



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 30 April 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:58 P.M., 30 April 2020). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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**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

#### ■ Business: Coronavirus

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[38908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the covid-19 pandemic, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of taking additional steps to support businesses that employ vulnerable people.

**Paul Scully:**

The Government has introduced important social distancing measures for all types of businesses to consider in order to minimise the risk of transmission in the workplace. The Government has been clear that it is vital that all employers follow this guidance, which is clinically led and based on expert advice.

The Government has stated that vulnerable people who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) need to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures. Additionally, the government guidance sets out that members of staff who are vulnerable or extremely vulnerable, as well as individuals whom they live with, should be supported by their employers as they follow the required social distancing and shielding measures.

#### ■ Companies House: Coronavirus

**John Lamont:**

[\[38507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what support Companies House is giving to businesses to assist with responding to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Paul Scully:**

On 25 March Companies House announced that all businesses could apply for a three-month extension for filing their accounts, with those citing issues around COVID-19 immediately granted an extension. To support this measure Companies House developed a fast-tracked, online system that takes businesses just 15 minutes to complete. There have so far been over 50,000 successful applications. This was supplemented on 28 March when the Government announced it will offer further extensions should circumstances require.

On 16 April Companies House announced that companies issued with a late filing penalty due to COVID-19 will have appeals treated sympathetically and that it has temporarily paused the strike off process to prevent companies being dissolved. This will help ensure businesses struggling to update their records because of the crisis, are not struck off the register.

**■ Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme****John Lamont:** [\[38503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many successful applications have been made to the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

**Paul Scully:**

The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme opened for applications on 23 March. As of 21 April, over £2.8bn worth of loans have been issued to over 16,000 businesses.

**■ Employment Agencies: Coronavirus****Preet Kaur Gill:** [\[38509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent assessment has made of the effect of the covid-19 lockdown on the recruitment sector.

**Paul Scully:**

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has not made a formal assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on the recruitment sector specifically. The Government is working to minimise any social and economic disruption as a result of Covid-19. We hold regular meetings with representatives of businesses and workers in the recruitment sector at all levels to understand the challenges they are facing and to help develop the Government's response.

**■ Maternity Leave: Coronavirus****Dan Jarvis:** [\[38916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of offering a three month paid extension to maternity leave in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Paul Scully:**

Maternity Leave and Pay are provided to enable employed women to take time off work in the later stages of their pregnancy and after they have given birth.

The UK's Maternity Leave offer is already amongst the most generous in the World – up to 52 weeks of leave are available, 39 weeks of which are paid – and we currently have no plans to extend it.

**■ Service Industries and Utilities: Coronavirus****Dr Dan Poulter:** [\[38466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the hospitality industry.

**Paul Scully:**

The Government recognises the huge impact that the COVID-19 outbreak is having on the hospitality sector and is engaging regularly with representatives from across the industry to assess the effects on hospitality businesses.

**CABINET OFFICE**■ **Devolution: Coronavirus****John Lamont:**[\[38508\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps they are taking to work with the devolved administrations to combat the covid-19 outbreak.

**Chloe Smith:**

I refer the Hon Member to the [statement](#) given by my Rt Hon Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 28 April 2020.

■ **Telecommunications: EU Nationals****Chi Onwurah:**[\[40826\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many EU workers are employed in the telecommunications sector.

**Chloe Smith:**

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. I have therefore asked the Authority to respond.

**Attachments:**

1. [UKSA Response](#) [PQ40826.pdf]

**DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ **Arts: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme****Tracy Brabin:**[\[39797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how many companies in the creative industries have claimed support through the (a) Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (b) Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (c) VAT payment deferral (e) PAYE self-assessment payment deferral and (f) Statutory Sick Pay rebate; the amounts supplied through each; and if he will publish this information on a regular basis.

**Tracy Brabin:**[\[39798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how many workers in the creative industries are beneficiaries of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

**Tracy Brabin:**[\[39799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how many and what proportion of organisations in the creative industries that are using the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme top up their employees' salaries to 100 per cent.

**Caroline Dinenge:**

Applications for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) opened on Monday 20th April. As of midnight on 23 April, HMRC had over half a million claims with a total value of around £4.5bn. CJRS, tax deferral of VAT payments due to coronavirus, deferral of Self-Assessment payments due to coronavirus and Statutory Sick Pay rebate are new schemes 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.

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, the Government cannot provide a breakdown of funding by sector, as lenders have been given a temporary dispensation from uploading their data to the British Business Bank's system in order to let lenders focus on issuing new loans. This is a pragmatic step that reflects the urgency of getting loans issued.

**■ Gambling: Reviews****Carolyn Harris:**[\[40685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what the planned timescale is for the gambling review.

**Nigel Huddleston:**

The government committed in its manifesto to review the Gambling Act 2005 to make sure it is fit for the digital age. This commitment remains a priority, but as with other areas of government business the impact of Covid-19 has placed unforeseen pressures on the Department. We are continuing to work closely with the Gambling Commission, including on ensuring that vulnerable people are protected in this time of potentially heightened risk. A timeline for the review will be announced in due course.

**■ Leisure: Coronavirus****Kevin Brennan:**[\[37474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what estimate he has made of the number of live events cancelled due to the covid-19 outbreak; and what estimate he has made of the economic cost of cancelling those events.

**Caroline Dinenge:**

No such estimate has been made. However, we know that the Covid-19 pandemic presents a significant challenge to many of DCMS' sectors including music and the wider live events sector. That is why the Government has announced unprecedented support for business and workers to protect them against the current economic

emergency including: a Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme; £330 billion worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses and a Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. We continue to work closely with our partners across music and the live events sector to understand the impact of Covid-19 on their activities and provide the necessary support.

## ■ Local Broadcasting: Coronavirus

**Dan Jarvis:**

[\[39599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department has plans to increase the funding allocated to the Community Radio Fund to cover emergency payments to community radio stations following the outbreak of covid-19.

**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.

The Government has today announced that the £400,000 Community Radio Fund administered by Ofcom will be used to provide a lifeline for radio stations hit hardest by the coronavirus. Relevant stations will be invited to bid for emergency grants through Ofcom to help meet their core costs.

**Dan Jarvis:**

[\[39600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the financial situation of community radio stations following the outbreak of covid-19.

**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.

The Government has today announced that the £400,000 Community Radio Fund administered by Ofcom will be used to provide a lifeline for radio stations hit hardest by the coronavirus. Relevant stations will be invited to bid for emergency grants through Ofcom to help meet their core costs.

## ■ Social Enterprises: Coronavirus

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[38902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Government's business support package for social enterprises.

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[38903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department has taken to support social enterprises during the covid-19 pandemic.

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[38907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has to increase access to finance for (a) social enterprises and (b) co-operatives during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mr John Whittingdale:**

The government recognises the vital work social enterprises and co-operatives are doing to support communities and ease demands on public services in light of Covid-19. In recognising this, we have put in place a number of emergency measures to support these organisations during this time.

The government's Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) has been made available to social enterprises and co-operatives. This scheme will provide lenders with a government-backed guarantee of 80% on each loan, ensuring eligible social enterprises and co-operatives gain access to crucial finance with no upfront costs and lower initial repayments. Big Society Capital has established and capitalised a Resilience and Recovery Loan Fund which aims to improve access to CBILS for social enterprises. The initiative has been enabled by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) accelerating the release of previously committed dormant bank accounts money.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is also available to social enterprises and co-operatives. This scheme allows employers to claim for a cash grant of up to 80% of a furloughed employee's wages. Many organisations are already accessing this support measure.

Additionally, the government announced a £750 million support package earlier this month for charities. A number of social enterprises that are delivering vital work during the coronavirus outbreak will be eligible to apply for this support package.

Over the coming weeks and months, the government will monitor and evaluate the support that has been provided to social enterprises and co-operatives, and it continues to consider what else can be done. This includes examining further initiatives around access to finance for social enterprises and cooperatives.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### ■ British Nationals Abroad: Coronavirus

**Stephen Timms:** [\[39456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how the ticket cost of £600 per person for nationals returning from Bangladesh was determined; and if he will make a statement.

**Stephen Timms:** [\[39457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how the ticket cost of £581 per person for UK nationals returning from India was determined; and if he will make a statement.

**Nigel Adams:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* Flight prices are based on the actual cost of each charter, which varies. To set a limit on the costs to travellers, we have capped prices: for flights under 6 hours at £400; 6-10 hours at £600; and 10 hours + at £800 (using the airline industry's 'time in air' calculator).

Costs above this amount are borne by the Government. We are determined that the cost of a flight will not be a barrier to bringing British travellers home. Often the cost will be covered by travel insurance; financial support is available where necessary.

**Stephen Timms:** [\[39458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether his Department has made an estimate of the costs incurred by UK citizens trapped in (a) India, (b) Pakistan and (c) Bangladesh after each country's recent ban on international flights.

**Nigel Adams:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* We do not have an estimate of the costs incurred by British nationals overseas.

However, we recognise that this crisis will have had a significant financial impact on people who have found themselves overseas for a longer period than planned or faced cancellations. Our consular staff continue to provide advice and support to British nationals who face financial difficulties overseas.

We are working to ensure airlines recognise their responsibility for transporting their passengers with pre-booked tickets home. This includes offering alternatives where routes are cancelled and encouraging airlines to allow passengers to change tickets - including between airlines.

We have worked with other Whitehall departments to help ensure that British travellers who normally live in the UK are eligible for furlough, business grants, and mortgage holidays on the same basis as they would be if they had been at home in the UK.

If people are struggling to afford ticket prices, emergency loans will be available as a last resort. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has streamlined the process for emergency loans, and is working with a commercial travel agency to ensure loan recipients have travel arrangements in place to return home.

**Jonathan Edwards:** [\[39548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many British nationals have been repatriated in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Nigel Adams:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* As of 29 April, we have brought back more than 20,000 people on 99 flights organised by the Foreign Office from 21 different countries and territories and have helped more than 19000 British passengers return home from 60 cruise ships.

**■ British Overseas Territories: Coronavirus****John Lamont:**[\[38520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to support the British Overseas Territories during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Wendy Morton:**

The UK Government is firmly committed to supporting the Overseas Territories in dealing with Covid-19. Baroness Sugg (Minister for the Overseas Territories) is in regular contact with the political leaders and Governors of the Territories, to understand the situation on the ground and identify how the UK Government can best support them. The impact of the pandemic on the Territories varies, and our support is being calibrated accordingly. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development are leading a cross-Whitehall effort, working closely with the Overseas Territories governments to provide support across the key areas we have identified, of healthcare, economy, security and access.

**■ South Ossetia****Mark Pritchard:**[\[39517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will hold discussions with his Russian counterpart on that country's policy of borderization of the Kareli Municipality in Georgia.

**Wendy Morton:**

The UK has raised concerns about the recent reports of Russian forces and the de-facto authorities in the breakaway region of South Ossetia working to create "borders" within the Kareli Municipality in Georgia. Through our Embassy in Tbilisi and in statements at the Council of Europe and the OSCE we have been clear that such actions must stop.

The UK is unwavering in our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

**■ Taiwan: Coronavirus****John Spellar:**[\[38872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the Taiwanese authorities on lessons learned from their handling of the covid-19 pandemic.

**Nigel Adams:**

Through our office in Taipei, the British Government has been in regular contact with the Taiwanese health authorities around all aspects of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. We will continue to learn from and share good practice with Taiwan, as we aim to do with all those who have been affected by this pandemic. In line with our longstanding policy, we believe Taiwan has a meaningful role to play in combatting global threats like COVID-19.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****■ African Coalition for Epidemic Research, Response and Training: Overseas Aid****Stephen Doughty:**[\[38926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what support his Department is providing to the Pan-African Network For Rapid Research, Response, Relief and Preparedness for Infectious Disease Epidemics (PANDORA-ID-NET) project.

**Helen Whately:**

*[Holding answer 27 April 2020]:* The Pan-African Network for Rapid Research, Response, Relief and Preparedness for Infectious Disease Epidemics (PANDORA-ID-NET) has received United Kingdom Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding through the Department's ODA-funded global health research portfolio.

**■ Cancer: Clinical Trials****Alex Norris:**[\[38586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many cancer-related clinical trials have been (a) cancelled and (b) suspended as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) guidance requires trial sponsors to notify the MHRA of a temporary halt to a clinical trial when it involves a direct participant safety issue or a medicines supply issue. Trials which end prematurely are required to be notified to the regulator within 15 days of the decision to end the study.

From 1 March 2020 to 22 April 2020 the MHRA has been notified of 10 temporary halts to cancer-related trials of investigational medicinal products which specifically state COVID-19 as the reason for halting. No cancer-related trials of investigational medicinal products were prematurely ended as a result of COVID-19 during this time. It should be noted that end of trial notifications are only required to be submitted to the regulator if the trial has ended in all the territories it was running in.

**■ Care Homes: Coronavirus****Dr Matthew Offord:****[37611]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the number of people in care homes who are likely to have contracted covid-19 and died of additional causes, since lockdown restrictions were introduced.

**Helen Whately:**

Public Health England (PHE) does not hold data on the total number of people who contracted COVID-19 in care homes. PHE collects data on the number of care homes that have reported an outbreak of suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Since the beginning of March 2020 up to and including the 22 April, the number of care homes that have reported outbreaks of COVID-19 is 4,132.

The Office for National Statistics publishes provisional counts of the number of deaths registered in England and Wales, including deaths involving COVID-19 in care homes. The latest data, up to week ending 10 April, can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregisteredweeklyinenglandandwalesprovisional/weekending10april2020>

**■ Coronavirus: Computer Software****Conor McGinn:****[39534]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish a list of covid-19 symptom tracker online apps that have been approved by his Department; and what guidance his Department has published on downloading Government approved apps.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* The National Health Service has an existing approach to assessing apps for their clinical efficacy, data security and cyber security using the Digital Assessment Questionnaire which is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/services/nhs-apps-library/guidance-for-health-app-developers-commissioners-and-assessors/how-we-assess-health-apps-and-digital-tools#preview-the-questions>

Apps can also be assessed against the NHS Digital Health Technology Standard that was introduced in February 2020. This is available at the following link:

[https://www.nhs.uk/media/documents/NHS\\_Digital\\_Health\\_Technology\\_Standard\\_draft.pdf](https://www.nhs.uk/media/documents/NHS_Digital_Health_Technology_Standard_draft.pdf)

To date, three COVID-19 symptom tracker apps have been assessed using these approaches. More information is available about how we assess apps and other digital health technologies at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/blog/transformation-blog/2020/how-we-are-assessing-covid-19-apps>

NHSX, together with jHub, are working with the providers of third party COVID-19 symptom tracking apps and will publish details of those that meet our standards on the NHSX website in due course.

## ■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

**Sir John Hayes:**

[34898]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish guidance on how social distancing measures implemented by the Government in response to the covid-19 outbreak can help (a) slow the spread of covid-19 and (b) reduce pressure on the NHS.

**Helen Whately:**

Following expert advice, the Government has issued social distancing measures. These measures will limit the spread of COVID-19 by helping to stop non-essential contact and lessen the demand on the National Health Service. Businesses have been asked to close except for supermarkets or retailers that supply fuel, medicines and other vital goods.

Under the restrictions, people must stay at home and only leave for the following reasons; to exercise once a day - either alone, or with members of their household; shopping for basic necessities, although this should be done as little as possible; medical need or to provide care for a vulnerable person; travel to or from work but only where this is absolutely necessary.

Several guidance documents have been published, which can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

**Justin Madders:**

[38608]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to re-introduce contact tracing for people who test positive for covid-19.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

We are building a large-scale, integrated contact tracing and testing programme. This includes a new app for contact tracing, which will complement the existing Public Health England contact tracing service. If someone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19, they will be able to securely tell the National Health Service via this app. The app will then send an alert – if appropriate – to other app users that the person has been in significant contact with over the past few days, even before they had symptoms, to provide advice.

We are taking measures to test the quality of the app and working closely with some of the world's leading tech firms and experts in digital ethics and clinical safety to get this right.

We are actively considering what the best time would be to roll-out the app after testing is completed. We are aware that scaled-up contact tracing is likely to have greatest value when we have achieved reductions in the rate of transmission.

**Justin Madders:** [\[38609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to publish a testing and tracing strategy.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

On 4 April the Government published its Testing Strategy titled 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): scaling up testing programmes', which is available online. This strategy will be used in collaboration with the Government's plans for enhanced contact tracing to support the next phase of our COVID-19 response.

**Rosie Cooper:** [\[39509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to his Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 34315, how many personnel in are involved in carrying out contact tracing to identify people who may be at risk of transmitting covid-19.

**Rosie Cooper:** [\[39510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 34315, how many close contacts of people infected with covid-19 have been identified in England since 1 March 2020.

**Rosie Cooper:** [\[39511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 34315, how many close contacts of people infected with covid-19 have been traced.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* Public Health England (PHE) undertook contact tracing of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 during the contain phase of the response, until 12 March. Since then contact tracing activities have been undertaken when needed as part of outbreak investigations. Contact tracing is undertaken by staff in local health protection teams and the PHE Field Service as part of their day to day health protection work. It is not possible to provide a specific number of people involved at this stage.

The number of people identified in England since 1 March 2020 having been in close contact with COVID-19 confirmed cases, and the number of people traced are not available in the format requested.

## ■ Coronavirus: Motor Neurone Disease

**Claire Hanna:** [\[37882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will include people with motor neurone disease on the list of vulnerable people during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Helen Whately:**

Individuals who have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable have been advised to shield to protect themselves. Six categories of clinical conditions were used to identify individuals who are extremely vulnerable due to complex health

problems. It was determined that people with motor neurone disease (MND) would not be included in this list, as there are many stages to the disease, with varying levels of severity. This is under constant clinical review.

General practitioners (GPs) and hospital clinicians have the discretion to add individual patients to the list based on case-by-case clinical assessments of each individual's needs. GPs and hospital specialists have completed initial reviews of their patient lists, and are continuing to identify patients as their clinical conditions change. Anyone with MND who is concerned that that the severity of their symptoms means they may be clinically extremely vulnerable, should contact their GP to discuss.

### ■ **Coronavirus: Pregnancy**

**Tim Farron:**

[\[39649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the Prime Minister's statement of 16 March 2020 that pregnant women should avoid unnecessary social contact and the Government's policy not to compel employers to furlough pregnant employees; and what steps he is taking to protect the health of pregnant women during the covid-10 outbreak.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* COVID-19 is a new disease and we are continually reviewing the emerging scientific evidence.

Due to a lack of evidence around how COVID-19 may affect pregnant women, we, as a precaution, encourage pregnant women to carefully follow social distancing advice and to have an individual discussion with their employers about their working arrangements.

We have discussed, and will continue to discuss, the evidence around COVID-19 and pregnancy with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and other experts.

We recognise that it is important for women to consider their own individual circumstances with their obstetrician or midwife and with their employer in terms of safely managing their pregnancy and work environment.

### ■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

**Paul Bristow:**

[\[38639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will provide details of the evidential threshold that his Department requires antibody tests to meet in order to detect people that have had covid-19.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is working with partners to support the delivery of the Government's agenda on COVID-19 testing. This includes rapid antibody tests for use by healthcare professionals and by people at home. The MHRA has prepared specifications to assist manufacturers to design

and deliver tests. These are initial specifications based on current best information but, as the science is rapidly evolving, are subject to review and may need to be updated at short.

## ■ Coronavirus: Surveys

**Caroline Lucas:** [\[38456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to collect sex-disaggregated data as part of the NHS coronavirus status checker.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

The National Health Service COVID-19 status checker collects only the minimum amount of data necessary to predict the likely demand on NHS services. NHSX plan to iterate the survey and may add gender to this collection, if it would help predict demand more effectively.

## ■ Detention Centres

**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[38618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many covid-19 tests have been conducted in immigration removal centres as of 21 April 2020; and what testing strategy is in place for those centres.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

*[Holding answer 27 April 2020]:* Information on the number of COVID-19 tests conducted in immigration removal centres is not held.

## ■ Health Visitors: Coronavirus

**Tim Loughton:** [\[38863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the (a) number of health visitors redeployed from their roles during the covid-19 outbreak, (b) proportion of qualified health visitors that have been redeployed in each area and (c) size of the caseloads held by health visitors following the redeployment of their colleagues.

**Helen Whately:**

*[Holding answer 27 April 2020]:* The department does not hold the data requested.

**Tim Loughton:** [\[38865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many local areas in England have less than 60 per cent of the pre-covid-19 number of health visitors available to work their normal roles.

**Helen Whately:**

*[Holding answer 27 April 2020]:* The department does not hold the data requested.

## ■ NHS: Conditions of Employment

**Justin Madders:**

[\[38612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to introduce a death-in-service benefit for NHS workers.

**Helen Whately:**

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.

Staff who have recently retired from the NHS Pension Scheme will have already received a tax-free lump sum and are therefore entitled to less generous death in service benefits should they re-join the scheme after retirement, but their family will receive additional death benefit if they die within five years of their retirement date as well as partner and dependent pensions.

The Department is considering whether to offer further support for the families of all staff providing frontline NHS services, including those who are not in the NHS Pension Scheme.

## ■ NHS: Coronavirus

**Fleur Anderson:**

[\[33760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps are being taken to carry out mass covid-19 testing of NHS staff.

**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

*[Holding answer 21 April 2020]:* Testing is a crucial part of the United Kingdom's response to the coronavirus pandemic and the Government is working on multiple fronts to deliver additional testing capacity into the system. On 4 April 2020, the Government published its testing strategy 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) Scaling up our testing programmes'. The strategy sets out five pillars and the second pillar focuses on the mass swab testing for critical key workers in the National Health Service.

The document is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-scaling-up-testing-programmes/coronavirus-covid-19-scaling-up-our-testing-programmes>

## ■ Palliative Care: Coronavirus

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[37784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of syringe drivers required to ensure the maintenance of palliative care regimes during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Edward Argar:**

The Department is aware of recent shortages of syringe drivers and has taken direct action to source additional equipment to alleviate the situation. New supply is now arriving in the United Kingdom from abroad with several thousand units now being checked and distributed in to the National Health Service. Further quantities are becoming available through the usual suppliers to the NHS to further increase the availability of these devices which will be distributed through a national allocation process.

**Speech and Language Therapy: Voluntary Work****Sir Christopher Chope:**[\[38417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy that retired therapists who return to work as volunteers for the NHS during the covid-19 pandemic are able to re-register with their former professional bodies to obtain insurance equivalent to that being provided for retired doctors re-registering with the GMC; and if he will make a statement.

**Helen Whately:**

*[Holding answer 27 April 2020]:* We have made available a number of provisions to support the safe return of retired professionals both in paid and volunteering roles. The Coronavirus Act 2020 enables the registrar of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to temporarily add any “fit and proper” professional to HCPC’s register for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. This power applies to all of the professions regulated by HCPC, including arts therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists.

As at 20 April, around 11,500 Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and other professionals regulated by HCPC had contacted NHS England and NHS Improvement to express an interest in returning to practice with 2,327 deployed to trusts or the 111 service.

In most cases, returning healthcare professionals will be covered by one of the two existing state indemnity schemes: the Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts if they return to work in a National Health Service trust; and the Clinical Negligence Scheme for General Practice if they are engaged by a general practitioner (GP) practice providing NHS GP services. In the rare instances where these or other indemnity arrangements do not apply, the Coronavirus Act provides additional powers to provide clinical negligence indemnity arising from NHS activities related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Ventilators: EU Action****Jonathan Ashworth:**[\[39538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on what date did the UK Government sign the EU's ventilator procurement scheme known as the Joint Procurement Agreement.

**Edward Argar:**

The United Kingdom has been a signatory to the European Union Joint Procurement Agreement since 2014 and is eligible to participate in EU joint procurements during the transition period under the terms of the Withdrawal Act.

Owing to an initial communication problem, the UK did not receive an invitation in time to take part in the first four EU Joint Procurements in response to COVID-19, including the ventilators scheme.

However, participating in those four initial joint procurement schemes would not have allowed us to do anything that we have not been able to do ourselves. We currently have over 10,800 mechanical ventilators available to National Health Service patients, with thousands more ventilators on order from manufacturers in the UK and abroad.

The UK will participate in the EU Joint Procurement scheme on therapeutics that is soon to launch and will consider participating in other future schemes on the basis of public health requirements, including any on personal protective equipment.

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT****■ Housing: Construction****Sir David Evennett:****[38873]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what comparative assessment his Department has made of the level of housebuilding in England (a) in 2020 and (b) from 2007 to 2010.

**Christopher Pincher:**

House building statistics are not yet available for 2020. The time series covering the period up to the end of December 2019 is available on the Department's website <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/house-building-statistics> .

**■ Private Rented Housing: Students****Rachel Hopkins:****[38986]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions his Department has had with private university accommodation providers on waiving rental fees for students during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Christopher Pincher:**

The Department is actively engaging with stakeholders across the student accommodation sector, including private student accommodation providers, to understand the challenges posed by the current crisis and to establish the most effective means of supporting the whole of the sector.

During this period tenants, including student tenants, remain liable for rent. Some universities and private accommodation providers have chosen to release students from their contracts early and not charge rent for students returning home. The

negotiation of rent waivers and early releases from contracts is a matter between the parties concerned. However, we expect universities to communicate clearly with residential students on rents for the summer term and administer accommodation provision in a fair manner.

## ■ Social Rented Housing

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[38969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the timetable is for the publication of the social housing White Paper.

**Christopher Pincher:**

The Social Housing White Paper will set out further measures to empower tenants and support the continued supply of social homes. It will include measures to provide greater redress, better regulation and improve the quality of social housing. We are working to bring forward the White Paper in due course.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### ■ Africa: HIV Infection

**Stephen Doughty:** [\[39572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the use of expired anti-retroviral (ARV) HIV medication in (a) Zimbabwe and (b) other African countries; and what steps her Department is taking to ensure that flows of in-date ARVs are maintained to tackle HIV during the covid-19 pandemic.

**James Duddridge:**

DFID Zimbabwe does not bilaterally fund the procurement of ARVs in Zimbabwe. The Global Fund – to which the UK is the second largest donor – does however provide support for the procurement of ARVs in Zimbabwe. In June 2019, concerns were raised over the distribution of expired ARVs, procured through the Global Fund. At the time of procurement, the ARVs expiry date was approaching but ARVs were urgently needed as there was a risk of stocks in country. Assurances were provided by the Manufacturer and the Medical Council Association of Zimbabwe (MCAZ) that the medicines were safe and effective before they were distributed.

DFID's central teams work closely with the Global Fund to ensure they are actively monitoring supply chain issues at a global level and engage closely with partners. Global Fund Partners are supported in implementing good practices including safeguarding against purchase and use of expired drugs.

The COVID-19 outbreak presents a risk to the ongoing supply and distribution of ARVs. The majority of ARV procurement and distribution in Zimbabwe is funded by PEPFAR and USAID have taken several steps to ensure that patients continue to receive their prescriptions such as providing monthly rather than weekly prescriptions, so patients do not have to visit clinics so frequently. The Global Fund is

also flexing to cope with the crisis. It has created up to \$1 billion of flexible funding opportunities for countries to re-programme existing grants and apply for additional funding, including in Zimbabwe. This will support countries with their direct COVID-19 response, address critical gaps in health systems, and to adapt their HIV, TB, and malaria programmes, including if needed to reinforce in-country ARV supply chain management.

## ■ Africa: Locusts

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[15079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps he is taking to support countries in Africa affected by swarms of desert locusts.

**James Duddridge:**

We are deeply concerned about the devastating locust outbreak in East Africa. It is destroying crops, livelihoods and essential food supplies.

The UK has contributed £7 million to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's Regional Emergency Appeal for the spraying of pesticides on the ground and by air to control the locust outbreak. In addition, DFID's existing humanitarian and development programmes in the region are working to address food insecurity and poverty challenges by flexing to respond to this crisis. As rising temperatures due to climate change make such events across Africa more likely, we are also helping communities adapt longer term to climate shocks.

Our support is having an immediate impact, and we continue to monitor the situation closely and stand ready to help further.

## ■ Bangladesh: Migrant Camps

**Yasmin Qureshi:**

[\[38889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to improve (a) sanitation, (b) ICU capacity and (c) emergency health care in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

**Nigel Adams:**

With no confirmed COVID-19 cases yet in the camps, there has been intense focus on preparedness for responding to an outbreak when it occurs. This includes funding our partners to distribute soap, build more handwashing facilities, and raise awareness about personal hygiene. Temporary isolation and treatment facilities are being rapidly constructed for severe and critical cases. These will have capacity for over 1,000 beds. Community case management will be supported through existing and auxiliary health facilities in the camps. Health teams already working in the camps will be bolstered by international medical surge teams who are on standby to deploy, once flights and access are arranged.

**Yasmin Qureshi:**

[\[38890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to take account of the views of affected (a) women and (b) elderly refugees in providing support to refugee camps in Bangladesh.

**Nigel Adams:**

The UK prioritises the protection and safeguarding of women and the elderly in our humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis. UK support to partners, including BRAC University Centre for Peace and Justice, BBC Media Action and Translators without Borders, provides information for the humanitarian community drawing directly on the views of Rohingya and host communities, including women and the elderly. This recently included a report sharing the concerns of older men and women about COVID-19. The UK also funds HelpAge International to work with humanitarian organisations to build their capacity to support older people and people with disabilities.

#### ■ **British Overseas Territories: Coronavirus**

**Dr Matthew Offord:**

[\[38529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support the Overseas Territories to deal with the covid-19 pandemic.

**Wendy Morton:**

A range of government departments, led by DFID and the FCO, are supporting Overseas Territories to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. Support includes essential medical supply, public health advice, security and access support, and financial aid to mitigate the economic impacts in the most vulnerable territories.

#### ■ **Commonwealth Development Corporation: Investment**

**Stephen Doughty:**

[\[39571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps the Commonwealth Development Corporation is taking to adapt its global investments to respond to the health and economic effects of the covid-19 pandemic.

**James Duddridge:**

CDC remains a long-term investor and is open for business. CDC and the Department for International Development are working together to deliver a targeted response that preserves, strengthens and helps rebuild economies across Africa and South Asia in response to the impact of COVID-19.

Firstly, CDC is supporting its existing portfolio of companies. CDC is assessing where it can provide additional capital to help firms and their workers weather the crisis. CDC has also launched an Emergency Technical Assistance Facility and published advice on its website ( <https://www.cdcgroup.com/covid-19> ) on measures that companies should take to protect the health and safety of employees and customers and protect jobs.

Secondly, CDC is focused on strengthening the response to the wider economic and health challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis. CDC is actively looking to make new investments that can provide more systemic liquidity to companies, especially Small Medium Enterprises, and at investments that can directly mitigate some of the adverse health impacts of COVID-19.

Finally, CDC will be there to support countries rebuild and will continue to invest for long-term sustainable development in its geographies.

## ■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

**John Lamont:** [\[38521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether her Department is providing support to organisations or projects researching a covid-19 vaccine.

**Wendy Morton:**

The UK is at the forefront of efforts to develop coronavirus vaccines. As agreed by the G20, we support a global approach to the rapid development and scaled up manufacture of vaccines with equitable access to all who need them, including in the poorest countries. We are working with international partners, industry and researchers to support an approach to accelerate research and development, scale up global manufacturing capacity and ensure funding to deliver this aim.

The UK is a strong supporter of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), which is supporting the development of vaccines that will be available throughout the world. We have pledged £250 million of UK aid to CEPI, the biggest donation of any country to date. CEPI is supporting the development of 10 COVID-19 vaccine candidates, such as the University of Oxford's vaccine research.

UK aid has also supported Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance for 20 years. We are its biggest donor, helping to immunise over 760 million children and saving over 13 million lives worldwide. Gavi will play a key role in making a new COVID-19 vaccine available and affordable.

UK support, through CEPI, GAVI and others, will help facilitate the end-to-end development and distribution of a successful vaccine.

## ■ **Crimes of Violence: Females**

**Yasmin Qureshi:** [\[38887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the accuracy of reports that the covid-19 pandemic is causing a rise in gender-based violence throughout the world; and what steps her Department is taking to support women and girls in vulnerable communities facing a heightened risk of gender-based violence.

**Wendy Morton:**

There is compelling evidence of a surge in violence against women and girls (VAWG) during the COVID-19 outbreak, which is deeply concerning. We know from our

humanitarian work the importance of taking a 'no regrets' approach: we should assume VAWG is occurring and take action to prevent and respond to it as a lifesaving measure from the earliest stages of the response.

DFID is working across the UK government and with global partners to prevent violence and ensure women and girls have access to vital services. We have provided £10 million of UK aid to UNFPA and £20 million to UNICEF to scale up protection and support services for women and girls. We have contributed £20 million of UK aid to UNHCR's COVID-19 response for refugees and internally displaced people. This response includes support for essential VAWG and child protection services. We launched a call for proposals under our Rapid Response Facility, which required all projects to mainstream gender, protection and safeguarding. We are also urgently reorienting existing bilateral programmes to ensure women and girls can continue to access support during the lockdown. In Nepal, for example, the UK has financed 14 Women's and Children Service Centres and 62 One Stop Crisis Centres.

#### ■ Department for International Development: Written Questions

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[39699\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when she plans to respond to Question 15079 asked by the hon Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston on 12 February 2020.

**James Duddridge:**

Due to a parliamentary system error, this PQ on East Africa Locusts remained unpublished. We have answered Question 15079 today.

#### ■ Developing Countries: Coronavirus

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[38949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 35046 on Developing Countries: Coronavirus, when the impact assessment will be completed; and if she will publish the findings of that assessment.

**James Duddridge:**

The nature of the Covid-19 pandemic means that a number of factors continue to interact in ways that are difficult to predict with certainty. These include the duration and severity of the pandemic, the intensity and efficacy of containment efforts, the extent of supply chain disruptions, commodity price levels and many other uncertainties. As a result, DFID will be continuously assessing the economic impacts on an ongoing basis, working with our partners to understand the real-time challenges facing workers and farmers and supporting the most vulnerable through our response.

## ■ Developing Countries: Food Supply

**Afzal Khan:** [\[39700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what additional support her Department is providing to countries in the Global South at risk of acute food insecurity as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

**James Duddridge:**

The UK is repurposing programmes in agriculture, social protection and humanitarian assistance to tackle the factors driving COVID-19 induced food insecurity. We are a major funder of existing multilateral programmes in these areas, including the recent Food and Agriculture Organisation £7.5 million contribution to fight the locust plague in East Africa. We have committed £15 million to the World Food Programme's recent urgent appeals. In all of these we continue to put the poorest and most marginalised at the heart of our programmes to address the underlying causes of chronic hunger.

## ■ Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria

**Stephen Doughty:** [\[39573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when she or ministers in her Department last met Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund for HIV, TB and Malaria; and what steps she is taking to ensure continued support for the Global Fund's work.

**Wendy Morton:**

The most recent meeting between Peter Sands and UK Ministers was with the Secretary of State for International Development's predecessor at the Global Fund Sixth Replenishment Conference in Lyon on 10 October 2019. The UK is a strong supporter of the Global Fund and the second largest donor to the Sixth Replenishment.

## ■ Israel: Palestinians

**Dr Matthew Offord:** [\[38897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 34965 on Israel: Palestinians, which organisations (a) distributed funds and (b) have received UK funds from the People to People programme.

**James Cleverly:**

Our three-year People to People programme aimed to bring together Israelis and Palestinians to cooperate on issues which can have a positive impact on both communities, helping to build understanding between people on both sides of the conflict in support of a peaceful, negotiated resolution.

Our programme was implemented by Search for Common Ground, who delivered some activities directly and worked through partners in areas requiring specialist expertise. These partners were: the Jerusalem Intercultural Centre, the Musalaha network, and the Al-Quds Public Health School.

**■ Overseas Aid: Coronavirus****Preet Kaur Gill:** [39698]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much Official Development Assistance has been (a) committed and (b) distributed to tackle the covid-19 pandemic.

**Wendy Morton:**

The UK is at the forefront of the global response and has publicly committed up to £744 million of UK aid. Following agreements and disbursement schedules DFID has disbursed £132.5 million to date. This does not include substantial spend through existing programmes.

**■ Overseas Aid: Government Departments****Stephen Doughty:** [39575]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what Official Development Assistance qualifying spending over £1 million she has (a) authorised, (b) suspended and (c) transferred to other Government Departments since 15 January 2020.

**Wendy Morton:**

Dev Tracker (<https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/>) publishes all our approved programming and disbursements, all of which flow from Secretary of State (or via her delegated approval). Ministers have made no decisions yet on suspension of activities. It is too early to catch changes to our planned spending for 2020/21 on our management information systems.

Pursuant to my answer on 16 March, the Department will provide details of all budget transfers to other Government Departments in our Memorandum to the International Development Committee on the publication of the department's Main Supply Estimate.

**TRANSPORT****■ Roads: Accidents****Sir Mike Penning:** [38878]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the timescale is for publishing his Department's review of the effectiveness of red lights for roadside recovery operators; and if he will make a statement.

**Rachel Maclean:**

The Government confirmed its intention to review available evidence on whether a more flexible approach might be appropriate to allowing the use of red flashing lamps by road recovery operators.

The Government is committed to improving road safety, and the Department is currently tendering this independent review through a competitive process. It is

expected that the contract will be awarded in approximately three months and, subject to the tenders received, the results could be available four months later. The report will be published following completion.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### ■ Child Maintenance Service: Staff

**Kate Green:** [\[39644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff employed in the Child Maintenance Service have been redeployed to other duties in her Department since 1 March 2020.

**Mims Davies:**

Within CMG we made 2886 available to support benefit activities, of which 1629 have been trained and deployed. The balance are currently unavailable due to leave relating to Covid-19.

### ■ Children: Maintenance

**Marsha De Cordova:** [\[39765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made on the effect of changes to Child Maintenance Service payments on single mothers during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mims Davies:**

*[Holding answer 29 April 2020]:* The Government recognises that as with other households, the income of many separated parents is being impacted by the public health emergency and some receiving parents may receive less maintenance as a result of a paying parent's drop in income.

We are however clear that no parent should be using this time as an excuse not to pay what they owe. Those found to be abusing the system at this difficult time could find themselves subject to the full extent of our enforcement powers once the emergency passes.

We have made a number changes to the welfare system to ensure people are receiving the support they need. These include increasing the standard rate of Universal Credit and working tax credit for this year by around £1000 per year. People who need money urgently continue to be able to access up to a month's Universal Credit advance upfront by applying online. In addition, Statutory Sick Pay now applies from day one, rather than the fourth day of illness. We are increasing in the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants so that it covers the cheapest third of local rents – 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 the 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 coronavirus outbreak.

## ■ Universal Credit

**Helen Hayes:**

[\[39735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent estimate she has made of the length of the waiting time for universal credit; and what steps she is taking to increase the number of staff available to provide support for universal credit claimants during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Mims Davies:**

The Department is doing all we can to deal with exceptional levels of demand. Our priority is ensuring people get their benefit payments and that we can continue to support those who need them most. The Department has mobilised robust business continuity plans to ensure we can do just that.

We are already redeploying 10,000 staff from other parts of DWP and are also recruiting additional staff to assist with the processing of claims, including support from other government departments and the private sector.

We have also introduced new processes to ease pressure on waiting times for identity verification over the phone and other processes. People making new claims for Universal Credit no longer need to call the Department as part of the process. Once they have completed their online application we will call them if we need to check any of the information they have given us.

These changes are making a real difference with at least 93% of claimants who applied for Universal Credit on 16 March receiving their first payments in full and on time.

## ■ Universal Credit: Coronavirus

**Margaret Greenwood:**

[\[29225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Budget Statement of 11 March 2020, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of removing the universal credit minimum income floor for self-employed people that are not (a) self-isolating and (b) directly affected by covid-19 but see their income fall as a result of that pandemic.

**Mims Davies:**

We are temporarily relaxing the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) for all self-employed UC claimants affected by the economic impact of COVID-19 from 6 April, for the duration of the outbreak. This means a drop in earnings due to sickness or self-isolation or as a result of the economic impact of the outbreak will be reflected in claimants' awards.

**■ Universal Credit: Scotland****Owen Thompson:**[\[39631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff are providing telephone support for people in Scotland trying to apply for universal credit; and what the average call waiting time is for those applicants.

**Mims Davies:**

We are unable to extract data for calls from claimants in Scotland from national data.

As of 24 April 2020 the Department has around 7.5 thousand full time equivalent (FTE) staff taking calls from claimants in Great Britain, this includes contracted supplier resource and DWP colleagues who also case manage claims. For week commencing 20 April 2020 the combined average waiting time for all Universal Credit service options on the national Freephone Universal Credit helpline was 22 minutes and 58 seconds, for the Department's supplier (Serco) who handle inbound calls for new claims this was under one minute.

People making new claims for Universal Credit in fact no longer need to call the Department as part of the process and we have communicated that widely. Once they have completed their online application we will call them if we need to check any of the information they have given us. We have also introduced new processes to ease pressure on waiting times for identity verification over the phone and other processes.

The Department's priority is to continue to ensure those who are entitled to benefit receive the support they need at a time when new claims for Universal Credit are at an unprecedented level.