

My speech during the debate on Covid-19, 12 January 2021

We have done many more tests than many other countries, and I pay tribute to Ministers and the NHS for all the hard work that has gone into achieving that. We are now vaccinating many more people than in other countries. We have got ahead, and that is very good news. As the Government see the main way out for us to relax the controls as being the vaccination of many more people, we wish everyone every speed and success in rolling out those vaccines.

I also think congratulations are in order for finding two more treatments that can make a difference to the death rate and reduce the length of time people suffer with a severe form of the disease, but what about ivermectin, which some doctors in other countries say can also achieve good results and reduce the death rate? It would be useful to know what progress is being made with the UK tests and whether that might ever be a recommended treatment, because the more treatments we can have to cut the death rate the better.

I would also be interested to know what our experts think about why there have been such differential case rates and death rates around the world. Unfortunately, the UK has now joined the group of countries where the death rate is over 0.1% of the total population, which means quite a lot of deaths, as we know to our sorrow and cost.

We have joined many other countries in that grouping, but why is it that countries like Sweden and Brazil have not yet got to 0.1% when some have been very critical of the way they have handled the virus, and why do many Asian countries seem to have got through with much less damage? What does the international research tell us about the reasons? Why is it, too, that a country such as Belgium has been blighted by such a high death rate and a pretty high case rate? Of course, testing more means that we identify more cases, but our case rate is still not one of the worst in the world, so clearly some of the actions taken are having a beneficial impact.

I also urge the Government to do rather more for the self-employed and small businesses. They are bearing the brunt of the economic damage of the policies being pursued, and more could be done, particularly for those small businesses and the self-employed who have not received any help at all.

Many of them are in business areas in which there have been closures for the best part of a year now, and in which social contact is very important for the business model, meaning their revenues are well down. We are going to need them, and we need a recovery fairly soon.

So I wish every success to those doing the vaccinations, and I hope we can then lift some of the restrictions, because we want to have a vibrant small business and small enterprise sector available to power the recovery we so desperately need.