

Vaccine Passports

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

16:30:00

Sir David Amess (in the Chair)

I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice—that is an obvious fact—in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. The timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate, which is why there will be a 15-minute interval, and there will be suspensions between debates.

I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate. I also remind Members participating virtually that they are visible at all times, both to each other and to us in the Boothroyd Room, so no drinking tea or eating food. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks' email address.

I ask Members attending physically to kindly clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room, if they would not mind. Members attending physically who are in the latter stages of the call list should use the seats in the Public Gallery and move on to the horseshoe when seats become available. Members may speak only from the horseshoe, which is where the microphones are.

To be helpful to colleagues, I have done the maths and am imposing a time limit of three and a half minutes on Back-Bench contributions. Obviously, Front Benchers will get the usual 10 minutes each.

16:31:00

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab) [V]

I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 569957, relating to vaccine passports.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank the petitioner, Mr David Nolan, and all the other signatories of the petition, which has reached 295,842 signatures. The wording of the petition is as follows:

“We want the Government to commit to not rolling out any e-vaccination status/immunity passport to the British public. Such passports could be used to restrict the rights of people who have refused a Covid-19 vaccine, which would be unacceptable.”

The petitioner wants me to make it clear that they do not represent themselves as anti-vaccination. In their own words, “We believe anti-vaxx people are in an absolute minority in Britain.”

The petition is not exclusively about those worried about discrimination if they refuse vaccination; it is more about the implementation of vaccine passports and their technology for everyone in society. In comparison with yellow fever, the petitioner wants it to be known that “comparing this certification alongside any proposed covid status certification is not a viable argument, as we are dealing with very different viruses. Yellow fever certification is only required for up to 30 African and 13 Latin countries.”

The petition is not difficult to understand and stems from genuine concerns among many of the petitioners. I state clearly for the record my support for the vaccination programme, and I

encourage everyone eligible for their vaccination to take it as soon as they are offered it by our national health service, which is working so hard to deliver the programme on time.

It is easy to understand why a vaccine passport may appear to be a perfect option for the Government, who are trying to ease the lockdown as quickly and safely as possible. The idea that we could allow events to start taking place at which people who have some immunity to the virus could return to some level of normality is attractive. Like everyone else in the country, I look forward to the day when such things can take place again safely, and something that could possibly speed us along to that point is a compelling suggestion.

After almost a year of lockdowns and social distancing restrictions, anything that can help to get people back out into the community, back into their workplaces, back into their businesses and back with their families is something that we cannot discount. However, we must also consider the possible drawbacks that come with such a proposal, and we must consider the concerns with fairness. There are concerns about vaccine passports that go beyond the pseudoscience of anti-vax protesters and Twitter trolls. I therefore urge hon. Members to be mindful of some of these arguments in their contributions.

To date, the Government have not brought forward any concrete plans on vaccine passports or how they could work. However, as some countries and travel companies are beginning to require proof of vaccination as a precondition of entering their territory without the need to quarantine or of booking travel, some form of proof may be necessary at least to relaunch our tourism sector. If British holidaymakers and travellers are required to have proof for international travel, it will be difficult not to have some kind of Government-issued certification to back that up. Even if the UK opts out and opts not to use vaccine passports in the same way as other states, we may be required to provide some proof for those wishing to go abroad if other states require proof prior to entry.

If that were to be the case, how it would work domestically is unknown. I invite the Minister present to shed some light on that in their summary of the debate, as the domestic and international situations are very different and, even if domestic requirements remain low, international requirements may not give us a great deal of choice. The concept of using vaccine passports in domestic settings is of concern to some people as we go forward.

As Members will be aware, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has published priority lists, which will work their way through the population from those most vulnerable to covid down to the least vulnerable. Although it is not always the case, often that involves going from the oldest groups in society to the youngest—again, I must stress that that is not always the case. Therefore, introducing vaccine passports at present would exclude those who have not yet had the opportunity to receive their vaccine. There is a genuine fear that younger people who do not have any characteristics that place them on the priority list could be prevented from taking part in events or from taking certain actions, for no reason other than age and lack of pre-existing health conditions. Similarly, many people are concerned about how a vaccine passport would be properly managed, as anything that required a smartphone, as the current covid app does, could bar many elderly people or people living in poverty from accessing such a system.

I must also stress at this point that although I encourage everyone to get their vaccination when they are offered it, people do have the right to choose not to be vaccinated if they so wish. Nobody can currently be compelled to take the vaccination under the law, despite it being our best hope in this national fight. The number of people currently indicating that they will not take the vaccine when offered it is currently very low, and it is my sincere hope that it remains that way, for the chances of our recovery. Nevertheless, the question that we must ask ourselves is whether such a policy would be fair to people who have the right to make that choice, however we who support the vaccination programme might personally feel about their decision.

If, as much media speculation indicates, proposals about domestic usage of vaccine passports are under consideration, I invite the Minister to clarify any of those proposals in their summary at the

end of the debate, in the interests of openness and of the petitioners. I invite Members to consider carefully some of the arguments that I have set out in their consideration of the petitioners' request. Even those in favour of such a system cannot dismiss counterarguments without proper and fair consideration, especially when it comes to ensuring that everybody in the elderly and vulnerable groups will have access to a vaccine passport, and that those who have not been vaccinated because they are further down the list are not excluded because they have not yet had their turn.

Once again, I thank Mr Nolan and all the petitioners for raising this important issue.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair)

Before I call the next speaker, I remind Members that, in line with Mr Speaker's wishes—I am not being old-fashioned or stuffy—gentlemen, when addressing the House physically or virtually, must be properly attired with a jacket and tie.

16:40:00

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con)

I refer Members to the declarations that I have made in relation to the covid recovery group.

"I will not be pushed, filed, stamped, indexed, briefed, debriefed, or numbered. My life is my own"—

I quote, of course, from the popular 1967 drama "The Prisoner". It seems to me that nothing has changed in some people's desire to treat us as commodities to be managed by the state, yet what has changed is the availability of technology to make it so.

I am very grateful to my constituents who have written to me about this matter. We have had a prior debate on this subject, or at least a debate in which I raised this subject, and I thought that the Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), had ruled out vaccine passports. I am very grateful, therefore, to have this opportunity to hear from the Minister at this stage in the review through this petition, and I am grateful to the petitioners.

I also thank Big Brother Watch, which has provided a very helpful brief, with nine reasons why covid passes must be stopped. I will briefly race through as many as I can squeeze in. First, they will be unnecessary due to the availability of effective vaccines. Indeed, the Government's amazing success in rolling out vaccines means that those most vulnerable to covid-19, and soon anyone who wants and is medically eligible for a vaccine, will have a high level of protection from the virus. That means that hospitalisations and deaths associated with covid will fall drastically, and overbearing controls on society will not be justified.

I know that the Government are now looking at covid status certificates, which bring into play the issue of mass testing. Of course, the ground has been sown with salt on the issue of false positives, I am sorry to say, often by some apparently eminent people who lamentably neglected the practical evidence from hospitals of real people with real disease, so I hesitate to bring up the issue. But it has to be said that, as we reach an era of low prevalence of the disease, if we carry out mass testing on asymptomatic people, the issue of false positives will undoubtedly be relevant. We need to hear from the Minister what she is going to do to ensure that people who test falsely positive with lateral flow tests, and indeed PCR—polymerase chain reaction—tests, do not end up deprived of their liberty unnecessarily. We very much need to hear from the Government about that.

Of course, vaccine passports would be discriminatory. They would have the effect of socially and economically excluding people who have not had either a vaccine or a recent test result. It is of course unlawful under equality law to discriminate against people with protected characteristics, including age, disability, pregnancy, religion or belief—I underscore belief. I shall have my vaccine when I am offered it, but there will be various people for various reasons who will choose not to do so.

Effectively making vaccines mandatory by implication through covid status certification could be counter-productive. The evidence from across Europe shows that if people feel compelled to take vaccines, it puts them off. It would implement, of course, a checkpoint society. It would mean passes for the pub—if you want your pint, Sir David, you will have to show your papers. I did not think that is the society that we wished to live in. A surveillance state would be instituted. There would be mission creep. Passes would be irreversible and divisive, and of course they would infringe on the autonomy of the individual. I lament that I do not have time to go through each of those points in detail, but I will certainly provide the brief to the Minister afterwards.

I want to finish with another quote from “The Prisoner”—something that I ask people advocating for these certification regimes to bear in mind. No. 2 says:

“We can treat folly with kindness...knowing that soon his wild spirit will quieten, and the foolishness will fall away to reveal a model citizen.”

No. 6 replies:

“That day you’ll never see.”

16:44:00

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]

The covid-19 pandemic has asked a great deal of our constituents, and for the last year the liberties that we all enjoy and should expect have been restricted. I know that most people I represent want those freedoms returned as soon as possible, and in as safe a way as possible.

The question posed by proposed vaccine passports is whether they are part of enabling all our society to return to normality, and that is complex. Many people look at this through the prism of whether it will work for them, or think that they have had the vaccine and therefore will be okay, but as the last year has shown us, when we pull together as a society and act in the spirit of selflessness, we can achieve so much more for everyone.

We need to consider whether such a scheme would enable some while unfairly restricting others who have, for their own reasons, not taken the vaccine. We cannot penalise people who have exercised their right not to take the vaccine. That may be an expectant mother, for example, who just cannot get peace about taking the vaccine, even with the reassurances given by scientists and health advisers. To restrict that person from public places or services would be wrong. We should also factor into the debate that we have so little evidence of the vaccine’s effectiveness in reducing transmission. It is simply too soon to consider taking such a significant step without evidence of whether it would actually be of real benefit.

In Northern Ireland we have a specific set of circumstances, including a land border with the Irish Republic. While our vaccine programme is well advanced, the roll-out of the vaccine in the Irish Republic is stumbling and slow, not helped by their decision to suspend the use of the Oxford vaccine. How would vaccine passports work on a cross-border basis for those who work in the public sector or who have family who they care for in the Irish Republic, and vice-versa? It simply cannot work.

I know that some industries, such as aviation, and some other countries may choose to administer some form of vaccine passport for those seeking to use their services, but in the public sphere the Government must remain cognisant of the issues around exacerbating inequality, evidence regarding transmission and so on. Let us focus instead on encouraging vaccine uptake first, and supporting the world-leading scientific research happening here in the UK to tackle the issues presented by covid-19.

In closing, I must make it clear that I would be utterly opposed to, and believe that the Government

need to avoid, a domestic internal vaccine passport requirement for travel throughout the United Kingdom. We must hold dear to the liberties that we once knew and want to return to.

16:47:00

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con)

It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) and the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart). I thought that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) set out so many of the issues very well. It is a pleasure to speak in this e-petition debate on electronic vaccine passports, which is incredibly timely.

The starting point is that it is fundamentally up to individual countries to make decisions for themselves, so it ought not to be, in that sense, for the United Kingdom to take a lead with regard to what Brazil, Italy or any other country chooses to do. We have to respect those countries and their decisions; it is not for us to determine what they do. I hope that all countries, including the United Kingdom, if we choose at some point to take this approach of vaccine passports for other countries' foreign nationals coming here, will themselves consider what they should do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe captured the point about the effectiveness of the vaccination programme. It is remarkable. I had no anticipation that it would be as effective as it seems to be at the moment. We have to recognise that, and the protection that will give to so many people right around the world. Any question over certification for vaccinations or anything else therefore has to be proportionate to the threat of the disease itself, which at the moment is diminishing, so actually the need is diminishing. At the same time, there has been an escalation in concerns and expectation that the passports will be delivered for many countries. I am quite sympathetic to the sense of having vaccinations.

About 20 or so years ago, when I was in the Territorial Army, I went on an expedition to Ecuador—Cordillera Enterprise—to climb Volcán Sangay. I had a yellow fever vaccination and got a certificate. There are minimal concerns about certification if someone has a piece of paper to demonstrate their vaccination status, and we do not need fancy electronic readers to read a certificate—we just need to be able to speak the language used on the certificate. I am pretty comfortable with vaccination certificates. If there were any questions about forgeries or anything else, companies such as De La Rue, which is based in my constituency, could make remarkable authentication devices to put on certificates and ensure that there were no concerns about authenticity.

If we moved from paper certificates to electronic, however, significant questions of civil liberty would arise. Who in the world would run that database? What data would go into it and who would determine that? Would it be an international body such as the United Nations, the EU or some other organisation? If we could not get an international organisation to take the lead, would a big corporate organisation do so? Would big tech in California have control over the database? In the light of what happened when the Australian national Government confronted a big tech company, giving such a company so much power would be a colossal problem. We need to be proportionate and cautious. We need to look to paper first and foremost, and there would need to be huge justification if we were to take the electronic route, which I would not welcome.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair)

Our next speaker could not be here at the start of proceedings because he was in the main Chamber, so he might not have heard that there is a three-and-a-half minute limit on speeches. I call Mr Ian Paisley.

16:51:00

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and thank you for that warning about time. I hope not to detain the House that long, but I will make a few brief comments.

I welcome the debate because it is an opportunity for the Government vigorously to reinforce the view that they are not going to introduce vaccine passports. I hope that they use this platform to state that they will not do so, because such passports would be a complete and total overreaction, and they are completely and totally unnecessary.

The vaccine roll-out has been positive—a success for the UK. We had a similar response with respect to the flu vaccine, but no one would say that people must have a passport to prove that they have had that particular vaccine, even though flu takes many lives in the United Kingdom each winter. It would be a complete and total overreaction for Members to stand up and demand such a passport for people who had received the flu vaccine. We do not need such passports, which would become supplementary identity cards.

I agree with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) about the Republic of Ireland's kneejerk reaction today to stop rolling out the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. That is more about the failure of the Republic of Ireland to have its own successful vaccine roll-out programme than it is about anything else. I understand that about 17 million people across Europe have received that vaccine, and from those 17 million vaccines, there have been only about 31 adverse effects. That is a remarkable state of affairs, and what we have seen in the Republic of Ireland is more to do with politics than it is to do with science.

Like the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), I believe that vaccine passports would lead to a two-tier society and would increase opportunities to discriminate. That would be abundantly wrong. I agree that we cannot legislate for what other countries do. If we want to go to certain countries, we might have to have a vaccine passport, or proof that we have received a vaccine, but that is a matter for those countries. All we can do is implore them to be proportionate and responsible in what they do. We should not pursue vaccine passports domestically, however. If airlines or other countries decide to do this, that is of course a matter for them, but we should implore those countries and organisations to demonstrate proportionality in what they do.

Our civil liberties are something we should cherish, and we should not throw them away so quickly for others to manage for us because they know better. The people know what is best and we should guard our civil liberties with care.

16:55:00

John Howell (Henley) (Con) [V]

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I think the issue needs to be split into two, as the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) said: we need to look at it from the point of view of foreign trips and activities, and from that of domestic activities.

Let me turn first to the foreign aspect of vaccine passports. It is almost certain that other countries, or indeed travel firms, will require us to have proof of vaccination. As hon. Members will know, I was the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria for a number of years, and my body is still awash with the enormous number of inoculations that I had. When I went to Nigeria for the first time, I was perfectly aware that if I did not have the inoculations I would not be going, or I would be running the risk of being inoculated when I got there, perhaps with a needle of slightly dubious quality. There is a lot of relevance in that comparison, and the issue of people who have not had the vaccine for medical reasons is easy to take into account by ensuring that certificates are given to them.

Domestically, the issue raises a number of ethical questions, and it is right for the Government to review it, although they are not the only organisation to be reviewing the ethical issues around vaccine passports. I lead the British delegation to the Council of Europe, which is also undertaking reviews of things such as vaccine passports. The Council of Europe, too, has come up with a huge number of ethical issues that it has to take into account. That is inevitable with a disease that is so prevalent and that has such enormous effect.

Whether such an approach discriminates against individuals is something that the courts will have to decide, and it is inevitable that if we go down the route of introducing a domestic vaccine passport, the issue will end up in the courts. Given the way society has gone, it is inevitable that this will go that way. That is a great shame, but I do not see any alternative to it.

My last suggestion is to allow the Government to conduct their review and to allow the Council of Europe to conduct its review, and then to allow those to feed into the conclusions that the Government will produce.

16:58:00

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for the even and balanced way in which he introduced the debate. We should start with principles. The first is obviously the ethical principle that no one should be subject to any medical procedure without informed consent being given. That is not just the current law; it dates back thousands of years in medical ethics, and we should stand by it.

Secondly, we in this House should speak up loudly and clearly for progress and science. Vaccines and medicines have transformed societies and the lives of millions around the world. Look at the diseases that have been controlled, or in some cases nearly eliminated: diphtheria, whooping cough, polio—owing to our age, Sir David, we knew people who had polio, but it is incredibly rare now—measles, rubella, human papillomavirus and hepatitis. Of course, there has also been the elimination of smallpox. That is a triumph of science, and we should proclaim it loudly against the sceptics. We should also applaud it. Harold Wilson talked about the white heat of the technological revolution, and that is where we should be.

That brings us to practicalities. I agree with the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) that our industry would be perfectly capable of producing secure validated certificates. I would hope, therefore, that the Government are engaging with industry on how it would produce such certificates were they to be introduced. Indeed, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency produces millions of driving licences for us every year. It is perfectly sensible, and actually imperative, for the Government to run those things in parallel. We do not have to wait, quite bluntly, for the Council of Europe, or indeed for Departments here, to decide on the ethics before pursuing the practicalities.

This is inevitable. Other countries will be opening their airports to those who are able to enter with a certificate or passport—however we describe it—and airlines will be eager to carry passengers there. The public will be keen to travel. Therefore, we need to do this in an orderly and practical manner. Also, let us not forget those who work for airlines and at airports, and the hundreds of thousands of our citizens who fear for their job—many of them have lost their job already—as well as those in the travel industry.

If we are able to produce such certificates, we should perhaps also consider domestic settings, in order to be able to get many of our industries back to work sooner rather than later. Many businesses are teetering on the brink and employees in the hospitality industry, at sports venues and in the entertainment industry—which is something we do rather well in this country, and which is one of the attractions—are worried about their job and their future. We should be backing them.

17:02:00

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con)

It is an unquantifiable pleasure, as ever, to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David.

There is no doubt about the prescience apparent in the debate, and the power of the oratory of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) has caused the Cabinet Office to publish—during his speech—the terms of reference for the review and, indeed, the consultation on it, which closes on 29 March. I thank him very much indeed for the power of his oratory, which has made the Cabinet

Office announce the publication of those important documents.

There are three matters to consider. The first, which has been alluded to, is international travel, and there is no doubt, as the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) said, that it will resume. We have to get on with that and ensure that we have sensible proposals that chime with those of our international partners.

The more vexed question is that of health workers. There is the precedent of the hepatitis B vaccine, but given the concern in the care sector about a relatively low uptake of the covid vaccine, that is where the issue will arise. I simply say this: after the year that those people have had, is it imaginable that the owner of a care home will say to their care workers, "Unless you take this jab, you'll be dismissed from your employment."? This will come down to that consideration.

The third issue, which I am totally opposed to, is that of covid vaccine certification for everyday use by citizens so as to access venues and services. It has become unfashionable in politics to talk about things that we believe in, and things that we used to know as values. I dare say that in this debate I am probably an accidental libertarian. That was never a description that I would have liked to be applied to me before this year, but it is one that I fear I will never be able to escape. However, those are deeply conservative principles, and there is a strange utilitarian, if not Benthamite, tendency coming into aspects of this Conservative Government and their policy.

Absolutely, we must fully encourage uptake of the vaccine—what a tremendous success it is and what foresight the Government showed in that aspect—but it was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster who gave, albeit prematurely, the most powerful response to the consultation. When asked by Sky News whether people will need certification to go to the pub, he said no, and I think that is a fair way to begin the consultation.

17:05:00

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I ask you to imagine the scene a few months from now: I can finally go out to a restaurant to catch up with a friend for a real meal, instead of the dreaded Zoom meals that we have all become accustomed to. At the door we are both asked to show proof of vaccination. One of us is vaccinated, but the other is not. I am allowed entry, but my friend is not. Is that really the sort of country we wish to live in—one in which we have two tiers of rights and discriminate over access to goods and services on the basis of health status?

Too often in the debate on this issue, I am told, "If everyone has the chance to be vaccinated, it is their own fault if they turn it down," which fundamentally misses several points. There are those who cannot be vaccinated, perhaps for health reasons. As a newly pregnant constituent said to me in an email, she and other pregnant women will not be able to get vaccinated while they are pregnant. If she is able to breastfeed, she will not be able to get vaccinated during the period in which she breastfeeds, either.

Furthermore, at present, none of the vaccines is authorised for adolescents. Are we saying that teenagers should not be able to go to the cinema with their friends or have a family pub lunch? The groups least likely to take up the vaccine are among the most marginalised, and they would become yet more marginalised by vaccine passports. Such passports would be, essentially, a way to make vaccines mandatory, but coercion is never a good way to build trust or to persuade people to do something.

I would also question whether we are offering false and perhaps even dangerous hope. As the Ada Lovelace Institute states,

"the vaccine passport is premised on the assumption that my vaccine status tells you something about the risk I pose to you, not simply the risk I face from COVID-19."

As yet, we do not have conclusive evidence regarding transmission, and no vaccine will ever be 100% effective. Furthermore, we know that vaccine efficacy might be diminished by new mutations and variants of covid-19. Covid vaccine status would therefore not be of fixed or standard duration applicable to all countries.

I want to end by blowing out of the water the idea that vaccine passports are the key to reopening our economy and society. The relentless focus on vaccination at the cost of everything else has been the hallmark of the Government's approach to the coronavirus since the pandemic began. We have seen from Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand that it is possible to lift restrictions on liberties with robust public health interventions, both at borders and through an effective test, trace and isolate system. Our focus should be on the 20,000 people a day not self-isolating, not on putting in place a discriminatory system from a Government who have proved time and again that they cannot be trusted with personal data.

As we see today with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, once the Government have encroached on our liberties under the cover of a pandemic, they will not be minded to hand them back easily. Will vaccine technologies be switched off once they are no longer needed? To quote a member of the Ada Lovelace expert group:

"Once a road is built, good luck not using it."

17:08:00

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David.

Many of the arguments relevant to the debate have already been eloquently made, not least by my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Mr Baker), for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) and for Bolton West (Chris Green). I shall begin with the concept of international versus domestic. I am far less concerned with vaccine passports focused on opening up borders. It is not unusual to need a host of jabs to travel to certain places, and I have happily proven my vaccination status on, for example, yellow fever when visiting Tanzania. That is right and fair, but domestic covid certificates, whether used by public services or private businesses, would be intrusive, pointless and wrong. I fear they would be tantamount to moving vaccination on to a more mandatory footing.

The World Health Organisation released a statement only a couple of months ago, saying that it was opposed for the time being to the introduction of vaccine passports. That said, there does appear to be a global push towards these restrictions on individual liberty. In my opinion, the Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), was right when he stated that vaccine certificates would be "discriminatory".

I want to be clear that, when my turn comes, I will be having my jab, and I encourage everybody to have their covid vaccination when offered it. However, the vaccine passport concept would have a disproportionate impact on groups in our society where vaccine hesitancy is at its highest. We cannot allow a position where significant numbers of Britons are turned away from jobs and services on the basis of their vaccination status.

Moreover, as other hon. Members have said, some people cannot be vaccinated. There are groups that are medically advised to avoid vaccination, from pregnant women, as the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) mentioned, to people with other health conditions, such as a young woman in my constituency who wrote to me, who suffers from epilepsy but is otherwise healthy. She is desperate to return to her university and continue her education. Should she not also be allowed to take part in our society?

The implication for young people at large would indeed be immense. At present, most young people have not been offered a vaccine. Vaccine certificates would result in young people facing

more stringent social restrictions than others, all through no fault of their own.

Importantly, a vaccine certificate scheme may also be counterproductive, with research showing that compelling people to take vaccines does not necessarily result in the higher uptake that we all want to see. Individuals are best placed to make their own choices. I am incredibly proud of the progress the United Kingdom has made in vaccinating the population, but that should be used to set people free, not to restrict their freedoms further.

I close with this view: I fear that, should vaccine certificates become commonplace, they would inevitably expand and endure beyond the immediate challenges of this pandemic. I do not believe that should be allowed to happen.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair)

Mr Paisley has had to temporarily leave our proceedings because he is on the call list in the main Chamber. I call Mr Alistair Carmichael.

17:12:00

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David.

I add my voice to those in this debate who have spoken about the importance of us all encouraging our fellow citizens to take up their vaccination. On Wednesday morning, I shall be joining the queues in the Pickaquoy Centre in Kirkwall to have my vaccination, and I very much look forward to the extra freedoms that that may allow me.

However, it is worth remembering that one year ago we all, as a country, surrendered a significant number of important freedoms to the Government. It was a necessary thing to do at the time, because we were facing something where we did not really know how it would pan out. One year on, though, we know an awful lot better how we must deal with this pandemic. We see the great increase in the numbers of our fellow citizens getting vaccinated, and I suggest that the Government's efforts should be focused on returning our liberties rather than tightening them further. That is why I oppose the idea of a vaccine passport.

I think the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) and I are the only people on the call list for this debate who were in the House when the Labour party, then in government, passed the Identity Cards Act 2006. I will just remind the House why many of us opposed that particular measure. It was not just the idea of having to carry an identity card; it was because along with that identity card there came the need for a register and a database. It was the considerations of the cost of those, and the security implications of the Government's holding so much data, that led many of us to oppose the Act, and I would say that, 15 years later, nothing has changed.

Of course, for some occupations it will be sensible for employers or others to ask for evidence of vaccination, but that is a very different proposition from the one being put to us today. To call it a passport is a good analogy. Let us consider this: in theory, we only need our passport if we are going to travel abroad, but in practice, I can tell the House that I have often had to argue that it is not necessary for me to produce my passport to get on a plane at Heathrow to go to Aberdeen.

We are required to produce passports for a whole range of things these days. They are not only needed to travel abroad; a passport needs to be produced to open a bank account or instruct a new solicitor. Once we have said that it is okay to have a passport for covid, where will that argument go when the threat of covid has receded? If it was okay for covid, why not require people to produce a passport for HIV, for example? What we have before us today is the very thin end of a thick and dangerous wedge.

The concept of a vaccine passport is not just a matter of administrative convenience; it is a first step in a major redefinition of the relationship between the citizen and the state, which we should

not take so lightly. When freedoms are given up, the state rarely rushes to return them. Remember how it was the last time we had identity cards. It was only going to be for the duration of the second world war, but seven years after the end of that war, it required a citizen to take the Government to court to end it. That is why this matters.

17:16:00

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con) [V]

It is difficult to speak at the end of this debate as the last Member on the Government side. Much has already been said in this short debate, which has been full of excellent points, particularly those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker).

I want to firmly and clearly lay out my position on the issue of vaccine passports. In the media, there are different versions of what they might look like. We have had what one might consider to be a vaccine passport for international travel for a long time, as those visiting Africa or South America have to prove they have had the relevant inoculations, most commonly against malaria but for other diseases, too. People who make those journeys do that routinely as part of their travel plans.

As colleagues have said, those decisions are not made unilaterally by the UK. We do not have the power to tell other countries what to do about immunisations, including the covid vaccine. If Guatemala wants visitors to have inoculations, then that is up to Guatemala. In my view, it makes sense for the UK to have a system by which people can prove their vaccine status, if that is what they want to do. People are highly likely to need to be able to do that if they want to travel extensively, but that is largely up to other countries.

We would therefore be well advised to have something like that available for people to access—importantly—if they choose to do so. If that has to be a database, I see no reason why the existing NHS app—or some other means where such data is already shared—could not be adapted for that function. I hope Ministers will look at that before they try to reinvent the wheel.

In my mind, there is no reason why this should not simply be done on paper, rather than requiring all this data sharing and the minefield that comes with it. People already get a certificate or an email when they get their covid test result, which could be used as proof. I am yet to find anyone who had a problem with the idea of proving a negative test, at least in the short term.

Obviously, we hope all this goes away and we do not have to do it for long, but in the interest of getting events and businesses up and running faster, it might make sense for people to show a result to attend a mass event, such as a football match or a concert. I think businesses would welcome that if it helped them to get up and running faster. That is something we could and should look at. Importantly, that is the line for me, and for many others.

I believe in the vaccine; it is a great feat of science and innovation to be able to deliver it. I believe everyone should have it, and I will have it when my turn comes, but we are asking people to inject something into their bodies, through a medical procedure, and that requires consent. That is a basic idea that we subscribe to. No Government should be in the business of mandating or coercing people to do that.

As much as we may feel that getting vaccinated is the right thing to do, people have rights and responsibilities over their own bodies. I draw the line firmly at coercing people to get vaccinated. That seems to be discriminatory and there would certainly be a legal challenge. We have to win the argument, recognising that some people will not want the vaccine or be able to have it, for whatever reason. That is their free choice.

Somebody described the vaccine passport as a requirement to prove vaccine status before being able to go to the pub or an event, or, as someone suggested, to get a job. I think that is truly abhorrent. That would be coercion on a level that I have never seen in any democratic country, and

not something I could ever support. The idea that any Government, never mind a Conservative one, could say “no jab, no job” is entirely morally wrong. I assume, therefore, that there are no plans to do this. I hope the Minister will reaffirm that. I have been told by other Ministers in the past that there are no plans to do it.

No matter how much I may personally believe that it is important and the right thing to have the vaccine, it will fundamentally impact on people’s basic rights if we require vaccination status to be shown in our daily lives, for our very basic rights, and be a huge backwards step for our liberty and freedom.

17:19:00

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) [V]

It is an absolute pleasure to speak on this issue. I have had many people contacting me. To make it clear from the outset, I have come back to my office today after having gone for my vaccine shot. That is the first one done, and I look forward to the second.

I annually take a flu shot due to my diabetes, and I booked in as soon as I was able to get the covid vaccine on the list as prepared. I am not a medical person, and I do not understand the in-depth biology and virology that is needed for a discussion of the vaccine. I made the decision in the same way as I trusted the doctor when he put me on my diabetes medication—I did not research the clinical trials. I am happy to take the vaccine, and have done so today. However, the key part of this statement is that I have chosen to do so. I was advised to do so and I followed the advice, but ultimately it was my choice. I am happy to encourage people to take the vaccine. I have often pressed Ministers in this House for greater availability for teachers, for instance. However, I will never instruct anyone to take it; that is not my place. It is my reasoned opinion.

The message that is coming through loud and clear to me is that there are many who are pleased to be able to access the vaccine. They see it as the first step towards regaining normality. I have repeatedly had correspondence and emails from people asking when they will be able to get the vaccine. Just as a GP will not force anyone to take medication they are not happy with, even if they sincerely believe it to be in the person’s best interests, neither can or should this Government play a part in forcing vaccination by introducing a vaccine passport.

It is absolutely right and proper that the Government investigate the pros and cons, and follow other nations in doing so. However, the most recent report I read made it clear that the vaccine programme had been incredibly successful without the threat of the removal of freedoms. More than 24 million people so far have had a first vaccine, and about 1.5 million have had a second. Let us hope that the number of doses rises over the next few days.

People want this. Eight in 10 people stated that they would take a vaccine if one was available for them in the week that the survey was taken. That is up from 55% in November, shortly before the first covid-19 vaccine was approved. To achieve herd immunity, it is understood that we should have about 80% take-up. We must understand that there are those who are unsure whether to take the vaccine, such as those with serious underlying health conditions. They should never be isolated because they cannot provide a copy of their up-to-date vaccination card.

Whenever I went away with the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme to Kenya, we had to have vaccinations. It was required, and it was for our better health. That was some time ago. However, the right not to be isolated or, as one constituent said to me, ostracised for a personal medical choice can never be something that the Government enforce on our constituents.

I will end where I began. I got the vaccination and was very happy to do so, but it was my choice, and it must remain so without enforcement through covid passports. I urge the Government to hold fast to what their mantra has been throughout—that they are

“deeply, spiritually reluctant to make any of these impositions, or infringe anyone’s freedom”.

Throughout covid, the public have permitted the curtailment of personal freedom for the greater good, but I believe that this vaccine passport takes us a step further than many will be comfortable going. Again, I urge people to take the vaccine when they have the opportunity, but I will certainly not prevent them from accessing my advice centre, office and staff if their health or another reason forbids them from doing so.

17:23:00

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]

It is a pleasure to participate virtually in today's debate under your chairmanship, Sir David. I commend my Petitions Committee colleague, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill), for his opening speech on behalf of the Committee. The impressive manner in which he spoke set the scene for the rest of the debate.

This is one of the more interesting debates to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic. It has implications for health and business, and there are serious ethical questions. This is not some theoretical or abstract debate; it has considerable real-world implications for us now. As part of their reviews of easing lockdown restrictions, the UK Government have declared that they will review the ethics and legality of vaccine passports—domestic covid certificates for UK businesses, venues and hospitality.

Saga, which specialises in holidays for the over-50s, says that passengers on its 2021 holidays or cruises must be fully vaccinated. Australian airline Qantas says that travellers will eventually need to prove that they have had a vaccination to board its flights. Some UK businesses have declared that all employees must be vaccinated or face a review of their contracts. However, the legality of that has been disputed by employment lawyers and trade unions. The Justice Secretary has said it may be legal if it were written into contracts.

Israel has developed the Green Pass mobile app to show that a person has received a covid vaccine. It can be used to access indoor seating and restaurants and to attend events in stadiums, among other things. In the US, President Biden announced an assessment of the feasibility of linking covid-19 vaccination to international certificates of vaccination or prophylaxis—ICVPs—and producing electronic versions.

I have asked numerous parliamentary questions over the past year about vaccine passports, as it is an issue that I know interests many constituents, with views both in favour and against. There are many ethical considerations, with arguments that passports are discriminatory. Vaccine hesitancy is more likely in black and minority ethnic communities, and cultural uncertainty exists. Poorer communities are also less likely to be vaccinated. Some people are medically excluded from vaccination. Issues such as whether a child is vaccinated might also be influenced by wealth, parental education or even just the place of residence. Then we have issues around data protection of any scheme, the security of it and the risk of fraudulent or fake certificates, which could undermine the process. There are questions as to how long certificates would be valid.

Taking every step to eliminate the virus needs to be our priority. However, the top priority right now must remain the successful continuation of the vaccine roll-out. While agreeing on 15 January 2021 to further investigate the efficacy and utility of vaccine passports, the World Health Organisation's Emergency Committee on Covid-19 made the following recommendation to states:

“At the present time, do not introduce requirements of proof of vaccination or immunity for international travel as a condition of entry as there are still critical unknowns regarding the efficacy of vaccination in reducing transmission and limited availability of vaccines. Proof of vaccination should not exempt international travellers from complying with other travel risk reduction measures.”

That is sound advice in my opinion.

In their response to the petition, the UK Government have said:

“The Government is reviewing whether COVID-status certificates could play a role in reopening parts of our economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety.”

The Scottish Government are also considering the role that a vaccination certificate might have. However, it is too soon to introduce any form of certification. Experts and Ministers still need to know more about the efficacy of the vaccines, their impact on transmission and the length of immunity before it is safe or sensible to introduce a vaccine certificate. To this end, the Scottish Government continue to engage with international developments in relation to covid-19, including on the subject of vaccine certification. This includes consideration of technical details, ethical and equality issues, and of course privacy standards. The outcome of those discussions will guide the Scottish Government's work in this area. A vaccine certificate could play a valuable role, but there are various issues to work through, not least the significant equalities issues with allowing freedoms only for people who are vaccinated.

It is worth remembering that vaccine passports are really a new name for something that is not a new idea. Indeed, they have been almost universally adopted or supported at various points in history. The first international certificate of vaccination was introduced in 1944 as proof of vaccination against smallpox. Throughout the following decades, it led to a significant reduction in the international spread of the disease, as ever more travellers were required to be vaccinated. After the declared eradication of smallpox in 1980, the smallpox-specific certificate was cancelled, but the precedent has been established and countries have continued to adopt vaccine regulations when a significant risk is posed to public health.

Several countries already have some form of vaccine passports in place, requiring proof of vaccination documented on an international certificate of vaccine or prophylaxis before people enter or leave the country. Indeed, like many others, I already have such a certificate. Polio vaccinations are still mandatory for travellers to and from countries that are still afflicted by this terrible disease, and many countries require proof of vaccination for yellow fever for all arriving travellers. This applies even to those travelling from somewhere not designated by the World Health Organisation as a yellow fever risk country, so we have plenty of examples on which to draw.

With regard to covid, a number of other countries require all international travellers to stay in designated hotel on arrival, generally at their own expense, which has proved effective in minimising the risk of importing new cases. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies has reportedly advised that only a universally applied policy will be effective in reducing the risk of importation, and the joint biosecurity centre has made it clear that a blanket approach to managed isolation is required, as it cannot confidently assess the risk of new variants appearing in other countries.

Unfortunately, the UK Government continue to rely on a targeted approach for international arrivals. As a result, the Scottish Government's approach goes further than England's and requires all international arrivals to enter hotel quarantine. This has been managed as part of a four-nations approach, with the UK Government managing the online booking system and the hotel contracts. The Scottish Government continue to press the UK Government to adopt a more comprehensive approach and to quarantine all international rivals. The SNP's preference is for a consistent quarantine rule across the UK to effectively prevent new variants from entering Scotland and undermining the vaccination programme.

One of the challenges of the certification approach is that experts around the world are still learning about the vaccine's effect on things such as the transmission of the virus—a challenge that has been recognised by the World Health Organisation and SAGE. The Scottish Government continue to engage in international developments in relation to covid-19, including vaccination certification. These discussions are led globally by the World Health Organisation and will include consideration

of technical details, ethical and equality issues, and privacy standards. As I said earlier, it is too early yet to assess whether this is viable, but it is appropriate for Governments to continue to keep the vaccine certification under review, as further evidence around vaccines and immunity emerges.

In conclusion, there may be some merit to certification in areas such as international travel, but we need to be wary of creating some dystopian future where those with a recent vaccination can lead a full and normal life while those without become second-class citizens, with severe restrictions on their freedoms. Of course, neither the Scottish nor the UK Government will have the authority or power to stop other countries from requiring travellers to take the coronavirus vaccine before going to those countries, but what we do here is up to us. Keeping the matter under review is probably the correct position for the time being, so let us stay focused on getting people vaccinated and eliminating the spread of the virus.

17:32:00

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir David. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for leading the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee and for further sharing the petitioners' concerns with us all. As he said, over 290,000 people have signed this e-petition, which shows the strength of feeling across the country, and that includes 700 people in my constituency of Putney. The question of vaccine passports is crucial and complex, but it needs an answer soon, so such debates are welcome. There are so many issues and considerations at play, so I am pleased to be able to contribute on behalf of the Opposition.

We have heard some interesting contributions this afternoon, raising many questions that need to be heard. In opening the debate, my hon. Friend spoke about the concerns of younger people, who have not been offered the vaccine yet, so the timing will be important. We also heard about the concerns of those who might not have the tech needed, such as smartphones, and about the technology of any passport or certificate, especially if it is digital. My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) talked about the important principle of no medical treatment without consent, about the need to be led by the science and about whether contingency plans are being made for the roll-out of certificates, in parallel with discussions about the ethics in this debate.

Airlines are rolling this out already, so it will be happening—we heard from the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) about Saga Holidays requiring vaccination. How will it be possible to meet this requirement? What documentation will be asked for? There will need to be some answers. Importantly, we also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley about the impact of getting business back to work and saving jobs. That needs to be a top consideration in this debate.

As Members have said, the success of the vaccine roll-out has been an absolute delight, and I commend all people who worked so hard in creating and distributing the vaccine. They are all heroes. I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who made clear in a similar debate back in December that the root of a lot of these discussions is vaccine hesitancy. Vaccines are the most effective public health intervention in relation to coronavirus or health in general, and are the ultimate ticket out of this crisis; I think we all agree on that. It is therefore hugely important that a significant proportion of people take up the vaccination, especially those with the greatest vulnerabilities. Like many other Members, I will take up the vaccine as soon as I am offered it.

Those hesitant to take the vaccine should not be mischaracterised as anti-vaxxers. That is not fair or true. Those who spout anti-vaccine conspiracy theories are a very small group of people indeed. A much more significant and noticeable number of people, though far from the majority, are vaccine-hesitant. I have spoken to local GPs in my constituency about this. There may be a number of reasons why people do not want the vaccine, and we need to respect those reasons. Others may not want to do so owing to safety concerns—something I have heard from some of my constituents. They want to be sure that any vaccine, be it for covid-19 or anything else, is safe. We

all have a role to play in giving them that confidence.

There are some serious practical matters that the Government should address to help improve the vaccine take-up. For example, the GMB union highlighted that the Government's adult social care infection control fund provides full sick pay for sickness in social care, yet it does not financially cover the immediate after-effects of having the vaccine, which makes some people poorly for 24 hours. We do not want any low-paid social care workers to be hesitant because they might lose a day's pay if they have the vaccine, so if that reason can be taken away, that will increase vaccine take-up.

We have seen through these developments and through our experiences in this country that the best method of countering those views is through proactive, positive health-promoting campaigns. I know that is something the Government are doing; I am following it closely. It is welcome, and we will support the Government in this. If they decide to introduce vaccine passports or certificates in any way, I hope that they continue with those health-promoting campaigns as a priority.

Vaccine passports, certificates or any other name they might be given are one of several possible responses to vaccine hesitancy. They may well play an important role in reopening the economy and society and keeping residents of care homes safe, for example, but they may be unnecessary and impossible to implement fairly. This is a highly complex area and there are no easy answers to this issue, so we will need to have a national conversation about this, and the Labour party will play its part. Our principle is that the Government must not abdicate their responsibility and simply leave this to the private sector to do any way and haphazardly, which will only lead to confusion and unfairness. Any decisions on vaccine passports must be based on firm evidence, such as the effect of vaccinations on transmission and international best practice from countries that have implemented vaccine certification schemes. There are currently several country-based examples for us to observe, such as Israel.

We all want lockdown to end and we all want as many people as possible to take the vaccine. Vaccine passports could provide an extra layer of protection for the vulnerable, they could be effective in protecting workers and they could give businesses in certain sectors the confidence they need to go forward. There are, however, legitimate concerns about the implications of vaccine passports for civil liberties and for discrimination. We cannot ignore either. We do not want a two-tier system in which those who are not vaccinated, especially the marginalised, are blocked from essential public services, work or housing; we do not want the passport abused and extended beyond what is legally required, or want it extended in time. These are all hugely important considerations for the Government to reflect on in making this decision, so we welcome this debate.

I end with a few questions for the Minister. I understand that the Government are reviewing whether covid status certificates could play a role in reopening parts of our economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. Can she share with us the progress on this review, and what it has found so far? What external advice are the Government drawing on to inform the review's recommendations? Is there research on the impact of a certificate on vaccine hesitancy? Finally, if the Government do proceed, how will they navigate the questions posed by civil liberties groups and ensure that the passport does not create a two-tier system?

This is a hugely important discussion that navigates new territory, but we need answers sooner rather than later. It is vital that the Government listen to all voices, for and against, including the voices of those who signed the petition.

17:40:00

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt)

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate all Members who spoke in the debate and who helped to secure it, particularly the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill). I also congratulate the petitioner and everyone who signed the petition that has led to the debate,

which is timely for a number of reasons. First, it is a pre-emptive strike, because the covid status certification review has yet to commence—indeed, as was alluded to, its terms of reference and the detail of what it will consider were published today; that information can be looked at on the Government website. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will lead on this and will primarily look at the domestic-facing issues that many Members referred to. The review goes wider than vaccinations, taking in testing and an array of other issues. To be helpful to hon. Members, let me say that, in parallel, a cross-Government group chaired by the Secretary of State for Transport is working on the international-facing and travel issues that Members have spoken about. That feeds into the work of the covid team in the Cabinet Office, and CDL has ultimate responsibility for that.

The review will report in advance of step 4 on the road map, which, as hon. Members will know, will be reached no earlier than 21 June. The review has come about in part because in spring, the Government committed in their covid-19 response to reviewing the potential role of certification in our handling of covid-19 from summer onwards. The review will assess whether certification could play a role in opening up the economy and society, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. I reassure hon. Members that we very much want to return to our normal way of life, which means not just lifting restrictions, but having all the other things that we previously enjoyed and have missed over the last 12 months.

The review will consider the extent to which certification would be effective in reducing risk and helping to open up parts of the economy. It will look at the ethical, privacy, legal and operational aspects of certification and their implications for those who are unwilling or unable to be vaccinated, the equalities implications, to which hon. Members have referred, and the impact of certification on groups who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Mr Steve Baker

There are many questions that I would love to ask, but I will ask one in particular. Can the Minister confirm that, if people choose not to get vaccinated, they will bear their own responsibility and the rest of us will not be held back because some people have made a personal choice not to have the vaccine? If they do not want the vaccine, that is fine, but they should not hold the rest of us back.

Penny Mordaunt

I cannot give my hon. Friend many answers today, as the review has just started, but what I would say to him is that, in all of this, we have to remember that the reason why we are charting our way out of this situation is, yes, in part due to fantastic science and the success of the vaccine programme, but also that members of the public have taken care of and taken responsibility for themselves and other people. We have not legislated for that to happen; it has happened because people feel motivated to take responsibility. We have to remember in all of this that, even though we are very used to passing laws talking about enforcement and all those other things, ultimately this has been about the British public taking responsibility for themselves, their families and their communities.

I thank the hon. Member for Hartlepool for setting out at the start of the debate why this is not a call from anti-vaxxers or covid sceptics. It is not. Legitimate questions are being raised about our freedoms and the practicalities and the implications of this for people who are disproportionately affected by covid. The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of the degree of control we have over decisions that may be taken in international forums. As I understand it, any international agreement would be years off; an initiative spearheaded, for example, by the World Health Organisation, would be many years down the line. We are in control of what we decide about our own borders and our own systems, but clearly my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and others are talking to international counterparts to get something that makes sense and also to learn from good practice.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about those who are not able to have the vaccine. People have spoken about physical health conditions, but there are also mental health conditions. I have been speaking to people who have a severe phobia of needles and could not in any way be injected. I

know that vaccine companies are looking at alternatives, but at the moment we do not have those alternatives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) spoke very powerfully, as he always does, about our freedoms. As an aside, I will say that I looked up the powerful Patrick McGoochan quote that he gave from "The Prisoner". I have to say that my hon. Friend did not say the preceding two lines, which were:

"I will not make any deals with you",

and,

"I've resigned",

although he has used those in other debates. But he does make a very powerful case about the practicalities. Would this actually have a practical effect if we were to bring it in? He raised very important points about equality. I can confirm that those are in the terms of reference for the review. Also, I hope he will take some comfort from what Ministers have said in the past about papers for having a pint. I think that that is the approach that people want to take, but it is right that we look at these issues and look at them in a transparent way. Again, this debate will help to inform and steer the review.

John Spellar

Is not one of the fundamental rights the ability to work? Huge numbers of our citizens are not able to work. Many have been made unemployed. Many are teetering on the edge because their businesses are on the edge. Surely the vaccine taskforce has shown us how we can move prudently and at pace, and perhaps we need to be getting a bit of urgency into this.

Penny Mordaunt

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for those comments and, indeed, for his contribution in the debate. He is right. I think that everyone in the House, no matter which side of the argument they are on, wants people to be able to get back to those freedoms that we had perhaps taken for granted—the freedoms not just to be with our loved ones and to have a social life, but to earn a living. The cost of the last 12 months to individuals in not being able to do that has been devastating. We all understand that. That is why we want to look at all the practical measures we can to give people as much certainty as possible in future. We need to ensure that the review looks at the practicalities: what would be the upside if this were to come to pass?

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) spoke about the importance of evidence, particularly of the effect of the vaccine on transmission rates. Like other hon. Members, she also discussed pregnant women. In a week when we have been looking at how women are short-changed in a variety of ways and while many women going to job interviews still complain about questions about whether they are pregnant or planning a family, anything that put further weight on someone's having to demonstrate why they did not have a certificate would be very disappointing indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) focused on the importance of trust and the fact that, ultimately, trust is how we are going to get through this—we have to rely on that, rather than having so much focus on Government action. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) spoke eloquently about the absolute issues of civil liberties and certain individuals who may be missing out—particularly those who will be vaccinated later in the programme. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) emphasised that we have to listen to others' experiences and ideas. The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) raised the issue of international travel, which I have addressed, and the fact that people are more likely to be open to data being shared if there is a benefit to them from doing so. That is what we need to come back to in this review: what is the benefit to our citizens of doing this?

My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, asked about employees. Again, the matter would be for individual employees. My understanding is that contracts would have to be rewritten if vaccination were to be made compulsory. On the back of his comments, I pay tribute to all healthcare professionals who are doing an incredible job in phoning up individuals who have concerns about taking the vaccine to reassure them. That is the way to do this, and a huge effort is being made to give people confidence that they can take it.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) raised the issues of evidence and transmission and of those who are highly marginalised. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) also spoke about those issues, and he and the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) both spoke about the dangers of creep: if such things happen, where will it all stop? Those points have been well made and will have been heard by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) spoke about the dangers of people being coerced into taking the vaccine; I point him to the very clear statements that the Prime Minister has made on that subject—that no one should be coerced or forced to take the vaccine; it is a personal choice. Enormous numbers of people are taking it, of course, including the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), whom I congratulate on getting his. I hope it was a positive experience. He will, I am sure, have been very moved by the work that not just healthcare professionals but volunteers are doing. Good luck with the second jab!

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), the spokesman for the SNP, rightly said that the main effort needs to be the vaccine roll-out. I agree and hope that we can take a four-nation approach on these other matters. We want simplicity and consistency for all our citizens.

The hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) raised a number of questions, some of which I think are answered by the terms of reference and the publication put out today. She is right that we want to have all efforts behind the vaccine programme. People are taking the vaccine because it is good for them and it is good for other people. We need to remember that that is why we are winning this battle against covid: it is personal action by our citizens, doing the right thing. I assure her that we will not let up on our public health campaigns either.

The vaccine programme continues to be successful, and I thank all who are contributing to it. We look forward to the economy's unlocking and to getting back to what we remember as normal—whether that is being able to see loved ones, to attend a protest if we wish to, or simply to enjoy a pint in a beer garden with roses in bloom—but if we are to get back to that, we must also focus on the practical things that must happen. Hon. Members have touched on those practical and ethical issues, but I think they have also summed up the public mood: people want to get back to normal and they do not want to be told what to do. If we are going to do anything in this space, it must be of practical benefit and it must be something that the public would wish to be done.

I thank all hon. Members for contributing to the debate, which I am sure will help to shape the review. It will not be long before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be back to report on the findings.

17:56:00

Mike Hill

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their excellent contributions. Let us simply hope that the review, the terms of reference for which have been published today, progresses sensibly and in a non-discriminatory fashion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 569957, relating to vaccine passports.

17:57:00

Sitting suspended.