Three tests to relax lockdown?

Each day we can witness some graphs of the progress of the virus in the UK. Two of the series of numbers that are produced are likely to be an important part of the decision this week about whether and to what extent the current strict controls on our work and lives are lifted.

The aim of saving the NHS is embodied in the graph of use of NHS Intensive Care beds and patient numbers. This graph has been coming down for some time, and is now well below NHS enhanced capacity to cope. So much so, we are told the emergency large hospitals built to handle more Covid 19 cases will be put on hold with no patients. The government should state that short of a major upsurge in cases way beyond the first surge, the NHS can now cope.

The aim to save lives is charted by the death rate. The graph of this is also now coming down, despite the changes to the numbers that boosted them. Given the decline in patients admitted with the disease to hospitals you would expect a fall in hospital deaths.

This leaves the third uncharted number that Ministers place great stress on – R or the rate of transmission. The absence of a regularly updated graph of R is disappointing, as we need to see how it changes over time. The verbal indications from the advisers is that it has fallen a lot and is now under 1, as it needs to be to slow the spread of the infection. Ministers should ask for more information on how R is calculated and how it has been trending, and tell the rest of us. It seems that much rests on the particular calculation and estimation of R and its trends.

I was pleased to read that they are now going to sample test the population for the presence of the virus, which should give a more reliable figure for R when you have several sampled tests over time. I trust this will help guide future changes to the controls on us but not delay getting more people back to work safely as soon as possible. Our prosperity and liberty requires us to relax these controls and there is now the opportunity to do so.