

My speech on the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps and Other Provisions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021, 16 June 2021

It is time to trust people more. It is time to control people less. I would like to praise Ministers and officials, and particularly all the scientists, medics and researchers, who have worked so hard to ensure that the UK is a leader in vaccines—supplying one of the best vaccines to the world, getting it out early and making it available for all of us, and ensuring that we had bought in other vaccines that became available so that we were in a position to protect our population well and relatively early compared with other countries. I pay tribute to all the work by the NHS and the medics to understand how to treat the disease better and how it is transmitted so that we can take better actions to give people greater security.

I say now to all those experts, the NHS and the Government, “Share what is relevant with the rest of us—the public—and let us make more of our own risk assessments.” We are now saying to people that there are two major ways in which we can all protect ourselves against the possibility of getting this disease, or a bad version of it. First, we are making two jabs available to all adults who want them, and the figures so far show that that gives them a much better probability of not catching the disease at all and very strong protection against a serious case of it, which is what we are mainly worried about, as we are trying to stop people dying or struggling in intensive care, and to stop that pressure on the NHS and all the suffering that it produces.

We are also saying to people, “If you’re still worried about the residual risk or if you really don’t like vaccines, you can self-isolate.” I hope that the Government will continue, as an employer and as the Government, guiding others in the economy to say that we should be generous and supportive of anyone who really does feel that they need to protect themselves against the virus by self-isolation, but I think that we are now well beyond the stage where we have to isolate practically everybody else to some extent when so many people now have protection, are making their own risk judgments, and want to get on with their lives.

In the room, when assessing the data, it is important that we look at all the data about jobs, livelihoods, incomes, family stress and mental health pressures, because this policy is creating all of those. The Government can do more. They should be helping the private sector to manage air flows, air extraction, ultraviolet cleaning and so forth to make it safer for many more social contact businesses to reopen and have a reasonable number of people enjoying their services. I think that more could be done on ensuring that all our health settings have really great infection control, because we do not

want any more slippages from health settings themselves.

I urge the Government to think again about an idea they looked at early on but did not develop, which is in the large populated areas, particularly the conurbations, to have isolation hospitals that deal with covid and other variant infectious diseases well away from general hospitals. We add to the pressures and the likelihood of cross-infection if we have a general hospital taking in a very infectious disease.

There is now huge scope to get a really good economic recovery to save jobs, create new jobs and get pay up, to have many more transactions in the economy. To do that, however, we need to relax and to trust the people more. I think my constituents are ready to make decisions about their own lives again and many are very frustrated that they are not allowed to. We have all this great advice and knowledge. Let us not get too gloomy and let us not lock everybody up again.

[Time to trust people more. Time to control people less.](#)

I will post this morning the text of my speech yesterday in Parliament about the planned extension to the lockdown. I joined with others to vote against the measures, and spoke in favour of an alternative approach.

Yesterday with full Opposition backing Parliament voted to delay the return of a full Parliament. All the time we are encouraged to join remotely, all the time seats are very limited in the chamber, all the time you need to bid for a speaking slot in advance and find your name on a published list, the scope for spontaneity and more challenge to government is limited. Parliament thrives on the momentum of causes, on the noise of support and opposition, on the heat of the moment remark or intervention. Much of this is lost with a largely remote Parliament.

The Opposition parties supported the government and most Labour MPs did not bother to join the debate. The few who did just wanted to exploit the latest Cummings Revelations. It fell to Conservative MPs to question the policy and to make the case for a restoration of Parliament.

Now the government has said we will have to live with the virus, and has stated it cannot be completely eradicated, the question is why not start doing that now? We accept all sorts of other risks in our lives. We all know there is no guarantee of immortality, and no government can protect us from all harms. Every time we cross a road, drive a car, fly in a plane, prepare food, stay in a railway carriage or on a bus with people with flu we run a risk of harm. It is important to let people decide for themselves how much risk of this virus they want to run, and offer them several ways of

minimising that risk.

We now want to get on with our lives. We now need to let people go to work and rebuild our prosperity.

President Macron's revealing view of Northern Ireland

When President Macron said that sending supermarket supplies from Toulouse to Paris was different from sending them from Liverpool to Belfast because in the first case they were in the same country he revealed a common international misunderstanding about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Fed on a diet of EU and Republic of Ireland spin they all see the issues in Northern Ireland from the Irish Republican viewpoint. They ignore or simply do not understand the majority community in Northern Ireland who are strongly of the view that Northern Ireland must remain an integral part of the UK, as much a part of the UK as Toulouse is part of France. There are quite a lot of Americans who also need to be told this. They sometimes seem to think the UK is holding onto some colony in Northern Ireland against the will of the people. As the Good Friday Agreement makes clear Northern Ireland is fully part of the UK by virtue of popular majority support. It could be changed by a referendum or border poll. Recent polling shows an insufficient level of support for any such change showing there is no need to hold a poll.

When challenged by the UK view that the current arrangements over trade between GB and NI are not working, the EU argues two contradictory soundbites. They say the UK entered into an international Agreement called the Northern Ireland Protocol, and that must be fully enforced and can never be changed. They also argue that the Good Friday Agreement is central to the wider issues of good peaceful government on both sides of the border on the island of Ireland.

The truth is the EU's aggressive and excessive approach to implementing their view of the Protocol is undermining the Good Friday Agreement. Their actions have alienated the majority community in Northern Ireland, who see the EU trying to force them into dependence on the Republic, severing important links with their own country, the wider UK.

Nor is it true to say that the EU's view of the legal requirements of the Protocol are correct. The Protocol, like the Good Friday Agreement, seeks to balance the interests of the UK and of the Republic/EU. It is meant to uphold Northern Ireland's full membership of the UK's internal or single market, yet the EU is doing everything it can to stop goods, animals and plants passing from GB to NI. The UK government needs to set out its legal view of the EU's need to respect the UK single market to comply with the Protocol, and its various suggested fixes for the restrictions and frictions

deliberately placed in the way of GB/NI trade by the EU.

I did not myself vote for the final UK/EU Agreement, fearing bad faith by the EU especially on fish and Northern Ireland. The Withdrawal Act I did vote for contained the crucial sovereignty clause which gives us the legal basis to act unilaterally if the EU refuses to negotiate a sensible compromise. We also have such rights under the Vienna Convention on Treaties should we need to renounce the Protocol. The EU/UK Agreement also gives us the right to suspend the Protocol if it is not being fairly and sensibly enforced. It is time to take control of our own internal trade and demonstrate that is legal as well as right.

[My Parliamentary Question on HGV Driving Tests](#)

I have received this answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to increase the rate of HGV driving tests undertaken. (12055)

Tabled on: 08 June 2021

Answer:

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has put in place a number of measures to increase driving tests. These include offering overtime and annual leave buy back to examiners, asking all those qualified to conduct tests, but who do not do so as part of their current day job, to return to conducting tests, and conducting out of hours testing (such as on public holidays).

The DVSA has also started a recruitment campaign to increase the number of examiners. The aim is to increase testing capacity and reduce the backlog as quickly as possible, whilst maintaining a COVID-secure service for customers and examiners.

The answer was submitted on 14 Jun 2021 at 15:17.

[Time to unlock](#)

I understand the caution of advisers specialising in controlling CV 19. For

them there may indeed be a mutant virus around the corner that beats the vaccine, or a new variant that spreads faster. The task of government is to weigh that advice in the balance with the advice coming from people wanting to re open their businesses, get back to work, have a less restricted social and family life who think the current restrictions have gone on long enough.

Earlier in the pandemic debates I suggested a range of measures to help keep people as safe as possible whilst locking down less of the economy. Some were adopted. The basis of the whole package was the principle of helping all elderly and medically vulnerable people to stay away from others who might be a centre of infection whilst allowing others unlikely to get a serious version of the disease more freedom if they wished. It was important to make it as easy as possible for those isolating to get deliveries of the things they needed from phone or on line orders, and for them to keep in touch by phone or zoom or social media. The measures adopted anyway had to allow a large minority freedom to work to keep the rest of us supplied with food and water, power and broadband. It also had to allow all of us the choice to go to food shops and to take some exercise. As the official figures for cases and deaths built up around the world there was no simple relationship between length and severity of lockdown and death rates. Countries like Belgium and Hungary with lockdown policies suffered worse than others not taking so many measures.

The UK government did well in early identification of vaccines to back, offering cash and orders to companies that seemed likely to develop and test a successful vaccine. It also took up the idea of testing existing drugs for their efficacy in treating the disease to cut death rates for those infected. I also urged more work on air flows and air extraction to make public venues safer, and better infection control in health establishments.

Yesterday the government announced a continuation of measures for another four weeks. This will harm a range of businesses still locked down, and continue to impede other businesses operating well below normal capacity thanks to social distancing rules. I urge them to review this decision as soon as new data becomes available. It appears that the vaccines are very effective, and that practically everyone vulnerable to bad version of the disease has now had a vaccine. I favour letting people make more of their own decisions about how much risk they are willing to run in their lives. If someone still has a fear of this virus then of course the employer, the family and the community should be sympathetic and help them to do as much as possible without social contact. For others who are at very little risk of a bad version of the disease, let them make more of their own choices.