

## 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.