward to an equivalence-based agreement, but we remain open to that and hope that it will also be in due course.

**Lord Lamont of Lerwick (Con):** My Lords, does my noble friend the Minister agree that, while it is good news that the TCA was ratified by the European Parliament, parts of Mrs von der Leyen's speech, with its talk of baring "teeth" and imposing tariffs, was deeply disappointing, not to mention rather unfriendly? By contrast, Monsieur Barnier said Brexit was "a failure of the European Union and we have to learn lessons from it".

When my noble friend meets Mr Šefčovič, will he stress that we want partnership and co-operation, and not continuing antagonism? It is time to put hurt behind them.

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I very much agree with my noble friend. As I made clear yesterday, I hope that we can now begin to move forward on a new chapter together, as Europeans. We want a relationship based on friendly co-operation between sovereign equals. That is what we have always wanted. I note that, a few days ago, the EU head of mission said:

"We are still in the process of accepting that the UK is no longer a member of the European Union."

I hope that that process of adjustment can be completed as soon as possible, that the language on the EU side can be toned down and that we can move forward together.

**Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab):** My Lords, in the Minister's recent statement following the meeting with Vice-President Šefčovič, can he clarify what the "outstanding issues" are, what "positive momentum"

[LORD McNICOL OF WEST KILBRIDE] was established and, more crucially, what the remaining “difficult issues” are? The statement said that Vice-President Šefčovič

“agreed there should be intensified contacts at all levels in the coming weeks.”

Can the Minister expand?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, quite a large number of issues are on the table between us and the European Union. We classify them differently, but the EU has talked of a number in the 20s, which is reasonable. We hope we are working on a joint programme to resolve some of them, but we have different perceptions of the problems. Some of the outstanding issues are SPS and food standards, pharmaceuticals, VAT and other technical arrangements. We are working intensively, at all levels, to move positions closer together and find solutions.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, an HMRC email I received at the beginning of April said:

“When exporting goods from a roll-on roll-off port or any other listed location, you, or the person submitting your customs declaration, must submit your declaration as ‘arrived’.”

So before British businesses can export and have their goods leave the country, they must declare them as “arrived” in another country. When the Minister meets the Vice-President next, can he clarify that the EU is similarly asking businesses to declare their goods as arrived before they have left, or is this an insanely irrational and confusing bureaucratic requirement from his business department alone?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, this is possibly not the moment to get into textual exegesis of HMRC guidance. I can say that we are doing our best to support UK businesses dealing with the practical consequences of leaving the customs union. There is a good deal of—I hope—intelligible guidance available to them, and most companies have now been able to deal with this new situation and are exporting successfully.

**Baroness Quin (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, I too hope that we can move quickly to solve some of the current problems facing businesses. Given the Minister’s welcome willingness to meet Members of the House, can I ask him to meet me to discuss specific ongoing problems faced by some businesses in the north-east which are threatening to jeopardise or even destroy the export trade to the EU that has been built up over many years?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I am always happy to meet Members of this House on EU exit and the practical issues that have emerged from it. On the broader point that the noble Baroness makes, the latest statistics published by the Office for National Statistics and HMRC show that trade in goods is close to previous levels and that companies are exporting successfully. There of course remain difficulties, which we are doing our very best to try to resolve.

**Lord Sarfraz (Con):** My Lords, today, the European Commission held a press conference on what better regulation might look like, delivered by Mr Šefčovič. It just so happens that, also today, the City of London

published its findings on the digital sandbox, an example of real-life better regulation in action. Does my noble friend the Minister agree that, post Brexit, the City of London will retain and enhance its position as one of the most competitive and innovative financial centres in the world?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I very much agree with my noble friend. One of the huge benefits of Brexit is that we can set regulations and rules for ourselves, for our own conditions and our own needs, rather than having to join a lowest common denominator that has been set for a wider group. We are committed to making the UK the most open and dynamic financial centre in the world, and we have every confidence that the City will prosper with our support in this new post-Brexit environment, with world-class regulation and a huge depth of expertise and entrepreneurialism.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, will the Minister agree that, before each of his meetings with Vice-President Šefčovič, he will meet our European Affairs Committee to get its views, and the views of the House, on the items on the agenda?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, I am in relatively frequent contact, remotely and face to face, with Vice-President Šefčovič. I am not sure that I can commit to meeting before every one of those meetings. I have committed to provide agendas for joint committee and Partnership Council agreements and to appear before scrutiny Committees frequently, so that the House has a good idea of the grounds of discussions.

**Lord Fox (LD):** My Lords, the Minister has recognised several times the problems that exporters are having with standards. Can he tell us how many times since January he has raised this issue with his counterpart, and, when they next meet, will he be proposing practical solutions that can significantly reduce the trade barriers that the lack of alignment has created?

**Lord Frost (Con):** My Lords, the question of support for business in this new environment is being taken forward by a large number of government departments, at all levels. We have a good dialogue with the member state customs authorities that we deal with, and implementation is going forward in a very pragmatic fashion. I expect that, at the Partnership Council, practical difficulties of the kind the noble Lord mentioned will be very much on the agenda when we meet for the first time, and going forward.

**The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Fookes) (Con):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed; apologies to those who were not called.

## Covid-19: Status Certification

### *Private Notice Question*

1.34 pm

*Tabled by Baroness Brinton*

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what plans they have to introduce COVID-19 status certification for (1) international, and (2) domestic, use.

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord True) (Con):** My Lords, we recognise the significant public and parliamentary interest in this important topic. That is why we are conducting a wide-ranging review, seeking input from clinicians, parliamentarians and businesses, and from specialists in areas such as ethics, equalities and privacy. The review is ongoing and no final decisions about the use of Covid status certification have been made. The Government will outline the findings of the review ahead of step 4 of the reopening road map.

**Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]:** For months, the Prime Minister and other Ministers said publicly that the Government do not support domestic Covid passports using test results and vaccine status. On 12 December, in a letter in the *BMJ*, the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, said that widespread asymptomatic testing could undermine the value of testing as there is a risk of giving misleading results. The MHRA, senior advisers at the Department of Health and other experts agreed. On Wednesday, and again yesterday, Ministers revealed to the press that the lateral flow tests that the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, referred to are to be used as part of the Covid certificates. Why are the Government proposing to use unreliable, voluntary surveillance tests as the mainstay of their passport scheme when Ministers and experts have said that this is wrong?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, I said in my Answer that work on the review continues and therefore there should not be an assumption. Before the Private Notice Question was agreed—which of course I have no objection to—my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster laid a Written Ministerial Statement, and I laid a Written Ministerial Statement, on the current position. It is before your Lordships and shows the current position, and I cannot add further to what is in that Statement.

**Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, given the enormous constitutional and ethical concerns about domestic Covid status certification in particular, can the Minister guarantee that there will be maximum transparency during the course of this review and commercial lobbying for such certificates, and that the Government will do their utmost to avoid any such scheme developing informally and non-legislatively, with the according risks for discrimination, privacy and so on going forward?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, as I said, and as is set out in the Written Ministerial Statement at greater length, ethical and equalities considerations are obviously among those being considered in the review. I can therefore confirm that those matters are being considered.

**Lord McLoughlin (Con):** My Lords, the Government very clearly set out their road map for getting us out of the Covid situation. Although it was a very slow map, it has been well understood and appreciated by the public overall. They should do something similar for certification, because that would bring a lot of confidence to people. It should not be a mandatory scheme, but if people do not want to partake, they might find that they do not get some of the advantages of the many who do.

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend expresses a point of view. The Government are committed to exploring whether and how certification might be used to reopen our economy, as my noble friend was implying, and reduce restrictions on social contact and improve safety. But I repeat that no final decisions have been made.

**Baroness Falkner of Margravine (CB) [V]:** My Lords, does the Minister agree with me that proportionality has to be the key to dealing with this issue? In saying so, I declare that I am chairwoman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Will he consider seriously the importance of regular parliamentary oversight of the scheme and clear, accessible exemption certificates for people who cannot be vaccinated for health reasons? Finally, does he agree that Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for people to have a right to work, so we must have balance in making a decision on this and not rule out people's right to work in gainful employment for fear of discrimination if we build in the necessary safeguards?

**Lord True (Con):** The noble Baroness raises important and germane points. I have said to the House twice now that ethical, equalities, privacy and other issues of those kinds are being and will continue to be considered. I refer to my Written Ministerial Statement, which sets this out at greater length.

**Lord Scriven (LD):** My Lords, Zühlke Engineering was awarded a £3.9 million contract to build the now-discredited and abandoned Isle of Wight centralised test and trace app. If no final decisions have been made, why and at what cost has it been awarded work without a competitive tendering process to build Covid certifications into the NHS app with centralised systems?

**Lord True (Con):** I will ask my colleagues involved to look at the points the noble Lord makes. I repeat that work is continuing, as set out in the Written Ministerial Statement before the House. The review is continuing.

**The Lord Bishop of Rochester:** My Lords, in relation to some of the issues raised, the Minister may well already be aware of the expert working group of the Ada Lovelace Institute on some of these practical and ethical considerations. While personally I see the need for schemes of this kind—for international travel, obviously, but also in relation to some activities and sectors—will Her Majesty's Government, in assessing the various pieces of work now being done, have a particular concern to make sure that no scheme becomes compulsory vaccination by default and to mitigate disproportionate effects on groups within the population such as those within which vaccine take-up has been low?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, I agree with the right reverend Prelate that any scheme would certainly have to take into account those who cannot have the vaccine. Obviously, the different strands—international and domestic—raise separate issues. On international travel, we also have to take fully into account what other countries may require of our citizens.

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** In the typical fashion of this Government, the Transport Secretary claimed that the prospects for foreign holidays in May looked good. First, can the Minister say whether that will be the case in two days' time? It seems that was probably a bit previous. Can he tell us whether the Government are having discussions with IATA about the creation of an internationally recognised travel passport? Can he also assure the House that we will not see a repeat of the chaotic experience of the test and trace app at the beginning and that the Government have learned the lessons of the benefits of working internationally and co-operatively, rather than going it alone?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, I think nobody pretends that everything that has happened in the last year has been done perfectly in every case. The Government maintain that we have made enormous progress. I think people are gladdened and heartened to see the progress being made, in both the statistics and delivery. So far as international travel is concerned, I will not add to speculation. The Government will set out their position on international travel in advance of 17 May, as set out in the road map.

**Lord Balfie (Con):** My Lords, I point out to the Minister that many people in this country are just fed up with lockdown, and anything that can ease it and make things simpler will be welcome. On the international front, I ask him to ensure that any international certificate we come forward with is compliant with and understandable in the countries that people wish to travel to. We really cannot go into a situation in which we have multiple different certificates for international travel.

**Lord True (Con):** I obviously agree with my noble friend that for international travel there have to be international discussions, and indeed there are. So far as his point on lockdown is concerned, lockdown is extremely hard. It is something that has been and is being done for the sake of the general good and has contributed to the situation we are now in. Of course, the Government never underestimate the mental health and other issues that arise and have arisen.

**Lord Bilimoria (CB) [V]:** My Lords, the CBI, of which I am president, has submitted evidence to the Government asking for a principles-based approach, meaning that these certificates should be voluntary, time-limited, science-led and either/or, based on tests or someone's vaccine status. That is for domestic. There should be alignment between domestic and international so that people can adapt and restore trade, business and tourism links. Does the Minister agree that we need urgent clarification about these intentions to instil confidence, allow preparations and give people, businesses and wider society time to adapt, alongside support for businesses?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, the Government have set out the intention and the timescale on which we intend to proceed. We have committed to setting out the conclusions of the review ahead of step 4, as set out in the Written Ministerial Statement that has been laid. Of course, businesses are among the interested groups with which the Government have engaged and will continue to engage.

**Baroness Barker (LD):** My Lords, in a Written Answer to my noble friend Lord Scriven's Question HL15192, the noble Lord, Lord True, said:

"We will present ... findings from the COVID-status Certification Review to Parliament today."

Given the serious restrictions on people's liberty and livelihoods, why is this being slipped out in the days before a recess? Why is it not subject to full scrutiny in Parliament?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, I have been open with Parliament and we have laid a Written Ministerial Statement. Given that Parliament is going into recess, it seemed appropriate to set out progress and the current state of affairs with the review. Any noble Lord who chooses to read it will see that that is fairly set out, but a final decision has not yet been made and, as we have repeatedly said, will be announced in due course.

**Baroness Andrews (Lab) [V]:** My Lords, can the Minister tell me whether a vaccine passport is supposed to be a substitute for quarantine? What tests or conditions will continue to be applied on leaving the UK for, and entering the UK from, countries on the green list or any other list?

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, again, the specific, final decisions that address those points have not yet been made and will be announced on the timescale I have indicated to the House.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, I raise a point I have raised many times before; I have had good answers from the noble Lord, Lord Bethell. A vulnerable area is the care home sector. It is absurd that care home workers are able to refuse to be vaccinated when they are attending to the most intimate needs of vulnerable, frail and often very old people.

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, my noble friend makes an important point about care homes, and I am sure my noble friend Lord Bethell will consider that carefully. The safety and security of the most vulnerable is absolutely vital.

**Baroness Bull (CB):** My Lords, arts organisations that are charities or in receipt of public funds have a duty to uphold and champion equality, inclusion and diversity. Unless government makes explicit how the Equality Act will be central to any Covid-19 certification scheme, these organisations will be put in an untenable position, unable to comply with their own charitable purposes or the conditions of public funding. How will government address this?

**Lord True (Con):** Again, my Lords, as set out in the Statement and in my response, equality issues are considered and they are being considered in the scope of the review, as are the specific interests of the performing and arts sector. The noble Baroness will know that my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and other members of the Government have met those in those sectors. We will of course reflect on the consideration that the noble Baroness puts forward.

**The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Fookes) (Con):** My Lords, for once, all supplementary questions have been asked.

## Conduct Committee: 11th Report

### *Motion to Agree*

1.50 pm

*Moved by Lord Mance*

That the Report from the Select Committee *Lords office-holders' interests* (11th Report, HL Paper 274) be agreed to.

**Lord Mance (CB) [V]:** My Lords, this report proposes a change to the rules governing the interests of the three officeholders of the House of Lords—that is, the Lord Speaker, the Senior Deputy Speaker and the Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees. The rules at present state that officeholders must give up most financial interests. The rationale is of course to ensure that they have the time to do the job properly as well as to avoid the perception of conflicts of interest.

The committee stands by that rationale absolutely, but it also believes that there should be the power to permit a derogation from the rules in exceptional circumstances where the rationale can be respected and, where this proves necessary, to avoid an unnecessary and disproportionate burden being visited upon an officeholder or potential officeholder. Any such derogation would be explained and published by the committee.

The reason why the report has been drafted, published and put to the House now in such short order is that, in the brief period since the election of the new Lord Speaker, a candidate to replace the noble Lord, Lord McFall, as Senior Deputy Speaker has been identified, and it has become clear that the interest rules as currently framed would cause him a serious problem in one respect. As noble Lords know, the candidate in question is the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, and his situation will perhaps illustrate why the Conduct Committee has concluded that this system of derogations is appropriate and should be introduced.

The noble Lord owns a significant part of family farming properties, an interest that he has correctly registered in the category for land and property under the code and guide, category 5. Interests in category 5 do not have to be set aside by officeholders. However, since he is also a partner in a farming business carried on at the farming properties—in his case, through a partnership—his interest in that respect must also be registered in the category for remunerated work, category 2, which covers employment, trade and so on, a wide variety of activities. Under the current rules, that is a category in which officeholders may not hold an interest.

It is right to say that the requirement for double registration may not always be appreciated or acted on, but the noble Lord has both appreciated it and acted accordingly. However, his double registration means that, if he is to serve as Senior Deputy Speaker, the noble Lord faces the unenviable choice of leaving the running of the farming properties to his 80 year-old cousin and another partner who lives in New Zealand—an impractical exercise, he assures us. The alternative would of course be disposing of his share in the partnership altogether.

The noble Lord has retained that partnership share and his farming interests in his current role as a Defra Minister for years. He has assured us that it has had

no adverse impact on his performance of the ministerial role, and we have heard no suggestion to the contrary. The committee is satisfied that there would be no such impact on how he carried out the function of Senior Deputy Speaker effectively and impartially.

The committee has therefore concluded that, should today's report be agreed upon, which I invite, the committee will then exercise its newfound power to allow the noble Lord to retain his farming interests during his term of office. I add that, quite apart from the fact that officeholders do not change every day, the committee anticipates that the use of the derogation power would itself be rare. I beg to move.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** I do not oppose this reasonable, generous and timely report, but I am very concerned about another recent, and much less generous, report from the Conduct Committee, one that is in danger of making your Lordships' House a laughing stock. I refer to the decision sprung upon us at short notice, which I opposed on the day the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mance, introduced it, to make attendance at behaviour classes compulsory. I was obedient, but I found the course a complete waste of time—condescending, patronising, superficial and not drawn up by anyone who appeared to be familiar with the workings of your Lordships' House.

That is not the main point that I wish to make today. A highly critical leader in the *Times* yesterday pointed out that the noble Baroness, Lady Boothroyd, holder of the Order of Merit and one of our most distinguished Members, is being investigated along with some 60 other Peers for not complying and taking the online bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment workshop. She missed the deadline not because she had refused but, in common with several others, because she had medical health problems. I have heard even this morning of another very disturbing example of a noble Lord who, for similar and other reasons, was not able to take the course before, I think, either 4 or 8 April. He took it, but he is still being censured because he did not meet the 1 April deadline.

To add insult to injury, we are told that the Commissioner for Standards has forbidden those to whom she has written from commenting. If they do, she alleges that they will be in contempt of Parliament. I am astounded that she should make such bullying comments.

I ask the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mance, in his capacity as chairman of the Conduct Committee, to summon an early meeting with his colleagues to reconsider their approach. As the *Times* said yesterday, elderly and respected parliamentarians, of whom the noble Baroness, Lady Boothroyd, is a most notable example, should not be made to suffer because certain other Peers have behaved badly. I made it plain when I opposed the introduction of the compulsory element that I have no sympathy for such Peers; they should be treated severely and meet their just deserts.

If, unlike the appropriate equivalent committee in another place, your Lordships' Conduct Committee decides to continue recommending compulsory training, I am sure it would find much better value by arranging for it to be done in-house rather than by spending £750,000 on a consultancy that clearly has little knowledge of Parliament.

[LORD CORMACK]

I appeal to the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mance, to act expeditiously on this matter in the way that he and his committee have rightly acted expeditiously on the matter of my noble friend Lord Gardiner of Kimble. This is a sad subject to have to raise on the last day of this Session, but to have the reputations of some of our most notable and honoured Members traduced in this way is completely unacceptable.

1.59 pm

**Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con):** I congratulate my noble friend Lord Cormack because he was not asleep at the switch, as I was when this order was put in front of the House. Of course, we were not given an awful lot of notice; I gather the order was published on a Wednesday and placed before the House the following day.

When I attended this course, I was asked whether I would like to be referred to by my Christian name, which I was happy to agree to. I then said that I would be very interested to know how much the course was costing, because we should all bear in mind value for the taxpayer. The lady conducting the course claimed that she did not know how much it was costing and referred me to somebody else in the organisation. Since then, the *Times* has told us—as my noble friend has asserted—that it is three-quarters of a million pounds. That is serious money in anybody's estimation. Are we getting value for money with this course?

The course I went on had a hypothetical situation of a new young girl working in the Library. She had to be working in the Library—I gather the Clerk of the Parliaments at the time said that it should not be said that she was working in the Library because somehow that would embarrass the staff of the House; I cannot think why—but, as she was being asked to research things, she had to be in the Library. A Peer called Lord Adams was approaching her in a lecherous manner. This hypothesis is almost too ridiculous to even contemplate because, if somebody wanted to approach some young woman in the House, they would not do it in public in front of everybody. But the great advantage of having a hypothetical situation where it is done in public in front of everybody is that we are all complicit in allowing it to happen. That was what this was all about; we should have stopped him behaving like this.

If there is a problem, it is probably that Lord Adams employs this girl with his own money and has her tucked away in some office in the Palace so far away in the rabbit warren that you can barely find it on a good day. He says to her, “Would you like to work late?” and she has to comply because he is paying her. He then says, “Why don't we share a drink together?” and, half a bottle of whisky later, you can imagine what happens. That is the problem—if there is a problem. The hypothesis we were dealing with was very unlikely to ever occur and was a complete waste of time.

I did learn something on this course. There are not such things as “girls” unless they are under the age of 14, so it is inappropriate to call a woman who is over the age of 14 a “girl”.

**A noble Lord:** But the noble Lord did.

**Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con):** Indeed, people on this course called people “girls”. We cannot say to a woman, “Gosh, that's a nice new hairdo you've got”, or, “I really like the dress you are wearing”, because that is inappropriate as well.

This course is a complete expensive farce and we should never have embarked on it in the first place. I hope the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mance, will abandon this course and get back to a more sensible use of taxpayers' money.

**The Deputy Speaker (Lord Faulkner of Worcester) (Lab):** Does any other noble Lord in the Chamber wish to speak? If not, I will ask the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mance, to reply.

2.03 pm

**Lord Mance (CB) [V]:** My Lords, I am grateful for the support this report has received. The comments on Valuing Everyone training will be taken back to the Conduct Committee at our next meeting. Not all of them were made for the first time. We have had some concerns expressed about the nature of the training and have relayed them, and there have been alterations.

As the Conduct Committee we are not responsible for the course and we are not competent to establish such a course, but noble Lords are right in saying that we recommended it be made compulsory. We were not the first. In Naomi Ellenbogen QC's report in 2019, she made precisely that recommendation. She also recommended the establishment of the Steering Group for Change, led by the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, which also made the same recommendation. We accepted it and put it to the House last October, I think, and it was accepted by the House. However, Members are right to express any concerns so that they can be considered.

The code is under constant review and the number of reports we have issued in the past two years indicates that. I will not comment on particular cases. The House has appointed an outside commissioner who deals with the investigation of particular cases. It is not the commissioner or any decision of hers which says that investigations are confidential; they are confidential under the code the House approved. That is in the interests of complainants as well as of Members complained against. Again, that is a matter under consideration to the extent that it might be appropriate in certain circumstances of consent to allow, for example, a Member to rebut a complaint publicly if it were dismissed. That is a rather ancillary point. The general principle is one of confidentiality, for obvious reasons, of the best interests of those directly involved.

As regards the pursuit of investigations in circumstances which might cause reason for special treatment, in our report—which the House approved—we provided for precisely that. The commissioner, who is no doubt conscientiously considering these matters, as she does, has the power to stop an investigation in exceptional circumstances, which include reasons of health. I have no doubt that, if they apply, that exception will be applied.

On the point made about timeliness, we have taken on board—the present is an exception, for reasons which I see are understood—the need to allow more time

between the publication of a report and its presentation to the House to enable the implications to become more widespread and for it to be digested. That is in train.

I will not comment on the article in the *Times* save to say this: yesterday, the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, and I composed a letter in response to the *Times* which I understand is not in the paper today—it may be tomorrow. We addressed a number of the points I have already covered. We pointed out that, as regards the popularity or otherwise of Valuing Everyone training, 93% of Members have now undertaken the course in person or online—

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** I hesitate to intervene on the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mance, but I think we need to agree his perfectly sensible Motion to approve the 11th report from the Select Committee. He has made it clear that he has noted the views of the Members opposite.

**Lord Mance (CB) [V]:** I am much obliged. I therefore ask the House to accept the report.

*Motion agreed.*

2.09 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Royal Commission

2.21 pm

*The Lords Commissioners were: Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Lord Fowler and Baroness Smith of Basildon.*

**The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con):** My Lords, it not being convenient for Her Majesty personally to be present here this day, she has been pleased to cause a Commission under the Great Seal to be prepared for proroguing this present Parliament.

*When the Commons were present at the Bar, the Lord Privy Seal continued:*

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, Her Majesty, not thinking fit to be personally present here at this time, has been pleased to cause a Commission to be issued under the Great Seal, and thereby given Her Royal Assent to divers Acts which have been agreed upon by both Houses of Parliament, the Titles whereof are particularly mentioned, and by the said Commission has commanded us to declare and notify Her Royal Assent to the said several Acts, in the presence of you the Lords and Commons assembled for that purpose; and has also assigned to us and other Lords directed full power and authority in Her Majesty's name to prorogue this present Parliament. Which commission you will now hear read.

*A Commission for Royal Assent and Prorogation was read:*

Elizabeth The Second, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, To Our right trusty and right well-beloved the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and to Our trusty and well-beloved the Knights Citizens and Burgesses of the House of Commons in this present Parliament assembled, Greeting:

Forasmuch as in Our said Parliament divers Acts have been agreed upon by you Our loving Subjects the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the Commons, the short Titles of which are set forth in the Schedule hereto but the said Acts are not of force and effect in the Law without Our Royal Assent and whereas, in pursuance of the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919, certain Measures, the short Titles of which are set forth in the said Schedule, have been presented to us in the form laid before Parliament, and forasmuch as We cannot at this time be present in the Higher House of Our said Parliament, being the accustomed place for giving Our Royal Assent to such Acts as have been agreed upon by you Our said Subjects the Lords and Commons, We have caused these Our Letters Patent to be made and have signed them and by them do give Our Royal Assent to the said Acts and Measures, Willing that the said Acts and Measures shall be of the same strength, force and effect as if We had been personally present in the said Higher House and had publicly and in the presence of you all assented to the same, commanding also Our Commissioners for the custody of the Great Seal of Our Realm, to seal these Our Letters with the Great Seal of Our Realm and also commanding The Most Reverend Father in God Our faithful Counsellor Justin Portal Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Metropolitan, Our well-beloved and faithful Counsellors

Robert James Buckland, Chancellor of Great Britain

Peter Norman Lord Fowler, Lord Speaker

Natalie Jessica Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Lord Privy Seal

Richard Mark, Lord Newby

Igor, Lord Judge

Angela Evans, Baroness Smith of Basildon

or any three or more of them to declare this Our Royal Assent in the said Higher House in the presence of you the said Lords and Commons and the Clerk of Our Parliaments to endorse the said Acts and Measures in Our name as is requisite and to record these Our Letters Patent and the said Acts and Measures in manner accustomed and We do declare that after this Our Royal Assent given and declared as is aforesaid then and immediately the said Acts and Measures shall be taken and accepted as good and perfect Acts of Parliament and good and perfect Measures and be put in due execution accordingly.

And whereas We did lately for divers difficult and pressing affairs concerning Us the State and defence of Our United Kingdom and Church ordain this Our present Parliament to begin and be holden at Our City of Westminster the seventeenth day of December in the sixty-eighth year of Our Reign, on which day Our said Parliament was begun and holden and is there now holden, Know Ye that for certain pressing causes and considerations Us especially moving We have thought fit to prorogue Our said Parliament.

We therefore confiding very much in the fidelity, prudence and circumspection of you Our Commissioners aforesaid have by the advice and consent of Our Council assigned you Our Commissioners giving to you or any three or more of you by virtue of these Presents full power and authority in Our name to prorogue and

[BARONESS EVANS OF BOWES PARK]  
 continue Our present Parliament at Our City of Westminster aforesaid on a day no earlier than Thursday the twenty-ninth day of April and no later than Tuesday the fourth day of May until and unto Tuesday the eleventh day of May there then to be holden, and we command you that you diligently attend the premises and effectually fulfil them in manner aforesaid We also strictly command all and singular Our Archbishops, Bishops, Lords, Baronets, Knights Citizens and Burgesses and all others whom it concerns to meet at Our said Parliament by virtue of these Presents that they observe, obey and assist you in executing the premises as they ought to do, In Witness whereof We have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent witness Ourselves at Westminster the twenty-ninth day of April in the seventieth year of Our Reign, by The Queen Herself signed with Her own Hand.

*The Lord Privy Seal continued:*

In obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, and by virtue of the Commission which has been now read, we do declare and notify to you, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in Parliament assembled, that Her Majesty has given Her Royal Assent to the Acts in the Commission mentioned; and the Clerks are required to pass the same in the usual Form and Words.

### Royal Assent

2.37 pm

*The following Acts were given Royal Assent:*

Trade Act,  
 Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act,  
 Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Act,  
 Non-Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Act,  
 Forensic Science Regulator Act,  
 British Library Board (Power to Borrow) Act,  
 Education and Training (Welfare of Children) Act,  
 Domestic Abuse Act,  
 Prisons (Substance Testing) Act,  
 Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Fillers (Children) Act,  
 Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act,  
 Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act,  
 Financial Services Act,  
 Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act,  
 Fire Safety Act,  
 National Security and Investment Act.

*The following Measures were given Royal Assent:*

Diocesan Boards of Education Measure,  
 Cathedrals Measure.

### Prorogation: Her Majesty's Speech

2.41 pm

*Her Majesty's most gracious Speech was then delivered to both Houses of Parliament by the Lord Privy Seal, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command, as follows.*

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, in the midst of a global pandemic, my Government's legislative programme responded to the needs of the

United Kingdom, making sure that public services and businesses had the support they needed. In addition, it progressed domestic reforms to strengthen the union; increase productivity and protect citizens; and delivered the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

My Government acted to protect the health and safety of the nation. Legislation was passed to ensure the NHS could continue to provide care for all those in need of it and that essential public services, such as the courts and prisons, could continue.

My Government took action to support jobs, businesses and livelihoods, with over £350 billion of financial support, helping to protect over 11 million jobs. To support businesses, my Government provided affordable loans, business rates relief and modernised insolvency laws. To facilitate businesses operating under social distancing restrictions, laws were passed to increase flexibilities in planning and licensing decisions. My Government took action to support the industries most heavily affected by the pandemic, including tourism, culture and leisure, and took steps to repair the public finances once economic recovery is secure.

My Government protected the most vulnerable by supporting those who were shielding during the pandemic, placing rough sleepers in emergency accommodation and increasing funding for essential public services.

My Government worked with the devolved Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure all citizens across the United Kingdom shared in the benefits of scientific advances in testing, medicines and vaccines, as well as benefiting from the logistical expertise of our gallant Armed Forces.

My Government built one of Europe's largest testing regimes, supporting an evidence-based roadmap to ease restrictions and making it safe to visit loved ones, including in care homes, at the earliest opportunity.

My Government supported research by British scientists to develop one of the world's most effective vaccines. Following the first deployment of a clinically authorised Covid-19 vaccine anywhere in the world, my Government embarked on one of the fastest vaccination programmes. My Ministers led international efforts to ensure fair and equitable access to vaccines for every country in the world.

Legislation was passed to ensure the United Kingdom's smooth exit from the European Union and the end of the transition period. A comprehensive trade and co-operation agreement was negotiated with the European Union, alongside continuity trade agreements with 67 countries.

Legislation passed in this Session will make the most of the opportunities that being an independent nation brings for the entire United Kingdom. A points-based immigration system was introduced, ending free movement while enabling the United Kingdom to welcome skilled workers from across the world. Hundreds of powers were returned to the devolved Governments following the end of the transition period. Laws were enacted to enable the funding of projects which further the prosperity of all parts of the United Kingdom through shared economic growth, enhanced infrastructure and common cultural values. Legislation was passed

to ensure the union continues to provide an effective market for businesses, regardless of where in the United Kingdom they buy from or sell to.

My Government pursued an extensive programme of domestic reform. Alongside increased investment in schools and putting more police on the streets, my Government prioritised the safety and health of the nation while pursuing economic growth and increasing opportunity across the United Kingdom.

My Ministers further supported the NHS by enshrining in law for the first time a multiyear funding settlement. Legislation was passed to ensure faster and safer access for patients to innovative medicines.

My Government prioritised investment in infrastructure and world-leading scientific research and skills. To unleash productivity and improve daily life for communities across the country, my Ministers brought forward proposals to transform rail, road, bus and aviation infrastructure and modernise the planning system. Legislation was passed to accelerate the delivery of gigabit-capable broadband.

Legislation was passed to ensure the United Kingdom's financial services sector remains open and internationally competitive. Pension laws were reformed to make it easier for people to save for later life.

The security of the nation and its citizens remains of the highest importance to my Government. New powers to protect the United Kingdom from emerging economic and cyber threats were introduced. New legislation passed in this Session will ensure the security services have the powers they need to keep citizens safe.

To tackle violence against women and girls, landmark laws were passed to address domestic abuse, including recognising coercive control and non-fatal strangulation for the crimes that they are. New measures were introduced to increase prison sentences for the most serious crimes, including terrorism, and to support victims and their families.

To keep residents safe in their homes, steps were taken to apply building safety regulations to communal areas and establish a new regulator to keep buildings safe.

My Ministers have pursued policies to protect the environment for future generations, including by improving the sustainability of agricultural and fishing practices. Proposals were published to reform the energy sector and deliver net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

My Government prioritised creating green jobs, including plans to quadruple offshore wind generation. My Ministers continued to lead the global effort against climate change, making preparations to host the COP 26 summit in Glasgow. Funding was increased for developing countries to respond to the impacts of climate change.

Legislation was passed to ensure that parliamentary boundaries are equally sized and up to date. Draft legislation was published to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act.

My Ministers announced plans to invest over £24 billion in our gallant Armed Forces over the next four years. Legislation to strengthen the Armed Forces covenant was introduced in Parliament. Measures to tackle vexatious claims made against veterans were passed into law.

My Government published a comprehensive review of its defence, foreign and national security policies and continued to promote freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law. A new sanctions regime targeted human rights violators and abusers, including those responsible for human rights violations in Xinjiang. A new visa will enable eligible citizens of Hong Kong to live, work and make their home in the United Kingdom.

My Government worked closely with international partners to tackle the global challenges presented by the pandemic, including by delivering over 300 aid programmes and supporting girls at risk of being excluded from education. Additional funding was announced to prevent famine for over 7 million vulnerable people.

Members of the House of Commons, I thank you for the provisions which you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public services.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

**The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park)**  
**(Con):** My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has been now read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to the 11th day of May, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Tuesday, the 11th day of May.

*Parliament was prorogued at 2.51 pm.*





