



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 29 April 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:39 P.M., 29 April 2020). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

CONTENTS

ANSWERS	5	■ Mobile Phones: Coronavirus	10
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY	5	EDUCATION	11
■ Construction: Coronavirus	5	■ Apprentices: Coronavirus	11
■ Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme: Fisheries	6	■ Children: Day Care	11
■ Government Assistance: Fisheries	6	■ Education: Internet	12
CABINET OFFICE	7	■ Free School Meals: Coronavirus	13
■ Coronavirus: Disease Control	7	■ Members: Correspondence	14
■ Health Education: Coronavirus	7	■ Schools: Assessments	15
DEFENCE	7	■ Students: Coronavirus	15
■ Global Positioning System: Military Bases	7	■ Training: Coronavirus	16
■ HMS Queen Elizabeth: Ventilators	8	■ Universities: Coronavirus	16
■ Perfluorooctanoic Acid: Military Bases	8	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	17
DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	8	■ Agriculture: Seasonal Workers	17
■ 5G	8	■ Animal Welfare: Coronavirus	18
■ Arts: Coronavirus	9	■ Care Homes: Coronavirus	21
■ Charities and Voluntary Organisations: Coronavirus	9	■ Fisheries: Coronavirus	21
■ Local Broadcasting: Coronavirus	10	■ Food Supply: Coronavirus	22
		■ Furs	22
		■ Horticulture: Coronavirus	23
		■ Schools: Plastics	23
		■ Supermarkets: Coronavirus	24

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	24	■ NHS: Staff	38
■ Australasia: Coronavirus	24	■ Nurses: Training	39
■ British Council: Coronavirus	25	■ Organs: Donors	39
■ British Nationals Abroad: Coronavirus	26	■ Social Services	40
■ British Overseas Territories: Coronavirus	26	HOME OFFICE	40
■ Hamed bin Haydara	27	■ Aviation: Foreign Nationals	40
■ Hong Kong: Human Rights	27	■ Cannabis: Imports	41
■ Saudi Arabia: Political Prisoners	29	■ Detention Centres: Coronavirus	42
■ UK Relations with EU: Northern Ireland	29	■ Domestic Abuse: Coronavirus	42
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	30	■ General Register Office: Marriage Certificates	43
■ Continuing Care: Finance	30	■ Immigrants: Coronavirus	43
■ Coronavirus: Care Homes and Funerals	31	■ Immigrants: Finance	44
■ Coronavirus: Disadvantaged	31	■ Immigrants: Health Services	46
■ Coronavirus: Disease Control	31	■ Immigration: EU Nationals	46
■ Coronavirus: Medical Treatments	32	■ Immigration: Married People	47
■ Coronavirus: Press Conferences	32	■ Internet: Safety	48
■ General Practitioners: Hospitals	33	■ Migrant Camps: Coronavirus	48
■ General Practitioners: Protective Clothing	33	■ Migrant Camps: France	49
■ Health Professions: Coronavirus	34	■ Migrant Workers: Visas	49
■ Health professions: Training	35	■ NHS: Migrant Workers	49
■ Hearing Aids: Staffordshire	35	■ Offences against Children: Social Media	50
■ Hospitals: ICT	36	■ Police: Coronavirus	50
■ NHS Trusts: Protective Clothing	36	■ Police: Re-employment	51
■ NHS: Compensation	37	■ Second Homes: Rural Areas	51
		■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel	52
		■ Visas: Married People	53
		■ Visas: Skilled Workers	53
		HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	54
		■ Domestic Abuse: Hotels	54
		■ Food Supply: Coronavirus	54

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation	55	■ Package Holidays:	
■ Homelessness: Coronavirus	55	Repayments	67
■ Housing Occupancy:		■ Pedicabs: Regulation	67
Coronavirus	55	■ Railway Network	67
■ Housing: Coronavirus	56	■ Railway Stations: Greater	
■ Local Government Finance:		London	68
Coronavirus	57	■ Railways: Coronavirus	69
■ Local Government:		TREASURY	69
Coronavirus	57	■ Charities: Coronavirus	69
■ Parish Councils: Coronavirus	58	■ Coronavirus Job Retention	
INTERNATIONAL		Scheme	69
DEVELOPMENT	58	■ Coronavirus Job Retention	
■ [Subject Heading to be		Scheme: Carers	70
Assigned]	58	■ Coronavirus Job Retention	
■ Conflict, Stability and Security		Scheme: Skilled Workers	71
Fund: Coronavirus	59	■ Coronavirus Job Retention	
■ Palestinians: Textbooks	60	Scheme: Theatre	72
INTERNATIONAL TRADE	61	■ Directors: Coronavirus	72
■ Trade Remedies		■ Economic Situation:	
Investigations Directorate:		Coronavirus	73
Public Appointments	61	■ Gift Aid	74
JUSTICE	61	■ Health Professions:	
■ Courts: Coronavirus	61	Coronavirus	74
■ Fraud: Land	61	■ Health Services: Coronavirus	76
■ Parole: Video Conferencing	62	■ Multinational Companies:	
■ Prison Accommodation: Wales	63	Disclosure of Information	76
■ Reading Prison	64	■ Non-domestic Rates: Dental	
■ Reading Prison: Coronavirus	64	Services	77
SCOTLAND	64	■ Revenue and Customs: Staff	78
■ Business: Scotland	64	■ Self-employment Income	
TRANSPORT	65	Support Scheme	78
■ Bus Services: Coronavirus	65	■ Transport: Government	
■ Motorcycles: Driving		Assistance	79
Instruction	66	WORK AND PENSIONS	80
■ Package Holidays:		■ Access to Work Programme:	
Coronavirus	66	Coronavirus	80

■ Carer's Allowance: Coronavirus	80	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	88
■ Children: Maintenance	81	■ Updated Advice for Maximum Sustainability Yield (MSY) – UK relevant Quota Stock Species	88
■ Department for Work and Pensions: Remote Working	81	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	89
■ Occupational Health	82	■ Ministerial Correction – HL2971	89
■ Personal Income: Coronavirus	82	HOME OFFICE	90
■ Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations	83	■ The Misuse of Drugs (Coronavirus) (Amendments Relating to the Supply of Controlled Drugs During a Pandemic etc.) Regulations 2020	90
■ Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus	84	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	91
■ Statutory Sick Pay	84	■ Local Government Finance update	91
■ Universal Credit: Sheffield City Region	85	TRANSPORT	92
WRITTEN STATEMENTS	87	■ Transport Update	92
CABINET OFFICE	87	TREASURY	93
■ Digital Identity and GOV.UK Verify Programme Update	87	■ Bilateral loan to Ireland	93
■ Notification of Contingent Liability	87	■ Treasury Update	94

Notes:

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Construction: Coronavirus

James Murray:

[\[39780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, for what reason (a) version 2 of the Construction Leadership Council's guidance stated that no construction work should be carried out on site if social distancing could not be enforced and (b) that guidance was relaxed in version 3 of that publication.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Construction Leadership Council has developed Site Operating Procedures (SOP), which align with Public Health England (PHE) guidance on social distancing. The SOP provides practical advice to those seeking to implement the guidance on construction sites.

Following consultation with the industry, Version 3 was published to better align with PHE guidance. Version 3 provides more detailed advice on safe working, based on the latest guidance and incorporating an approach based on the Health and Safety Executive Hierarchy of Controls for work planning to mitigate risks.

James Murray:

[\[39781\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has plans to enforce staggered start times for construction sites to enable social distancing for construction workers on public transport during rush hour.

James Murray:

[\[39782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps the Government is taking to protect construction workers during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The health and safety of construction workers is a priority for the Government. To help ensure that it is safe for construction workers to operate in their workplace, the Government has worked with Public Health England to develop sector-specific guidance on social distancing, and has also worked with the Construction Leadership Council to develop Site Operating Procedures (SOP) which provide practical advice to those seeking to implement the guidance.

The SOP set out that sites should consider introducing staggered start and finish times to reduce congestion and contact, and plan site access and egress points to enable social distancing. The Government has asked the Health and Safety Executive to consider enforcement action if a site is not consistently implementing the measures set out by PHE.

■ **Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme: Fisheries**

Stephanie Peacock:

[39689]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy how many loans have been granted to fishing and aquaculture companies under the Government's Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans Scheme.

Paul Scully:

As of 22 April, over £2.8bn worth of loans have been issued under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme across all sectors, to over 16,600 businesses. At this time we cannot provide a breakdown of funding by sector, as we have given lenders a temporary dispensation from uploading their data to the British Business Bank's system in order to let them focus on issuing new loans. This is a pragmatic step that reflects the urgency of getting loans issued. We are working with the British Business Bank, HM Treasury and lenders on regular and transparent data publication going forward.

■ **Government Assistance: Fisheries**

Stephanie Peacock:

[39688]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy how many fishing and aquaculture businesses have applied to the (a) Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and (b) Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme in England.

Paul Scully:

As of 22 April, over £2.8bn worth of loans have been issued under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme across all sectors, to over 16,600 businesses. At this time we cannot provide a breakdown of funding by sector, as we have given lenders a temporary dispensation from uploading their data to the British Business Bank's system in order to let them focus on issuing new loans. This is a pragmatic step that reflects the urgency of getting loans issued. We are working with the British Business Bank, HM Treasury and lenders on regular and transparent data publication going forward.

Applications for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) opened on Monday 20th April. As of Thursday 23rd April HMRC had received about 512,000 claims with a total value of about £4.5bn. This is a new scheme and HMRC are currently working through the analysis they will be able to provide based on the data available. HMRC will make the timescales for publication and the types of data available in due course.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Coronavirus: Disease Control****Shabana Mahmood:**[\[39560\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that Government strategies to ease social distancing measures take into account the living circumstances of multi-generational households.

Penny Mordaunt:

The government has committed to keeping social distancing measures under close review. As part of this work, we have been considering the impact of these measures on different groups in society or those from particular backgrounds.

■ Health Education: Coronavirus**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[39827\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much was spent from the public purse on advertising aimed at warning the public of the dangers of covid-19 between 23 March 2020 and 23 April 2020 in (a) newspapers, (b) commercial radio, (c) internet advertising and (d) commercial television.

Chloe Smith:

I refer the Hon. Gentlemen to the answer I gave to PQ [33512](#) on 21 April 2020.

DEFENCE**■ Global Positioning System: Military Bases****Jessica Morden:**[\[39513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to ensure military access to GPS satellites resilient to jamming of signals for (a) communications, (b) direct energy weapons, (c) route planning and (d) local confirmation; and if he will make a statement.

Jeremy Quin:

UK Armed Forces rely upon accurate Positioning, Navigation and Timing (PNT) information for a variety of critical applications. GPS, owned and run by the US Armed Forces, is our main system; as a tier 1 nation, we have privileged access to the most secure GPS signals. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has a dedicated Research & Development programme looking at diminishing traditional PNT vulnerabilities. This includes key work with industry on research into anti-jam techniques (jamming is the most common form of PNT interference) and the £70 million Robust Global Navigation System contract to deliver Multi Constellation Open Signal receivers, further decreasing our vulnerabilities. The MOD is committed to a systems-of-systems approach to managing PNT vulnerabilities, including with cross-Government partners.

■ HMS Queen Elizabeth: Ventilators

Mr Stephen Morgan:

[\[39736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many ventilators that may be used to support people with covid-19 there are on board the HMS Queen Elizabeth.

James Heappey:

There are currently six ventilators held on board HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH as part of the Role 2 Afloat Medical Facility equipment holdings. For this period of Operational Sea Training, there is no requirement to have a full complement of secondary healthcare personnel embarked to deliver a Role 2 Afloat Medical Facility. Plans are in place that, should a member of the ship's company become unwell and require a higher level of care, while in UK waters that patient would be evacuated from the ship to an appropriate NHS facility.

■ Perfluorooctanoic Acid: Military Bases

Jessica Morden:

[\[39512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) perfluorooctane sulfate and (b) perfluorooctane acid firefighting foams there are on military bases in the UK; and if he will make a statement.

Jeremy Quin:

There are no firefighting foams in use on the Defence estate that use either perfluorooctane sulfate and perfluorooctane acid as constituents. Foams with these constituents were withdrawn from use in 2015.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ 5G

Hilary Benn:

[\[38427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what estimate he has made of the number of masts that will be required to roll out 5G throughout the UK.

Matt Warman:

The Government is committed to establishing the UK as a global leader in 5G technology and ensuring that the majority of the population has access to a 5G signal by 2027. We have made good progress toward these aims, with 5G networks available in over 70 UK towns and cities and the investment of £200m in a 5G testbeds and trials programme.

5G deployment is still in its infancy and decisions on rollout and deployment remain a matter for the network operators themselves, based on need and demand for 5G services. It should be noted that in many cases 5G deployment will be delivered utilising masts that are currently used for the delivery of 4G services.

As roll out continues Government will continue to work with industry and stakeholders to support the timely and efficient rollout of 5G across the UK.

■ Arts: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[39624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what funding his Department has made available to (a) arts companies and (b) arts venues to ensure the sustainability of those organisations during the covid-19 outbreak.

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[39625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the financial implications of the covid-19 outbreak on (a) arts companies and (b) arts venues.

Caroline Dineneage:

In order to support the sustainability of the Arts sector, including arts companies and arts venues, DCMS has worked closely with Arts Council England (ACE) to provide a tailored package of financial support. In March, ACE announced a £160m emergency response package to complement the financial measures already announced by the Government and to ensure immediate resilience of this vital sector.

£90 million is being made available to National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and Creative People and Places (CPPs) lead organisations. £50 million will be made available to organisations that are not in receipt of regular funding from the Arts Council in order to maintain their survival through this crisis. Finally £20 million of financial support is being made available to individuals, so they can better sustain themselves, and their work, in the coming months. DCMS and ACE are continuing to work closely to consider the additional measures that are needed to ensure the long-term recovery and growth of the cultural sector.

The Secretary of State, myself and officials continue to consult the Art sector extensively to ensure we fully understand the financial impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the sector.

DCMS is engaging with other departments to support the economic response, by ensuring that the needs of its sectors, and those who work in them, are understood.

DCMS will continue to work with this valuable sector to understand the difficulties it faces and help it access support through these challenging times and through recovery.

■ Charities and Voluntary Organisations: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[\[39581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he has taken to allocate additional funding to cover the overhead costs of charities and other not-for-profit organisations facing reduced income during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Government is aware of the financial challenges charities are facing during the coronavirus outbreak. This is why the £750m funding we have announced is specifically aimed at supporting those who need to continue providing their services as part of the national coronavirus response.

In addition, many charities and not-for-profit organisations will have access to cross-cutting support already announced. This includes the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme which enables them to furlough staff. They can also defer VAT bills to the end of June, pay no business rates for their shops next year and can get a Business Interruption Loan. Many charity shops are already eligible for 80% charitable rate relief, and will benefit from the new enhanced retail rate relief at 100%.

Local Broadcasting: Coronavirus**Mr Steve Baker:**[\[39659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will take steps to support community radio stations through the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Government is strongly supportive of the community radio sector and recognises the great value that it offers to communities across the United Kingdom, in terms of providing quality local news, information and entertainment.

We recognise the challenges that some community stations are facing due to Covid-19 and are currently holding discussions with Ofcom and the Community Media Association (CMA) on possible options to provide urgent support for those stations in greatest need.

Mobile Phones: Coronavirus**Chi Onwurah:**[\[39664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on network resilience.

Matt Warman:

The telecoms sector has undertaken a significant amount of work over recent years to prepare for a pandemic. DCMS is working closely with the main broadband providers to ensure the network remains stable and continues to have sufficient capacity for the increases in home-working and remote learning the country has seen as a part of its response to Covid-19. The key telecommunications providers are monitoring all aspects of network performance including traffic levels and shifts in behaviour due to home-working and learning.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis:

[37663]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to provide financial support for apprenticeships delivered by independent training providers following the covid-19 outbreak .

Gillian Keegan:

As my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

We recognise the financial impact on training providers, and have been regularly liaising with the sector and working to make changes where we can. On 24 April 2020, we published details of a provider relief scheme that will offer targeted financial support for training providers. This is designed to retain capacity within the apprenticeships and adult education sector to deliver the skills we need to support economic recovery. As part of that, we want to maintain support for existing learners and employers and enable new learners to enrol. Full details of the scheme are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-post-16-provider-relief-scheme>.

This is in addition to the series of wider measures to support employers and employees set out by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 3 April. Details are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

The full range of our latest guidance and advice for all educational settings can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>.

These are rapidly developing circumstances and we will continue to keep the situation under review and to keep Parliament updated accordingly.

■ Children: Day Care

Kate Osborne:

[39828]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to make additional funding available to cover childcare costs for key workers during the covid-19 outbreak who would normally rely on relatives for childcare.

Vicky Ford:

Early years and childcare settings are closed except for children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home. The list of critical workers is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining->

[educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision.](#)

On 17 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed that we will continue to pay local authorities for free early years entitlement places for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds. We will publish guidance shortly to set out how local authorities can use their free entitlement funding differently, redistributing it in exceptional cases and in a clearly focused and targeted way, in order to secure childcare for the children of critical workers and for vulnerable children at this time, where their usual arrangements are no longer possible.

Guidance, including details of additional business support available, for early years and childcare providers is available at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures)

■ Education: Internet

Mr Kevan Jones: [39483]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what contingency planning his Department has undertaken on supporting teachers and students to learn remotely.

Kate Osborne: [39817]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to support students in year 9 that have missed out on education as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is committed to ensuring that children can continue to learn at home in these very difficult circumstances. We recognise that many schools and colleges have already shared resources for children who are at home, and we are grateful for this.

The Department has issued guidance for schools which signposts to an initial list of free online resources identified by educational experts and teachers. Many other suppliers have also helpfully made their resources available for free. The guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources>.

The Department has also issued information, guidance and support to parents and carers of children who are learning from home at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

Leading state schools have collaborated to open The Oak National Academy, which was launched online on 20 April. This new initiative is led by 40 teachers who have assembled video lessons and resources for any teacher in the country to make use of if they wish to do so. 180 video lessons will be provided each week, across a broad range of subjects, for every year group from Reception through to Year 10.

Additionally, the BBC has developed resources for families as part of a comprehensive new education package, which is now available on TV and online at BBC Bitesize.

The Government has also committed over £100 million to boost remote education. This includes, providing devices and internet access for those who need it most, ensuring every school that wants it has access to free, expert technical support to get set up on Google for Education or Microsoft's Office 365 Education, and offering peer support from schools and colleges leading the way with the use of education technology. Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

■ Free School Meals: Coronavirus

Daniel Zeichner:

[37713]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, how many vouchers have been issued under the national voucher scheme to families whose children are eligible for free school meals; and what proportion of those vouchers have been used.

Vicky Ford:

Our national voucher scheme is playing a significant role in ensuring that eligible pupils can still receive free school meals while they are staying at home due to the coronavirus outbreak. The scheme offers a valuable service where schools are unable to arrange meals or food parcels through their existing food suppliers.

In the maintaining educational provision guidance, we ask schools to continue to provide care for a limited number of children, including those who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response and cannot be safely cared for at home. Some schools are making their own arrangements for vulnerable children and schools are providing funding to support this.

The value of the vouchers redeemed into gift cards by parents and schools has increased significantly since the start of the summer term. Edenred has reported that over £29m worth of voucher codes has been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families through the scheme as of Monday 27 April. Edenred has also reported that over 15,500 schools had placed orders for the scheme as of Wednesday 22 April.

Dan Jarvis:

[39598]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made of the processing times for supermarket vouchers as an alternative for pupils in receipt of free school meals via the Edenred online portal following the outbreak of covid-19.

Vicky Ford:

As both my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

During this period, we are asking schools to support pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals by providing meals or food parcels through their existing food providers wherever possible. We know that many schools are successfully delivering food parcels or arranging food collections for children who are eligible for free school meals, and we encourage this approach where it is possible.

However, we recognise that providing meals and food parcels is not a practicable option for all schools. That is why on 31 March we launched a national voucher scheme as an alternative option, with costs covered by the Department for Education.

We are monitoring the use of the scheme on a daily basis. Voucher codes are being processed and many thousands of families are already redeeming them. As of Monday 27 April, Edenred reported that over £29 million worth of voucher codes has been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families through the scheme.

Once an eCode has been ordered, it will be sent within four days. Edenred is keeping schools informed of the status of orders once they have been placed. Schools can choose to 'bulk order' eCodes for regular distribution, for example on a weekly basis, in which case the eCode will be sent on or before the date specified. The eCodes must then be redeemed to create an eGift card, which will be received within 24 hours.

We continue to work closely with our supplier and with schools to increase the speed at which orders can be processed. We thank schools using the system for their patience while it is upgraded to meet demand.

While we encourage schools to use the national voucher scheme, they are best placed to determine what is appropriate locally. Schools providing meals themselves or using their own voucher schemes can be reimbursed for any additional costs, with further details available in the published guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools>.

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Members: Correspondence**Paul Blomfield:****[39658]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when the Minister for Universities plans to respond to the letter from the hon Member for Sheffield Central dated 27 March 2020 on support for students.

Michelle Donelan:

The department received the letter from the hon Member for Sheffield Central on 2 April 2020.

The department takes the concerns raised by the hon Member seriously and is in the process of drafting a response which will address the concerns raised. This will be sent out to the hon Member in due course.

Schools: Assessments**Daisy Cooper:****[39785]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to allow schools to challenge examination boards and Ofqual where student grades are adjusted on the basis of statistical modelling.

Nick Gibb:

This is a matter for Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. I have asked its Chief Regulator, Sally Collier, to write to the hon. Member and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Students: Coronavirus**Colum Eastwood:****[39750]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Executive on ensuring that students tied into private rental agreements are supported during the covid-19 outbreak.

Michelle Donelan:

As my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Housing and student maintenance loans are devolved matters, as is higher education. However, the department has been working closely with colleagues in Northern Ireland to discuss a range of higher education areas affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

The government encourages universities and private hall providers to be fair in their decisions about rent charges for this period.

Students who are tenants with individual private landlords should discuss the possibility of an early release from their lease.

If a student thinks that their accommodation provider is treating them unfairly, they can raise a complaint under the UK accommodation codes of practice as long as their provider is a code member. The codes can be found at: <https://www.thesac.org.uk/> and <https://www.unipol.org.uk/the-code/how-to-complain>. The code of practice for the Landlords Association for Northern Ireland is at: <https://www.lani.org.uk/about/code-of-practice/>.

Students with a part-time employment contract should speak to their employer about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) which has been set up to help pay staff wages and keep people in employment.

■ Training: Coronavirus

Emma Hardy:

[37897]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to implement the Cabinet Office guidance entitled Procurement Policy Note 02/20: Supplier relief due to COVID-19 for contracted suppliers for apprenticeships and other skills programmes.

Gillian Keegan:

As my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

On 24 April we opened the Education and Skills Funding Agency's post-16 provider relief scheme to training providers with contracts for services that were procured as a service under the Public Contract Regulations (2015). The purpose of the scheme is to ensure that training providers can continue to deliver high quality education and training to make sure we have the skills needed to rebuild our economy following the COVID-19 outbreak. This also includes supporting new learners, where possible, to learn the skills that they need to progress. Details of eligibility and how to apply are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-post-16-provider-relief-scheme>.

The closing date for applications is 30 April 2020 at midnight. Providers will be notified on or around 15 May 2020 if they are to receive support.

These are rapidly developing circumstances and we will continue to keep the situation under review and to keep Parliament updated accordingly.

■ Universities: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher:

[39637]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on (a) the number of (i) international student numbers and (ii) domestic student numbers intending to take up a university place in the 2020 academic year and (b) research and innovation funding.

Michelle Donelan:

We are very grateful for the work that universities are doing in supporting students, undertaking ground-breaking research and providing specialist equipment. We are working closely with them to understand the financial risks and implications that they might face at this uncertain time.

The COVID-19 outbreak will have an impact on international students. The government is working to ensure that existing rules and regulations relating to international students, including visa regulations, are as flexible as possible under these unprecedented circumstances.

My right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has also announced an unprecedented package of support, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and a range of business loan schemes, to help pay wages, keep staff employed and support businesses whose viability is threatened by the outbreak.

We recently confirmed universities' eligibility for these schemes, and we are working closely with the sector, the Office for Students (OfS) and across the government to understand the financial risks that providers are facing, stabilise the admissions system and help providers to access the support on offer.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and UK Research and Innovation analysts are working closely with the Department for Education, OfS and wider non-government stakeholders to undertake a rapid programme of analysis to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on a range of research institutions including universities and analyse suitable policy responses.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Seasonal Workers

Afzal Khan:

[39703]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure farmers have access to the seasonal workers required to harvest crops during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

The ongoing impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak have meant that there will be a shortfall in the numbers of workers who usually travel to the UK from Europe to work during the harvest season, with the demand for workers peaking from late May through the summer. We need to mobilise the British workforce to fill that gap and make sure our excellent fruit and vegetables are on people's plates over the summer months.

Farming leaders have already kick-started a recruitment drive for work on farms, with thousands of British people already expressing an interest in picking up seasonal agricultural work over the coming weeks and months. With many British workers furloughed from their jobs, and students having to put their summer plans on hold, the Government is supporting industry efforts to help farmers bring in this year's harvest, working to build on these numbers.

The majority of roles for the early part of the harvest season have already been filled. We are closely monitoring the situation and we will shortly be launching a public-facing campaign to highlight the roles available from late May onwards and to

encourage people to apply. The Government has confirmed that those who have been furloughed from their jobs due to coronavirus, and who are contractually allowed to work for another employer, can take on this seasonal work.

The Pick for Britain website is a recently launched joint Defra and industry initiative to support this effort. The website will act as a central hub to signpost people to the jobs available and to hold guidance and resources so growers, workers and industry can have a single place to go, available at <https://pickforbritain.org.uk/>. The website will also provide links to a wide range of recruitment campaigns organised by labour providers. The Pick for Britain website includes links to the Government's 'Find A Job' website, which will give access to a wide reach of potential applicants. The Find a Job website has more than 1.6 million registered users and is available here: <https://findajob.dwp.gov.uk/>.

Our farmers are doing a fantastic job of feeding the nation during this challenging time. To help our farmers, industry Best Practice Guidance for employers of seasonal agricultural workers to avoid the spread of coronavirus has also now been published, which has been endorsed by Public Health England: <https://ahdb.org.uk/coronavirus/social-distancing-farm-businesses>.

■ Animal Welfare: Coronavirus

Sarah Champion:

[37694]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Government has issued sector specific guidance for the operation of animal rescue shelters and adoption services as a result of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government has not issued any specific guidance in this area, but guidance has been published by the Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG) which advises the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England and Defra Ministers. The CFSG guidance provides animal rescue and rehoming centres with advice about how to work during the Covid-19 crisis and in the context of Government restrictions in respect of social distancing and essential travel and was developed in consultation with Defra. A copy of the CFSG guidance can be found here on their website:

<http://www.cfsg.org.uk/coronavirus/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/CFSG%20Guidance%20for%20Pet%20Rescues.pdf>

Dr Luke Evans:

[37851]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to prevent an increase in the level of animal cruelty during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

I am very aware of the issues currently facing organisations who are on the frontline as regards tackling animal cruelty. My department is in regular contact with the main bodies representing the animal welfare sector, including the RSPCA, Canine and

Feline Sector Group, the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes and the equine welfare charities to understand their position and offer advice.

The Government has supported the sector providing guidance which enables it to continue to operate within the current restrictions, available here:

www.cfsg.org.uk/coronavirus/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/CFSG%20Guidance%20for%20Pet%20Rescues.pdf.

We have also encouraged the sector to consider all the various financial support already announced by the Chancellor, and issued guidance for the charity sector which provides further information, available here: www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector.

Social enterprises such as community interest companies can benefit from all of the measures set out by the Chancellor to benefit small businesses. We are also exploring options for and giving advice to the sector on the possibility of assistance from the additional specific fund recently announced by the Chancellor to support charities. We have also exempted veterinary practices from having to close so that they continue to treat animals in need of veterinary attention and to help provide for their good welfare.

Powers are available under existing legislation to tackle anyone who commits cruelty on an animal. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, local authorities and police have powers to investigate complaints about poor welfare or animal cruelty. In addition, the RSPCA can also investigate such complaints. Animal charities carry out valuable work to ensure that the health and welfare needs of sick, abandoned and stray animals in their care continue to be met.

Dr Luke Evans:

[37956]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that animal charities are able to continue working with animals during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

I am very aware of the issues currently facing organisations in this sector with falls in income and pressure on staff. My department is in regular contact with the main bodies representing the sector, including the Canine and Feline Sector Group, the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes and the equine welfare charities to understand their position and offer advice.

The Government has supported the sector providing guidance which enable it to continue to operate within the current restrictions, available here:

www.cfsg.org.uk/coronavirus/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/CFSG%20Guidance%20for%20Pet%20Rescues.pdf.

We have also encouraged the sector to consider all the various financial support already announced by the Chancellor, and issued guidance for the charity sector which provides further information, available here:

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector.

Social enterprises such as community interest companies (CICs) and charitable zoos can benefit from the measures set out by the Chancellor to benefit small businesses. We are also exploring options for and giving advice to the sector on the possibility of assistance from the additional specific fund recently announced by the Chancellor to support charities. We have already announced, for zoos in severe financial distress, a Zoos Support Fund for licensed zoos in England. Zoos policy is devolved. Funding is being provided to the Devolved Administrations in line with the Barnett formula. Where a zoo is in severe financial distress and has fully explored and exhausted all other reasonable avenues to generate income and reduce costs, including the existing COVID-19 business support schemes, then they should approach Defra as quickly as possible. Defra has already written to all licensed zoos in England to make them aware of the COVID-19 support schemes available as well as the new Zoo Support Fund.

We have also exempted veterinary practices from having to close so that they continue to treat animals in need of veterinary attention and to help provide for their good welfare.

Jane Stevenson:

[39811]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what financial support is available to animal sanctuaries and rescue centres during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

I am very aware of the issues currently facing organisations in this sector with falls in income and pressure on staff. Defra is in regular contact with the main bodies representing the sector, including the Canine and Feline Sector Group, the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes and the equine welfare charities, to understand their position and offer advice. The Government has supported the sector, providing guidance which enables it to continue to operate within the current restrictions which is available here:

www.cfsg.org.uk/coronavirus/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/CFSG%20Guidance%20for%20Pet%20Rescues.pdf.

Where income has fallen we have encouraged the sector to consider all the various financial support arrangements already announced by the Chancellor, and issued guidance for the charity sector which provides further information and advice on raising funds, available here: www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector. Social enterprises such as community interest companies can benefit from all of the measures set out by the Chancellor to benefit small businesses. We are also exploring the possibility of assistance from the additional specific fund recently announced by the Chancellor to support charities and not-for-profit organisations.

■ Care Homes: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes:

[39734]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to provide support to care homes that are facing difficulties accessing deliveries of fresh produce.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra has been working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education to ensure that care homes can access the food they need, through wholesalers, retailers and other local suppliers.

The Federation of Wholesale Distributors has set up a new online portal (www.Food2Care.co.uk) to enable care homes to find local wholesalers, based on a postcode search. The website is also highlighted on the Care Providers Association website. This portal will help those care homes struggling to get supplies during the COVID-19 outbreak. More than 90 national and regional wholesalers have signed up to the scheme so far.

Defra has also been working closely with retailers on their online provision services. Retailers have worked hard to increase their online capacity of both click and collect and delivery slots available to customers, including care homes. Many have now lifted or significantly relaxed their item limits on home delivery orders which should aid the ability of care homes to get the supplies they need in sufficient quantities.

■ Fisheries: Coronavirus

Stephanie Peacock:

[39690]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many businesses have applied to the Coronavirus Fisheries Support Scheme.

Victoria Prentis:

The £9 million Fisheries Response Fund (FRF) went operational on Tuesday, April 21st. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has contacted just under 1000 registered fishing vessel owners directly by email, and the final 200 will be contacted today (28 April).

Stephanie Peacock:

[39691]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many businesses have received a direct cash grant through the Coronavirus fisheries support scheme.

Victoria Prentis:

Of the 978 registered fishing vessel owners contacted, over 600 have returned completed application forms and 351 payments have been processed (to a total value of over £1.5 million) within the first five days. Further payments to all eligible fishing vessel owners will be made during this week and will continue in response to applications returned.

Stephanie Peacock:

[\[39775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many projects to support fishermen in selling their catch to local communities have been funded by the Government's fisheries support scheme.

Victoria Prentis:

The £1 million Direct Seafood Supply Scheme is due to be launched during this week, commencing with a call for projects. Applicants will have time to complete their bids for grants, which will be judged by a panel including fishing industry representatives. It is anticipated that decisions will be made and applicants informed from May 15.

■ Food Supply: Coronavirus

Afzal Khan:

[\[39701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure food supply chains are safeguarded during the covid-19 outbreak.

Afzal Khan:

[\[39704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure food supply during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government has well-established ways of working with the food industry during disruption to supply situations. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, we have intensified our discussions with the industry and together we are continuing to monitor the situation closely, taking the necessary steps to address issues wherever they arise.

Following a significant spike in consumer demand in early March, we have subsequently seen stock levels in supermarkets constantly and significantly improve. To support the food sector, the Government temporarily relaxed competition law and regulations relating to driver hours and delivery times so that the sector could work together to keep putting food on the shelves.

We welcome the actions that the industry is taking, including hiring more staff, and prioritising delivery slots and shopping times for those that need them most. We are grateful for the extensive support and positive collaboration that they have shown. We will continue this engagement with industry to keep food supply chains flowing and make sure people have the food and products they need.

■ Furs

Bill Esterson:

[\[39529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if the Government will make it its policy to ban all animal fur products.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government shares the British public's high regard for animal welfare. There are restrictions on some skin and fur products, making it illegal to import them into the UK. These include fur from cats and dogs and seal skins and products from commercial hunts. Fur farming has been banned in the UK since 2000.

In addition, we do not allow imports of fur from wild animals caught using methods which are non-compliant with international humane trapping standards. Where fur is from an endangered species protected through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), its import or trade will be subject to CITES controls.

During the transition period it is not possible to introduce restrictions relating to the fur trade. Once our future relationship with the EU has been established there will be an opportunity for the Government to consider further steps it could take in relation to fur sales.

Horticulture: Coronavirus**Afzal Khan:**[\[37836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 April 2020 to Question 33584 on Horticulture: Coronavirus, what steps her Department plans to take in response to discussions with the Horticultural Trades Association; and whether garden centres will be allowed to re-open during the covid-19 lockdown.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government is aware of the challenges currently faced by garden centres and plant nurseries. We continue to work closely with representatives from the horticulture supply chain, including the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) to understand what short-term and long-term support the sector needs.

The Government is keeping the situation on Garden Centres under review, but concluded last week that it was too early to ease any restrictions on such retail environments. We will continue to work closely with the representatives from the horticulture supply chain to understand what short-term and long-term support the sector as a whole needs. We are ready to work with the industry to respond to emerging issues quickly and effectively.

Schools: Plastics**Kate Osamor:**[\[38565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that schools are reducing their use of single use plastic.

Rebecca Pow:

Whilst Defra does not directly work with schools to reduce their use of single use plastics, the Government published the Resources and Waste Strategy (RWS) in December 2018, setting out our plans to reduce, reuse and recycle more plastic than we do now. Our target is to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste throughout the life of

the 25 Year Environment Plan, but for the most problematic plastics we are going faster - that is why we are committing to work towards all plastic packaging placed on the UK market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025.

Our landmark Environment Bill will enable us to significantly change the way that we manage our waste and take forward a number of the proposals in the RWS. The Bill will enable us to create extended producer responsibility schemes; introduce deposit return schemes; establish greater consistency in the recycling system and charge for single use plastic items, all of which will assist with reducing and dealing with single use plastics in schools.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), supported by Defra, works to deliver practical solutions to improve resource efficiency. Through RecycleNow, a national recycling campaign for England, they run an engagement programme targeted towards primary school children and encouraging them to think about recycling and sustainability.

In addition, Keep Britain Tidy runs an England-wide Eco-Schools programme, working with schools to educate young people about the dangers of littering.

■ Supermarkets: Coronavirus

Kate Osborne:

[\[39816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how often updates to the list of people that are clinically extremely vulnerable to covid-19 are sent to supermarkets.

Victoria Prentis:

Supermarkets receive an updated list of the clinically extremely vulnerable every day.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

■ Australasia: Coronavirus

Dr Jamie Wallis:

[\[35051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to repatriate UK citizens from (a) Australia and (b) New Zealand during the covid-19 outbreak.

James Duddridge:

The Foreign Secretary announced on 30 March an important new partnership between the Government and airlines to fly home more stranded British travellers, where commercial routes do not exist. The Government will provide up to £75 million financial support to enable special charter flights to priority countries, operated by airlines including Virgin, Easyjet, Jet 2 and Titan. This service has already begun, with flights earlier this week from Ghana and Tunisia.

Our High Commissioner in Canberra has written to the Australian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on this issue. We are signposting British nationals to commercial

flight options and continuing to explore new routes by which they can travel home. We have also set up an online registration tool for any British Nationals in Australia who require our support. Found at: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/australia/return-to-the-uk>. Over 50,000 British Nationals have left Australia on commercial flights in the last month.

In New Zealand, the British High Commission in Wellington is fully staffed and doing all it can to support British Nationals at this time, including finding routes home. Our High Commission remains open to issue emergency travel documents. However, given the New Zealand Government's directive on social distancing, we are asking people not to visit our High Commission in Wellington or our Consulate in Auckland in person, and instead reach out via our online webform. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/new-zealand/coronavirus>. Between commercial and charter flights, over 4,200 British Nationals have departed since 31 March.

■ **British Council: Coronavirus**

Rachel Hopkins:

[39754]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how much emergency funding he plans to allocate to the British Council to enable that organisation to continue operating and paying staff after May 2020.

Rachel Hopkins:

[39755]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the level of funding required from the Government to enable the British Council to continue to operate following the reduction in the income of that organisation as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Rachel Hopkins:

[39756]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that the British Council is not required to reduce the (a) wages of its staff and (b) number of jobs in that organisation as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Rachel Hopkins:

[39757]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will take steps to protect the future of British Council by providing emergency funding to that organisation until its income from English teaching abroad has returned to the level it was prior to the covid-19 pandemic.

Nigel Adams:

The FCO remains committed to the British Council, who are a key driver of our soft power overseas and a precious part of the FCO family. In order to help stabilise their immediate financial position following the impact of Covid-19 on their ability to operate, we agreed to provide the British Council with £26m of additional funding for the 2019-20 financial year. We have also provided some of their 2020-21 Grant-in-Aid funding upfront this month to further alleviate pressures.

The FCO have also supported the British Council in accessing wider government relief available through the COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme and similar schemes in other countries. This will help them support many of their workforce, and those employed through its partners, funded through the commercial side of their business. We will continue to work closely with the British Council in the coming days and weeks to address the impact of COVID-19 on their ability to operate.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Coronavirus**

Jonathan Edwards:

[\[39547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that British nationals in foreign countries are tested for covid-19.

James Cleverly:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has lobbied foreign governments to provide COVID-19 tests and treatment without charge to British nationals currently based on their territory, as the UK is doing for foreign nationals here. Although access to the NHS is usually based on residence in the UK, in January the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) decided that overseas visitors would not be charged for testing for COVID-19 (even if the test is negative) nor for treatment for COVID-19 in the UK. We advise British nationals overseas to follow the advice of the local health and government authorities, and this includes following their testing regime.

Jonathan Edwards:

[\[39549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that repatriated British nationals are (a) tested for covid-19 and (b) subject to a quarantine period upon their arrival in the UK.

Nigel Adams:

All passengers returning on repatriation flights should follow the UK's latest public health advice, as laid out by the Prime Minister last month. We will not be flying back people who are symptomatic or have COVID-19. All British nationals returning to the UK must comply with current social distancing rules, and self-isolate should they develop symptoms.

■ **British Overseas Territories: Coronavirus**

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[38573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what criteria the Government uses to prioritise registrations for seats on return flights for British nationals stranded abroad due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Adams:

The British Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to help bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary on 30 March - with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers. In some countries, where commercial routes are no longer an option due to

countries closing borders, we are working with airlines to charter their aircraft on an at-cost basis to help stranded British travellers return home. British Nationals will be asked to register for flights with Corporate Travel Management (CTM) when charters have been announced for a country.

We will prioritise vulnerable British Nationals most at risk from the effects of Coronavirus who normally live in the UK and are trying to return home for these flights, together with their families who normally live with them in the UK. We are giving additional consideration to the local context and the situation of the individual themselves, this can include lock-down processes in country, access to reliable healthcare, possible reduction in access to routine medication, and those at additional risk if they contract the virus for example the elderly or those with pre-existing medical conditions. In many countries, commercial flights have also continued to operate and have been able to return British Nationals to the UK. We are working with host governments to keep flights running and airspace open where possible for this to continue to happen.

■ **Hamed bin Haydara**

Rachel Hopkins:

[\[38993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Yemen on expediting the release of Hamed bin Haydara from prison following his pardon granted on 25 March 2020.

James Cleverly:

We are monitoring the case of Hamed bin Haydara closely. On 25 March the Houthis announced that they would release Mr Haydara and his fellow wrongfully detained Baha'i, but we have seen no further action since then. I made public my concerns on 22 April, urging the Houthis to release all political prisoners without delay. We strongly condemn the death sentence and the continued persecution of the Baha'i in Yemen for their religious beliefs. We meet often with the Baha'i representatives in London who keep us updated on the situation.

■ **Hong Kong: Human Rights**

Sarah Champion:

[\[39567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of 19 February 2020 UN Special Procedures letter to the Government of the People's Republic of China concerning violations of human rights of healthcare workers in Hong Kong; and what representations he is making to the governments of the People's Republic of China and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on those allegations.

Nigel Adams:

The allegations relating to the mistreatment and arrest of medics at demonstrations are extremely serious. We expect the Hong Kong authorities to abide by international humanitarian norms and laws. These allegations warrant a full and transparent

investigation. We have consistently made clear our view that there should be a robust, independent inquiry into events in Hong Kong. We frequently raise issues of concern with senior figures in the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments, and discuss the situation in Hong Kong with our international partners, and will continue to do so. The Foreign Secretary has set out our concerns about the situation in Hong Kong directly to both the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam and to the Chinese Foreign Minister, State Councillor Wang Yi.

Sarah Champion:

[39568]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking with his international counterparts to develop a coordinated response to the two letters from six United Nations Special Procedures to the Government of the People's Republic of China, on alleged mistreatment of healthcare workers and the use of teargas and other hazardous substances by the Hong Kong Police Force.

Nigel Adams:

The allegations relating to the mistreatment and arrest of medics at demonstrations are extremely serious. We expect the Hong Kong authorities to abide by international humanitarian norms and laws. These allegations warrant a full and transparent investigation. We have consistently made clear our view that there should be a robust, independent inquiry into events in Hong Kong. We frequently raise issues of concern with senior figures in the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments, and discuss the situation in Hong Kong with our international partners, and will continue to do so. The Foreign Secretary has set out our concerns about the situation in Hong Kong directly to both the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam and to the Chinese Foreign Minister, State Councillor Wang Yi.

Sarah Champion:

[39569]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his policy is on support for an international, independent inquiry on the treatment of healthcare workers by the Hong Kong Police Force.

Nigel Adams:

The allegations relating to the mistreatment and arrest of medics at demonstrations are extremely serious. We expect the Hong Kong authorities to abide by international humanitarian norms and laws. These allegations warrant a full and transparent investigation. We have consistently made clear our view that there should be a robust, independent inquiry into events in Hong Kong. We frequently raise issues of concern with senior figures in the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments, and discuss the situation in Hong Kong with our international partners, and will continue to do so. The Foreign Secretary has set out our concerns about the situation in Hong Kong directly to both the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam and to the Chinese Foreign Minister, State Councillor Wang Yi.

Sarah Champion:

[\[39570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he plans to impose Magnitsky-style sanctions on people directly or indirectly responsible for violations of human rights against healthcare workers in Hong Kong and the alleged misuse of teargas and other hazardous substances by the Hong Kong Police Force.

Nigel Adams:

We have announced our intention to establish a UK autonomous Global Human Rights ('Magnitsky-style') sanctions regime. The regulations will come into force once secondary legislation is laid in Parliament in the coming months. It would be inappropriate to comment on potential designations before the regulations come into force.

■ Saudi Arabia: Political Prisoners

Margaret Ferrier:

[\[38936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he has made representations to the Saudi Arabian authorities on the release of (a) human rights campaigner Dr Abdullah al-Hamid and (b) all other prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia.

James Cleverly:

We are aware that Dr Abdullah al-Hamid sadly died on 24 April. We continue to monitor the cases of political detainees in Saudi Arabia. The Foreign Secretary raised our concerns on a number of cases during his visit to Saudi Arabia on 4 and 5 March. We raise concerns about individual cases regularly and will continue to call for political detainees to be given adequate legal representation.

■ UK Relations with EU: Northern Ireland

Stephen Farry:

[\[37813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, for what reasons he refused a request from the EU to establish an office in Northern Ireland to facilitate the implementation of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government considered the EU's request in February and again in March, to establish a Belfast office of the EU Delegation to the UK and responded on both occasions that we cannot agree to a permanent EU presence in Belfast. While Article 12 gives EU officials the right to be present during the activities of UK authorities related to the implementation and application of the Protocol, we do not accept that that necessarily requires an EU Delegation office in Belfast, or indeed any other permanent EU presence in Northern Ireland.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Continuing Care: Finance

Emma Hardy:[\[37917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of continuing healthcare funding appeals have been successful in each of the last three years.

Helen Whately:

The proportion of continuing healthcare funding appeals that have been successful in each of the last three years is shown in the following tables:

Requests for Reviews of Eligibility Decisions – Local Resolution

FINANCIAL YEAR	NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR LOCAL RESOLUTION COMPLETED	OF WHICH, NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR LOCAL RESOLUTION FOUND ELIGIBLE	PROPORTION OF REQUESTS FOR LOCAL RESOLUTION FOUND ELIGIBLE
2017/18	No data	No data	No data
2018/19	3,297	623	19%
2019/20	2,489	449	18%

Requests for Reviews of Eligibility Decisions – Independent Review

FINANCIAL YEAR	NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT REVIEWS COMPLETED	OF WHICH, NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT REVIEWS FOUND PARTIALLY OR FULLY ELIGIBLE	PROPORTION OF INDEPENDENT REVIEWS FOUND PARTIALLY OR FULLY ELIGIBLE
2017/18	690	121	18%
2018/19	875	197	23%
2019/20	1,402	386	28%

We have interpreted the request for information regarding ‘continuing healthcare funding appeals’ as a request for data on both the Local Resolution and Independent Review processes in relation to the review of eligibility decisions.

We do not hold information on the number of Local Resolution requests prior to 2018/19.

Data for Local Resolution requests for 2019/20 is only available for Quarters 1 to 3 and therefore does not give a complete picture for this financial year.

■ Coronavirus: Care Homes and Funerals

Caroline Lucas:

[33496]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) care home staff and (b) funeral directors are able to access personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of covid-19 transmission; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

The Department has published a personal protective equipment (PPE) plan which sets out steps taken towards three strands of work: guidance, delivery and future supply. The plan can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan>

We have also published the Adult Social Care Action Plan, which details new ways for care homes to order PPE, including through direct dispatches via Royal Mail, a 24 hours a day, seven days a week hotline and a new pilot website. The Action Plan can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-social-care-action-plan>

■ Coronavirus: Disadvantaged

Alex Norris:

[38659]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether there are any (a) regional or (b) local differences in ability to receive urgent medical treatment during the covid-19 outbreak based on levels of deprivation.

Edward Argar:

Thanks to the hard work of National Health Service staff, increased critical care capacity across the NHS has meant that all patients needing urgent treatment for COVID-19 have been able to receive treatment.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

Stephanie Peacock:

[38553]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to decreasing emergency attendances since lockdown measures were introduced in response to the covid-10 outbreak, what steps his Department is taking to encourage seriously ill people to go to hospital.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: In line with Government advice, people have been advised that they should not leave their home during the COVID-19 outbreak unless it is essential to do so. This is central to our strategy which is to ensure that the National Health Service is not overwhelmed but also able to operate sustainably.

Nevertheless, we have been clear from the outset that patient safety remains our priority and have ensured that urgent services, such as cancer operations, are protected. The Prime Minister has encouraged all patients needing urgent and emergency services to continue to come to hospital and receive treatment – and not to delay which might make someone's condition worse. Clear and consistent processes have also been agreed between local partners to ensure the safe handling of emergency and urgent referrals from primary care. We are taking every step necessary to bolster the NHS's resilience and capacity so it can provide the best possible care for those who need it.

■ Coronavirus: Medical Treatments

Jane Stevenson:

[\[37993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of using plasma therapy in the treatment of patients with covid-19.

Helen Whately:

There is emerging evidence from China of some effectiveness of using convalescent plasma to treat COVID-19. The Department is aware that research protocols are being developed, and being considered, to assess the possibility of using convalescent plasma from United Kingdom donors to determine its efficacy for treating COVID-19.

■ Coronavirus: Press Conferences

Stuart Anderson:

[\[37838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to provide simultaneous sign language interpretation at the Government's daily covid-19 briefing.

Helen Whately:

The Government is committed to ensuring deaf people can fully participate and play a full role in society. We support initiatives aimed at improving understanding of the needs of deaf people and how the barriers they face can be removed, as well as giving deaf people more say in how they access services.

We worked with the BBC to introduce a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter on Monday 16 March to accompany the Prime Minister's daily COVID-19 press conference. The BSL interpreter is available on the BBC News Channel and BBC iPlayer. We intend to continue to work with the BBC to ensure there is a BSL interpreter in our daily updates on COVID-19 and are prioritising the exploration of additional methods to ensure that all disabled people have access to pertinent communication in accessible formats.

■ General Practitioners: Hospitals

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[33424\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to redeploy GPs from closed surgeries to work in local hospitals.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 21 April 2020]: NHS England and NHS Improvement have advised that practices should remain open unless advised to close by the health protection team.

General practice has a vital role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering high quality care for both COVID-19 patients and for individuals requiring urgent care or essential routine care for pre-existing conditions that are non COVID-19. The way in which people can access general practice services during the COVID-19 emergency response has changed. Practices are now offering more telephone appointments and video consultations. This is to see as many patients as possible while protecting staff and patients from avoidable risk of infection. Where a face to face appointment or a home visit is clinically necessary the practices will take all necessary steps to reduce the risk of infection, including using personal protective equipment.

Qualified general practitioners (GPs) who have temporarily, or permanently left the National Health Service have also been asked to return to support the COVID-19 response as part of a “call to arms” for healthcare professionals across the NHS. These GPs are being deployed where they are needed the most, including in practices and COVID-19 clinical assessment services in NHS 111.

■ General Practitioners: Protective Clothing

Jonathan Ashworth:

[\[32264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of GP practices have received additional stocks of personal protective equipment for staff since 1 January 2020.

Jo Churchill:

As of 14 April, since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak we have delivered over 923 million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) to 58,000 different health and care settings including National Health Service trusts, general practitioners, pharmacies and community providers. We have provided PPE equipment to over 26,000 care homes including home care and hospices across the country. Over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, over 48 million PPE items have been delivered.

We are working around the clock to give the NHS and the wider social care sector the equipment and support they need to tackle this outbreak. We have brought together the NHS, industry and the Armed Forces to create a new nationwide PPE distribution network, delivering critical PPE supplies to those who need it.

We have a 24 hours a day, seven days a week helpline for those experiencing supply disruption with business as usual ordering channels. Where there may be any shortages, we act on this immediately. Local Resilience Forums are also supporting care homes, hospices, home care and primary care in getting hold of PPE equipment.

■ Health Professions: Coronavirus

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[34972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of psychological support and resources available to doctors and nurses in primary care.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 21 April 2020]: The National Health Service currently provides comprehensive mental health support for doctors and dentists in England through the NHS Practitioner Health Programme, a mental health assessment and treatment service that NHS doctors including general practitioners and dentists can access confidentially via self-referral.

Last year, we asked NHS England to develop an NHS People Plan to address workforce challenges and improve the support offered to all NHS staff. The health and wellbeing of NHS staff is very important. As part of the NHS People Plan, we plan to set out a comprehensive package of support that all NHS staff can expect to receive from their employer, including rapid access to occupational health services and psychological support. Publication of the final NHS People Plan has been deferred to allow the NHS to provide maximum operational effort to COVID-19 response. However, we have commissioned the NHS to urgently put in place a package of support for NHS staff during the COVID-19 response. Details of this will be released soon.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[34973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has plans to make available additional (a) funding and (b) resources to ensure that NHS (i) doctors and (ii) nurses are able to access psychological support during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 21 April 2020]: The Chancellor has been clear that the National Health Service will receive the resources it needs to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. I have commissioned the NHS to create a package of support for NHS staff during the COVID-19 response. This will include training and guidance, access to psychological support and other practical measures to sustain staff wellbeing.

■ Health professions: Training

Geraint Davies:

[37381]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether final year trainee (a) doctors and (b) nurses will be charged tuition fees while working for the NHS during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

Medical students and student nurses will continue to be required to pay tuition fees for their final term. Given the extended length of medical degrees, which can be up to six years in length, Health Education England pay medical student tuition fees from year 5 of study.

As part of the Government's COVID-19 response, current year 5 medical students are currently being graduated by their medical schools early to enable them to apply for Provisional Registration with the General Medical Council, and if they so choose to deploy in to Foundation Year 1 posts. Those that do so will be contracted from the date they start their employment and employed under the 2016 terms and conditions for doctors and dentists in training. They will also continue to get their National Health Service bursary and student maintenance loan.

Year 3 nursing students have been invited to opt in to paid placements in the NHS. All students who do opt in to support the COVID-19 response will be rewarded fairly for their hard work. Students will be getting a salary and automatic NHS pension entitlement at the appropriate band. They will also still receive their student maintenance loan and Learning Support Fund payments too.

Decisions about the NHS workforce in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, including the funding that they provide for students, are a matter for the devolved administrations of those countries.

■ Hearing Aids: Staffordshire

Jonathan Gullis:

[37770]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group is compliant with the revised NICE guidance on hearing loss in adults in relation to the provision of hearing aids to people with mild and moderate hearing loss, published in June 2018.

Helen Whately:

From 6 January to 1 March this year the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) ran an engagement exercise called Difficult Decisions to consider clinical priorities in these local areas.

One area under consideration is hearing loss in adults as patients in North Staffordshire do not currently automatically qualify for hearing aids if their hearing loss is mild or moderate, while they do in Stoke-on-Trent and the rest of Staffordshire.

Currently work on analysing and further developing proposals is paused as clinicians engaged in the work need to prioritise frontline duties, due to COVID-19. The CCGs currently cannot give an estimate of when this work will continue.

■ Hospitals: ICT

Caroline Lucas:

[34959]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions his Department has had with technology companies on the donation of (a) mobile phones and (b) tablets to hospitals to enable patients dying from covid-19 without access to technological devices to communicate with their families.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 21 April 2020]: On 27 March 2020, NHS England published a clinical guide for the management of palliative care in hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance highlights the importance of supporting those close to a dying patient to keep in touch, including the ability to connect via phone or other virtual communication.

Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/C0081-Speciality-guide-Palliative-care-and-coronavirus.pdf>

With regard to patients' ability to access technology to communicate with their families, whilst in hospital, on 9 April, the Government launched an initiative whereby the National Health Service is working with tech firms to help care home residents and patients connect with loved ones. Fifty of the devices have already been deployed to pilot sites in Surrey with Manchester, Newcastle and London to follow.

Further information is available at the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/news/nhs-works-with-tech-firms-to-help-care-home-residents-and-patients-connect-with-loved-ones

■ NHS Trusts: Protective Clothing

Jonathan Ashworth:

[32256]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which NHS trusts have received additional stocks of personal protective equipment for staff since 1 January 2020.

Jo Churchill:

As of 14 April, since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak we have delivered over 923 million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) to 58,000 different health and care settings including National Health Service trusts, general practitioners, pharmacies and community providers. We have provided PPE equipment to over 26,000 care homes including home care and hospices across the country. Over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, over 48 million PPE items have been delivered.

We are working around the clock to give the NHS and the wider social care sector the equipment and support they need to tackle this outbreak. We have brought together the NHS, industry and the Armed Forces to create a new nationwide PPE distribution network, delivering critical PPE supplies to those who need it.

We have a 24 hours a day, seven days a week helpline for those experiencing supply disruption with business as usual ordering channels. Where there may be any shortages, we act on this immediately. Local Resilience Forums are also supporting care homes, hospices, home care and primary care in getting hold of PPE equipment.

Helen Hayes:

[32709]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) in NHS Trusts in (a) London and (b) England; and what steps he is taking to ensure that additional PPE is provided to NHS trusts.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 25 March 2020]: As of 14 April, since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak we have delivered over 923 million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) to 58,000 different health and care settings including National Health Service trusts, general practitioners, pharmacies and community providers. We have provided PPE equipment to over 26,000 care homes including home care and hospices across the country. Over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, over 48 million PPE items have been delivered.

We are working around the clock to give the NHS and the wider social care sector the equipment and support they need to tackle this outbreak. We have brought together the NHS, industry and the Armed Forces to create a new nationwide PPE distribution network, delivering critical PPE supplies to those who need it.

We have a 24 hours a day, seven days a week helpline for those experiencing supply disruption with business as usual ordering channels. Where there may be any shortages, we act on this immediately. Local Resilience Forums are also supporting care homes, hospices, home care and primary care in getting hold of PPE equipment.

■ NHS: Compensation

Dr Dan Poulter:

[R] [37569]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to introduce compensation payments for the families of NHS staff that die as a result of covid-19 infection.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: The NHS Pension Scheme provides death in service cover of two times annual pay to active members who are yet to retire to support a member's partner and dependents should they die before claiming their benefits.

Membership of the pension scheme is voluntary and is available to all staff in the National Health Service who are yet to retire. Around 90% of staff are active scheme members.

The Government is in the process of setting up a life assurance scheme for frontline health and social care staff who contract coronavirus during the course of their work.

We recognise that frontline health and social care staff are working in environments where direct personal healthcare is provided to patients and service users who have or are suspected to have coronavirus.

The scheme is non-contributory and pays a £60,000 lump sum where staff die as a result of coronavirus and have been recently working in frontline roles and locations where personal care is provided to individuals who have contracted the virus.

Payments received from this scheme will be in addition to any benefits received from the NHS Pension Scheme.

■ NHS: Staff

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[R] [37789]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support the psychological (a) welfare and (b) resilience of NHS staff during the covid-19 outbreak.

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[R] [37790]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help ensure the (a) psychological and (b) physical welfare of NHS staff working in temporary hospitals during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

The Department asked NHS England and NHS Improvement to develop a comprehensive emotional, psychological and physical support package for all National Health Service staff, including those working in Nightingale hospitals, during and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

This package includes free-to-access self-guided mental health support, confidential helpline and 24 hours a day, seven days a week text service, as well as free-to-download mental health and well-being apps.

NHS England and NHS Improvement are also co-ordinating commercial offers to provide practical support for NHS staff at a local level.

More information can be found online at the following link:

people.nhs.uk/help

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[R] [37791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of deploying psychological professionals to support the wellbeing of NHS staff during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

The Department asked NHS England and NHS Improvement to develop a comprehensive support package for all National Health Service staff during and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

As a part of this support package all NHS staff are now able to call or text a free number staffed by specially trained respondents, to receive support and advice for the pressures they face every day during the global health emergency.

Anyone who requires further help will be signposted to other services including specialist professional psychological support where this is needed. The phone line will be open between 7am and 11pm every day, while the text service will be 24 hours a day, seven days a week. More details, including the numbers to call, can be found online at the following link:

people.nhs.uk/help

■ Nurses: Training**Mr Barry Sheerman:****[37445]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take support student nurses that began their courses in 2017 and are therefore not eligible for the grant announced by the Government in December 2019.

Helen Whately:

The maintenance grants announced on the 18 December 2019 are available to new and continuing Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional (NMAHP) students from September 2020. NMAHP students who started courses in the 2017/18 academic year and will have completed their studies will not receive backdated payments. The move from bursaries to loans in 2017 enabled the Government to increase the upfront financial support available to students while studying by around 25%.

Final year nursing students, of which the vast majority commenced their studies in 2017, have been invited to opt in to paid placements to support the COVID-19 response. We have guaranteed that all nursing students who do opt in to paid placements will be rewarded fairly for their hard work. Nursing students who opt in will be getting a salary and automatic National Health Service pension entitlement at the appropriate band. They will also still receive their student maintenance loan and Learning Support Fund payments too.

■ Organs: Donors**Dr Matthew Offord:****[37600]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to delay the planned publication of the national guidelines on organ donation on 20th May until the covid-19 personal mobility restrictions have been rescinded.

Helen Whately:

The Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Act 2019 heralds a new system of consent for organ and tissue donation in England, known as 'opt-out' or 'deemed consent'. The new consent arrangements mean that all adults over 18 will be considered potential organ and tissue donors after death, unless they make a decision that they do not want to be a donor, they have nominated a representative to make a decision on their behalf after death, or are in an excluded group.

As announced by the Government on 25 February, subject to approval of affirmative regulations and a draft Code of Practice by Parliament, the intention is that deemed consent becomes legal in England on 20 May. The Government appreciates that transplants can only proceed where the relevant consent requirements have been met, including the deemed consent requirements where they apply, and it is safe for patients to have a transplant. In reality, this means that this is unlikely that transplants will proceed under deemed consent during the current COVID-19 pandemic because people are distanced and communication between relevant parties is more challenging.

■ Social Services**Afzal Khan:**[\[37908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer 3 February 2020 to Question 8468 on Social Services, whether he plans, in response to the covid-19 outbreak, to expedite the Government's timetable for bringing forward a plan for the future of social care; and what plans he has to publish the Social Care Green Paper.

Helen Whately:

On 15 April, the COVID-19 adult social care action plan was published. The Government's number one priority for adult social care is for everyone who relies on care to get the care they need throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are committed to bringing forward a plan for social care to ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect and to find long term solutions for one of the biggest challenges we face as a society. There are complex questions to address, which is why we have invited cross-party talks. These will take place at the earliest opportunity in light of the current circumstances.

HOME OFFICE**■ Aviation: Foreign Nationals****Tom Hunt:**[\[38950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reducing foreign nationals' air access to the UK to help tackle the spread of covid-19.

Chris Philp:

Our approach to international travel and checks at the border must be informed by the scientific and medical evidence and advice provided by SAGE and Public Health England. Any decision to implement additional restrictions on international travel to the UK or on arrival at ports/airports will be made by Ministers based on the consideration and advice of SAGE/PHE.

■ Cannabis: Imports**Ronnie Cowan:**[\[39001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the processing time of Letters of Declaration for the import of cannabis-based products for medicinal use by the Drugs and Firearms Licensing Unit; what steps she is taking to tackle delays in that processing; and if she will make a statement.

Ronnie Cowan:[\[39002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the guidance document entitled, The supply, manufacture, importation and distribution of unlicensed cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans specials, published by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency in March 2020, what steps the Drugs and Firearms Licensing Unit in her Department is taking to speed up the process of granting import licences for cannabis-based products for medicinal use since that guidance was published; and if she will make a statement.

Ronnie Cowan:[\[39004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many officials in the Drugs and Firearms Licensing Unit in her Department have been seconded to work on the response to covid-19; and if she will make a statement.

Kit Malthouse:

All applications are considered individually on their merits and with regards to our obligation under International Conventions and Domestic law. Applications for importation of Cannabis Based Products for Medicinal Use in Humans (CBPMs) are already expedited, where documentation and regulatory approval is provided, in recognition of the need to ensure continuity of the supply of unlicensed medicines.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency guidance- "The supply, manufacture, importation and distribution of unlicensed cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans specials" - was updated in March 2020 to enable pharmaceutical wholesalers to move from a system where they can only apply to import the quantity specified on a prescription, to a system that allows the import of CBPMs in anticipation of prescriptions.

Licensed wholesalers could hold supplies of products to be drawn on when in receipt of a prescription from a specialist doctor on the General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register. The Drug & Firearms Licensing Unit (DFLU) continues to

expedite applications made in response to this updated guidance, where all relevant documentation and regulatory returns have been made by the wholesalers.

No officials have been seconded from the Drug and Firearms Licensing Unit. Since 25 March 2020, it has delivered its regulatory functions remotely, issuing a total of 1,699 controlled drug import-export licences.

It is presently operating a next day turnaround for applications where all required information has been submitted with the application.

■ Detention Centres: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis:

[\[38487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to (a) prevent the transmission of covid-19 in immigration removal centres and (b) protect (i) staff and (ii) detainees in those centres from that infection.

Chris Philp:

The safety and health of people in the detention estate is of the utmost importance. The Home Office is following all Public Health England and Health Protection Scotland guidance on COVID-19 and have robust contingency plans in place.

Measures such as protective isolation are considered on a case by case basis to minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading in the immigration detention estate. Further measures including shielding, single occupancy rooms and the cessation of social visits have been introduced in line with the Government direction on social distancing. Appropriate personal protective equipment is available to contractor and healthcare staff when interacting with detainees being held in isolation.

Handwashing facilities are available in all immigration removal centres and we are working closely with suppliers to ensure we have a continuous supply of soap and cleaning materials. In addition, each centre has posters and leaflets to inform detainees about the importance of handwashing and social distancing to minimise the risk from COVID-19. Detainees are also able to speak to staff directly for advice on the measures in place.

■ Domestic Abuse: Coronavirus

Christine Jardine:

[\[38953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much her Department has spent on communications for the (a) #YouAreNotAlone and (b) Stay Home Save Lives campaigns to date; and what her Department's total spend on covid-19-related communications has been to date.

Christine Jardine:

[\[38954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what languages the #YouAreNotAlone campaign communications are available in.

Victoria Atkins:

The Home Office has committed £219,000 so far towards the #YouAreNotAlone campaign. Not all of this spend has yet been delivered in full as media advertising is still live. Campaign value has been maximised with adverts running across donated media, as well as paid media channels.

The Home Office has not contributed funding to the Stay Home Save Lives campaign but has been supporting the campaign by sharing materials through Home Office channels.

To date, the Home Office has spent a total of £260,000 on coronavirus-related communications. This includes spend on the #YouAreNotAlone campaign.

The key #YouAreNotAlone campaign materials are being made available in Welsh and will be translated into a number of other languages. We are in the process of scoping and translating priority languages with advice from key stakeholders including Karma Nirvana, Refuge, Women's Aid, Southall Black Sisters, Imkaan and others.

■ General Register Office: Marriage Certificates**Caroline Nokes:**[\[37617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average time taken is for the General Register Office to correct a marriage certificate that contains an error.

Kevin Foster:

GRO has a target of 25 working days to process an application for a correction.

The length of time before the correction is made is dependent on other factors such as the production of the correct evidence and the availability of the person who has custody of the register(s); as only they can correct the entry.

■ Immigrants: Coronavirus**Mr Barry Sheerman:**[\[37456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the effects of the covid-19 outbreak on people with no recourse to public funds.

Mr Barry Sheerman:[\[37457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is planning to take to support those with no recourse to public funds.

Chris Philp:

The Government has put in place a range of measures to support people affected by the covid-19 outbreak and we will continue to review the situation to consider if more can be done.

The Home Office is working closely with other government departments to support people, including migrants with no recourse to public funds, through this crisis. We are taking a compassionate and pragmatic approach to an unprecedented situation.

The Coronavirus job retention scheme, self-employment income support and statutory sick pay are not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Contribution-based benefits are also not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Additionally, measures we have brought forward such as rent and mortgage protections are not considered public funds and can be accessed by migrants with leave to remain.

In addition, the Government has made in excess of £3.2bn of funding available to local authorities in England to assist them in managing the pressures arising out of the pandemic.

People granted leave under the family and human rights routes can apply to have a condition lifted or for access to benefits if their financial circumstances change. Additionally, the Home Office has confirmed in light of the pandemic, anyone who would normally cease to be eligible for accommodation because their asylum claim, and any appeal, has been resolved, is being allowed to remain in their current accommodation for at least three months. This applies both to those who have been refused asylum and granted asylum.

■ Immigrants: Finance

Chris Elmore:

[38004]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what financial support her Department is providing during the covid-19 outbreak to people that hold visas that restrict their access to public funds.

Chris Philp:

The Government has put in place a range of measures to support people affected by the covid-19 outbreak and we will continue to review the situation to consider if more can be done.

The Home Office is working closely with other government departments to support people, including migrants with no recourse to public funds, through this crisis. We are taking a compassionate and pragmatic approach to an unprecedented situation.

Migrants with leave under the Family and Human Rights routes can apply to have the restriction lifted by making a 'change of conditions' application if there has been a change in their financial circumstances. The Home Office has recently digitised the application form to make sure it is accessible for those who need to remain at home, and I can assure you that the applications are being dealt with swiftly and compassionately.

The Coronavirus job retention scheme, self-employment income support and statutory sick pay are not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Contribution-based benefits are also not classed as public funds for immigration

purposes. Additionally, measures we have brought forward such as rent and mortgage protections are not considered public funds and can be accessed by migrants with leave to remain.

The Government has made in excess of £3.2bn of funding available to local authorities in England to assist them in managing the pressures arising out of the pandemic.

Kate Green:

[R] [\[38626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on migrants in the UK who have no recourse to public funds.

Kate Green:

[R] [\[38627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to suspend the no recourse to public funds condition during the covid-19 lockdown.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office is working closely with other government departments to support people, including migrants with no recourse to public funds, through this crisis. We are taking a compassionate and pragmatic approach to an unprecedented situation.

Migrants with leave under the Family and Human Rights routes can apply to have the NRPF restriction lifted by making a 'change of conditions' application if there has been a change in their financial circumstances. The Home Office has recently digitised the application form to make sure it is accessible for those who need to remain at home, and I can assure you that the applications are being dealt with swiftly and compassionately.

Many of the wide-ranging Covid-19 measures the government has put in place are not public funds and therefore are available to migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). We therefore do not believe it is necessary to suspend the NRPF condition.

The Coronavirus job retention scheme, self-employment income support and statutory sick pay are not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Contribution-based benefits are also not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Additionally, measures we have brought forward such as rent and mortgage protections are not considered public funds and can be accessed by migrants with leave to remain.

Local authorities may also provide basic safety net support if it is established that there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example, where there are community care needs, migrants with serious health problems or family cases where the wellbeing of a child is in question.

The Government has made in excess of £3.2bn of funding available to local authorities in England to assist them in managing the pressures arising out of the pandemic.

■ Immigrants: Health Services

Drew Hendry: [38964]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of removing the Immigration Health Surcharge for NHS workers during the covid-19 outbreak.

Drew Hendry: [38966]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the financial effect of increases in the cost of the Immigration Health Surcharge on NHS employees making use of the 12 month covid-19 visa extension.

Kevin Foster:

We welcome the vital contribution NHS staff from across the globe make to our healthcare system.

The Home Secretary announced on 31 March 2020 the Home Office will automatically extend the visa of any NHS doctor, nurse or paramedic, where it will expire before 1 October 2020, for 12 months, free of charge. This extension will also apply to their families and includes an exemption from payment of the immigration health surcharge.

■ Immigration: EU Nationals

Dr Matthew Offord: [37614]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many EU nationals have applied for (a) settled and (b) pre-settled status since that scheme became operational; and what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of EU nationals who permanently reside in the UK.

Dr Matthew Offord: [37615]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many EU nationals of each nationality have applied for (a) settled and (b) pre-settled status since that scheme became operational.

Kevin Foster:

The latest published information shows that more than 3.4 million (3,468,700) EU Settlement Scheme applications had been received up to 31 March 2020 of which 3.2 million (3,259,000) were from EU nationals.

In the same period 3.1 million (3,147,000) applications had been concluded of which 58% were granted settled status and 41% granted pre settled status. Grants by conclusion type and nationality will be published in the next detailed quarterly release later this month. Data to 31 December 2019 can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-december-2019>

The latest figures, including applications by EU nationality, can be found in the Home Office's 'EU Settlement Scheme monthly statistics' available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics-march-2020>

Estimates of UK population are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The published figures refer specifically to applications made to the EU Settlement Scheme and cannot be directly compared with ONS estimates of the resident population of EU/EEA nationals in the UK. The published EUSS figures include non-EEA family members, Irish nationals, and eligible EEA citizens not resident in the UK, none of whom are usually included in ONS estimates of the resident EU population. Furthermore, the population estimates do not take account of people's migration intentions and will include people who have come to the UK for a range of purposes, including some who have no intention to settle in the UK.

■ Immigration: Married People

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[38421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential effect on families of the Minimum Income Requirements for non-EEA spouses and partners in the event that those family members are facing financial difficulties as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office has put in place a range of measures to support those affected by the covid-19 outbreak. We continue to monitor the situation closely and take these exceptional circumstances into account.

The minimum income requirement can be met in a number of ways in addition to or instead of income from employment or self-employment. For example, income from the couple's investments, property rental or pension may also be taken into account, together with their cash savings. Where there are exceptional circumstances, other sources of income can be taken into account.

These are unprecedented times and we may make further adjustments to requirements where necessary and appropriate, to ensure people are not unduly affected by circumstances beyond their control.

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[39647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure that non-EEA (a) spouses and (b) partners of UK citizens residing in the UK applying (a) to extend their leave and (b) for indefinite leave to remain are not disadvantaged by the economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office has put in place a range of measures to support those affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. We continue to monitor the situation closely and take these exceptional circumstances into account.

These are unprecedented times and we may make further adjustments to requirements where necessary and appropriate. We will ensure people are not unduly affected by circumstances beyond their control.

■ **Internet: Safety**

Conor McGinn: [\[38012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish her Department's list of identified online harms and the groups at risk from each of them.

James Brokenshire:

I take the problem of online harms very seriously and am clear that while companies have taken some positive steps, more needs to be done to tackle online harms.

The Government committed to introducing new online harms legislation in the Queen's speech on 19th December. The legislation will build on proposals in last year's Online Harms White Paper and will establish a new duty of care on companies towards their users, overseen by an independent regulator.

The White Paper did provide an indicative list of harms. However, that list was neither exhaustive nor fixed. Online harms legislation will need to be sufficiently flexible, so that it is responsive to emerging forms of harmful content and behaviour as well as new technologies, while at the same time providing sufficient certainty to companies.

We are working with stakeholders to ensure that legislation and the process for defining harms in scope of legislation meets the dual needs of flexibility and certainty. Further information on this will be provided in the full government response to the White Paper consultation.

■ **Migrant Camps: Coronavirus**

Afzal Khan: [\[39687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 30 March 2020 to Question HL2717 on Migrant Camps: Coronavirus and with reference to the Department for International Development's concern about the risk posed by coronavirus in relation to migrant camps in Greece, if her Department will increase the number of unaccompanied child refugees taken out of those camps and brought to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

Protecting vulnerable children remains a key priority of this Government and we have a proud record of doing so through our asylum system and our resettlement schemes. The UK remains fully committed to meeting our obligations under the Dublin III Regulation and we are keen to ensure that children who have family members in the UK, including those currently in Greece, are transferred as soon as it is safe to do so.

■ Migrant Camps: France

Tracey Crouch:

[37581]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with her French counterpart on conditions in migrant camps in northern France.

Chris Philp:

The UK and France maintain a strong relationship on managing the response to those attempting to access the UK illegally, including in respect of migrant camps and identifying supporting the most vulnerable. The Home Secretary was due to meet the French Interior Minister in March; however this trip has been postponed due to current Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Those who are moved on from camps in Northern France are taken to reception centres where their asylum claims can be lodged, and any other needs assessed. Since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown in France, over 600 migrants have been moved to accommodation centres to aid with social distancing measures. Within these centres, individuals are provided with medical and administrative support.

■ Migrant Workers: Visas

Vicky Foxcroft:

[37829]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure that people applying for visa renewals which require a minimum term of employment in the UK are not disadvantaged by job losses during the covid-19 pandemic.

Kevin Foster:

These are extraordinary times and the Government has been clear no one will have a negative outcome through the immigration system due to circumstances beyond their control.

The Government is doing all it can to protect jobs and has announced a range of measures to support sponsored workers in Tier 2. Details are published on Gov.uk at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-immigration-and-borders>

We will keep our policies under review and a dedicated coronavirus immigration helpline has been set up to help those who have been affected by the current situation.

■ NHS: Migrant Workers

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[38422]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to grant relevant NHS staff indefinite leave to remain until the end of the covid-19 pandemic.

Kevin Foster:

The Government has announced, for NHS doctors, nurses and paramedics, whose visa will expire before 1 October, we will extend their visa for 12 months. This offer also applies to their families.

The extension is automatic and free of charge and those benefitting will not have to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge.

We keep all of our policies under review and are continuing to consider how we can best support the NHS and its staff.

■ Offences against Children: Social Media

Alexander Stafford: [\[35062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with technology companies on the steps they are taking to (a) identify and (b) tackle online child abuse during increased traffic to social media sites and platforms during the covid-19 outbreak.

Alexander Stafford: [\[35063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the capacity of technology firms to provide adequate moderation processes for (a) identifying and (b) tackling online child abuse during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Atkins:

The Government is working closely with technology companies, NGOs, law enforcement and other Governments to understand the impact of COVID on technology companies' ability to identify and combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and any steps that can be taken to address this in order to protect children and stop offenders.

From initial conversations, this issue remains a priority for companies and they continue to identify child sexual abuse content albeit with reduced capacity.

■ Police: Coronavirus

Tom Hunt: [\[37736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to encourage recently retired police officers back to service to deal with additional pressures on the force during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kit Malthouse:

On 22 April, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury made a written statement confirming that the relevant tax rules are temporarily suspended. This means that that retired officers who re-join the police to support Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak will not be subject to punitive tax charges which may otherwise deter officers from returning to serve during this period.

The written ministerial statement is available at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-04-22/HCWS196/>

The Government is committed to ensuring that police forces and officers have the support and resources they need to meet the increased demands of the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ **Police: Re-employment**

Christine Jardine:

[37995]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on relaxing tax and pensions rules which could deter (a) police officers nearing retirement from retiring and (b) recently retired police officers from returning to serve during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kit Malthouse:

On 22 April, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury made a written statement confirming that the relevant tax rules are temporarily suspended. This means that that retired officers who re-join the police to support Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak will not be subject to punitive tax charges which may otherwise deter officers from returning to serve during this period.

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The Government is committed to ensuring that police forces and officers have the support and resources they need to meet the increased demands of the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ **Second Homes: Rural Areas**

Daniel Kawczynski:

[37542]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department is taking steps to ensure that city dwellers do not move to second homes in rural areas during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government advice makes it clear that people should stay home and avoid all but essential travel. Essential travel does not include visits to second homes, camp sites, caravan parks or similar, whether for isolation purposes or holidays. People must remain in their primary residence. Not taking these steps puts additional pressure on communities and services that are already at risk.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 give the police the appropriate powers to ensure that the public comply with these necessary measures, including through issuing penalties.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-transport-and-travel-advice>

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Tracey Crouch: [\[37576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department has taken to protect Border Force officials from contracting covid-19 when dealing with illegal migrants crossing the English Channel to enter the UK.

Chris Philp:

We take the welfare of the domestic population, our staff and the welfare of the detainees in our care very seriously and we are taking the following further measures in respect to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Border Force and Immigration Enforcement Officers have been provided with facemasks, disposable gloves, eye protection and aprons. Additionally, other items to support frontline staff including hand sanitiser, wipes for equipment/vehicles and clinical waste sacks have been procured and distributed.

Staff use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when encountering symptomatic migrants, in line with PHE guidance. Specific guidance has been issued to staff about the processes for dealing with symptomatic clandestine arrivals during interviewing, fingerprinting and transport.

Tracey Crouch: [\[37578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had discussions with representatives from (a) Kent County Council and (b) Kent Police on the potential merits of providing additional Government support to help deal with illegal migrants crossing the English Channel to enter the UK during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

In line with existing processes, we are in regular contact with Kent Police and the Local Resilience Forum regarding migrant crossings in the Channel. These discussions have continued during the covid-19 response and have been factored into operational planning.

Border Force and Immigration Enforcement are continuing to keep the UK's border secure and have robust contingency plans in place to respond to the covid-19 pandemic driven by the latest scientific and medical advice. In line with that advice to date, no changes have been required at the UK border.

Working with the Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Border Force Maritime have worked with commercial operators and Port Security Officers to ensure that sightings of potentially suspicious small vessels are reported immediately.

Additionally, Border Force have worked with HM Coastguard to increase safety broadcasts to all vessels in the Channel, encouraging them to look out for and report small vessels. Border Force Maritime continues to encourage the public and industry to report suspicious activity and reduce the threat from organised crime and

terrorism. Regional General Maritime teams have been bolstered to further improve their capability to receive and process migrants.

The Kent Multi-Agency Hub brings together officers from the police, National Crime Agency, Border Force, HMRC and Immigration Enforcement to share, develop and analyse intelligence between agencies.

■ Visas: Married People

Andrew Rosindell:

[37494]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of suspending the minimum combined income requirements for spousal visas during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office has put in place a range of measures to support those affected by the covid-19 outbreak. We continue to monitor the situation closely and take these exceptional circumstances into account. We may make further adjustments to requirements where necessary and appropriate to ensure no one is penalised for circumstances beyond their control.

The minimum income requirement can be met in a number of ways in addition to or instead of income from employment or self-employment. For example, income from the couple's investments, property rental or pension may also be taken into account, together with their cash savings.

■ Visas: Skilled Workers

Catherine West:

[37968]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of extending the length of Tier 2 visas for 18 months due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Kevin Foster:

Where employers wish to continue to employ sponsored migrant workers, those workers can qualify for extensions in the normal way.

To show our appreciation to the health sector we have already extended the visas of key NHS frontline workers, and their families, automatically for one year, where their visa was due to expire before 1 October.

The Government is doing all it can to protect jobs and has announced a range of measures to support sponsored workers in Tier 2. Details are published on Gov.uk at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-immigration-and-borders>

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Domestic Abuse: Hotels****Christine Jardine:****[39695]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if his Department will introduce a coordination system, developed in conjunction with specialist Violence Against Women and Girls providers and with local authorities, to allocate hotel spaces alongside specialist support to people deemed in priority need as a result of domestic abuse.

Luke Hall:

We are looking carefully at all safe and appropriate accommodation options for supporting victims of domestic abuse and their children.

The Government's priority remains for refuges to stay open, up and running to enable victims of domestic abuse to be able to access the support they need.

My officials have been liaising closely with Refuge and the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Women's Aid and the wider refuge sector as well as other Government Departments, including the Home Office, from the start of the lockdown to monitor how demand is changing.

In England, under homelessness legislation a person who is pregnant, has dependent children, or is vulnerable as a result of having to leave accommodation due to domestic abuse has priority need for accommodation and will be accommodated by the local authority. Local authorities use a range of accommodation options to find appropriate housing for victims, including working with specialist domestic abuse and/or Violence Against Women and Girls providers where appropriate.

The Scottish Government are responsible for setting policy regarding homelessness and domestic abuse in Scotland and will be able to advise further.

■ Food Supply: Coronavirus**Mr Kevan Jones:****[39481]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether people who are classified as extremely vulnerable are able to apply for priority access to supermarkets, without needing to apply for free food packages.

Christopher Pincher:

Once they have received their NHS letter, shielded individuals can receive a priority supermarket slot if they register online: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>. Alternatively, they can use the phone line available. When signing up, they must request essential food supplies in order for their data to be passed onto supermarkets.

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation

Andy Slaughter:

[\[39499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the non-ACM cladding remediation fund applies to (a) combustible cladding with a Euroclass rating of B as well as cladding with a Euroclass rating of C or below, (b) all types of combustible cladding, or just to HPL and timber, (c) the removal of combustible insulation installed beneath combustible cladding, (d) the removal of combustible insulation installed beneath A1 or A2 cladding and (e) the removal of combustible insulation installed in External Wall Insulation systems with render.

Christopher Pincher:

We will be publishing the prospectus for the Building Safety Fund in May which will provide all the eligibility criteria for the Fund, including which cladding materials and systems will be supported.

■ Homelessness: Coronavirus

Alberto Costa:

[\[38593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of resources available to local authorities who are housing homeless people during the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

The Government has announced that councils across England will receive another £1.6 billion in additional funding as they continue to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. With this funding councils can provide support to those who need it most, including rough sleepers. This takes the total funding to support councils to respond to the pandemic to over £3.2 billion and follows on from the announcement of £3.2 million in targeted funding to ensure that we minimise the risk to those currently unable to self-isolate.

The Government has made clear that no one should be without a roof over their head, and this funding further demonstrates our commitment to assist the most vulnerable in society.

■ Housing Occupancy: Coronavirus

Shabana Mahmood:

[\[39557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps the Government is taking to help prevent people living in multi-generational households from being at increased risk of covid-19.

Mr Simon Clarke:

MHCLG is working closely with Public Health England (PHE) who have produced guidance on self-isolation and social distancing within the home as well as guidance on how to minimise the risk of infection by following cleaning and hygiene practices. This will be especially important for those who share facilities with others. At a local

level, Directors of Public Health in local authorities have specific responsibilities with regard to the public health implications of local outbreaks of coronavirus.

The department will continue to work closely with PHE on a range of matters, including to ensure risks associated with overcrowded conditions are addressed.

We are working with sector representatives to see how we can best support local authorities in identifying at-risk groups, signposting and matching needs to services, and supporting the voluntary and community sector.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[39558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the living circumstances of people in multi-generational households will be taken into account by the Government when social distancing measures are potentially amended.

Mr Simon Clarke:

My Department continues to work closely with local authorities to manage the impacts of Covid-19 on households and the most vulnerable in our society.

The Government is keen to support local authorities in identifying and responding to additional vulnerability created by the Covid-19 outbreak both through existing support and engaging civil society to provide further assistance.

We are working with sector representatives to see how we can best support local authorities in identifying at-risk groups, signposting and matching needs to services, and supporting the voluntary and community sector.

■ Housing: Coronavirus

John Redwood: [\[38408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to make changes to housing build out rates for local authorities as a result of the disruption to the industry during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

It is important to keep the planning system moving as much as we can, so that it is able to play its full part in the economic recovery to come. We note the concerns some authorities are raising on house building rates and we will continue to monitor the situation.

Alberto Costa: [\[38594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to support local authorities that are facing (a) delays in the fulfillment of Section 106 obligations as a result of the shutdown of construction sites and (b) the risk that applicants use the covid-19 outbreak to avoid their legal obligations.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government is introducing a range of measures to make it easier to operate the planning system so that it is able to play its full part in the economic recovery to come. Contributions from developers play an important role in delivering the

infrastructure that new homes, and local economies, require. We will continue to work closely with local authorities and the sector to understand the issues around the use of section 106 planning obligations and will respond in due course

■ Local Government Finance: Coronavirus

Tim Farron:

[\[39525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the planned period of cover is for the funding allocated to local authorities for increased costs during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government has pledged over £3.2 billion to support local authorities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. This support demonstrates the Government's commitment to making sure local authorities have the resources they need to support their communities through this challenging time. We continue to work closely with the sector to understand the financial impact of Covid-19.

Steve Reed:

[\[39552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the financial effect on local authorities of responding to the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government has announced a package of additional funding worth over £3.2 billion, alongside introducing a number of measures to support immediate cashflow concerns. This package of support responds to the range of pressures councils have told us they are facing. Additionally, the data that councils have provided to the Department in recent weeks has been crucial in building a picture of what is happening on the front-line. The Department will continue to work with the sector to develop our understanding of the pressures that local authorities are currently facing.

■ Local Government: Coronavirus

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[38541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many local co-ordination centres have been established to mitigate disruption to logistics as a result of the covid-19 outbreak in (a) England, (b) London and (c) the London Borough of Barnet.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are the principal mechanisms at the local level in England for planning multi-agency responses to mitigate disruption from emergencies. During an emergency, LRFs can stand up Strategic Coordination Groups (SCGs) to enhance coordination. SCGs are currently being held in all 38 LRFs including in London. The London SCG is attended by representatives from Local Government. Barnet has opened a Borough Emergency Coordination Centre to manage activity across the Borough.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[39561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to ensure local authorities have adequate personal protective equipment to respond effectively to the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

My Department is working tirelessly to support DHSC and local partners within Local Resilience Forums (LRF) to help them respond to urgent local spikes in need across the adult social care system and other frontline services, where providers are unable to access PPE through their usual, or dedicated wholesaler routes.

This includes relevant local authority frontline workers, such as adult social care, children's social care and funeral services, in line with published clinical guidance.

Since 6 April, over 50 million items of PPE have been authorised for release to LRFs across the country. We will continue to make drops of PPE to LRFs identified as being in the highest need of resupply until the new e-commerce solution is operational.

■ **Parish Councils: Coronavirus**

Dr Julian Lewis: [\[39453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to enable town and parish councils to recover lost income caused by the covid-19 crisis; and what discussions he has held with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the equity of compensation arrangements for such losses by town and parish councils, relative to those applying to the principal local authorities.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Government does not directly financially support parish councils. Parish councils are funded through a precept collected from within the overall council tax paid by the residents of the parish. The Government has announced a further £1.6 billion of funding to meet additional pressures arising from the pandemic and help continue to deliver frontline services, taking the total amount of support to local government to £3.2 billion. Parish and Town Councils should liaise with the relevant principal authorities on how this money is allocated in their area.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]**

Craig Whittaker: [\[902046\]](#)

What steps the Government is taking to ensure that the UK maintains its expenditure of 0.7 per cent of GDP on development aid during the covid-19 pandemic.

James Cleverly:

There has never been a more important time to deliver on our 0.7% commitment, a commitment that this government has enshrined in law.

The UK has plans in place to meet this commitment whilst delivering value for money for the taxpayer and ensuring that we continue to support coronavirus response efforts.

Ian Lavery:

[\[902052\]](#)

What steps she is taking to cancel the debt of countries in the Global South affected by the covid-19 pandemic.

James Duddridge:

It is essential to help developing countries deal with the secondary economic effects of coronavirus. This will protect vulnerable people and help the world economy recover. The UK is taking a leading role by contributing up to £150m to the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, to fund the poorest countries' debt repayments to the IMF. We also support the suspension of debt repayments from the poorest countries by G20 and Paris Club creditors. We are working hard to stop the poorest suffering the most.

Geraint Davies:

[\[902055\]](#)

What steps she is taking to help ensure that UK trade agreements promote (a) fair trade and (b) the provision of affordable medicines.

James Cleverly:

The UK is both a champion of free trade and a friend to developing countries. Now that we have left the EU, the UK will work for trade deals that are free and fair for developing countries. We are seeking to continue and even enhance our previous trade agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Access to medicines is vital, so we are continuing our commitment to the Doha Declaration on Public Health to help developing countries get the supplies they need.

Jeremy Corbyn:

[\[902058\]](#)

What steps she is taking to ensure that universal healthcare is available as a right in countries that are in receipt of support through her Department's aid programmes.

James Cleverly:

The UK was an architect of the Sustainable Development Goals, one of which is to achieve Universal Health Coverage. Our NHS is a shining light and we have deployed British expertise across the world including during African Ebola outbreaks. DFID's health programmes support developing countries to build resilient health systems that provide quality health services for all and are prepared for global health threats like coronavirus.

■ **Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Coronavirus**

Stephen Doughty:

[\[39574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, what (a) changes to existing and (b) new programmes she has made or established in response to the covid-19 global pandemic.

James Cleverly:

The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) is a cross-government fund managed by the Joint Funds Unit (JFU). The JFU are taking steps to ensure existing programmes consider the implications of COVID-19 and are currently assigning 25% of discretionary spending to new programming on COVID-19 response. Activities funded to date include supplying specialist medical equipment, hygiene kits and pharmaceuticals in the Middle East and North Africa, and funding healthcare systems in the UK's Overseas Territories. An ongoing CSSF re-prioritisation exercise will determine how existing and new programmes respond to COVID-19. This exercise will ensure that CSSF funding complements departmental efforts to coordinate the international health response and support vulnerable countries to meet future challenges to security and stability linked to the pandemic.

■ Palestinians: Textbooks

Jonathan Gullis: [\[38980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions she has had with her international counterparts on reports of incitement to violence in the online version of the Palestinian Authority school curriculum used by students at home as a result of school closures during the covid-19 pandemic.

Jonathan Gullis: [\[38981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether the Georg Eckert Institute review of the Palestinian curriculum will include the online lessons by Palestinian Authority teachers during the covid-19 pandemic.

Jonathan Gullis: [\[38982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of reports that a Palestinian Authority teacher recently gave 10-year-olds an online reading comprehension lesson glorifying the terrorist Dalal Mughrabi.

James Cleverly:

The UK government is deeply concerned about allegations of incitement in the Palestinian Authority's curriculum. We are pleased that the Palestinian Authority is undertaking a review of its textbooks and updating them for the new academic year.

The UK has been at the forefront of international action to get to the bottom of allegations. We secured agreement from European partners to commission the Georg Eckert Institute to conduct an independent review, which is currently underway. The scope of the Review was set before the COVID-19 crisis and it does not cover online teaching arrangements put in place by the Palestinian Authority while schools are closed. Any changes to its scope would be a matter for Georg Eckert Institute and our European Partners. We have not had specific discussions with our international counterparts on the Palestinian Authority's online curriculum. Ministers have regularly raised the issue of incitement in the education sector with the

PA's Minister for Education, which the Secretary of State did most recently in February this year.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Trade Remedies Investigations Directorate: Public Appointments

Bill Esterson:

[\[39661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, who the (a) executive and (b) non-executive members of the Trade Remedies Investigations Directorate are; whether any of those members have (a) recently given notice of resignation or (b) had their appointments terminated.

Conor Burns:

The Chief Executive Officer Designate of the shadow Trade Remedies Authority, and Director of the Trade Remedies Investigations Directorate, is Claire Bassett. As announced on Gov.uk website on 28th April, Claire Bassett has given notice of resignation and is stepping down from her role on 31 August 2020.

The Chair Designate of the Trade Remedies Authority is Simon Walker.

The Department for International Trade has started a recruitment process for a new Chief Executive Officer Designate, and five Non-Executive Directors.

JUSTICE

■ Courts: Coronavirus

Jessica Morden:

[\[39516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps are being taken to initiate virtual court hearings for serious criminal cases during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

We are working closely with the courts and judiciary to ensure that cases progress through the system. We introduced emergency legislation which enables courts to make greater use of audio and video hearings where appropriate. Magistrates' court trials are now being listed wherever it is safe to do so and every effort is being made to resume Crown Court trials. Representatives from across the criminal justice system are working at pace to agree the best way of doing this safely.

■ Fraud: Land

Craig Whittaker:

[\[38891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many investors in land banking investment scams have been compensated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority as a result of a solicitor being successfully prosecuted.

Craig Whittaker: [38892]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment his Department has made of whether the Solicitors Regulation Authority is effectively meeting its regulatory objectives.

Craig Whittaker: [38893]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, for what reasons the Solicitors Regulation Authority has not attempted to recover proceeds of land banking investment scams in cases where solicitors have been successfully prosecuted.

Craig Whittaker: [38894]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department has made of whether the Solicitors Regulation Authority is effectively meeting its regulatory objectives when compensating victims of land banking investment scams.

Craig Whittaker: [38895]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, for what reasons the Solicitors Regulation Authority plans to change the rules of its compensation fund on fraud.

Craig Whittaker: [38896]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will investigate for what reasons the Solicitors Regulation Authority have compensated a small proportion of people who invested in land banking investment scams.

Alex Chalk:

Under the framework established by the Legal Services Act 2007, the legal profession in England and Wales, and the bodies that regulate it, are independent from government. It is the responsibility of the Legal Services Board (LSB), as oversight regulator, to ensure that the approved regulators are complying with the regulatory objectives set out in the 2007 Act. Their latest reports on regulatory performance are available online here <https://www.legalservicesboard.org.uk/our-work/regulatory-performance#regulatory-performance-reports>. The role of the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) is as a regulator of solicitors. The SRA consulted between 21 January and 21 April on changes to its compensation fund. Details about the fund and this exercise are available online here <https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/access-legal-services/>. Should the SRA proceed to change the rules of its compensation fund, it will firstly need to seek the approval of the LSB, and it will be matter for the LSB to determine whether or not to approve the new rules.

■ Parole: Video Conferencing

Sir Christopher Chope: [39471]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure that parole board hearings can be heard by video link so that offenders in custody, of whom a

probation recall report recommends release, can have their cases resolved without further delay; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

The Parole Board is ensuring, where appropriate, that the conclusion of all parole cases can continue via a remote telephone or video hearing; or via an intensive paper review.

■ **Prison Accommodation: Wales**

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[38475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many inmates are housed in double cells in (a) HMP Berwyn, (b) HMP Cardiff, (c) HMP Parc, (d) HMP Swansea and (e) HMP Usk/Prescoed as at April 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

Upon arrival into custody, all prisoners' suitability to share a cell is risk assessed. These assessments are based on numerous factors including index offence, health concerns and security information (such as beliefs and prejudices). There are benefits to some prisoners sharing cells for the positive impact it has on mental health and stress levels, in addition to many prisoners preferring to share a cell.

Shared cells at HMP Berwyn are designed for two prisoners.

The table below shows the number of prisoners sharing a cell in prisons in Wales as at 22 April.

PRISON	TOTAL NUMBER OF OFFENDERS SHARING A CELL
HMP Berwyn	1100
HMP Cardiff	426
HMP Parc	731
HMP Swansea	291
HMP Usk/Prescoed	299

The Prison Service has implemented a three-pronged approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 within jails – known as 'compartmentalisation'. In many prisons they have been able to isolate those with symptoms, shield the vulnerable and quarantine new arrivals for 14 days. Work to create additional space in the prison estate is continuing at pace, with the installation of temporary, single occupancy cells alongside the scheme to release low-risk offenders. Efforts to expedite sentencing hearings for those on remand are ongoing. Our actions have been informed by the advice of experts from Public Health England and Public Health Wales and will be kept under review.

■ Reading Prison**Matt Rodda:** [\[39751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what due diligence process the Department followed to assess the preferred bidder for Reading Gaol; and whether Departmental staff or contactors undertook that process.

Lucy Frazer:

Departmental staff and the Department's real estate advisors were involved in the evaluation of all bids received for Reading prison. The evaluation process covered a range of factors in assessing which bid represented the best value for the Department and the taxpayer.

Matt Rodda: [\[39753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, in what form payment for the Reading Gaol site will be made, and whether that payment will be phased or paid as a lump sum.

Lucy Frazer:

The marketing of the former prison at Reading has been completed and we have selected a preferred bidder. We are in commercial negotiations with the preferred bidder and details of the terms of the bid including the price are commercially sensitive and confidential until the sale has completed. We will always seek best value for the taxpayer.

■ Reading Prison: Coronavirus**Matt Rodda:** [\[39752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what impact assessment the Government has made of the covid-19 outbreak on the sale of Reading Gaol and the preferred bidder's financial status.

Lucy Frazer:

The department continues to keep all of its property transactions under review. We are in commercial negotiations with the preferred bidder and all matters relating to the bid including the preferred bidder's financial status are commercially sensitive and confidential. We will always seek best value for the taxpayer.

SCOTLAND**■ Business: Scotland****John Lamont:** [\[38557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent discussions he has had with banks on helping Scottish businesses to respond to the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Alister Jack:

My office and I have regular discussions on vital government support to Scottish businesses in light of the global Covid-19 crisis with a very wide range of Scottish

stakeholders, including the key Scottish financial sector. The Chancellor is in regular contact with the banking industry to emphasise their importance in supporting businesses at this time.

Through our Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme and newly announced Bounce Back Loans Scheme, we're lending businesses of all sizes the money they need to stay afloat. This week the British Business Bank has announced that it has approved four new lenders for accreditation under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) and more than 80% of the UK's smaller businesses have a finance relationship with CBILS' 52+ accredited lenders. These loans are an important part of the wide-ranging UK Government package of support the government has put in place to help UK businesses.

John Lamont:

[\[38946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the differences between the financial support available for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK.

Mr Alister Jack:

I regularly attend a cross-government Economic and Business Response Group, which discusses how to minimise the impact of Covid-19 and ensure that the UK Government, working in collaboration with the Scottish Government, can best support businesses.

Local business support and grants are a devolved policy. However, as a result of the grants schemes which we have established in England, the Devolved Administrations have received around £2.3bn of additional funding via the Barnett formula.

Through the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund in England, the UK Government is providing eligible businesses in these sectors with grants depending on the rateable value of their properties. Eligible businesses in these sectors with a property that has a rateable value of up to and including £15,000 will receive a grant of £10,000 per property. Eligible businesses in these sectors with a property that has a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000 will receive a grant of £25,000 per property. In Scotland, businesses can only claim the full grant for one property, and 75% of the grant for any others.

TRANSPORT

■ **Bus Services: Coronavirus**

Jane Stevenson:

[\[39760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what support is available for private coach companies during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

Last month the Chancellor announced £330 billion of guarantees, so businesses, such as coach operators, have access to the funds to pay essential bills. This includes the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which has been extended until the end of June.

The Department has also asked local transport authorities outside London to continue to pay coach operators for home-to-school transport at pre-coronavirus level during the outbreak.

Motorcycles: Driving Instruction**Margaret Ferrier:**[\[39656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make it his policy to extend compulsory basic training certificates for motorcycle riders during the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department for Transport is aware that the compulsory basic training certificate (CBT) for some people has already expired or is due to expire shortly and we are currently considering options on this matter. In the meantime, DVSA are prioritising motorcycle tests and CBT applications for workers whose jobs are critical to the coronavirus response as set out in government guidelines.

Package Holidays: Coronavirus**Ronnie Cowan:**[\[39667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people who have booked holidays that have been cancelled as a result of the covid-19 outbreak will receive a full refund in cash if they are ATOL protected; and if he will make a statement.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Government recognises the challenges businesses and consumers are experiencing regarding refunds for cancelled holidays and flights. Airlines are working hard to answer the high call volumes and to process the very large number of applications for refunds.

The Government appreciates the distress and frustration consumers may be experiencing. The Department for Transport is in regular conversation with UK airlines and working closely with the sector, the regulator and consumer groups to help ensure airlines deliver on their commitments.

The Civil Aviation Authority wrote to UK airlines and some non-EU carriers last week to emphasise their approach on the issue of refunds and setting out their expectation that airlines make refunds in a reasonable period.

■ Package Holidays: Repayments

Claire Hanna:

[\[39697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government plans to take to support consumers who are eligible for a refund under the The Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018 and who have not received a refund within the legislative time limit of 14 days.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Government recognises the challenges businesses and consumers are experiencing regarding refunds for cancelled holidays and flights. Airlines are working hard to answer the high call volumes and to process the very large number of applications for refunds.

The Government appreciates the distress and frustration consumers may be experiencing. The Department for Transport is in regular conversation with UK airlines and working closely with the sector, the regulator and consumer groups to help ensure airlines deliver on their commitments.

The Civil Aviation Authority wrote to UK airlines and some non-EU carriers last week to emphasise their approach on the issue of refunds and setting out their expectation that airlines make refunds in a reasonable period.

■ Pedicabs: Regulation

Florence Eshalomi:

[\[39774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to bring forward legislative proposals on regulating rickshaws and pedicabs in (a) London and (b) the UK.

Rachel Maclean:

Outside London, in England and Wales, pedicabs are treated as taxis for the purposes of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 and Part II of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. Accordingly, pedicabs may be regulated as taxis under the provisions of the 1847 and 1976 Acts.

The Government is aware of concerns raised about unregulated pedicabs in London and as such, has committed to seek opportunities to introduce legislation that will enable the regulation of pedicabs.

■ Railway Network

Olivia Blake:

[\[39796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what process the Government will use to decide which rail routes and stations closed after the Beeching report are re-opened; what the Government's timeframe is for that process; and if he will consider reopening (a) the Woodhead line, (b) the direct Derby to Manchester line (via Bakewell), and (c) Millhouses station in Sheffield, Hallam constituency.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

This Government has been clear that our ambition is to level up local economies across the country, improving access to jobs and education and boosting the wider region. Improving connections across the rail network is obviously an integral part of that.

The Secretary of State wrote to all England and Wales MPs outlining the process and inviting them to contact him by 28 February if they wished to bid for the first round of study funding for schemes in their constituencies. Outline proposals needed to be submitted by 16 March for initial assessment.

For those bids already put forward as part of the Beeching Ideas Fund – such as for the Derby to Manchester line – these are currently under consideration by the Panel of ministerial, local authority and rail industry representatives. We have adapted the process so it is consistent with the Government advice on COVID-19 and a virtual panel chaired by the Minister of State is examining bids on paper in the first instance. We are keeping applicants up-to-date on the timetable.

For those who have not yet applied to the Ideas Fund there will be another round in June and another in the autumn. We published a progress update on gov.uk on 27 April and my department has written to all MPs about future rounds.

For proposals for reopening or new stations that are sufficiently advanced the third round of the New Station Fund closes to applications on the 5 June.

■ Railway Stations: Greater London

Florence Eshalomi: [\[39770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, which stations in London have been made accessible under the Access for All programme; and by which Network Rail Control Period they became accessible in.

Florence Eshalomi: [\[39771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, which stations in London have been made accessible outside of the Access for All programme since 2006; and by which Network Rail Control Period they became accessible in.

Florence Eshalomi: [\[39772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, which stations in London are due to be made accessible under the Access for All programme during Network Rail Control Period 6.

Florence Eshalomi: [\[39773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, which stations in London are due to be made accessible outside of the Access for All programme during Network Rail Control Period 6.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

In the majority of cases station accessibility in London is a matter for Transport for London. However, 42 London stations have been given step free access under the Department's Access for All programme since 2006 with a further 19 due to be

completed by 2024. In addition, all 41 Elizabeth Line stations will have step free access when the line opens.

■ Railways: Coronavirus

John Spellar:

[\[39474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on long term rail passenger demand of the covid-19 outbreak on (a) suburban (b) inter-city rail, (c) light rail and (d) underground systems.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

This crisis will have a long-lasting impact on our society – but it is too early to predict what that may mean in practice. There are a number of factors that will determine the demand for these modes of transport, including when lockdown restrictions are lifted, the nature of social distancing guidelines put in place going forward, and how people's attitudes towards travel may have changed.

In the short term, we are working to ensure essential services are still running, and goods and passengers can get where they are needed most

TREASURY

■ Charities: Coronavirus

Sarah Champion:

[\[39665\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he will take to encourage philanthropy and charitable giving to offset the effect of covid-19 on the charity sector.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government promised to match whatever the public donated to the BBC Big Night In fundraising event – which was broadcast on 23rd April – starting with a contribution of at least £20m to the National Emergencies Trust appeal. The remainder will be split between the Comic Relief and Children in Need charities. On the night of its broadcast, the event raised £27m.

On 8 April the Government announced a £750 million package of support for charities providing key services and supporting vulnerable people during the Covid-19 crisis. This funding package will help charities providing essential services to continue their operations and to weather the storm until we return to more normal times. Funding for charities will be made available in the coming weeks and further information will be announced on Gov.uk. The Government's aim is to get funding to those in greatest need as soon as possible.

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[39480\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether employees of umbrella companies can be furloughed beyond the dates of assignments with subcontractors.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is open to any individual who was on their employer's PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020, where HMRC received an RTI submission notifying payment in respect of that employee on or before the 19 March 2020.

The scheme covers employees on any type of contract, including full-time, part-time, agency, flexible or zero-hour contracts. An employee on a fixed term contract can be furloughed, and if the employee's fixed term contract has not already expired, it can be extended, or renewed.

Full guidance can be found at: www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme.

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Conor McGinn:**[39618]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to provide financial assistance to employees who were working before 19 March 2020, but are exempt from the furlough scheme due to a real-time information submission after this date by their employer.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is open to any individual who was on an employer's PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020 and for whom HMRC received an RTI submission notifying payment in respect of that employee on or before the 19 March 2020. Those not eligible for the scheme may be eligible for other support Government is providing, including a package of temporary welfare measures and up to three months' mortgage payment holidays for those struggling with their mortgage payments.

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Carers**Jessica Morden:****[39514]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether employers can furlough employees who are (a) shielding, (b) vulnerable, (c) pregnant and (d) unable to work as a result of caring responsibilities resulting from covid-19.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is open to all employees providing that they were on their employer's PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020 and that HMRC received an RTI submission notifying payment in respect of that employee on or before 19 March 2020. Employees should speak to their employer about whether they plan to place staff on furlough.

If a firm chooses not to furlough staff who are shielding, these staff are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay as a statutory minimum, although many employers will pay more than that in occupational sick pay. The Government recognises it is a challenge for parents to balance paid work and childcare while schools and nurseries are closed.

Schools remain open for children of critical workers and for the most vulnerable children, and the Government has put in place a national voucher scheme to provide free school meals for children while at home. Families who see a fall in earnings may become eligible for support through the welfare system, in particular through Universal Credit (UC).

■ **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Skilled Workers**

Stephen Kinnock:

[39629]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of changing the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme to help industries such as the steel industry that are experiencing a shortage of skilled workers to reduce the hours of their employees in preference to furlough.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is designed to help those who otherwise would have been made unemployed and provide support to businesses as quickly as possible. Allowing employers to move staff to part-time and claim the difference would have involved delay and substantially increased the risk of fraud. It is also inconsistent with public health guidance for people to stay at home. However, there is flexibility in the scheme as employers can decide how many staff to furlough, and staff can be furloughed multiple times while the scheme is in operation, provided they are furloughed for a minimum of 3 weeks.

Stephen Kinnock:

[39630]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits to industries such as the steel industry which are experiencing shortages of skilled workers of amending the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme to enable employers to furlough employees for shorter periods of time.

Jesse Norman:

To be eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, firms must have created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 19 March 2020, enrolled for PAYE online and have a UK bank account. Once on furlough, employees cannot work for their employer but they can undertake training or volunteer subject to public health guidance, so long as they are not making money for their employer or any organisation linked or associated with their association, or providing services to their employer or any organisation linked or associated with their association.

The arrangement between workers and their employers remains subject to negotiation. To be eligible for the scheme, each employee must be furloughed for a minimum of three weeks at a time. This is consistent with public health guidance seeking to minimise the number of people outside their homes on a regular basis. There is no restriction on the number of times an individual could be furloughed or the maximum period, other than the life of the scheme.

Employers may also be able to benefit from other schemes and measures such as the VAT deferral and the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

Further details can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Theatre

Colleen Fletcher:

[39623]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to enable theatres to continue to claim employee wages through the Job Retention Scheme until they can fully re-open.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is open to all employers provided they have created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 19 March 2020, enrolled for PAYE online and have a UK bank account. The Chancellor announced on Friday 17 April that the CJRS will be extended to the end of June. This means the scheme will be open for at least four months.

Decisions on when and how to close the scheme will have to take into account the wider context of any lockdown extension and the public health response, so that people and businesses can get back to work when it is safe to do so. The Government will ensure the approach is coherent with any necessary non-pharmaceutical interventions, while also considering the status of the economy, the affordability of the scheme, and the need to provide certainty to employers and employees.

The Government will continue to keep the exit strategy of the scheme under review, engaging with businesses and representatives.

■ Directors: Coronavirus

Dr Julian Lewis:

[39451]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will ensure that directors of businesses, who cannot be themselves be furloughed while administering the payments of their staff members on furlough, receive financial support comparable to that received by such members of staff; and what other steps he plans to take to support directors of small businesses during the covid-19 outbreak.

Gavin Robinson:

[39536]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of giving directors of limited companies capped access to the Self-employed Income Support Scheme of up to £2,500 per month; and if he will make a statement.

Sarah Olney:

[39711]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the support available for self-employed people whose income primarily comes from dividends.

Claire Hanna:

[39783]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to support company directors and self-employed company owners who pay themselves via dividends and are therefore ineligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Those who pay themselves a salary through their own company may be eligible to claim for 80% of usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). The CJRS is available to employers, including personal service companies, and individuals paying themselves a salary through a PAYE scheme are eligible. Where furloughed directors need to carry out particular duties to fulfil the statutory obligations they owe to their company, they may do so provided they do no more than would reasonably be judged necessary for that purpose, i.e. they should not do work of a kind they would carry out in normal circumstances to generate commercial revenue or provides services to or on behalf of their company.

Income from dividends is a return on investment in the company, rather than wages, and is not eligible for support. Under current reporting mechanisms it is not possible for HM Revenue and Customs to distinguish between dividends derived from an individual's own company and dividends from other sources, and between dividends in lieu of employment income and as returns from other corporate activity. Expanding the scope would require HMRC to collect and verify new information. This would take longer to deliver and put at risk the other schemes which the Government is committed to delivering as quickly as possible.

Those who are not eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme might be able to access the other support Government is providing, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, the Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses, and the deferral of tax payments. More information about the full range of business support measures is available at

www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/

■ Economic Situation: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas:

[38460]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that the economic response to the covid-19 outbreak aligns with the (a) delivery of UK carbon budgets (b) UK's commitment to the 1.5 degree goal of the Paris climate agreement and (c) Government's national and global ambitions on biodiversity and habitats; and if he will make a statement.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government continues to take its environmental responsibilities very seriously and is committed to meeting its climate change and wider environmental targets.

The Budget reinforced the UK's strong track record in this area. Announcements included £640m for tree planting and peatland restoration, over £1bn of further

support for ultra-low emission vehicles, at least doubling funding for energy innovation, and tax measures to reduce plastic waste, among other measures.

We recognise the importance of a strong economy to support the transition to net zero and continue the UK's leadership in clean growth.

That is why the Government has announced unprecedented support for public services, workers and businesses to protect against the current economic emergency, including £330bn of guaranteed loans for supporting businesses to access finance, equivalent to 15% of GDP.

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[39668\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak on university towns and cities.

Kemi Badenoch:

The government continues to monitor the impact of Covid-19 on local communities across the United Kingdom, including through regular engagement with local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Mayoral Combined Authorities. In responding to these challenges, the government remains committed to levelling up opportunity in every region and nation of the UK.

■ Gift Aid

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[38664\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the value of gift aid from 25 per cent to 50 per cent that gift aid charities can claim on donations until the end of August 2020.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government recognises the vital work charities are doing to support the country during the coronavirus pandemic and on 8 April pledged £750 million to ensure charities can continue their vital work. Additionally, many charities can also benefit from the other support schemes put in place by the government, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme.

However, there are no plans to increase Gift Aid tax repayments from 25% to 50% on donations made to charities. Full tax relief is already available on donations made with Gift Aid, with basic rate relief being claimed by the charity and higher rate relief available to the taxpayer where relevant.

■ Health Professions: Coronavirus

Dr Julian Lewis:

[\[39452\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support he plans to allocate to (a) optometrists, (b) physiotherapy, chiropractic and osteopathy clinics, (c) podiatrists and (d) other healthcare practices that are receiving near-zero patient income due to the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make it his policy to exempt such healthcare practices from fees normally payable to their regulators.

John Glen:

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) recognises this is a challenging and uncertain period for providers of health and social care, with some suspending their routine services, changing how services are delivered or developing and expanding their service to support the national response to COVID-19. The CQC are asking providers to contact them if they are facing any difficulties in paying CQC's fees. In these circumstances the CQC will work constructively to find an appropriate solution. Additionally, to give providers in financial difficulty space during this period the CQC will not seek to recover aged debt for the next three months.

NHS England and NHS Improvement issued guidance on 1 April setting out that all routine NHS eye care services should be suspended during COVID-19 to ensure compliance with social distancing measures. Essential services will continue to be provided from a limited number of optical practices. NHS England and Improvement has committed to securing funding for NHS ophthalmic contractors based on average monthly NHS General Ophthalmic Services fees from the previous year. Where activity exceeds the average monthly costs, this will attract additional funding and be reimbursed in the usual way.

Practices are still able to access central Government support for the private element of their business, as can practices who have not been selected to provide essential eye care services.

Support available for private medical businesses includes a commitment to pay 80% of the regular monthly wages, up to £2,500, of furloughed workers for four months, via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), and help for the self-employed with the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), which will provide grants to those who are self-employed, or members of partnerships, worth 80% of their trading profits/partnership trading profits, also up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.

Healthcare practices may also benefit from other measures, including:

- Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief;
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBL)
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- Through the Time To Pay scheme, businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs
- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020

The Business Support website provides further information about how businesses can access the support that has been made available, who is eligible, when the

schemes open and how to apply - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support>.

■ Health Services: Coronavirus

Sarah Olney: [39707]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he has taken to prevent medical businesses, such as dentists and ophthalmologists, from becoming insolvent as they are unable to access small business support.

John Glen:

Some small medical businesses could be eligible for the Small Business Grant Fund, which provides a £10,000 cash grant to businesses which occupy a property in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rates Relief.

Medical businesses which aren't eligible for the Small Business Grant Fund should be able to benefit from other measures in the Government's unprecedented package of support for business. For example, private dentists and ophthalmologists who are self-employed could be eligible for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme. Those who are employees and receive a salary through a PAYE scheme could be eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. All employed staff in medical businesses, including support staff, could also be eligible for this scheme.

From Monday 4th May, small private medical businesses can also access the Bounce Back Loans scheme, which will ensure that small and micro businesses can quickly access loans of up to £50,000 which are 100% guaranteed by the Government. This is in addition to the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which medical businesses can access if they can channel their activity through a business account.

Finally, the NHS has put out clear guidance that dentists will be fully remunerated for the NHS work they would have otherwise undertaken during the Covid-19 outbreak, subject to some basic requirements.

■ Multinational Companies: Disclosure of Information

Dan Carden: [39777]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether it remains his Department's policy to participate in the OECD joint publication of aggregate data from the country by country reporting of multinational companies.

Dan Carden: [39778]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to publish aggregate data from the country by country reporting of multinational companies.

Jesse Norman:

The Government fully supports the goal of improving the measurement and monitoring of base erosion and profit shifting, and improving tax transparency.

As part of that, it supports the principle behind the publication of aggregated and anonymized Country-by-Country Reporting information as per the recommendations in BEPS Action 11 report.

It is important to ensure that data is accurate and reliable, and the Government cannot agree to publication unless it is.

Dan Carden: [\[39779\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish the UK's company level data from country by country reporting of multinational companies.

Jesse Norman:

The UK receives Country-by-Country reports from multinational companies under the OECD BEPS Action 13 framework.

As set out in that framework, the primary purpose of CbCR is to assist tax administrations in conducting high-level risk assessments for transfer pricing and BEPS purposes.

The UK's CbCR information must be treated in accordance with the internationally agreed data confidentiality standards and used only for the agreed purposes as codified in the relevant treaty.

To that end, individual reports received under the OECD framework cannot be published.

■ **Non-domestic Rates: Dental Services**

Sarah Olney: [\[39705\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend business rates relief to dental surgeries.

Sarah Olney: [\[39706\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend business rates relief to ophthalmologists.

Sarah Olney: [\[39708\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend business rates relief to veterinary practices.

Sarah Olney: [\[39709\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend business rates relief to physiotherapy practices.

Jesse Norman:

The guidance for local authorities published by MHCLG sets out that the Government does not consider properties providing medical services to be eligible for the business rates holiday for retail, hospitality and leisure properties.

A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, has also been made available.

■ **Revenue and Customs: Staff**

Hywel Williams: [39478]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what progress has been made on (a) recruiting and (b) training additional HMRC customs agents.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC have engaged extensively with the customs intermediaries sector on demand for customs broker services post-EU Exit and a possible shortfall in capacity. In response to feedback, HMRC have made £34 million available to support the sector with training, improvements in automation and recruitment of customs agents, and HMRC continue to consider ways to promote innovation in the sector and increase capacity. This support has funded approximately 19,200 training courses in customs processes and procedures and the creation of a new UK Customs Academy to provide online training courses and industry-recognised qualifications.

■ **Self-employment Income Support Scheme**

Gavin Robinson: [39535]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of including the 2019-20 tax returns of self-employed graduates under the Self-employed Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

It has not been possible to include those who began trading after the 2018-19 tax year in the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. This was a very difficult decision and it was taken for practical reasons. It is correct that individuals can now submit Income Tax Self Assessment returns for 2019-20, but there would be significant risks for the public purse if the Government relied on these returns for the scheme. HMRC would not be able to distinguish genuine self-employed individuals who started trading in 2019-20 from fake applications by fraudulent operators and organised criminal gangs seeking to exploit the SEISS. The Government cannot expose the tax system to these risks.

However, those who entered self-employment after April 2019 may still be eligible for other support. For example, the self-employed can benefit from the Government's relaxation of the earnings rules (known as the Minimum Income Floor) in Universal Credit. The SEISS supplements the significant support already announced for UK businesses, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and the deferral of tax payments. More information about the full range of business support measures is available at www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/

Sarah Olney: [39710]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will remove the requirement to make annual profits of less than £50,000 for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Some 95% of people who receive the majority of their income from self-employment could be eligible to benefit from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). The scheme, including the £50,000 threshold, is designed to ensure it is targeted at those who need it the most, and who are most reliant on their self-employment income.

Those with average profits above £50,000 could still benefit from other support. Individuals may have access to a range of grants and loans depending on their circumstances. The SEISS supplements the significant support already announced for UK businesses, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the deferral of tax payments. More information about the full range of business support measures is available at www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/.

■ Transport: Government Assistance**Dr Julian Lewis:****[39450]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support he is providing to small-to-medium transport companies that are substantially engaged in the importing and distribution of personal protective equipment and other essential medical supplies; and if he will make it his policy to offer such companies (a) business rate relief and (b) support grants similar to those available to retail, hospitality and tourism businesses.

John Glen:

The Government recently announced a trilateral agreement, with the French and Irish governments, committing to keeping freight routes open throughout the crisis. In addition, the Government has announced additional support to protect key maritime freight routes. This includes up to £17m to support routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and up to £10.5m for links to the Isle of Wight and the Scilly Isles, to ensure the continued operation of essential services. The Department for Transport is continuing to engage with the haulage industry to understand the impact of Covid-19 on the sector.

The business rates relief and grant schemes for eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses have been designed to support the smallest businesses, and smaller businesses in some of the sectors which have been hit hardest by the measures taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Small and medium-sized businesses which are not eligible for these schemes may be able to benefit from other measures in the Government's unprecedented package of support, including:

- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBL)
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- Through the Time To Pay scheme, businesses in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs

- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020

The Business Support website provides further information about how businesses can access the support that has been made available, who is eligible, when the schemes open and how to apply - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support>.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme: Coronavirus

Marsha De Cordova:

[39763]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether Access to Work claims can be processed electronically during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

Access to Work is keen to continue to support disabled people whether working in the workplace or at home. In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, Access to Work have implemented a number of easements to support customers, one of these easements is removing the need for customers to obtain a physical signature from either their employer or support worker.

From 23rd April, Access to Work will not require a physical signature from employers or support workers to validate customer claims. Instead the employer or support worker will be able to send in an email confirmation to support the claim, or the customer can attach the email to their claim form.

Recognising that some customers have expressed concerns about still having to sign claim forms and post them, Access to Work is exploring alternative ways of accepting claim forms and customer signatures.

■ Carer's Allowance: Coronavirus

Hywel Williams:

[39479]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has plans to increase carer's allowance to reflect the (a) additional care that carers may be providing and (b) financial difficulties they may face as a result of loss of income during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

DWP has now introduced two important temporary measures to help unpaid carers through the current emergency:

- unpaid carers will be able to continue to claim Carer's Allowance if they have a temporary break in caring, because they or the person they care for gets coronavirus or if either have to isolate because of it. (Under normal rules there are restrictions on breaks in care, but these have been lifted.); and

- providing “emotional support” (rather than just more traditional forms of care) to a disabled person will also now count towards the Carer’s Allowance threshold of 35 hours of care a week.

The rate of Carer’s Allowance was also increased in early April as part of the annual uprating process. Since 2010, the rate of Carer’s Allowance has increased from £53.90 to £67.25 a week, meaning nearly an additional £700 a year for carers. The standard allowance in Universal Credit has been temporarily increased for the 20/21 tax year by £86.67 per month (equivalent to £20 per week) on top of the planned annual uprating. This additional increase means claimants will be up to £1040 better off. Carers receiving Universal Credit will benefit from this.

Income replacement benefits help people and households on lower incomes, and can include a carer premium, currently £37.50 a week. An equivalent additional amount applies in Pension Credit. Universal Credit also includes a carer element at the rate of £162.92 per monthly assessment period. These amounts recognise the additional contribution and responsibilities associated with caring and mean that lower-income carers can receive more money than others who receive these benefits.

■ Children: Maintenance

Kate Green:

[\[39643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many child maintenance arrangements have been (a) altered and (b) withdrawn by the Child Maintenance Service since 1 March 2020.

Mims Davies:

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Remote Working

Margaret Ferrier:

[\[37720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff of her Department have formal arrangements to work from home during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mims Davies:

Working from home data is not recorded on our HR systems. However, the number of staff logging into the Department’s computer system via a secure remote connection shows that approximately 20% of staff were working from home.

We have now provided an additional 6656 computers to enable working from home; we will deploy a further 6,000 in the next fortnight.

■ Occupational Health

Sir Paul Beresford:

[\[39454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of whether an increase in the proportion of employees covered by group income protection insurance would support the Government's aim to reduce ill health-related job loss.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Government consulted on the role of group income protection (GIP) products in reducing ill-health related job loss as part of our Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper, which recognised the potential of GIP policies to support employers to retain disabled employees and employees with health conditions.

In Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability, the Government signalled its desire for the insurance industry to develop a product that retains the positive aspects of GIP but which overcomes existing challenges around complexity and employer perceptions of cost and benefit to support greater take-up, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

■ Personal Income: Coronavirus

Angela Crawley:

[\[33737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of the proposal from Citizens Advice to establish a Crisis Minimum Income of £180 per week for people affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Will Quince:

[Holding answer 31 March 2020]: There are no plans to introduce a crisis minimum income at this time.

The Government has been clear in its commitment to support those affected in these difficult times and we have made a number of changes to the welfare system to ensure people are receiving the support they need. These changes include:

- making it easier to access benefits. Those applying for Contributory ESA will be able to claim from day 1 – as opposed to day 8 - and we have removed the need for face-to-face assessment. Both Universal Credit and Contributory ESA can now be claimed by phone or online;
- increasing the standard rate of Universal Credit and working tax credit for this year by around £1000 per year;
- temporarily relaxing the application of the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) for all self-employed claimants affected by the economic impact of COVID-19 to ensure that the self-employed can access UC at a more generous rate;
- making Statutory Sick Pay available from day 1 – as opposed to day 4 - where an eligible individual is sick or self-isolating; and

- increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants so that it covers at least 30% of the market rents in an area – which is on average £600 in people's pockets.

Taken together, these measures represent an injection of over £6.5 billion into the welfare system and, along with other job and business support programmes announced by the Chancellor, represent one of the most comprehensive packages of support introduced by an advanced economy in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations

Owen Thompson:

[\[39635\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to suspend all (a) telephone and (b) paper-based reviews of people in receipt of disability living allowance who have been notified of a reassessment for personal independence payments.

Justin Tomlinson:

Effective from 24 March, a decision was taken to suspend all review and reassessment activity unless an individual reports a change in their needs, including existing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants who have been invited to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Activity has been suspended on the majority of cases and work is ongoing to suspend activity on any remaining cases identified. Recipients of DLA who have already been invited to claim PIP, and have not yet been invited to an assessment, will continue to be paid their DLA and will be contacted in the future about their PIP claim. Recipients of DLA who have been invited to claim PIP and have already been invited to an assessment, will be required to take part in a telephone assessment where possible as this will help us process their claim.

Owen Thompson:

[\[39636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether people in receipt of disability living allowance who have received notification for reassessment for personal independence payments will cease to receive those payments if they (a) do not attend a reassessment over the (i) phone and (ii) on paper and (b) cannot attend a reassessment due to the inability of a carer to provide the necessary support due to social distancing measures introduced during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

A.

1. i) Claimants may have their claim disallowed if they fail to attend or participate in their telephony assessment, however we are taking a number of steps to ensure that no individuals are unfairly penalised. Claimants who fail to attend or participate in a telephony assessment will therefore be contacted in the first instance to establish the reason and rearrange the appointment where possible. This recognises that there may be situations where, due to circumstances outside their control (e.g. health conditions or disability) claimants may be unable to attend or participate.

1. ii) Healthcare Professionals will continue to make recommendations based on paper-based evidence where possible for those claimants who have already returned their PIP2 and have a scheduled assessment. Where this is not possible a telephony assessment may occur. They will be of a similar structure to that of face-to-face assessments and provide the Healthcare Professionals with an opportunity to gain further evidence from the claimant about how their health condition or disability affects their daily life and mobility needs. DLA to PIP reassessment claimants will not need to return a PIP2 at this time, form unless their needs have changed.

B. Where appropriate, it is possible for an appointee and/or companion to join a telephony assessment even if they are based in different locations.

■ Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus

Ian Murray:

[\[37590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to (a) cancel or (b) suspend all pre-existing benefits sanctions during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mims Davies:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: We are focused on the processing of claims and will not be checking conditionality compliance regarding preparing for, looking for and being available for work until the end of June. This means that claimants won't receive any new sanctions if they are unable to meet these commitments during this period.

We currently have no plans to cancel or suspend pre-existing sanctions. Claimants who were sanctioned before Covid 19 can continue to apply for hardship payments and are no worse off as a result of the pandemic. We continue to review our policies as the situation evolves.

■ Statutory Sick Pay

Rachael Maskell:

[\[39584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the level of the rate of statutory sick pay; and what discussions she has held with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on increasing that rate.

Justin Tomlinson:

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) provides financial support to an employee when they are off work sick. Any increase to the rate of SSP would place an immediate, direct financial burden on employers at a time when we know many employers are struggling. This could put more jobs at risk.

Statutory Sick Pay is just part of our welfare safety net and our wider government offer to support people in times of need. Those on low pay can receive more help through the welfare system, depending on their personal circumstances.

Rachael Maskell:

[\[39585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she has taken to remove the (a) lower earnings limit and (b) 28-week cap for people claiming statutory sick pay.

Justin Tomlinson:

My department has been working with departments across government to ensure that there is an effective safety net for individuals who are unable to support themselves financially. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is just one part of our welfare safety net and our wider offer to support people in times of need. Many of those earning below the Lower Earnings Limit (£120 per week), who are not eligible for SSP, are already in receipt of benefits. For those on Universal Credit, their award will rise if their income falls.

Those who are not already in receipt of benefits may be able to claim Universal Credit and new style Employment and Support Allowance, depending on their personal circumstances, to support them when they are unable to work. We have ensured that benefits are easily accessible and more supportive for those who need to make a claim which will help millions of people most in need.

Employees are eligible for up to 28 weeks of SSP per sickness absence. Sickness absences must be 8 or more weeks apart to count as separate periods of sickness. In any new period of sickness employees are eligible for 28 weeks of SSP.

Employees who have received the maximum entitlement of SSP may be able to apply for [Universal Credit](#) or new style [Employment and Support Allowance \(ESA\)](#).

■ **Universal Credit: Sheffield City Region**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[39586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people claimed universal credit in each week from 1 March 2020 in (a) York and (b) throughout the UK.

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[39601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many claimants had their applications for universal credit (a) approved and (b) rejected in the (i) Sheffield City Region and (ii) Barnsley Central constituency since 1 March 2020.

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[39602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many universal credit claimants had their applications for an advance on their first payment (a) approved and (b) rejected in the (i) Sheffield City Region and (ii) Barnsley Central constituency since 1 March 2020.

Rachel Hopkins:

[\[39716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many new universal credit applications have been made by Luton South constituents since 23 March 2020.

Will Quince:

The information requested is not readily available at constituency level and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ Digital Identity and GOV.UK Verify Programme Update

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): [\[HCWS217\]](#)

I would like to update the House on the GOV.UK Verify programme and the provision of digital identity services to government, following the WMS of October 2018 by the former Minister for Implementation, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP.

As you will know, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has led to unprecedented demand for key online services using digital identity such as Universal Credit. In this light, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has given approval to the Cabinet Office to continue GOV.UK Verify operations for up to a further 18 months.

The Government has also taken steps to bolster the resilience of the service which is facing an unprecedented level of usage.

During this time the Government will continue to update the House on our broader work as it progresses.

■ Notification of Contingent Liability

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): [\[HCWS216\]](#)

During the course of the coronavirus outbreak, the Government's strategy to increase ventilator capacity has focused on procuring more devices from existing manufacturers overseas, scaling up production of existing ventilator suppliers, and working with industry to design and manufacture new devices.

The Ventilator Challenge was launched in March. At present, two devices from the Ventilator Challenge are ready for use in hospitals, with the Penlon ESO2 device becoming the first newly-adapted device to receive approval for use during the pandemic from the regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). A number of other devices are currently undergoing tests for regulatory approval.

Given the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic, Cabinet Office has given indemnities both against IP infringement, in respect of the designs, and against product liability claims against the manufacturers of Rapidly Manufactured Ventilator System (RMVS) products.

It is normal practice, when a government department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Department concerned to present to Parliament a Minute giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until

fourteen parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the Minute, except in cases of special urgency.

Unfortunately, due to the urgent need to finalise the deal and the confidential commercial nature of the negotiations, it was not possible to notify Parliament of the particulars of the liability and allow the required 14 days' notice prior to the liabilities going live. A delay would have resulted in an unacceptable delay in lifesaving equipment being provided to the NHS.

The precise commercial terms which have been negotiated for each supplier are, and will remain, commercially confidential. While it is difficult to estimate the potential liability exposure, it could exceed £300,000. For this reason, I am informing Parliament of these arrangements.

On this basis, I have today laid before Parliament a Departmental Minute setting out what these indemnities are.

The Treasury approved these liabilities before they were activated. However, if any Member of Parliament has concerns, he/she may write to me and I will be happy to examine their concerns and provide a response.

Attachments:

1. Departmental Minute [Departmental Minute-Notification of Contingent Liability.pdf]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Updated Advice for Maximum Sustainability Yield (MSY) – UK relevant Quota Stock Species

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (Victoria Prentis): [\[HCWS213\]](#)

I would like to update the House today on a change to the number of Total Allowable Catch limits (TACs) for quota stock that the UK has an interest in that will be fished at or below their Maximum Sustainable Yield in 2020.

Analysing the UK's progress towards delivering sustainable fisheries management including fishing at MSY is complex. This is because few Total Allowable Catch (TAC) spatial management areas directly overlap with their corresponding International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) biological stock advice areas; with examples of both pooled TACs comprising elements of multiple biological stocks, and other biological stocks being split across TAC areas.

Noting these complexities, and in partnership with our scientific advisers at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), we have now reviewed the outputs from the fisheries negotiations for 2020. In doing so we have identified some corrections need to be made to the number of TACs at MSY that the UK has a fishing interest in for 2020. With these adjustments – a change related to one stock - accounted for, the UK had 36 (67%) TACS set at MSY out of a total of 54 TACs derived from stocks with MSY assessments in 2020. These figures are different from the figures previously

communicated for 2020 i.e. 37 (69%) TACs set at MSY out of a total of 54. The figures for 2019 are unchanged: 30 (59%) TACs set at MSY out of a total of 51 TACs derived from stocks with MSY assessments in 2019.

As we have left the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy, the UK Government will undertake a further forward-looking review of the methodology applied to assess the sustainability of fishing opportunities. In doing so we will seek the views of stakeholders. The new methodology will inform our negotiations for fishing opportunities in 2021 and will represent a fresh and transparent new approach to assessing outcomes on TAC setting including in relation to MSY that will reflect our objectives for delivering sustainable fisheries as an independent coastal state.

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HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Ministerial Correction – HL2971

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Prevention, Public Health and

Primary Care) (Jo Churchill):[\[HCWS215\]](#)

My Noble Friend the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Innovation (Lord Bethell of Romford) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I would like to inform the House that a written answer I gave on 15 April to the Noble Lord Sharkey contained information that was out of date at the time of answering. I wish to correct the formal record.

In my reply, I stated that information on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) methods review was not yet available. However, information had been shared by NICE that updates my answer as it originally stood, therefore, making the information provided on 15th April out of date.

The updated position is that NICE has considered its ability to carry out and complete the methods and process update and has decided to extend the timelines. NICE now plans to hold a 6-week public consultation on proposals in October 2020 and a further consultation on a draft programme manual in February 2021, with implementation in June 2021.

HOME OFFICE**■ The Misuse of Drugs (Coronavirus) (Amendments Relating to the Supply of Controlled Drugs During a Pandemic etc.) Regulations 2020****The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):**[\[HCWS214\]](#)

Today, the Government is laying the Misuse of Drugs (Coronavirus) (Amendments Relating to the Supply of Controlled Drugs During a Pandemic etc.) Regulations 2020 ('the 2020 Regulations') in the House.

These regulations enable emergency supply of controlled drugs during a pandemic and will come into force on 30 April 2020.

The instrument amends the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 ('the 2001 Regulations') in order to allow pharmacists at a registered pharmacy business to supply, in a pandemic situation, medicines without a prescription, where the patient has been receiving a Schedule 2, 3 or Part 1 Schedule 4 controlled drug as part of on-going treatment, and to supply Schedule 2, 3 or Part 1 Schedule 4 controlled drugs under a Serious Shortage Protocol. The amendments also allow pharmacists, in a pandemic situation, to change the intervals on instalment prescriptions for Schedule 2 and 3 controlled drugs without the immediate need for a new prescription from an authorised prescriber under the 2001 Regulations, with the approval of the prescriber or their appointed representative.

The amendments are enabling and would only be used in limited circumstances following an announcement by the Secretary of State and under conditions specified by the health service in the area(s) to which the announcement applies.

On 1 April 2020, I wrote to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), to set out the proposed measures and to seek its advice. The ACMD provided its advice on 7 April, and this is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/acmd-advice-on-covid-19-emergency-legislation-to-enable-supply-of-controlled-drugs>

I have considered the ACMD advice carefully, consulted with the Department of Health and Social Care, and agreed to all the recommendations. Further explanation of the legislative changes is set out in the Explanatory Memorandum attached to the 2020 Regulations.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Local Government Finance update

**Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
(Robert Jenrick):**

[\[HCWS220\]](#)

I wish to set out to the House the financial support my department has provided to local government so that it can fulfil its essential role in the national response to covid-19.

Additional Funding

In total I have announced over £3.2 billion of additional funding for councils to support their continued efforts to address the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in their communities, both through increased expenditure and those budgetary pressures that arise from falls in income during the lockdown period.

Recognising that councils are best placed to decide how to meet pressures in their local area, this funding has not been ringfenced; however, we expect councils to prioritise spending in those areas where we asked them to carry out extra work and new tasks, in particular, in relation to adult social care, children's services, public health services, shielding the vulnerable, homelessness and rough sleeping, supporting the NHS, and managing excess deaths.

An initial £1.6 billion of funding was announced on 19 March, and allocated based on a mixture of the Adult Social Care Relative Needs Formula; and the 2013-14 Settlement Funding Assessment, which is a measure of general service needs – both of which are familiar formulations to local councils. Further details of this allocation, broken down by individual local authority, can be found on the government website.

On 18 April I announced a further £1.6 billion to support councils in their continued response to the pandemic. Full details of the allocation of this further funding were announced on 28 April 2020 and have, once again, been made available on the Government website. These additional allocations have been made on a per capita basis, using the latest ONS population projections. This reflects that this is a national emergency and there are a range of pressures across local government. For two-tier areas, the split of this funding between county and district authorities will be 65:35. This provides significantly more funding to district councils than the first round of allocations

reflecting the impact that a reduction in incomes from sales, fees and charges has had, particularly on these councils. However, this formulation also continues to reflect the acute pressures on social care.

Of the additional funding, £28.5 million will support standalone fire and rescue authorities (including Greater Manchester Fire). In addition, the Home Office will launch a £6 million Fire Covid-19 Contingency Fund specifically to support fire and rescue authorities who incur significant costs as a result of additional duties during the covid-19 outbreak.

Cashflow Support

On 16 April, I announced measures to provide cashflow support to authorities. These were intended in part to mitigate the impact of temporary delays in tax payments. These measures include deferring the payment of the central government share of business rates by councils: payments collectively worth £2.6 billion; and, bringing forward central government payments of social care grants worth £850 million, so that they are paid entirely in April rather than in April, May, and June.

Future Reform

I am committed to reforming the funding framework for local government so that it is simpler, more up to date, and more transparent. However, in order to ensure that we get these reforms right, both the Government and councils need to work together to arrive at the right approach. Neither we nor councils currently have the capacity, nor the necessary degree of financial certainty, to engage properly with these reforms now. As such, I have announced that we will be suspending implementation of the Review of Relative Needs and Resources and the planned increase to 75% business rates retention in 2021-22. These decisions will allow councils to focus on meeting the immediate public health challenge posed by the pandemic.

The Government will work closely with local councils as it determines how best to treat accumulated business rates growth and the local government finance settlement in 2021-22.

TRANSPORT

■ Transport Update

Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

[[HCWS212](#)]

This statement confirms that it has been necessary to extend the deadlines for decisions on the following five applications made under the Planning Act as indicated below to allow for further work to be carried out before they are determined by the Secretary of State:

- **Lake Lothing 3rd Crossing Lowestoft:** for the proposed development by Suffolk County Council of a new multi-span single highway opening bascule bridge over Lake Lothing in Lowestoft. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on 5 September 2019 and the current deadline for a decision was 5 December 2019. The deadline is now extended to 5 May 2020;

- **West Midlands Strategic Rail Freight Interchange:** for the proposed development by Four Ashes Limited of a new Strategic Rail Freight Interchange and other supporting infrastructure works near Junction 12 of the M6 motorway in South Staffordshire District. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on 27 November 2019 and the current deadline for a decision was 27 February 2020. The deadline is now extended to 5 May 2020;
- **A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling:** for the proposed development by Highways England of a continuous dual carriageway on the A303 linking the Podimore Bypass and the Sparkford Bypass. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on 12 September 2019 and the current deadline for a decision was 12 December 2019. The deadline is now extended to 17 July 2020;
- **A63 Castle Street Improvement – Hull:** for the proposed improvement by Highways England of approximately 1.5km of the A63 and connecting side roads in Hull between Ropery Street and the Market Place/Queen Street junction. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on 24 December 2019 and the current deadline for a decision was 24 March 2020. The deadline is now extended to 31 May 2020; and
- **A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down:** for the proposed construction by Highways England of a new two-lane dual carriageway for the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down in Wiltshire. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down Development Consent Order application on 2 January 2020 and the current deadline for a decision was 2 April 2020. The deadline is now extended to 17 July 2020.
- Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make his decision within 3 months of receipt of the Examining Authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a Statement to the House of Parliament announcing the new deadline.
- The Department will also endeavour to issue decisions ahead of the deadlines above wherever possible.
- The decision to set new deadlines is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to give development consent for the above applications.

This statement has also been made in the House of Lords: [HLWS211](#)

TREASURY

■ **Bilateral loan to Ireland**

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

[\[HCWS219\]](#)

I would like to update Parliament on the loan to Ireland.

In December 2010, the UK agreed to provide a bilateral loan of £3.2 billion as part of a €67.5 billion international assistance package for Ireland. The loan was disbursed in 8 tranches, and the final tranche was drawn down on 26 September 2013. Ireland has made interest payments on the loan every six months since the first disbursement.

HM Treasury has today provided a further Report to Parliament in relation to the loan as required under the Loans to Ireland Act 2010. The Report relates to the period from 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020. It reports fully on the one principal repayment and one regular interest payment received by HM Treasury during this period, and sets out details of future payments up to the final repayment on 26 March 2021.

HM Treasury received a further payment on 20 April 2020, after the scope of the report published today. In line with the agreed repayment schedule, HM Treasury received a total payment of £406,672,904.07 from Ireland. This comprises the repayment of £403,370,000 in principal and £3,302,904.07 in accrued interest. The total outstanding principal on the loan is £1,613,480,000, and the Government continues to expect the loan to be repaid in full and on time.

A written ministerial statement on the previous statutory report regarding the loan to Ireland was issued to Parliament on 3 October 2019, Official Report, column 62WS.

■ Treasury Update

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

[[HCWS218](#)]

The Government warmly welcomes the expertise and resources offered by those who wish to come to the UK to combat the coronavirus, from anaesthetists through to engineers working on ventilator design and production.

However, the actions and presence of these individuals in the UK could inadvertently and unfairly affect their own tax residence status, and potentially deter others from giving their assistance.

Accordingly, the Government will legislate in Finance Bill 2020 to amend the Statutory Residence Test (SRT) to ensure that any period(s) between 1 March and 1 June 2020 spent in the UK by individuals working on coronavirus disease related activities in specified sectors will not count towards the residence test.