



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 4 May 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:11 P.M., 04 May 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****■ Bankruptcy: Coronavirus****Thangam Debonnaire:** [\[39531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he plans to waive bankruptcy fees for people who become bankrupt as a result of the economic effects of the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

Government has no plans at this time to waive bankruptcy fees.

■ Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme: Hertfordshire**Daisy Cooper:** [\[37970\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many businesses (a) registered and (b) operating in Hertfordshire have applied for a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan; and how many of those businesses have been awarded funding from that loan scheme.

Paul Scully:

As of 21 April, over £2.8bn worth of loans have been issued under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, to over 16,600 businesses. We are working with the British Business Bank, HM Treasury and lenders on regular and transparent data publication going forward.

■ Energy: Meters**Thangam Debonnaire:** [\[39824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what (a) financial and (b) practical help he is providing to ensure that (a) people (i) self-isolating and in a (ii) vulnerable or shielded group and (b) other people who use coin-operated energy meters are able to maintain power supply during the lockdown.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The Department reached a voluntary agreement with all domestic energy suppliers to a set of principles to support energy customers impacted by COVID-19. These principles include support for prepayment meter customers, who primarily use electronic tokens, keys or cards to top up their meters. Based on individual circumstances, the support available to prepayment meter customers could include:

- extending discretionary/ friendly credit or sending out a pre-loaded top up card;
- enabling customers to nominate a trusted third party to be able to pick up discretionary credit sent to a shop on their behalf;

- switching smart prepayment meters into credit mode, or extending non-disconnection periods, and;
- taking reasonable steps to contact prepayment customers with advice on what to do in the event of self-isolation.

Many energy suppliers have provided additional support for their customers.

■ **Green Deal Scheme: Misrepresentation**

Alan Brown:

[\[39544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many new complaints his Department received on the mis-selling of Green Deal loans by Home Energy and Lifestyle Management Ltd (HELMS) in each of the last 12 months.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The number of mis-selling complaints received by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy regarding Home Energy & Lifestyle Management Ltd in each of the last 12 months are shown in the table below.

MONTH	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
May 2019	10
June 2019	6
July 2019	10
August 2019	3
September 2019	3
October 2019	3
November 2019	9
December 2019	5
January 2020	5
February 2020	8
March 2020	7
April 2020	1

■ **Home Energy and Lifestyle Management: Complaints**

Alan Brown:

[\[39545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many intention notices have been issued by his Department in response to complaints of the

mis-selling of Green Deal loans by Home Energy and Lifestyle Management Ltd (HELMS); and how many intention notices remain outstanding.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

As of 27th April 2020, there are 179 outstanding appeals, relating to the company Home Energy & Lifestyle Management Ltd (HELMS), which have been referred to my Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Ninety-seven Intention Notices have been issued in respect of the outstanding HELMS appeals.

■ **Postal Services: Coronavirus**

John Spellar:

[\[40974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department was consulted by Royal Mail prior to its suspension of letter deliveries on Saturdays during the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

The Universal Service Obligation is set out in the Postal Services Act 2011. Ministers have no role in temporary changes to the service level.

Under section 33 of the Postal Services Act 2011, it is for Royal Mail and Ofcom to manage temporary changes to the service level, such as in an emergency.

■ **Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund**

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[39565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending eligibility for the Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant Fund to include all businesses in that sector, irrespective of the premises from which those businesses operate.

Paul Scully:

Businesses are eligible for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund if they are based in England with a property that has a rateable value of up to £51,000 and is wholly or mainly being used for the purposes of retail, hospitality and/or leisure. The Government is also providing an unprecedented package of wider support available to businesses in these sectors.

Stephen Hammond:

[\[41408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans he has to implement a London weighting to increase the £51,000 rateable value limit for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund.

Paul Scully:

There are no plans to introduce a London weighting into the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Fund. The Department is in regular contact with local authorities to understand the impact that the scheme is having on the ground.

Stephen Hammond: [\[41411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether event hire companies that pay business rates are eligible for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund during the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

Businesses in England that would have been in receipt of the Expanded Retail Discount (which covers retail, hospitality and leisure) on 11 March with a rateable value of less than £51,000 are eligible for support via the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund.

The Government has published guidance on the types of businesses that would be eligible for the Expanded Retail Discount. The list is not exhaustive and it is for local authorities to determine whether particular properties not listed are broadly similar in nature to those that are included and, if so, to consider them eligible for the relief.

In addition, on the 1 May 2020 the Business Secretary announced that a further up to £617 million is being made available to local authorities as a discretionary fund so that they can address cases that are out-of-scope from the Small Business Grants Fund and Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund, including business sectors that weren't previously covered and businesses that occupy space and pay rent and rates through a landlord.

■ Self-employed: Coronavirus

Lilian Greenwood: [\[902141\]](#)

What estimate he has made of the number of self-employed people who do not qualify for covid-19 support.

Yasmin Qureshi: [\[902142\]](#)

What estimate he has made of the number of self-employed people who do not qualify for covid-19 support.

Caroline Lucas: [\[902174\]](#)

If he will seek representations from self-employed workers on the effectiveness of the Self-employment Income Support Scheme.

Paul Scully:

We have prioritised helping the greatest number of people as quickly as possible and it is difficult to come up with reliable criteria that apply to all the relevant sectors of the economy. We are aware some people will not be eligible for the scheme, but they may still benefit from a number of other support schemes available.

The Department is engaging a wide range of stakeholders in relation to Covid-19, and in addition to the Business Secretary's regular meeting with business representative organisations, I recently hosted a call with stakeholders on support for the self-employed and will continue to engage on the issue.

■ Small Business Grants Fund: Coronavirus

Alex Norris: [\[902140\]](#)

Whether the Government has made an estimate of the number of businesses that do not qualify for the Government's covid-19 grant schemes.

Paul Scully:

Local Authorities are responsible for identifying and contacting eligible businesses for either the Small Business Grants or the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants. No assessment has been made of the number of businesses not qualifying for the schemes; rather we estimate about 1 million businesses will benefit.

I am personally calling local authorities that have reported slow progress to offer any support they need to get grants out to businesses as soon as possible.

■ Takeovers

Bill Esterson: [\[39650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effectiveness of legislation on hostile takeovers.

Bill Esterson: [\[39651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the potential for hostile takeovers of UK companies.

Paul Scully:

Under the Enterprise Act 2002, the Government may intervene in certain takeovers for three public interest reasons – national security, media plurality and financial stability.

In December 2019, the Queen's Speech lobby pack confirmed the Government's intention to legislate to "strengthen the Government's existing powers to scrutinise and intervene in business transactions to protect national security".

The Government continues to monitor the market closely during the Covid-19 pandemic.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Brexit: Negotiations

Dr Matthew Offord: [\[39669\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what recent progress he has made in negotiations with the EU.

Penny Mordaunt:

Last week the UK and EU engaged in a full and constructive negotiating round, via videoconference. A Written Ministerial Statement ([HCWS209](#)) made on Tuesday 28 April 2020 provides full details.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control**Kim Johnson:**[\[902107\]](#)

What plans the Government has to modify social distancing measures.

Amanda Milling:

Thanks to our collective national resolve, the Social Distancing measures we introduced are continuing to save lives. These measures are kept under constant review, with a formal review point every three weeks.

As the Prime Minister said on Thursday 30 April, he will be setting out a comprehensive plan this week. We have set out five tests which we will need to be satisfied with, before that plan can be put into action.

■ Coronavirus: Ethnic Groups**Shabana Mahmood:**[\[40546\]](#)

To ask the Minister the Cabinet Office, what recent assessment he has made of whether social distancing measures implemented by the Government in response to covid-19 disproportionately put black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities at an increased risk of contracting covid-19.

Chloe Smith:

We share concerns that COVID-19 may be adversely affecting BAME communities. That is why the Chief Medical Officer has commissioned Public Health England to review the impact on health that COVID-19 has on those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The findings of this review will help to inform what further action we can take to better protect these communities.

■ National Security Council**Conor McGinn:**[\[39626\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on what dates the National Security Council has met since 24 July 2019; who chaired those meetings; and which Ministers were present.

Penny Mordaunt:

Details of the National Security Council's membership is publicly available on [GOV.UK](#). It is a long established precedent that information about the discussions that have taken place in Cabinet and its Committees, and how often they have met, is not shared publicly.

■ Press Conferences: Coronavirus**Marsha De Cordova:** [39766]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what reasons a British Sign Language interpreter is not provided in the Government's daily press briefings on covid-19; and if he will take steps to ensure that a British Sign Language interpreter is included in future briefings.

Rachael Maskell: [41529]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that the daily Government briefing on the covid-19 outbreak has live British Sign Language interpretation.

Chloe Smith:

It is vital that key information is accessible to all. Since the daily press briefings began, British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation has been available on the national broadcaster. The BBC provides BSL interpretation at the daily No10 press conference via its News channel, Youtube channel and iPlayer. This is available free to air.

■ Public Health: Coronavirus**Hywel Williams:** [40517]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department is responsible for co-ordinating the covid-19 public information campaign in (a) Wales, (b) Scotland and (c) Northern Ireland.

Hywel Williams: [40518]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much the Government has spent on placing advertisements in (a) national Welsh media, (b) local and regional Welsh media and (c) Welsh language media since the start of the covid-19 public information campaign.

Chloe Smith:

The Government has developed a strong national campaign across all four nations of the UK to provide information and reassurance to the public about COVID-19.

This is a cross-government campaign involving multiple departments. It is being coordinated centrally by the Cabinet Office who are working closely with the Devolved Administrations, including with the Welsh Government to ensure campaign materials are translated for use in Wales.

The Cabinet Office publishes expenditure, including on public information campaigns, on a rolling monthly basis on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) as part of routine government transparency arrangements.

■ Subversion: Russia**Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[40706\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to publish the report by the Intelligence and Security Committee on Russian involvement in UK democracy.

Chloe Smith:

We acknowledge the public's interest in the publication of the report, however the report itself is the property of the independent ISC. As such it is not for the Government to publish ISC reports; it is for the ISC to lay them before Parliament. Once a new Committee has been established, it will be up to them to choose when they wish to publish it.

Members are appointed by the Houses of Parliament (having been nominated by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition). The Committee is being formed in the normal way and as quickly as current circumstances allow.

DEFENCE**■ Armed Forces: Coronavirus****Jamie Stone:**[\[40728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the evidence base is for the decision to issue the armed services with insect repellent containing Citriodiol as part of the enhanced force health protection measures during the covid-19 pandemic.

James Heappey:

I will write to the hon. Member in response to his letter to the Defence Secretary on the same subject, and place a copy in Library of the House.

John Healey:[\[40985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many military personnel have been tested for covid-19.

James Heappey:

Defence personnel are included within the national testing programme established by Department for Health and Social Care and the National Health Service.

The central collation of data on COVID-19 testing of military personnel started from 18 April. Between 18 April and 29 April, a minimum of 1,222 military personnel were tested for COVID-19.

John Healey:[\[40987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will place in the House of Commons Library a copy of any advice his Department has (a) undertaken and (b) commissioned on the use of citriodiol as a treatment for covid-19.

James Heappey:

I will write to the hon. Member about this, and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

John Healey:[\[40988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many military personnel have received citriodiol as protection against covid-19; and how much his Department has spent on that product.

James Heappey:

Defence arranged for an initial supply of 36 bottles of Citriodiol to be provided to each of the 10 Joint Military Commands, at a total cost of £1,725.84. They now have the freedom to order supplies directly. It is not possible to confirm the number of personnel who have used the product.

■ Armed Forces: Deployment**Robert Halfon:**[\[39640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans for armed forces personnel stationed overseas to return to the UK to help in tackling the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heappey:

Supporting the Government's response to COVID-19 continues to be Defence's main effort. There are nearly 3,000 members of the Armed Forces deployed in the UK to assist Civil Authorities with the response. They are part of over 19,000 Defence personnel in the COVID Support Force stood ready to support. The availability of UK-based personnel means that there is currently no need to return personnel stationed overseas to support the COVID-19 effort in the UK.

■ Arms Trade: Saudi Arabia**Zarah Sultana:**[\[39815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what effect the order by the Court of Appeal in June 2019 not to issue new licences for the export of equipment to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen has had on the Government's obligations to Saudi Arabia under existing Government-to-Government agreements for the supply of military equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Jeremy Quin:

The Government's obligations to supply military equipment and support to Saudi Arabia under the existing Government-to-Government arrangements are fulfilled under contract by the designated prime contractor, BAE Systems. Under these contracts, it is the responsibility of the company to submit an export licence application for all exports of arms and controlled military goods, which are considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Government continues to act fully in line with the decision of the Court of Appeal.

■ Army: Coronavirus

Gavin Robinson:

[\[40641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the 77th Brigade has been deployed as part of the response to the covid-19 outbreak in the UK.

James Heapey:

A team from the Ministry of Defence, including members of the Army's 77th Brigade, is currently supporting the UK Government's Rapid Response Unit in the Cabinet Office and are working to counter dis/misinformation about COVID-19. Additionally, 77th Brigade planners, including from the Brigade's Engineer and Logistic Staff Corps, have also deployed as part of Defence's wider support to the Government's response to this national emergency.

■ Defence: Contracts

Caroline Lucas:

[\[39616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to Sir Stephen Lovegrove's Covid-19 guidance to arms companies dated 27 March 2020, which defence contractors qualify as key workers.

Jeremy Quin:

The Covid-19 guidance provided by the Permanent Secretary for Defence on 27 March drew contractors attention to the Government advice that some Defence contractors, who are unable to work from home, may qualify as key workers and encouraged contractors to engage with the Ministry of Defence.

■ HMS Queen Elizabeth: Coronavirus

John Healey:

[\[40986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, by what date the crew of HMS Queen Elizabeth will have been tested for covid-19.

James Heapey:

All members of the ship's company of HMS Queen Elizabeth were tested for COVID-19 on Monday 27 April. The ship sailed for a planned period of Operational Sea Training on 29 April.

■ Protective Clothing: Armed Forces

Robert Halfon:

[\[39639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that British Armed Forces servicemen and women stationed overseas have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment and medical supplies to protect them from covid-19.

James Heapey:

Defence has taken several steps to protect those serving overseas from COVID-19 while ensuring that critical outputs can still be delivered, including reducing its

international footprint by extracting non-essential personnel to the UK. For those personnel who remain overseas, Defence is committed to ensuring they have the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medical supplies required to conduct their duties safely. Mirroring the national approach, Defence has developed a system of centralised control of PPE to continue to ensure no significant impact on critical Defence outputs due to a shortfall in PPE.

■ Russia: Military Intervention

Mark Pritchard: [\[39518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will offer additional defence support to his Georgian counterpart in respect of the continued borderization of that country's sovereign territory by Russia.

James Heapey:

The UK remains concerned by the political and human rights situation in the Georgian breakaway regions and is unwavering in support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

We were disturbed by recent reports of Russian forces and the de-facto authorities in the breakaway region of South Ossetia working to create "borders" within Georgia. Through the British Embassy in Tbilisi and in statements at the Council of Europe and the OSCE we have been clear that such actions must stop.

We remain completely committed to our bilateral defence relationship with Georgia, and fully support Georgia's NATO aspirations. We will continue to support the Georgian MOD to enhance their capabilities to assure a better level of security and resilience to defend their own state.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Arts: Coronavirus

Jessica Morden: [\[40537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what support the Government is providing to the exhibition and events industries that have lost revenue as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

We are aware that multiple aspects of the exhibition and events industries have been significantly impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. The Tourism Minister has engaged regularly with the sector over the last few months, for example by convening a panel of Senior Leaders from across the industry and meeting with the Events Industry Board.

We have announced unprecedented support for business and workers to protect them against the current economic emergency. This includes employee support, business rates relief and grants for eligible hospitality and leisure businesses, plus

£330bn worth of government backed and guaranteed loans. The Chancellor also announced a Bounce Back loan scheme to help small businesses access loans of up to £50,000, with a 100% government-backed guarantee for lenders.

The Welsh Government is responsible for any support tied to business rates or council tax in Wales.

We will continue to engage with the Devolved Administrations to support business events across the UK during the recovery period, as set out in last year's International Business Events Action Plan.

■ Charities: Coronavirus

Julie Elliott:

[\[41044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the financial situation of charities not eligible for Government support packages during the covid-19 outbreak; and what plans the Government has to support those charities.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Government is aware that charities are experiencing financial challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic, whilst dealing with increased demand for services. Organisations that are not supporting the response to Covid-19 will have access to the range of horizontal economic support measures announced by HM Treasury in March, which are available across all sectors equally, such as the furloughing scheme or VAT deferral.

We will continue to work closely with the sector to assess how we can further support charities in doing their important work.

Henry Smith:

[\[41428\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture Media & Sport, whether charity employees furloughed on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme can still participate in fundraising activities for their employer.

Mr John Whittingdale:

HMT guidance on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme confirms that furloughed employees can take part in volunteer work, provided that it does not provide services or generate revenue for their employer. The system has been carefully set up to encourage employees whose working is not required due to social distancing to take up a unique opportunity to support the frontline delivery of essential support services.

However, the scheme is not designed to help charities cut the costs of delivering vital services. Where staff are needed in organisations to provide vital services and help vulnerable people through the Covid-19 crisis, these organisations will be eligible to apply for the new £750m funding package that was recently announced.

■ Digital Technology: Economic Growth

Chi Onwurah:

[40601]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 24 February 2020 to Question 1988 on Regional Digital Growth, what assessment he has made of the potential variable economic effect of each intervention on each region of the UK.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Department's assessment of economic effects, especially in relation to regional and wider impacts, are completed in line with [Green Book guidance](#) issued by HM Treasury on how to appraise policies, programmes and projects. The Department routinely develops internal and published analysis (broken down by locality where relevant) for its interventions. Previous Impact Assessments for DCMS interventions can be [found here](#).

Furthermore, DCMS has published:

1. [DCMS Sectors Economic Estimates 2017](#) : Regional GVA (Gross Value Added) - which reports the regional GVA by DCMS sectors
2. A cost-benefit analysis of Superfast Broadband in August 2018 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-economic-impact-and-public-value-of-the-superfast-broadband-programme>, Annex E). The evaluation includes effects by devolved administration. The evaluation found that the programme led to a net increase in national economic output (GVA) of £690m by June 2016.

■ Gambling: Children and Vulnerable Adults

Stephanie Peacock:

[41136]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the UK gambling industry on the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government has made clear that we expect operators to be aware of the potential risk for increased gambling harm as people spend much more time at home and online. I have written and spoken to operators to remind them that they should be particularly responsible regarding player protections and advertising at this time, as have the Gambling Commission and the Advertising Standards Authority. We are continuing to monitor the situation carefully.

The government has welcomed the '10 commitments' launched by the Betting and Gaming Council to ensure safer gambling practices amongst its members. Following engagement and correspondence with the government and the Commission, BGC members have also pledged for the next six weeks to replace all slot, casino and bingo advertising on TV and radio with safer gambling adverts or to donate the slots to charity, and their online advertising will focus more on safer gambling measures.

The Gambling Commission has published Covid specific guidance to customers about staying safe when gambling online, including on how to limit ad exposure on social media and access support if needed. This all comes against a backdrop of continuing government and regulator action, including the introduction of tighter age and identity verification requirements, a ban on credit card gambling and the introduction of Gamstop integration as a condition of holding a licence.

We continue to hold operators to account if they fail to adequately protect consumers at this difficult time and will not hesitate to step in if that becomes necessary.

■ **Gambling: Coronavirus**

Owen Thompson:

[\[40686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the frequency of targeted adverts for online gambling sites on social media channels during the covid-19 outbreak.

Stephanie Peacock:

[\[41135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department has taken steps to restrict targeted online advertising by gambling businesses during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government, Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), and Gambling Commission do not hold data on the frequency at which targeted advertising is shown to or seen by social media users. The nature of targeted advertising makes it difficult to generate accurate figures as the number of targeted gambling advertisements varies considerably between users.

Targeted gambling advertising on social media platforms, like all forms of gambling advertising, is subject to strict controls. Rules on content mean that these adverts must never seek to exploit or appeal to children or vulnerable people, and rules on placement mean that they must never be targeted at these groups. In October 2019 the Gambling Commission issued a challenge to industry to make better use of advertising technology to target away from vulnerable people. Following this, it was announced in April that industry has committed to make better and more consistent use of customer data to ensure paid-for advertising is targeted away from vulnerable people on social media platforms.

The government is aware of concerns that the anxiety and isolation experienced as a result of measures in place to curb the spread of covid 19 may increase the risk of gambling-related harms for some people. In recognition of this, the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage has written to operators to urge them to increase the prominence of safer gambling messaging in all adverts during the current period, including online. In addition, the ASA has written to operators warning them that they must continue to abide by existing rules and must not look to exploit the current situation.

Owen Thompson:[\[40689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment his Department has made of whether there has been an increased risk of problem gambling among (a) adults and (b) children and young people through in-game purchases in video games during the covid-19 outbreak; and what steps his Department is taking to mitigate such risks.

Caroline Dinenage:

The government has no evidence of a causative link between in-games purchases and problem gambling, and we have no evidence that this has changed during the covid-19 outbreak. However, we continue to monitor the situation closely.

The government takes concerns around gambling-like behaviour in video games very seriously. We have committed to a review of the Gambling Act, with a particular focus on tackling issues around loot boxes. Further details will be set out in the government response to the DCMS Select Committee's report on Immersive and Addictive Technologies which will be published shortly.

We also continue to work with industry and the age ratings bodies to encourage the use of parental controls that can disable or limit spending on devices, and welcomed the launch in January 2020 of the games industry's Get Smart About P.L.A.Y. campaign encouraging parents to use parental controls and take an active role in their children's gaming. We also welcome PEGI's decision to introduce a new 'paid random items' content label.

■ Gambling: Video Games**Owen Thompson:**[\[40690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, when he plans to publish a response to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee report on Immersive and Addictive Technology, published on 12 September 2019, HC 1846.

Caroline Dinenage:

The government response setting out further details and our planned next steps across a range of areas will be published shortly.

■ Internet: Safety**Chi Onwurah:**[\[41450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the level of risk of harm posed to children who are spending more time online as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Caroline Dinenage:

We know more people will be going online as a result of the Covid-19 lock down, including school age children. The internet can help children stay connected and access educational resources. However, it could also place them at greater risk of harm online.

On 22 April, I hosted a roundtable with child safety organisations to hear directly from them what trends they are seeing online during this period and discuss how government and civil society can work together to support children, parents and carers.

On 23rd April, DCMS published new online safety advice on how to stay safe online during the Covid-19 outbreak, with a particular focus on supporting parents and carers to protect children.

The Government is firmly committed to making the UK the safest place to be online, and we are working at pace to introduce Online Harms legislation.

■ **Local Broadcasting: Coronavirus**

Thangam Debonnaire:

[39540]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will increase the Community Radio Fund for 2020-21 to provide additional support to community radio stations experiencing financial hardship as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

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.

■ **Mobile Phones: Coronavirus**

Julie Elliott:

[40606]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he has taken to assist people who use pay as you go data and calls packages and who face increased costs for those services as a result of the covid-19 outbreak and the closure of face-to-face services.

Matt Warman:

In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, my Department has agreed a package of measures with the UK's major fixed and mobile providers to protect vulnerable consumers, and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from Covid-19.

In relation to mobile services, all the signatory providers have agreed to offer new packages to support vulnerable consumers, including free data boosts and free calls from mobiles, and to support their customers in financial difficulties.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-agrees-measures-with-telecoms-companies-to-support-vulnerable-consumers-through-covid-19>

■ Mobile Phones: Remote Working**Dr Lisa Cameron:**[\[41075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring mobile network operators to supply people working from home with unlimited mobile data.

Matt Warman:

In response to Covid-19, my Department has already agreed a package of measures with the UK's major fixed and mobile providers in order to help and support vulnerable consumers, and those who may be vulnerable, with their connectivity needs.

In recognition of more people working from home, signatory companies have agreed to lift data caps on all their customers' fixed broadband connections. To assist those relying on mobile networks, companies have also agreed to provide new generous offers, including free voice and data boosts to their mobile customers. All signatories have also committed to working with customers who find it difficult to pay their bill as a result of Covid-19 to ensure that they are treated fairly and appropriately supported.

■ Sanitary Protection: VAT**Paul Girvan:**[\[40737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what (a) role and (b) responsibilities his Department has apportioned to the Department of Communities in Northern Ireland in relation to the Tampon Tax Fund; and if he will publish documentation on that role and those responsibilities.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Tampon Tax Fund is a UK-wide fund. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport works in consultation with the government of the devolved administrations, including the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, to deliver the Tampon Tax Fund.

The 2020/21 round of the Tampon Tax Fund was launched on 16th March 2020. The Department for Communities in Northern Ireland will be asked to provide additional feedback on how applications looking to deliver projects in Northern Ireland fit within their priorities, as part of a wider assessment process. The Department for Communities in Northern Ireland also holds the grant agreements for Tampon Tax Fund projects that are delivered predominantly in Northern Ireland and will continue to do so for the 2020/21 round of funding.

■ Sports: Coronavirus**Alison McGovern:**[\[37625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the Government has taken to support the sporting sector during the covid-19 emergency.

Nigel Huddleston:

We recognise the impact that covid-19 is having on the sport sector, and we are continuing to engage with sporting organisations to understand how it is affecting them and provide support.

The Chancellor has already announced a host of measures to help businesses, with £330 billion worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses across the UK. In addition, our national sports council, Sport England, has also announced £195 million of funding to help sport and physical activity organisations deal with the short and long term effects of the pandemic.

Dr James Davies:[\[40680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will take steps to work with the devolved administrations to support and protect sports teams which are in financial difficulty as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

Sport is a devolved matter, but we remain in close contact with the Devolved Administrations on a range of ways to support sport at this time, We are seeing fantastic levels of cooperation between all political parties and governments as we work together to tackle this crisis.

The Government has announced an unprecedented package of support to protect businesses across the UK, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (covering 80% of furloughed employees wages up to a cap of £2,500 per month), and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (up to £2,500 per month in grants for eligible self-employed workers). These support measures are open to businesses across the UK and in every sector, including Sport.

■ Telecommunications: Coronavirus**Julie Elliott:**[\[40605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the number of people in the community who do not own telecommunication devices in order to contact friends and family during lockdown measures imposed as a result of the covid-19 outbreak; and what plans the Government has to support those people.

Caroline Dinéage:

Ofcom report that 94% of individuals 16+ year olds in the UK use a mobile phone and 87% of UK households have internet access. The government has already agreed a set of commitments with telecoms companies to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from Covid-19. The government is working with the NHS, schools, local authorities and charities to further address digital exclusion, including the Devices Dot Now Campaign.

Attachments:

1. [OFCOM NATIONS & REGIONS TECHNOLOGY TRACKER](#) - 2019 [technology-tracker-2019-uk-data-tables.pdf]
2. [Online Nation 2019 Report](#) [online-nation-summary.pdf]

■ Young People**Nadia Whittome:** **[41210]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of establishing a Minister for young people to represent the perspectives and concerns of that age group.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Decisions on Ministerial remits and duties lie with the Prime Minister. A range of government departments (including DCMS) have policies that affect young people, and that is why the government believes there should be a cross-departmental approach.

This government is committed to supporting young people to have a voice on issues and concerns that matter to them, at both a local and national level. DCMS leads this work, and funds the British Youth Council (BYC) to deliver a youth voice programme including the UK Youth Parliament, the Make Your Mark ballot, the Youth Select Committee, The Government's Youth Steering Group and the Young Inspectors group.

Officials are working collaboratively across Whitehall, with the youth sector, and young people to ensure that we support our young people during and post Covid-19, and that their voices are heard.

EDUCATION**■ Assessments****Helen Hayes:** **[41554]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he is taking steps to ensure that Ofqual and other exam boards are prepared to provide replacement GCSE, A-level, AS-level and BTEC exams in the Autumn term 2020 for students who wish to sit those exams.

Nick Gibb:

I can confirm that we are working with the independent qualifications regulator, Ofqual, and the exam boards to ensure that students have the opportunity to sit exams in the autumn.

■ Assessments: Coronavirus

Kate Green:

[\[39645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether examination boards will be required to refund schools for fees paid for examinations that have been cancelled as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department recognises that schools and colleges want clarity on examination fees following the announcement that examinations will not take place in schools and colleges this summer. The Department and the examination boards are working together to ensure that schools and colleges are provided with further information as soon as possible. The examination boards are looking at the costs that will be saved this summer, alongside new work they need to undertake on the process for gathering examination centre grades and providing calculated grades to students.

Schools and colleges will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure. This will ensure that they are able to continue to meet their regular financial commitments. We expect schools and colleges to pay any due invoices, as the process is worked through.

■ Assessments: Coronovirus

Layla Moran:

[\[41160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to halt the introduction of baseline English and Maths assessments for reception children in England in the 2020-21 academic year as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department understands the challenging circumstances schools are facing and is working closely with our delivery partners to keep progress towards the reception baseline assessment under regular review. We are gathering feedback from stakeholders on a range of options and will be providing further guidance to schools in the summer term.

■ Children

Seema Malhotra:

[\[39622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will (a) bring forward a Comprehensive Children's Recovery Plan and (b) provide ringfenced resources for schools, local authorities, civil society, and children's service providers.

Vicky Ford:

The government is doing everything it can to ensure that all parts of the education system are getting the guidance and support they need to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and protect the most vulnerable groups. The government has already announced it will make extra funding available for schools to cover the unique challenges and financial costs of the COVID-19 outbreak. The money will cover

specific unforeseen additional costs up to the end of the 2019 to 2020 summer term including £3.2 billion for local authorities.

We know that there will be many challenges across the sector, and we are working hard to mitigate the impact on education, childcare and children's social care and prepare to help the sector recover from the crisis.

We are working with schools, teaching unions and other partners to make sure we have the right guidance and support in place once we are ready to re-open education settings.

■ Children: Coronavirus

Tim Farron:

[40545]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Government's social distancing measures in response to covid-19, what steps his Department plans to take to protect public safety when children return to school.

Nick Gibb:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has made it clear that schools will only reopen when the scientific advice indicates that it is the right time to do so, based on five key tests.

The Department is working with the sector to ensure we have the right guidance and the right support in place once we are ready to reopen schools, based on the latest scientific advice.

Our latest guidance on implementing social distancing in schools and childcare settings in relation to COVID-19 is set out below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings> .

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

Richard Burgon:

[41551]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of children who do not have access to a computer or laptop for their school work during the covid-19 lockdown.

Nick Gibb:

The Department has considered the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and will ensure they get the support they need. To make remote education accessible to pupils while schools are closed, the Department is providing laptops and tablets to disadvantaged children who would otherwise not have access and are preparing for examinations in Year 10, receiving support from a social worker, including pre-school children, or are a care leaver.

Where care leavers, children with a social worker at secondary school and children in Year 10 do not have internet connections, we will be providing 4G internet hotspots so that they can learn at home.

To support householders who face challenges accessing an internet connection, the Government has brokered an agreement with all the major telecoms companies aimed at protecting the most vulnerable, as well as those who may become vulnerable due to COVID-19.

The Government is also working with telecoms companies to exempt educational resources from data charges, supporting families who rely on mobile data.

For those in rural areas or without a connection, schools will be able to draw on support from the BBC which is broadcasting lessons on television. Some of the BBC educational content is offline, via the red button, which disadvantaged pupils without digital devices or connectivity will still be able to access.

Schools may also choose to draw on the many resources offers which have been made by publishers across the country. The Department has published an initial list of high-quality online educational resources, which have been identified by some of the country's leading educational experts to help pupils to learn at home. The list is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources>.

■ Children: Day Care

Neil Coyle:

[39633]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure childcare options are accessible and flexible once the covid-19 social distancing measures are lifted.

Vicky Ford:

The government is committed to ensuring that vulnerable children and critical workers are able to access childcare places at this time, and that the sector is ready and able to support the country's recovery as social distancing measures are altered.

To help achieve this, the government has announced unprecedented support for businesses, including the early years sector, to protect against the impact of COVID-19. For childcare providers, this includes business rates relief for nurseries, a range of loans and grants, access to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for the proportion of their pay bill which could be considered to have been paid for from private income, access to the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and continued early years entitlement funding for local authorities. The government is monitoring the impact these measures are having and keeps all policies under review.

The Department for Education has published guidance for the early years sector on the eligibility criteria for this support, including the interaction between early years entitlements funding and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care#sector-specific-guidance>.

The department is having regular conversations with local government about the availability of childcare locally and will continue this as we move through the COVID-19 outbreak to recovery.

■ Children: Food

Chris Stephens: [R] [41091]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking in addition to the Holiday Activities and Food programme for safeguarding children's access to food during the summer holidays 2020.

Vicky Ford:

Responsibility for this policy area is devolved.

In England, the Holiday Activities and Food scheme is integral to our approach to provide healthy food to children over the summer and in 2019, our coordinators supported around 50,000 children. We are working with our 2020 coordinators to explore how support can be delivered in light of COVID-19.

In addition, the government continues to invest significantly each year on welfare benefits for people of working age, supporting people when they need it, including those who are out of work or on a low income. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the government has announced a package of temporary welfare measures. Taken together, these measures provide over £6.5bn of additional support through the welfare system for people affected by COVID-19

■ Children: Social Services

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [41053]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, on what date he informed the Children's Commissioner for England that children's social care regulations were being amended; and whether the Commissioner was able to contribute to those changes.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [41054]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, on what date his Department provided a copy of The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to the Children's Commissioner for England.

Vicky Ford:

The department shared a list of the children's social care regulation changes with the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) on 16 April 2020 and provided further detail of the changes in response to the OCC's questions.

The OCC has also commented on the revised COVID-19 guidance for local authorities on children's social care. The guidance provides information on the regulation changes and is due to be published shortly.

The department shared the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 with key stakeholders, including the Children's Commissioner, when they were published on 23 April 2020. The regulations and guidance will be under continuous review, in close co-operation with the sector.

■ Education: Coronavirus

Julie Elliott:

[\[41043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the quality of internet connectivity for statutory aged students on pupil premium who do not have exams this academic year; and what steps the Government is taking to support those students.

Rachael Maskell:

[\[41097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that children have access to a broadband connection to access virtual lessons during the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachael Maskell:

[\[41098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that children have access to (a) laptops, (b) desktops, (c) tablets and (d) other IT equipment to enable them to undertake virtual learning during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

To make remote education accessible to pupils while schools are closed, the Department is providing laptops and tablets to disadvantaged children who would otherwise not have access and are preparing for examination in Year 10, those receiving support from a social worker, including pre-school children, or are a care leaver.

Where care leavers, children with a social worker at secondary school and children in Year 10 do not have internet connections, we will be providing 4G internet hotspots so that they can learn at home.

To support householders who face challenges accessing an internet connection, the Government has brokered an agreement with all the major telecoms companies aimed at protecting the most vulnerable, as well as those who may become vulnerable due to COVID-19.

All the major telecoms companies have committed to providing support to their customers including on broadband, landline and mobile services, and ensuring that their customers in financial difficulties, due to circumstances arising from COVID-19, are supported and treated fairly.

We are also working with the major telecoms companies to make it easier for families who rely on mobile data to access online educational resources.

For those in rural areas or without a connection, schools will be able to draw on support from the BBC which is broadcasting lessons on television. Some of the BBC educational content is offline, via the red button, which disadvantaged pupils without digital devices or connectivity will still be able to access. Schools may also choose to draw on the many resources offers which have been made by publishers across the country. The Department has published an initial list of high quality online educational resources, which have been identified by some of the country's leading educational experts to help pupils to learn at home.

The list is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources>

■ Education: Internet

Dan Jarvis: **[40619]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the guidance published by his Department on 19 April 2020 entitled Remote education during coronavirus, what estimate he has made of the number of pupils that (a) will receive IT equipment and (b) have a reliable internet connection.

Dan Jarvis: **[40620]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the guidance published by his Department on 19 April 2020 entitled remote education, what estimate he has made of the number of children from low-income households that do not have access to (a) IT equipment and (b) a reliable internet connection that will not qualify for support.

Nick Gibb:

To make remote education accessible to pupils while schools are closed, the Department is providing laptops and tablets to disadvantaged children who would otherwise not have access and are preparing for examination in Year 10, receiving support from a social worker, including pre-school children, or are a care leaver.

Where care leavers, children with a social worker at secondary school and children in Year 10 do not have internet connections, we will also be providing 4G internet hotspots so that they can learn at home.

To support householders who face challenges accessing an internet connection, the Government has brokered an agreement with all the major telecoms companies aimed at protecting the most vulnerable, as well as those who may become vulnerable due to COVID-19.

The Government is also working with telecoms companies to exempt educational resources from data charges, supporting families who rely on mobile data.

We will ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children have the support they need at this time.

■ Education: Standards

Stephanie Peacock:

[\[41137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans the Government has to ensure that disadvantaged children do not experience a comparative reduction in attainment during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department has taken rapid, wide-ranging action to help schools and parents support all young people during the school closures. This includes publishing an initial list of online education resources and guidance for parents, supporting the launch of a new online academy, and supporting the BBC package of TV and online education materials.

The Department is doing everything it can to ensure that schools and other education providers are getting the guidance and support they need to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 while pupils are not attending school. We will do everything possible to make sure no child, whatever their background, falls behind as a result of COVID-19.

The Government has already committed over £100 million to boost remote education, including by providing devices and internet access to vulnerable children who need it most. Devices have been ordered for the most disadvantaged Year 10 pupils who are preparing for examinations, as well as for children receiving support from a social worker, and for care leavers.

Schools also continue to receive additional funding in the form of the pupil premium – worth around £2.4 billion annually – to help them support their disadvantaged pupils.

The Department recognises that disadvantaged pupils making the transition into new primary and secondary schools and into post-16 education risk missing out on crucial support. The Department is looking at how to draw on best practice being put into place by schools and how to support links between education providers. The Department is also looking at how other providers might support children and young people with engagement and development activity now and in the run up to schools reopening.

The Department is also considering, with a range of partner organisations, how best to support all pupils, especially the disadvantaged, who have been affected by school closures.

■ Free School Meals

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[\[39501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the equity of the free school meal income threshold for families with no recourse to public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Vicky Ford:

Earnings thresholds are used widely across government for determining eligibility for passported benefits.

The earnings threshold of £7,400 for free school meals for children with no recourse to public funds is in line with that of families who are applying as part of the standard means-tested eligibility criteria. This threshold applies for Zambrano carers, families with leave to remain under Article 8 of the European Convention for Human Rights, and those receiving support from Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989. Families receiving support from Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act are not able to work and as such are not subject to an earnings threshold.

The government does not expect to make any further statement at this point.

■ Free School Meals: Coronavirus

Neil Coyle: [\[39641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to revise the temporary free school meals eligibility criteria to (a) increase the household income threshold for families with no recourse to public funds and (b) allow children from undocumented families who are not receiving s4 or s17 support to claim for free school meals during the covid-19 outbreak.

Neil Coyle: [\[39642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to extend the temporary free school meals eligibility criteria once covid-19 social distancing measures are lifted.

Vicky Ford:

Earnings thresholds are used widely across the government for determining eligibility for passported benefits. The threshold of £7,400 per annum is in line with the threshold for families applying for free school meals under the standard means-tested eligibility criteria.

We do not intend to revise the eligibility criteria to include children from undocumented families who are not receiving section 4 or section 17 support. We think that it is right that we have extended eligibility to those families with no recourse to public funds who have been identified as needing extra support.

This is a temporary extension that will last for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak, until schools have reopened to all children. Plans to permanently extend eligibility to children with Zambrano carers, families receiving Section 4 support, and families with leave to remain under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights have been consulted on.

Dan Jarvis: [\[40618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) parents and (b) schools are not charged to access telephone support for supermarket vouchers supplied by Edenred for pupils in receipt of free school meals during the outbreak of covid-19.

Vicky Ford:

An Edenred phone number (0333 400 5932) has been set up specifically for the department's national voucher scheme. Phone calls to this number should cost no more than the national rate and therefore are included within mobile phone and landline contract 'minutes' or times and charged at the national rate thereafter.

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

Chris Stephens:**[R] [41089]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of children in receipt of free school meals have been fed through (a) the national voucher scheme, (b) school collection and distribution models and (c) other means since school closures due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Stephens:**[R] [41090]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many children have become eligible for free school meals since school closures as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Vicky Ford:

As education is a devolved matter, this answer refers to free school meals in England only.

It is critically important that eligible children continue to receive benefits-related free school meals during this period. We have published guidance for schools explaining what they should do to make sure that eligible pupils have continued access to this provision, which is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>.

As of 28 April our supplier, Edenred, reported that over 16,500 schools had placed orders for the scheme and as of Monday 4 May, Edenred has reported that over £47 million worth of voucher codes has been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families through the scheme. We do not collect data at pupil level. The department does not hold information on the number of children that have been fed via school collection and distribution models or other means since school closures.

The department does not hold data regarding how many children have become eligible for free school meals since the school closures. This information will be collected as part of the school census. Schools and local authorities should continue to accept free school meal applications during the closures to ensure that newly eligible children are able to receive meals they are entitled to.

■ Free School Meals: Voucher Schemes**Neil Coyle:****[39614]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate his Department has made of the number of students who (a) are eligible for and (b) have signed up to National Voucher Scheme in the UK.

Neil Coyle:

[39615]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to speed up the processing of applications for the National Voucher Scheme.

Vicky Ford:

Around 1.3 million children are eligible for and claiming benefits-related free school meals. During this period, we are asking schools to support these children 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 eligible children, 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 28 April our supplier, Edenred, reported that over 16,500 schools had placed orders for the scheme and as of Monday 4 May, Edenred has reported that over £47 million worth of voucher codes has been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families through the scheme.

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 increased demand.

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

Hilary Benn:

[40510]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what arrangements are in place to enable schools to contact Edenred about problems with free school meals vouchers.

Vicky Ford:

Schools can contact Edenred using either the email address or phone number set up specifically for the department's national voucher scheme (freeschoolmeals@edenred.com or 0333 400 5932). Call volumes are very high at the moment so we would recommend submitting queries via email where possible. As always, we thank schools for their patience and for ensuring that families most in need continue to receive the support they require.

We are working tirelessly with Edenred to resolve any outstanding technical problems so that children eligible for free schools meals are supported quickly.

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

Olivia Blake:

[\[40801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals are participating in the Government's food voucher scheme in (a) South Yorkshire and (b) the UK.

Olivia Blake:

[\[40802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how the value of food vouchers in the covid-19 free school meals voucher scheme was calculated.

Vicky Ford:

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.

During this period, we are asking schools to support pupils 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 eligible children 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.

Voucher codes are being processed and many thousands of families are redeeming them. As of 28 April, our supplier Edenred reported that over 16,500 schools had placed orders for the scheme. As of Monday 4 May, Edenred has reported that over £47 million worth of voucher codes has been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families through the scheme.

Schools are able to order a single voucher to the value of £15 each week for every child eligible for benefits-related free school meals who is not attending school. This is more generous than the weekly amount provided to schools for provision of free school meals, recognising that families will not buy in bulk and will therefore not be able to achieve the same economies of scale.

Rachael Maskell:

[\[41096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of enabling parents to choose to have a food voucher instead of a food parcel for children in receipt of free school meals.

Vicky Ford:

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.

During this period, we are asking schools to support children who are eligible for and claiming 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 eligible children 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.

The department has published advice for schools on options available. This is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>.

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

■ Music: Education

Alexander Stafford: [40805]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure music is taught at every school.

Alexander Stafford: [40806]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent studies his Department has carried out on the benefits of teaching music in schools.

Alexander Stafford: [40807]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure music lessons in schools are affordable.

Nick Gibb:

The Government believes that music is an important subject and that all pupils should receive a high quality music education, at least up to age 14. That is why the subject is compulsory in the national curriculum and why this government provided funding of over £300 million for Music Education Hubs between 2016 and 2020 and in January 2020 I announced a further £80 million investment by the Government in these hubs for 2020-21.

In 2011 the Government published 'The Importance of Music: A National Plan for Music Education', available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-music-a-national-plan-for-music-education>.

The document set out a vision for how music education should look up to 2020 and introduced the plans for the music education hubs. The vision is to enable children from all backgrounds to have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, to make music with others, to learn to sing, and to have the opportunity to progress to the next level of excellence. In January 2019, the Government committed to refreshing the Plan to ensure music remains at the forefront of school life and made clear that the Plan would be refreshed.

At the same time to ensure all pupils are able to enjoy high quality lessons it was announced that schools are to receive a new model music curriculum created by an

independent panel of experts. As well as ensuring all pupils can benefit from knowledge rich and diverse lessons, it is hoped that the curriculum will make it far easier for teachers to plan lessons and help to reduce workload.

In the same period the Government also funded the Music and Dance Scheme with £120 million. The aim of the scheme is to help identify, and assist, children with exceptional potential, regardless of their personal circumstances, to benefit from world-class specialist training as part of a broad and balanced education.

Although the Department has not commissioned any recent studies, a Call for Evidence on music education was launched on 9 February 2020, and closed on 13 March 2020, the findings from which will inform the development of proposals for the refreshed Plan. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the refresh of the Plan is currently on hold but will be published in due course.

In terms of individual music tuition, in addition to support provided through the hubs, the Government also invests in organisations that help young people learn about different styles of music and to support the next generation of musicians. These programmes are:

- In Harmony
- National Youth Music Organisations (NYMOs)
- Music for Youth.

■ Nurseries: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[39580]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to provide additional time to nurseries to enable them to comply with the guidance published by his Department on 22 April 2020 on furloughing staff.

Vicky Ford:

The government has put in place a number of funding and financial measures to support organisations – both public and private – during the COVID-19 outbreak. These are intended to be temporary, timely and targeted, to support public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption. They include the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), which is a temporary scheme for all entities with a UK payroll and is in place for 4 months starting from 1 March 2020, but it may be extended if necessary and employers can use this scheme at any time during this period.

Guidance on how early years providers are able to access the CJRS is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care>.

■ Relationship and Sex Education

Crispin Blunt: [\[40955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether it remains his Department's policy that statutory relationships and sex education will be implemented in schools from September 2020.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is giving due consideration to the implementation of the statutory relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) curriculum in the context of COVID-19. There is no intention to change the regulatory requirements for the implementation of RSHE.

The Department continues to work with key stakeholders and subject experts to develop a comprehensive programme of support for schools which includes a digital service to be delivered through GOV.UK.

■ Schools: Attendance

Sir Christopher Chope: [\[40480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to enable school age children to attend school whose parents cannot work from home and are employed in jobs which are not listed as key; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

Schools will remain closed until further notice, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

Schools will only reopen for additional children when the scientific advice indicates it is safe to do so. The Department will engage closely with the sector on any approach taken.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Dr Matthew Offord: [\[39564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an estimate of the potential increase in demand for school places within the maintained sector as a result of parents withdrawing their children from independent schools in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is not in a position at this stage to estimate whether there will be an increase in demand for school places within the maintained sector as a result of parents withdrawing their children from independent schools in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review, and we will consider the impact of pupils moving between the independent and state sectors once the position is clearer.

Alex Sobel:

[39792]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to allow parents who are in the covid-19 at risk groups to decide whether their children return to school, when schools reopen.

Nick Gibb:

Schools will remain closed until further notice, except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

Schools will only reopen when the scientific advice indicates it is safe to do so. We will keep our guidance to the sector about school attendance up to date as the situation develops.

Judith Cummins:

[41495]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential for the spread of covid-19 from re-opening schools due to parents and carers congregating at schools.

Judith Cummins:

[41496]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is planning to take to prevent the spread of covid-19 when schools reopen.

Nick Gibb:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has made it clear that schools will only reopen when the scientific advice indicates that it is the right time to do so, based on five key tests. The Department is working closely with the sector on our approach.

The safety of students, parents and staff is our top priority. The Department has published guidance on social distancing in education settings which is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>.

■ Schools: Playing Fields

Zarah Sultana:

[39681]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will support the roll out of a national programme of timed access to school playing fields for families who are unable to access green spaces safely and easily.

Nick Gibb:

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.

Schools are closed until further notice except for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. The management of school sites remains the responsibility of school leaders and governing bodies during this period and their first priority is

ensuring arrangements are in place so that pupils and staff still attending school can do so safely.

Whilst there are currently no plans to roll out a national programme of timed access to school playing fields, we are aware that schools do sometimes choose to make their facilities available for use and may have chosen to allow community access to outdoor spaces during this period.

It is important that children continue to remain fit and active wherever possible at this time, as long as this is done in line with the latest official advice on social distancing which can be accessed from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others> . Our latest guidance on supporting children to get exercise during COVID-19 can be found on the following page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education#physical-education-pe-and-physical-activity>.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Coronavirus

Afzal Khan:

[39702]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what support the Government is providing to farmers to ensure they are able to harvest their 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 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>.

Alex Sobel:

[39794]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to provide to support the people in the agricultural sector affected by market disruption during the covid-19 outbreak through a mechanism similar to the retail and hospitality grant scheme.

Victoria Prentis:

The Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF) is a specific fund that is run by local authorities and linked to business rates. Most farmers are exempt from business rates so the rationale and operation of this scheme is unsuitable for the farming sector.

The department has been in close discussion with banks to ensure the farming sector has access to financial support to ease cashflow problems during this period, including through the HMG backed Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan (CBIL), and the Bounce Back Loan scheme, which was announced on 27 April, and is the latest step in a package of support measures announced by the Chancellor. The Government will provide lenders with a 100% guarantee on each loan, to give lenders the confidence they need to support small businesses. These loans will be from £2,000 up to £50,000, capped at 25% of firms' turnover, and the Government will cover the first 12 months of interest payments and fees charged to the business by the lender. Almost all UK businesses will be eligible to apply for a loan under the scheme.

In addition, we have temporarily relaxed certain elements of competition law to support the farming sector during this period. Legislation will be laid shortly to enable collaboration between dairy farmers and producers, supporting them to adapt to changes in the supply chain including decreased demand from the hospitality sector. The legislation will have retrospective effect.

■ Agriculture: Floods

Mr Laurence Robertson:

[40482]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to publish details of the Farm Flood Recovery Scheme; and how farmers will be able to apply for support from that scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

We announced on 20 March that the existing £4 million Farming Recovery Fund would be extended to cover the impacts of storms Ciara and Dennis and the further flooding that occurred in late February 2020. The available funding was increased by £6 million to help those who were most affected by these floods. Farmers in the eligible areas will be able to access up to £25,000 as a single contribution to cover their uninsurable losses. The funding will help with the re-cultivation or re-seeding of arable and grassland and the restoration of features such as field gates and fencing. As part of the announcement, we also confirmed a relaxation of the crop diversification requirements known as the three crop rule for 2020, to help any farmers who may have difficulty complying with the rule this year.

Defra has been working with the Rural Payments Agency to develop a new way to apply for the funding. We are now planning to launch a new application process that uses an online portal. Use of the portal will already be familiar to the many thousands of farmers who applied to the Countryside Productivity Small Grants scheme, and is recognised as being an easily accessible and fast route to access funding. This portal can be accessed via GOV.UK from late May and we will publicise its availability.

■ Angling

Scott Mann:

[39546]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the results of the survey conducted in 2016 by his Department and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science on the effect on the economy of recreational angling.

Victoria Prentis:

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 3 March, PQ UIN 22008.

www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-02-27/22008

■ Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr Laurence Robertson:

[40481]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to speed up payments due to farmers under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has introduced a series of measures to simplify the guidance for Countryside Stewardship (CS) and make it easier to apply for the scheme. As of 24 April 2020, the RPA has issued full payments of £34 million to just over 56% of eligible CS 2019 annual revenue claims in comparison to 2018 where no full payments had been made. In recognition of the disruption caused by Coronavirus (Covid-19) we announced on 28 April that we will issue bridging payments, in May, for eligible 2019 CS annual revenue and Environmental Stewardship claims who have not received a full payment in order to help rural businesses with their cash-flow at this challenging time.

■ Dogs: Animal Breeding**Alex Norris:**[\[40742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 34397, whether puppies bred outside the UK can be sold by a person who is licensed to sell a puppy in England.

Victoria Prentis:

The ban on the commercial third party sales of puppies and kittens came into force on 6 April 2020 through the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2019. From this date, licensed pet sellers in England are only able to sell puppies that they have bred. Licensed pet sellers in England will not be able to sell puppies that they have not bred, regardless of what country they were bred in.

■ Floods: Insurance**Craig Whittaker:**[\[40564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the build back better Flood Re scheme on insurers' ability to make more homes resilient to future flooding.

Rebecca Pow:

We are considering the implications of all the proposals made by Flood Re as part of their July 2019 Quinquennial Review report. This includes the proposal that Flood Re be permitted to pay insurers over and above the cost of flood damage for a property to allow insurers to make it more resilient to future flooding (Build Back Better). We will respond formally to the report in due course.

■ Food Supply: Coronavirus**John Lamont:**[\[38523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government is taking with the food retail sector to ensure continuity of food supply.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government has well-established ways of working with the food industry during disruption to supply situations. The Government has regular engagement across the industry who continue to monitor the situation closely, taking the necessary steps to address issues where they arise.

Following a significant spike in consumer demand, we have now seen stock levels in supermarkets 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 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 the industry has shown. We will continue these conversations to keep food supply chains flowing and make sure people have the food and products they need.

Thanks to rapidly increasing testing capacity, the government has expanded eligibility to all essential workers with symptoms of coronavirus, including those working in the food and drink industry.

Hilary Benn:[\[40512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many different firms have been contracted to deliver food to people who are shielding; and whether those firms are being paid the same for that work.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra have contracted two firms, Brakes and Bidfood, to deliver food boxes to extremely clinically vulnerable people who have no other means of accessing food. The contract details including the contract and value will be published on Contracts Finder and the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in due course and in any event within the prescribed publishing timeframe. The contracted price per delivered box is the same for both firms.

■ Food Supply: Delivery Services**Bill Esterson:**[\[39530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to remove restrictions on delivery times throughout the food supply chain to mitigate the effects of the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

On 13 March, the Government issued a statement encouraging retailers to increase the frequency of deliveries. It also strongly encouraged local authorities not to enforce planning action unnecessarily that would restrict deliveries of food and other essentials during this time, given the exceptional circumstances.

The Government has granted a temporary relaxation of the enforcement of the drivers' hours rules for all road haulage until 31 May 2020 (which is being kept under

review), to help alleviate some of the unprecedented pressures on local and national supply chains. This is on the understanding that driver welfare and road safety must not be compromised and the relaxations only used if absolutely necessary.

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 continue to monitor the situation closely, taking the necessary steps to address issues wherever they arise. We welcome the actions that the industry is taking and we will continue this engagement with industry to keep food supply chains flowing and make sure people have the food and products they need.

■ Food: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[\[39588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many Government-supplied food parcels have been delivered (a) nationally (b) to City of York council in each week since 1 March 2020.

Victoria Prentis:

(A) Nationally **955,433** food packs had been successfully delivered as of 30th April 2020.

Breakdown by weeks is as follows:

WEEK COMMENCING	SUCCESSFUL DELIVERIES
23 rd March	4,334
30 th March	66,659
6 th April	141,477
13 th April	194,391
20 th April	286,605
27 th April	261,967

(B) In the City of York over **5,231** food packs had been successfully delivered as of the 24th April 2020.

Breakdown by week is as follows:

WEEK COMMENCING	SUCCESSFUL DELIVERIES
*6 th April	1,266
13 th April	1,777

WEEK COMMENCING	SUCCESSFUL DELIVERIES
20 th April	2,188

*Different category codes were used for deliveries made prior to 6th April, so they have been excluded from the figures above.

■ Horticulture: Coronavirus

Sir Christopher Chope: [\[40963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Horticultural Trade Association on the (a) re-opening of garden centres and (b) effect of the closure of garden centres on small horticultural suppliers; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

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 representatives from the horticulture supply chain, including the HTA, to understand what short-term and long-term support the sector as a whole needs.

At all times we have been consistently guided by scientific advice to protect lives and we will continue to work together on how best to ease measures when the time is right to do so.

■ National Parks: Coronavirus

Tim Farron: [\[40543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the proportion of National Parks' income that will be lost through reduced car parking charge receipts during the covid-19 outbreak.

Tim Farron: [\[40544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he will take to support National Parks who have lost income during the covid-19 outbreak after the lockdown finishes.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government has been working with the National Park Authorities (NPAs) collectively, individually and through National Parks England from the outset to understand the impacts of COVID-19. We are ensuring that Parks make full use of the existing Government support schemes available to them. We will continue to engage closely with each NPA to assess the level of further support required.

As part of our engagement with NPAs we have gathered information to understand impacts to their revenue. We do not, however, have a breakdown by NPA of car parking revenue.

■ Police Patrolling: Recycling

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[41378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether visits to a household recycling centre in England are categorised as necessary travel; and if he will take steps to prevent police intercepting vehicles travelling to such centres.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government is working with local authorities to explore ways in which household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) that have been closed might be re-opened and we expect to publish further guidance on this shortly. The guidance will clarify the circumstances under which a trip to the HWRC might be justified.

Police enforcement does not apply in circumstances where travel is classified as reasonable or necessary. Therefore journeys to a HWRC, made in accordance with the forthcoming guidance, will be allowed. The police are aware of the proposed guidance.

■ Waste Disposal: Coronavirus

Robert Halfon:

[\[41030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what guidance he has issued to local authorities about the re-opening of rubbish tips; and if he will make it his policy that rubbish tips can remain open on condition that social distancing can be adhered to.

Rebecca Pow:

We published guidance on 7 April to help local authorities prioritise waste services at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-to-local-authorities-on-prioritising-waste-collections/guidance-on-prioritising-waste-collection-services-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>. This recommends keeping household waste recycling centres open if it is safe to do so.

The Government is working closely with local authorities and the waste industry to see how we can re-open these sites in the coming weeks, whilst observing social distancing and other requirements, to make sure collections are prioritised appropriately and that all parts of the waste system continue to run as smoothly as possible. We expect to publish further guidance shortly.

Local authorities should maintain black bag collections and prevent waste from building up to protect the environment and public health.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**■ Animals: Markets****Jonathan Edwards:**[\[40571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to encourage the closure of wildlife wet markets throughout the world.

Nigel Adams:

Wet markets exist all around the world. All wet markets should follow best practice on hygiene and safety to avoid health issues, whether in China or elsewhere and that should include safe sourcing of animal and other products. The UK has always been at the forefront of international efforts to ensure global trade in wild animals is sustainable and well regulated, including through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). We are investing over £36m between 2014 and 2021 and last year pledged a further £30 million over three years to crack down on the abhorrent illegal trade in animals and plants.

We welcome China's decision on 24 February to put in place a ban on the sale of wildlife for food, and urge China to ensure this is strictly enforced until such times that they can ensure that all meat for sale is sustainably and legally sourced and poses no threat to human health. We have been in regular contact with the Chinese authorities since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, including a phone conversation between the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister Wang-Yi on 20 March.

■ Armed Conflict: Sexual Offences**Anthony Mangnall:**[\[39744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what progress he has made on developing a three-year strategy for the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

Nigel Adams:

The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) is part of the UK's Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (NAP), which includes our strategy for tackling and preventing conflict-related sexual violence. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will be developing an additional three-year strategy on PSVI, which remains a top priority for the British Government.

The FCO, Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) will all contribute to this strategy, not only in London but across the network of Embassies in countries where conflict-related sexual violence issues are acute, and in doing so will closely consult civil society organisations and other key stakeholders. This work will be overseen by the joint FCO-DFID Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth and Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon.

Our PSVI objectives will remain to champion wider restorative justice for survivors and hold perpetrators to account; support all survivors and children born of conflict-

related sexual violence, and tackle the stigma they face; and prevent sexual violence in conflict. The Government will ensure the three-year strategy is survivor-centred, working closely with the UK's PSVI Survivor Champions throughout its development.

■ Bangladesh and Pakistan: Coronavirus

Stephen Timms:

[\[40472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer on 27 April 2020 to Question 37392 on Bangladesh and Pakistan: Coronavirus, how many UK nationals have returned to the UK from (a) Pakistan and (b) Bangladesh on repatriation flights organised by the Government as of 27 April 2020; and if he will make a statement.

Nigel Adams:

As of the 28 of April, 2,102 passengers have returned to the UK from Pakistan on our Phase One flights. Since 21 April we have helped 970 people return to the UK from Bangladesh and have five further flights scheduled to take place between 29 April and 7 May. There will be a second round of nine direct charter flights from 30 April, including one from Karachi.

■ British Nationals Abroad: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[38489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many British nationals stranded abroad as a result of the covid-19 outbreak have registered with his Department for flights to return to the UK.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[38492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of British nationals stranded abroad as a result of the covid-19 outbreak who have registered with his Department for flights to return to the UK who have not yet returned to the UK.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: 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. The FCO does not have a central registration system for flights and British nationals will only be asked to register for flights with Corporate Travel Management (CTM) when charters have been announced for a country.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[38494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that British nationals stranded abroad as a result of the covid-19

outbreak not allocated a seat on UK Government charter flights are able to return to the UK.

Nigel Adams:

We appreciate that this is an incredibly stressful time and that many British citizens are worried and frustrated. Helping British nationals who need and want to return to the UK is one of the Government's highest priorities. We will work as hard as possible to ensure that all those who have registered their interest in a charter flight are allocated a seat. Flights are based on demand and are reliant on individuals registering on the booking system. Seats are allocated on a first-come first-served basis, with provision for the most vulnerable as a priority. This is an unprecedented global event; we are working to resolve the challenges involved as quickly as possible. As of 30 April, we have brought back more than 21,000 people on 102 flights organised by the Foreign Office from 21 different countries and territories.

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[40656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 March 2020 to Question 32097, what steps he is taking to ensure that British citizens who purchased travel insurance before leaving the UK and extended their trip to avoid international travel due to the covid-19 pandemic, and who are now trying to return to the UK on commercial flights, are able to secure travel insurance for their return journey.

Nigel Adams:

We are in regular contact with the insurance industry to understand the impact on them and keep the information on our travel advice pages up to date. The Association of British Insurers announced on 2 April that UK-based insurers will look to extend travel insurance policies for 60 days to ensure British travellers abroad will be covered for emergency medical treatment they might need, provided that the customer is making every effort to return home. Anyone affected should speak to their insurance company to discuss the options available to them.

John Spellar:

[\[41380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many charter flights have been arranged by his Department to deal with repatriation to the UK to date; how many passengers have been carried; and which companies have provided the aircraft and crew for those flights.

Nigel Adams:

As of 30 April, we have brought back more than 21,000 people on 102 flights organised by the Foreign Office from 21 different countries and territories. We have worked with the following airlines to provide these flights: British Airways, Biman, Cathay Pacific, EgyptAir, LATAM, PAL, Qatar Airways, Titan, TUI, Virgin Atlantic, Viva, Vueling.

We are aware that there are tens of thousands of British nationals remaining overseas and our effort is focused on supporting their return as quickly and safely as

possible. We will continue to work to bring British nationals back to the UK where commercial options do not exist, focusing on the most vulnerable. We are still working through future plans, identifying where needs are greatest, and where charter flights will have the greatest impact on vulnerable British nationals overseas.

Ronnie Cowan:

[\[41522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what support his Department is providing to UK citizens being repatriated that have nowhere to self-isolate on return; and if will he make a statement.

Nigel Adams:

The Government recognises the challenges faced by those who have nowhere to self-isolate on return to the UK, should self-isolation be required: no one who presents symptoms at check in for a Her Majesty's Government repatriation flight will be allowed to board. 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.

■ **British Overseas Territories: Coronavirus**

Stephen Doughty:

[\[40622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what support the Government is providing to help the UK Overseas Territories respond to the (a) health, (b) economic, (c) logistical and (d) transport effects of the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government is firmly committed to supporting the Overseas Territories in dealing with Covid-19. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development are leading a cross Whitehall effort, working closely with the Overseas Territories governments. The Minister for the Overseas Territories and Sustainable Development is in regular contact with the political leaders and Governors of the Territories. The impact of the pandemic in the Territories varies, and our support is being calibrated accordingly.

In the areas where it is needed, we are providing support to strengthen territories' public health systems, through provision of essential medical supplies, equipment and personnel. We are also working with partners to maintain lifeline transport routes. The Government has organised flights to enable British nationals to return to the UK from the Overseas Territories, and to enable a number of British nationals in the UK to return to their homes in the territories. The flights also carried medical equipment to the territories.

Just as the UK is doing, we are looking to Overseas Territories to make full use of their financial resources in order to address the needs of their people. Requests for further support to complement comprehensive local economic response plans are being considered on a needs basis. In the Territories which are in receipt of financial assistance from DFID, the UK Government will continue to provide the support needed to ensure delivery of essential services and to protect their economies.

■ China: Animals**Jonathan Edwards:**[\[40570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Chinese counterparts on the closure of Chinese wildlife wet markets.

Nigel Adams:

Wet markets exist all around the world. All wet markets should follow best practice on hygiene and safety to avoid health issues, whether in China or elsewhere and that should include safe sourcing of animal and other products. The UK has always been at the forefront of international efforts to ensure global trade in wild animals is sustainable and well regulated, including through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). We are investing over £36m between 2014 and 2021 and last year pledged a further £30 million over three years to crack down on the abhorrent illegal trade in animals and plants.

We welcome China's decision on 24 February to put in place a ban on the sale of wildlife for food, and urge China to ensure this is strictly enforced until such times that they can ensure that all meat for sale is sustainably and legally sourced and poses no threat to human health. We have been in regular contact with the Chinese authorities since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, including a phone conversation between the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister Wang-Yi on 20 March.

■ China: Coronavirus**Jonathan Edwards:**[\[41425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has received on the Government of the People's Republic of China using economic and political leverage against governments that have raised diplomatic concerns on China's potential role in the covid-19 pandemic.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary has not received any specific representations of this nature. Coronavirus is a global challenge and we are focused on working with our international partners - including China - to stop the spread of the virus and save lives. The Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with his counterparts in a wide range of countries to discuss the international response to the pandemic.

■ China: Uighurs**Tommy Sheppard:**[\[41088\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in China on the camps in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China.

Nigel Adams:

The British Government regularly makes representations directly to the Chinese Government about the human rights situation in Xinjiang. Most recently, on 9 March the Foreign Secretary raised his concerns with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi. On 5 March, I also raised the issue with the Chinese Ambassador in London.

Colombia: Armed Conflict**Clive Efford:**[\[40473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the activity of (a) the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces (AGC) in the Colombian department of Chocó and (b) the response of the Colombian security forces to that situation; and if she make a statement.

Wendy Morton:

We are aware of reports of violence and intimidation by the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces in parts of Colombia, and in particular the Chocó region. We remain extremely concerned about the continued presence of illegal armed groups in Colombia, and the impact their competition for control of illicit economies has on local people - even more so at this challenging time. The UK Embassy in Colombia is monitoring events in Chocó.

The UK has been vocal in expressing our concern about the effect the activity of these armed groups has on the future of peace in Colombia. We regularly raise these issues with the Colombian Government and in multilateral fora. Most recently, our Permanent Representative to the United Nations spoke on this issue at the UN Security Council on 14 April, and we consistently press the Colombian Government to focus on extending the rule of law to all parts of the country.

Colombia has made significant progress in its efforts to end the influence of such groups, and we remain steadfast in our support of the Colombian authorities as they work towards sustainable peace.

Colombia: Politics and Government**Clive Efford:**[\[40474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations she has made to her Colombian counterpart on support for the transitional justice mechanisms of the Colombian peace process.

Wendy Morton:

President Duque's Government has publicly committed to implementing the Peace Accords of 2016 in their entirety. In meetings with the President in London last year the then-Foreign Secretary made it clear that the UK sees the transitional justice system and the involvement of victims as vital parts of the 2016 accords. President Duque's signing of the transitional justice law last June was a positive step forward, and we are pleased that the institutions have since begun their work.

We continue to emphasise our support for transitional justice in Colombia both with the government and in multilateral fora, including most recently at the UN Security Council on 14 April.

The UK Government has contributed over £26 million towards transitional justice mechanisms and victims of the conflict in Colombia since 2016. This includes supporting the truth commission's work to gather testimony from Colombians abroad, including here in the UK. We will continue to work closely with the Colombian government and civil society on the peace process and related matters.

■ Cuba and Venezuela: Coronavirus

Catherine West:

[\[41130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of US sanctions on (a) Venezuela and (b) Cuba on the ability of those countries to respond effectively to the covid-19 pandemic; and what steps the Government is taking to ensure essential medical supplies can reach those nations.

Wendy Morton:

The UK remains deeply concerned about the continuing deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Venezuela and its long-term economic crisis. Venezuela's economy has shrunk 65% since 2013, and not as a result of economic sanctions imposed from 2017, but caused primarily by political and economic mismanagement and the gross misuse of power by the illegitimate Maduro regime and its predecessor. The collapse of the country's health system is one example of what has gone wrong, at such high cost to the Venezuelan people, and long predates the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through DFID, HMG has to date committed £44.5 million to support the humanitarian crisis, including ongoing work being delivered by key partners, such as the UN, to support the Covid-19 response and alleviate the humanitarian consequences of the crisis in Venezuela, including through the provision of medical supplies.

The UK Government does not support the US sanctions regime against Cuba. Our Ambassador to Havana regularly discusses with the Cuban authorities how we can develop our bilateral relationship, including how we might work together to deliver a robust global response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We were most appreciative of the Cuban authorities' support with the repatriation of passengers from the cruise ship *Braemar* in March after passengers on the ship were stricken by the Covid-19 virus.

■ Cuba: Coronavirus

Grahame Morris:

[\[40585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to the Cuban authorities supporting British nationals stranded on the cruise ship MS *Braemar*, what assistance the Government is providing to Cuba to help that country tackle the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

We are grateful to the Cuban authorities for having led an exceptional operation to bring back to the UK 684 British citizens and people of other nationalities who were on board the Braemer cruise ship. The UK Government is working with its Cuban counterparts, both bilaterally and via multilateral fora, to deliver a robust global response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our Ambassador to Havana continues to engage in conversations with the Cuban authorities about how to deepen and broaden our bilateral relationship, and what we can do to help our countries weather this crisis.

■ **El Salvador: Coronavirus****Catherine West:**[\[40717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his El Salvadorian counterpart on the treatment of prisoners in that country during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The British Government is working with the Government of El Salvador to try and improve conditions in prisons, and prepare prisoners for reintegration into society. Our Embassy in San Salvador is in regular contact with the Salvadoran authorities.

■ **Greece: Asylum****Hywel Williams:**[\[40997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Greek counterpart on the humanitarian situation of migrants along the Greek-Turkish border.

Wendy Morton:

The British Government remains committed to supporting Greek efforts to manage migration effectively. We regularly discuss our concerns with Greek ministers and senior officials, as well as our Turkish counterparts. The Foreign Secretary spoke to the Greek Foreign Minister about the issue of migrants on the Greece/Turkey border on 18 March. On 22 April, the UK Immigration Compliance Minister and Greece's Alternate Migration Minister signed a bilateral migration action plan to reaffirm our commitment to cooperation. The Plan covers joint work to tackle organised immigration crime; sharing of expertise on asylum processing and migrant returns; deployment of a Border Force search and rescue cutter to the Aegean; facilitation of family reunification of unaccompanied asylum seeking children; and establishment of a strategic migration dialogue.

■ Greece: Coronavirus**Tommy Sheppard:**[\[41087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help support children living in refugee camps in Greece during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The Greek Government is responsible for supporting migrants on arrival in Greece, including unaccompanied minors. The United Kingdom has provided bilateral support to Greece, including provision of funding for humanitarian supplies and, in 2019, funding a shelter for unaccompanied children who arrive in Samos. The UK and Greece signed an action plan on migration on 22 April which reaffirms our commitment to continued cooperation to tackle the challenges posed by irregular migration.

We recognise the challenge faced by Greece in dealing with increased migrant flows, and are also concerned about the condition of migrant camps on the Greek islands. We understand that the Greek Government are implementing a series of steps to seek to address the risk of coronavirus in the migrant camps including the strengthening of health facilities and measures that reduce the need for travel. We continue to monitor the situation via our Embassy in Athens very closely.

■ Hong Kong: Freedom of Association**Fiona Bruce:**[\[40576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the UK is taking as co-signatory to the Sino-British Joint Declaration to defend the freedom to protest in Hong Kong.

Nigel Adams:

The right to peaceful protest is fundamental to Hong Kong's way of life and as such is protected in both the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. The UK remains committed to upholding the rights and freedoms underpinned by the Joint Declaration, the Basic Law and enshrined in Hong Kong's Bill of Rights, and we expect the Chinese authorities to respect and preserve Hong Kong's rights and freedoms and high degree of autonomy. We regularly make this position clear to the Hong Kong and Chinese Governments, and will continue to do so, both publicly and privately.

■ Hong Kong: Politics and Government**Fiona Bruce:**[\[40574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on the rule of law in Hong Kong of the recent arrest of fifteen democracy activists and former lawmakers.

Nigel Adams:

We are concerned about the arrests of a number of political figures in Hong Kong, and are following these cases closely. The rule of law and independence of the judiciary are one of the foundations on which Hong Kong's success and prosperity is built. It is crucial that Hong Kong's courts are able to exercise their power independently and free from interference. We therefore expect any arrests and judicial processes to be conducted in a fair and transparent manner.

Fiona Bruce:[\[40577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is bound by Article 22 of Hong Kong Basic Law which ensures that Chinese Government departments cannot interfere in the affairs of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Nigel Adams:

Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy is guaranteed under the Sino-British Joint Declaration to which the UK is a party. We expect the Chinese authorities to respect and preserve this high degree of autonomy.

Afzal Khan:[\[40754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 April 2020 to Question 37960 Hong Kong: Politics and Government, what assessment he has made of whether the statement of 17 April 2020 by the Chinese Liaison Office in Hong Kong that Article 22 of the Hong Kong Basic Law neither applies to the Chinese Liaison Office or the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, is a breach of the terms and the spirit of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

Nigel Adams:

Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy is guaranteed under the Sino-British Joint Declaration to which the UK is a party. We expect the Chinese authorities to respect and preserve this high degree of autonomy.

■ Human Rights: Coronavirus**Stephen Doughty:**[\[40623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the (a) UN Human Rights Council and (b) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the effects of the covid-19 pandemic.

Nigel Adams:

On 9 April, the UK and other UN member states participated in the UN Human Rights Council's first ever virtual conversation with Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Discussion focused on the human rights implications of the COVID-19 crisis; both the immediate impact of the response on human rights around the world, and the social and economic consequences, including the prospect of greater inequality. The UK stressed the importance of

ensuring that measures to tackle the crisis be proportionate, time-bound, transparent and regularly reviewed. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the UK Mission to the UN in Geneva has continued to engage regularly with the High Commissioner and with other senior leaders in her office. The UK supports all efforts by the UN to minimise long-term damage to global economies, societies, politics and freedoms.

■ Hungary: Foreign Relations

Catherine West: [\[40718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Hungarian counterpart; and whether the issue of LGBT rights in Hungary was raised in those discussions.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is committed to the principle of non-discrimination on all recognised grounds, including on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. I spoke to the Hungarian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Levente Magyar, on 30 April. I raised the UK's concerns about Hungary's proposed amendment to its Registry Act which will affect the rights of transgender people. Officials in our Embassy in Budapest have also discussed the proposed amendment with senior Hungarian officials, as well as civil society. We will continue to maintain a dialogue with Hungary, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora, on promoting tolerance and non-discrimination towards LGBT people.

■ Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review

Conor McGinn: [\[39627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the status is of the Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, announced in February 2020 and led by Alex Ellis; and what the timetable is for its publication.

James Cleverly:

Following the Chancellor's announcement that the Comprehensive Spending Review is being delayed, the Integrated Review has been paused given the pressing need to focus on COVID-19. We will return to the Integrated Review when appropriate to do so, ensuring that we engage with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society.

■ International Assistance: Security

Stephen Doughty: [\[40633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many Government assistance programmes were assessed against the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidelines in each of the last five years.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) updated its guidance on Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) in 2017 by written ministerial statement.

Since then, information on its implementation has been included in the FCO's Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report. Information on the number of programmes that have drawn on the OSJA guidance and a more detailed breakdown of assessments identifying specific forms of human rights risks, is not held centrally nor readily available. Any technical assistance we provide is kept under regular review to ensure it is in line with international standards, and fully complies with our human rights obligations and the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance process.

Stephen Doughty:

[\[40634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessments of proposed Government assistance in each of the last five years raised concerns about (a) death penalty policies, (b) torture and (c) extra-judicial killings.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) updated its guidance on Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) in 2017 by written ministerial statement. Since then, information on its implementation has been included in the FCO's annual Human Rights and Democracy Report. Information on the number of programmes that have drawn on the OSJA guidance and a more detailed breakdown of assessments identifying specific forms of human rights risks, is not held centrally nor readily available. Any technical assistance we provide is kept under regular review to ensure it is in line with international standards, and fully complies with our human rights obligations and the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance process.

■ Iraq: Politics and Government

Gareth Bacon:

[\[40785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to promote good governance in Iraq.

James Cleverly:

The UK continues to promote good governance in Iraq through both political engagement and programmatic support. I discussed the current situation in Iraq with the Iraqi Ambassador to London on 16 March and with Foreign Minister Hakim on 1 April. As part of the UK's wide-ranging support to Iraq, we have contributed £16 million to a World Bank Trust Fund for technical assistance to both the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to deliver economic reforms.

■ Islamic State

Gareth Bacon:

[\[40786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions has he had with coalition allies on preventing ISIS from resurging.

James Cleverly:

We continue to work closely with our allies in the Global Coalition to prevent Daesh from resurging, in particular in Syria and Iraq. Senior officials from the Coalition

members discussed this in a meeting on 16 April. Among other occasions, I raised the importance of the continued fight against Daesh in my conversations with Iraq's Ambassador to the UK on 16 March, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hakim on 1 April and the US Envoy for Syria Ambassador Jeffrey on 16 April.

■ Israel: Palestinians

James Murray: [\[41609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the increase in settler violence against Palestinians and their property reported by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs since the outbreak of covid-19 in the occupied Palestinian territory.

James Cleverly:

We are concerned by reports that settler violence is continuing at this time. We called on both parties to avoid any provocative action which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical in response to COVID-19, including settler violence, at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 23 April. We condemn any incidents of violence by settlers against Palestinians.

■ LGBT People: Coronavirus

Crispin Blunt: [\[41368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that support for LGBT+ initiatives remain adequately resourced during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The British Government is fundamentally opposed to all forms of discrimination and works to uphold the rights and freedoms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people in all circumstances, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding for LGBT projects comes from a variety of sources. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will consider future funding cycles for FCO funded programmes as part of its preparation for the Spending Review.

■ LGBT People: Human Rights

Crispin Blunt: [\[41366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how the Government is using its term as co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition to ensure that LGBT+ people's rights are being upheld globally (a) during the covid-19 pandemic and (b) more generally.

Crispin Blunt: [\[41367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how his Department is using its term as (a) co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition and (b)

Commonwealth Chair in Office to ensure governments around the world are protecting LGBT+ communities from increased marginalisation and violence during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

As co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC) in partnership with Argentina, we are leading the ERC's work, in co-operation with civil society, to address violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals, and the ongoing criminalisation of same sex conduct in 70 countries. We have started work on a new ERC Strategy to guide and re-energise the work of the ERC, and are currently working on an ERC statement that calls on all governments to limit the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic on people identified based on real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. Likewise as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, the UK continues to raise the importance of countering discrimination within the Commonwealth, including on grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation. In both of these roles working through international organisations, we regularly raise concerns about countries that do not comply with their human rights obligations and promote non-discrimination against LGBT people, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 9 April, the UK participated in the UN Human Rights Council's first ever virtual conversation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Discussion focused on the human rights implications of the COVID-19 crisis which included concerns about increased risks on vulnerable groups. In his statement to the Council, our Ambassador to the UN in Geneva stressed the importance to ensure that parliaments, media and civil society all play their role to scrutinise the actions of governments and international agencies, and that we do not lose sight of the international human rights frameworks. The British Government remains committed to upholding the rights and freedoms of LGBT people in all circumstances.

■ **Palestinians: Coronavirus**

James Murray:

[41608]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of recent demolitions and seizures of Palestinian (a) homes, (b) water and hygiene structures and (c) clinics on the Palestinian Authority's ability to contain the spread of covid-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly:

The UK is seriously concerned by any demolition and seizure of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities. In all but the most exceptional circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We are particularly concerned that demolitions are continuing at this time. Such actions weaken the capacity of Palestinians to withstand the impact of COVID-19. Under IHL, an occupying power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the occupied territory to the fullest extent of the means available to it. We call on both parties to

avoid any provocative action which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical.

■ Philippines: Prisons

Dr Rupa Huq:

[\[40705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Government of the Philippines on (a) reported human rights abuses in their prison system which houses British nationals and relatives of Filipinos living in the UK and (b) the release of prisoners during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Adams:

We remain concerned about allegations of human rights abuses in the Philippine prison system. The British Embassy in Manila regularly raises our concerns, alongside other human rights issues, with relevant stakeholders in the Philippines. We understand that the Philippine Bureau of Jail Management and Penology have yet to reach a decision on the release of inmates from the prison system in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the Bureau of Immigration did notify the British Embassy on 29 April that 2 British detainees have been fast tracked for deportation. We are working with the Philippines authorities to understand the implications of this decision. The airlines that would normally carry deportees are not operating due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

■ South America: Coronavirus

Catherine West:

[\[41623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the operational ability of South American drugs gangs.

Wendy Morton:

The impacts of the Covid-19 response are already affecting how criminal networks operate across the globe, although it is too soon for us to understand fully how the picture is changing. We are monitoring the situation closely and our international law enforcement response continues. In the last month alone the NCA has contributed to the seizure of more than 1.7 tonnes of illicit drugs internationally.

It also seems likely that the pandemic and countries' responses to it, while leading to a reduction in some organised criminal activities, will be providing opportunities for new ones. It is too early to judge how long-term the consequences of this might be. The United Kingdom shares the concerns of our Latin American partners regarding ongoing activity by organised groups fighting for control of illicit economies, and the impact of this on peace and security in the region.

Our priority remains working alongside our international partners to resolve the health and economic risks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and to set the stage for a strong and sustainable economic recovery.

■ Syria: Coronavirus

Bambos Charalambous:

[\[40727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if the Government will take steps to work with its (a) Turkish and (b) European counterparts on reducing the risks of (i) infection and (ii) transmission of covid-19 in the area of Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria also known as Rojava.

James Cleverly:

The UK recognises the significant threat posed by COVID-19 in North East Syria and across the country. We are speaking regularly to other donors, including Turkey, other European countries and with the UN, to effectively reduce the risks of infection and transmission throughout Syria.

Aside from our diplomatic efforts, the UK is one of the leading donors supporting international efforts to deliver vital healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene activities; all of which reach communities in North East Syria, and help mitigate the threat posed by COVID-19.

The Department for International Development's current support inside Syria includes training for health workers; educational material to raise awareness on health and sanitation; provision of infection, prevention, and control supplies; and cash assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons. The UK is monitoring the situation closely and working with humanitarian partners inside Syria to respond to the outbreak and to sustain life-saving services.

■ Yemen: Military Intervention

Jonathan Edwards:

[\[40573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the United Arab Emirates authorities on their support for Yemen's Southern Transitional Council.

James Cleverly:

UK representatives are in regular contact with representatives of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) about the situation in Yemen and the importance of ensuring that Yemen's Southern Transitional Council remains committed to the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement. We note that since the Southern Transitional Council's 'self-rule' declaration, the UAE have reiterated their support for implementation of the Riyadh Agreement.

■ Yemen: Politics and Government

Jonathan Edwards:

[\[40572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the Government's policy is on the claim of Yemen's Southern Transitional Council for self-rule.

James Cleverly:

The announcement of self-rule by the Southern Transitional Council is a dangerous move which risks prolonging the conflict. The UK supports the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement between the Government of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council. The Riyadh Agreement is the best means of restoring security and stability to Southern Yemen and the UK urges the parties to resume their efforts towards implementation. We are encouraging the parties to refrain from unconstructive acts and statements, and we are working with them to agree a way forward.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE■ **Abortion: Coronavirus****Jonathan Ashworth:**[\[37680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what services are available to women seeking an abortion during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

Abortion services remain open and are defined as an essential service. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have put in place two temporary measures in England to limit the transmission and ensure continued access to abortion services: women and girls are able to take both pills (Mifepristone and Misoprostol) for early medical abortion up to 10 weeks gestation in their own homes, without the need to first attend a hospital or clinic (subject to eligibility); and registered medical practitioners are able to prescribe both pills for the treatment of early medical abortion up to 10 weeks from their own homes.

Alex Sobel:[\[37735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to amend the Abortion Act 1967 to allow one doctor, nurse or midwife to certify abortion procedures while the medical profession is under strain due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

The Government has no plans to amend the requirement for two doctors to certify abortion procedures under the Abortion Act 1967 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Abortion is classed as an essential service.

We have put in place two temporary measures in England to ensure continued access to abortion services: women and girls are able to take both pills (Mifepristone and Misoprostol) for early medical abortion up to 10 weeks gestation in their own homes, without the need to first attend a hospital or clinic (subject to eligibility following a telephone or e-consultation with a clinician); and registered medical practitioners are able to prescribe both pills for the treatment of early medical abortion up to 10 weeks from their own homes.

■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Coronavirus

Dr Dan Poulter:

[\[40557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has plans to relax the 12 hour A&E target to enable patients to be tested for covid-19 before transfer to other health care providers.

Dr Dan Poulter:

[\[40558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has plans to relax the four hour A&E target to enable patients to be tested for covid-19 before transfer to other health care providers.

Edward Argar:

The accident and emergency (A&E) operational standard is that at least 95% of patients attending A&E should be admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours.

We have been clear from the outset we expect COVID-19 to have a pronounced effect on the National Health Service and the latest published data has shown that A&E attendances are much reduced.

There are no plans to relax the A&E target, but we are continuing to take every step necessary to bolster the NHS's resilience so dedicated NHS staff can continue to provide the best possible care for those who need it most. Hardworking staff are working round the clock to test and treat patients with COVID-19.

■ Blood Cancer: Medical Treatments

Henry Smith:

[\[40579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people with blood cancer have had (a) CAR-T cell therapy and (b) a stem cell transplant in each of the last six months for which data is available.

Jo Churchill:

The table shows the number of patients who have been infused with manufactured chimeric antigen receptor T (CAR T) cells. NHS England/Improvement report that the number of patients who have undergone apheresis (separating a particular blood constituent but returning the remainder to circulation) with an intention to treat will be significantly higher.

Indication	2019			2020			Grand Total
	10	11	12	1	2	3	
Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL)	Less than 5	6					
Diffuse Large B-Cell Lymphoma (DLBCL)	15	7	15	12	13	13	75

■ Cancer: Health Services**Rosie Cooper:****[41009]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve the rate of cancer referrals within two weeks.

Jo Churchill:

NHS England and NHS Improvement launched a new drive on 25 April 2020 urging the public to seek care, including cancer care when they need it. There have been concerns that patients with cancer symptoms are not seeking medical advice in fear of contracting COVID-19. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/04/help-us-help-you-nhs-urges-public-to-get-care-when-they-need-it/>

Essential and urgent cancer treatment and care will continue during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. People should still attend hospital for essential appointments. General practitioners and cancer teams are finding ways to reduce the need for them to leave their homes wherever possible, for example offering telephone or video consultations.

■ Cancer: Medical Treatments**Dr Rupa Huq:****[35007]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 2 March 2020 to Question 18741 on cancer treatments, what plans he has to increase patient access to non-pharmaceutical cancer treatments not currently funded by the NHS; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

The Cancer Drugs Fund will be extended to create a new Innovative Medicines Fund so that doctors can use the most advanced, life-saving treatments for conditions such as cancer.

Detailed proposals for the new Innovative Medicines Fund are in development and will be consulted on in due course. The will extend the successes of the reformed Cancer Drugs Fund into other areas.

The NHS Long Term Plan for Cancer states that “by 2021, where appropriate every person diagnosed with cancer will have access to personalised care, including needs assessment, a care plan and health and wellbeing information and support”.

■ Cancer: Surgery**Rosie Cooper:****[40536]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many cancer-related NHS operations were carried out throughout the UK in (a) November 2019, (b) December 2019, (c) January 2020, (d) February 2020 and (e) March 2020.

Jo Churchill:

The information on how many cancer-related National Health Service operations were carried out throughout the United Kingdom is not available in the format requested.

A count of finished admission episodes (FAEs) with a primary diagnosis of cancer, with a main procedure carried out in England in November 2019, December 2019, January 2020 and February 2020 is provided in the following table. Data for March 2020 is not yet available.

Activity in English NHS hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector:

MONTH	FAEs
November 2019	133,898
December 2019	126,754
January 2020	141,329
February 2020	108,287

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS Digital

Note: Provisional data (subject to change following reviews)

■ Cannabis: Medical Treatments

Ronnie Cowan:[\[39003\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the guidance 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 discussions officials in his Department have had with officials in the Home Office on ensuring that import licences for cannabis-based products for medicinal use are granted without delay; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

The Department continues to work closely with the Home Office and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to maintain the supply of unlicensed cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs) to ensure that patients with prescriptions from specialist doctors can access their medicine. The Home Office and the MHRA treat all import requests for CBPMs as emergency supplies, and on receipt of the correct documentation, applicants receive decisions within a few working days.

The Government made changes to import policy in March 2020 to enable pharmaceutical wholesalers to apply to import CBPMs in anticipation of prescriptions,

instead of only applying to import the quantity specified on a prescription. We are continuing to work with industry to ensure supply remains uninterrupted during the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ Cannabis: Prescriptions

Ronnie Cowan: [\[39000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many prescriptions for cannabis-based products for medicinal use have been issued on the NHS since the rescheduling of those products.

Jo Churchill:

There have been 3,546 items for licensed and unlicensed cannabis-based medicines prescribed on a National Health Service prescription, dispensed in the community in England and submitted to the NHS Business Services Authority for reimbursement for the period November 2018 to February 2020 (latest data available).

■ Cardiovascular System: Diseases

Ben Bradley: [\[39787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to raise awareness of cardiovascular disease.

Jo Churchill:

NHS England and NHS Improvement are running a campaign as part of the national COVID-19 campaign to encourage people to access NHS services for non-COVID-19 related conditions.

This will include raising awareness of the symptoms of heart attack and of the need to immediately call 999. These campaign assets will be made available for all National Health Service organisations to publish through their public facing channels.

■ Cervical Cancer: Screening

Jonathan Ashworth: [\[38921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many cervical smear tests have taken place in the NHS in each month of 2020 to date.

Jo Churchill:

Information on the number of cervical smear tests carried out between January and April 2020 is not currently available. Information on cervical screening uptake rates is published quarterly by NHS Digital and can be found on their website using the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/cervical-screening-programme/cervical-screening-programme-coverage-statistics-management-information>

■ Childbirth

Alberto Costa:

[\[39563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to enable birthing partners to be present at (a) emergency and (b) unplanned births.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Guidance produced by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is clear that women should be encouraged to have a single birth partner, who has no symptoms of COVID-19, present with them during any type of labour and birth, unless the birth occurs under general anaesthetic. Having a trusted birth partner present throughout labour is known to make a significant difference to the safety and well-being of women in childbirth.

If the birth partner has symptoms of coronavirus, they will not be allowed to go into the maternity suite, to safeguard the health of the woman, other women and babies, and the maternity staff. However, an alternative, well birth partner can attend in their place.

■ Clipper Logistics: Protective Clothing

Caroline Lucas:

[\[39617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reasons Clipper Logistics deliveries of personal protective equipment have not been delivered to the Brighton and Hove area; on what date those deliveries are expected to arrive; (a) how and (b) for what reasons Clipper Logistics was selected to make those deliveries; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 29 April 2020]: In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the system set up to supply 226 National Health Service trusts has increased its operations in a matter of weeks so that it now provides drops of critical equipment to 58,000 different providers.

Clipper Logistics is an agile and experienced logistics provider used to servicing fast-moving consumer goods industry. Therefore, to manage the required increase in logistic capabilities, we have brought together the NHS, Clipper Logistics, industry and the Armed Forces to create a giant personal protective equipment (PPE) distribution network and deliver critical PPE supplies to those who need it.

The NHS Supply Chain has confirmed that all Brighton trusts have had PPE pushed to them and we are working around the clock to get PPE to where it needs to go as soon as possible.

■ Coronavirus: Cervical Cancer**Alex Norris:** [\[38646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) total and (b) routine cervical smears have been delayed (i) across NHS England and (ii) by NHS Trust as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

NHS England and NHS Improvement do not hold the data requested. Information on cervical screening uptake rates is published quarterly by NHS Digital and can be found on their website using the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/cervical-screening-programme/cervical-screening-programme-coverage-statistics-management-information>

To protect patients and staff during this pandemic, some clinical services are rescheduling routine invitations or appointments to a later date, including routine screening appointments. NHS England and NHS Improvement are working with service providers to ensure that plans are in place to reschedule and restore services as soon as is safely possible to do so, in order to minimise any risk to individual patients.

NHS England and NHS Improvement recommend that anyone experiencing any unusual symptoms should contact their general practitioner practice as soon as possible for advice.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control**Steve McCabe:** [\[37434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of enabling (a) hospital specialists and (b) GPs to exercise discretion in the classification of people with pre-existing categories as vulnerable people in relation to covid-19 support.

Jo Churchill:

The Chief Medical Officer has led a thorough clinical review process to identify six categories of underlying clinical conditions which place someone at very high risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19. General practitioners and hospital clinicians have the discretion to add individual patients to the list of those classified as clinically extremely vulnerable based on careful, clinical assessments of each individual's needs. This requires expert clinical judgement on a patient-by-patient basis.

Dr Matthew Offord: [\[38539\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he held discussions with delegates at the most recent G20 meeting on a proposal for a global covid-19 testing, treatment and vaccine scheme.

Jo Churchill:

The G20 Health Ministers' Meeting on 19 April was held virtually and attended by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Innovation (Lord Bethell). During its intervention, the United Kingdom emphasised the importance of a coordinated global response to COVID-19, including on the development of vaccines. Due to the virtual nature of the meeting, discussions were not held in the margins.

Ministers in the Department are in regular discussions with their counterparts in other countries on a wide range of issues relating to COVID-19. This includes regular conversations on collaboration on the issues of testing, treatment and vaccinations.

■ Coronavirus: Ethnic Groups**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[39829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when (a) the Government and (b) Public Health England began to record data on ethnicity in the number of deaths due to covid-19.

Jo Churchill:

Routine statistics on deaths produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) do not include any breakdowns by ethnicity, because ethnicity is not one of the particulars recorded at death registration. The content of the death certificate and the process of registration are laid down by law. However, the ONS is working to produce estimates of death rates by ethnicity by linking death registrations to demographic characteristics recorded at the 2011 Census.

Standard recording practice of laboratory confirmed cases across laboratory systems requires recording of only minimal data, such as date of birth and name; this does not include ethnicity. As these records are not intended for disease surveillance purposes, Public Health England is matching thousands of laboratory records of COVID-19 cases to other health records to draw down accurate data on ethnicity.

Shabana Mahmood:[\[40547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment the Government has made of for what reasons black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities are disproportionately affected by covid-19.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England (PHE) has been asked to review the potential that some ethnic minority groups are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. As part of this review, PHE is matching laboratory records of COVID-19 cases to other health records to draw down accurate data on ethnicity, age, sex and geographical region.

■ Coronavirus: Protective Clothing**Alexander Stafford:****[37742]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that sufficient personal protective equipment is available for care workers looking after (a) the elderly and (b) vulnerable people during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

We are working at pace with wholesalers to ensure a longer-term supply of all aspects of personal protective equipment, including gloves, aprons, facemasks and hand sanitiser.

As of 20 April 2020, we have provided 29 million items of personal protective equipment (PPE) to designated social care wholesalers. This includes 11.4 million facemasks, 13.3 million aprons and 4.2 million gloves. Starting in the week beginning 6 April 2020, we have authorised the release of a further 34 million items of PPE across 38 Local Resilience Forums, including 8 million aprons, 4 million masks and 20 million gloves. These stocks are intended primarily for social care and primary care health services. We have also mobilised the National Supply Disruption Response system to respond to emergency PPE requests.

Further information can be found in the Adult Social Care Action Plan and PPE Plan at the following links:

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

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

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Julian Sturdy:****[38560]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase manufacturing capacity to mass produce a potential coronavirus vaccine.

Jo Churchill:

The new Government 'Vaccines Taskforce' is working with the BioIndustry Association Taskforce to review options for increasing the capacity of domestic capability to manufacture vaccines, in response to COVID-19, including how to support the acceleration and expand the capacity of the Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, so that it becomes operational earlier than planned and is able to manufacture population level doses.

For COVID-19, the type of vaccine manufacturing capacity needed will be determined by the nature of the vaccine that is developed and the technology used to produce the vaccines. The scale of facility needed will depend on how potent the vaccines are, and the productivity of the processes used to produce them.

This work is proceeding at pace, with the support of industry and academic partners, to ensure that we are identifying suitable capacity across different vaccine types, while those vaccines are still under development.

Christian Wakeford:

[38632]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) funding and (b) other resources the Government is allocating to the search for (a) a vaccine and (b) different treatment options for covid-19.

Jo Churchill:

The Government has announced a total of £42.5 million to support clinical trials of vaccines being developed at the University of Oxford and Imperial College London. This funding is in addition to the £25 million committed through the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-Medical Research Council and National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Covid-19 Rapid Response Research Call¹. The NIHR and UKRI have also jointly launched a Rapid Response rolling call for proposals to address evidence gaps and needs on COVID-19, which builds on the earlier NIHR-UKRI COVID-19 research initiatives.

Building on existing trial capability, national platform trials have been expanded to test the most promising therapeutics candidates as large Phase III clinical trials. This currently includes the PRINCIPLE, RECOVERY and REMAP-CAP trials which cover primary, acute and intensive care settings.

A cross-Government Vaccines Taskforce has been established to coordinate and accelerate the development and manufacture of a COVID-19 vaccine, in partnership with academia and industry, and look at other therapeutic options.

The Government has also contributed £250 million of United Kingdom aid, the biggest donation of any country, to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to support ongoing work to rapidly develop a COVID-19 vaccine.

Note:

¹<https://www.ukri.org/news/covid-19-research-boosted-by-new-projects/>

■ Coronavirus: Ventilators

Sir John Hayes:

[34903]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many ventilators have been purchased by the NHS since the start of the covid-10 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

At the start of the Covid-19 outbreak in March there were more than 8,000 ventilators in hospitals across the UK. Today, we have over 10,800 mechanical ventilators available to NHS patients. There are another 2,000 mechanical ventilators on order that are expected to be available shortly, comprising 1,500 sourced from existing providers and 500 from new UK suppliers responding to the Prime Minister's ventilator challenge.

This figure will continue to rise as we procure further equipment and more products from the PM's ventilator challenge become available.

■ Dental Services: Coronavirus

Alex Norris: [\[38655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the (a) mean and (b) median wait is for a patient referred to an urgent dental care hub for initial treatment.

Jo Churchill:

This data is not collected. Patients will be referred into urgent dental treatment centres via local dental practices and through NHS 111. We would expect urgent treatment centres to prioritise patients based on clinical need.

Alex Norris: [\[38658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many dentists (a) have been trained and (b) are waiting for training to work at urgent dental care hubs.

Jo Churchill:

No additional training is necessary for dentists undertaking work at urgent dental care centres. The necessary changes to high street dental services during COVID-19 relates to location and not to the types of care being delivered, which continue to be within the scope of dentists' clinical expertise.

■ Dental Services: Medical Equipment

Dame Diana Johnson: [\[38441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of supply of FFP3 for aerosol generating procedures at urgent dental centres.

Alex Norris: [\[38653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to ensure that dentists at urgent dental care hubs receive adequate supplies of personal protective equipment.

Jo Churchill:

The Government is doing everything to support and protect all our frontline health and care staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, including dentists. The Government is working closely with industry, the National Health Service, social care providers and the army to ensure that personal protective equipment (PPE) is delivered to those who need it.

Dentistry does not usually require FFP3 masks or other higher level PPE. However, the heightened risks presented by COVID-19 mean that this is required for any aerosol generating procedures. We are aware that there have been delays for a number of urgent care dental hubs in getting all the PPE now required and that this is still an issue for some hubs. The Department and NHS England and NHS

Improvement are working urgently to resolve this. As an immediate measure emergency dentistry has been placed on the list of priorities areas to receive supplies from Local Resilience Forums.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[41374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many Written Questions to his Department due for answer on (a) 26, (b) 27 and (c) 28 April (i) did not receive a substantive response on the named day and (ii) are still awaiting a substantive response; and what steps he is taking to ensure that hon. Members are able to hold him to account through Written Questions.

Edward Argar:

The information requested is shown in the following table, as of 30 April.

DATE	ANSWERED AFTER NAMED DAY	UNANSWERED
27 April	17	64
28 April	0	1
29 April	5	22

In total, 402 Written Questions from hon. Members and Noble Lords were due to be answered in April, with 280 or 70% of those due on 27, 28 and 29 April.

We take parliamentary scrutiny incredibly seriously and have put arrangements in place to ensure that Ministers continue to fulfil their Parliamentary duties whilst adhering to the Government's guidance to work from home where possible.

In addition to Written Questions, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has provided regular oral statements to update Parliament on the Government's response to COVID-19 and has appeared before the Health and Social Care Select Committee to provide evidence on the work of the Department.

■ Doctors: Recruitment

Dr Dan Poulter:

[\[39611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to ensure that doctors in training are recruited to the first year of core training posts for August 2020.

Jo Churchill:

The majority of core level and specialty trainee level 1 (ST1) recruitment was completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with offers being released to successful applicants in early March 2020. For specialties with vacancies remaining, contingency processes have been put in place to ensure that applicants can be ranked and selected without face to face interview. Health Education England (HEE)

has confirmed that offers for these posts will be released by no later than 26 May 2020.

HEE has also confirmed that alternative selection processes have been adopted to ensure that higher training posts in all specialties can be appointed to in time for August 2020.

Dr Dan Poulter: [\[39662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to ensure that doctors in training are recruited to the first year of higher training posts for August 2020.

Helen Whately:

The majority of core level and specialty trainee level 1 (ST1) recruitment was completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with offers being released to successful applicants in early March 2020. For specialties with vacancies remaining, contingency processes have been put in place to ensure that applicants can be ranked and selected without face to face interview. Health Education England (HEE) has confirmed that offers for these posts will be released by no later than 26 May 2020.

HEE has also confirmed that alternative selection processes have been adopted to ensure that higher training posts in all specialties can be appointed to in time for August 2020.

■ **Drugs: Coronavirus**

Justin Madders: [\[38607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the availability of generic drugs since the start of the covid-19 outbreak; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the outbreak on the supply of medicines.

Jo Churchill:

As part of our concerted national efforts to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, we are doing everything we can to ensure patients continue to access safe and effective medicines.

The Department is working closely with the pharmaceutical industry, the National Health Service and others in the supply chain to help ensure patients can access the medicines they need. and precautions are in place to reduce the likelihood of future shortages, including access to United Kingdom stockpiles of a range of generic medicines.

The Department shares regular information about impending supply issues and management plans with the NHS via networks in primary and secondary care and will liaise with relevant patient groups about issues affecting specific medicines.

■ Estradot

Caroline Nokes:

[\[37619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of supplies of the HRT drug, Estradot.

Jo Churchill:

We are aware of ongoing supply issues with some hormone replacement therapy (HRT) preparations for a variety of reasons. Although some HRT products are still affected by supply issues, alternatives remain available, and the overall supply situation has been improving since February 2020 and will continue to improve over the coming months. We are continuing to work closely with all suppliers to resolve the issues as quickly as possible and maintain overall supply to patients across the United Kingdom.

Novartis, the manufacturer of Estradot confirmed that it has not experienced manufacturing issues and that Estradot supplies continue to remain available. However, the company has experienced an increase in demand, due to shortages affecting other HRT products so has been managing and monitoring supplies closely.

■ Ethnic Groups: Coronavirus

Shabana Mahmood:

[\[40548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that the cross-Government strategy to tackle covid-19 does not disproportionately put black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities at a heightened risk of infection.

Jo Churchill:

We have asked Public Health England to complete a rapid review to understand how COVID-19 may be having an impact on different ethnic groups. To complement this rapid review, the National Institute for Health Research and UK Research and Innovation issued a joint call on 22 April for research proposals to investigate emerging evidence of an association between ethnicity and COVID-19 incidence and adverse health outcomes.

■ Exercise Cygnus

Catherine West:

[\[41129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish a list of the participants of Exercise Cygnus.

Jo Churchill:

Exercise Cygnus was a national level pandemic influenza exercise involving Ministers and officials from the Department; other Government departments; devolved administrations; NHS England; Public Health England and local agencies.

The lessons identified from the exercise have been considered across Government and shared with participants and local pandemic preparedness planners. Lessons

identified from previous influenza pandemics, and exercises such as Exercise Cygnus, continue to inform the development of pandemic preparedness plans.

■ Gender Recognition: Children

Sir John Hayes:

[40976]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps are being taken to ensure that children cannot take irreversible decisions about their gender before they are sufficiently mature to make such decisions.

Jo Churchill:

The issue of informed consent by people under the age of 16 is currently the subject of legal proceedings and therefore the Department is unable to comment pending judicial ruling.

Meanwhile, NHS England is reviewing its commissioning position on the administration of hormone treatments to children and young people on the gender dysphoria pathway, including the evidence-base on the administration of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones.

Further to this £1.3 million has been awarded to fund a Longitudinal Outcomes of Gender Identity in Children (LOGIC) study looking into the development of gender identity in children and young people. The study began in 2019 and is following patients over a two-year period.

■ Health Services and Social Services: Disease Control

Mr Stephen Morgan:

[40749]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of guidance from Public Health England which outlines that chest compressions and defibrillation are not considered aerosol generating procedures and the guidance from the Resuscitation Council UK to the contrary on the ability of care provider executives to safeguard staff; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

The United Kingdom's Personal Protective Equipment guidance continues to recommend the highest level of protection for health and social care teams treating COVID-19 patients. It is crucial that everyone that needs it has access to the right protective equipment.

The Department's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) has recently reviewed the evidence and has maintained this position, stating that they do "not consider that the evidence supports chest compressions or defibrillation being procedures that are associated with a significantly increased risk of transmission of acute respiratory infections." Further information is available at the following link:

<https://app.box.com/s/3lkcbxepqixkg4mv640dpvvg978ixjtf/file/657486851975>

■ Health Visitors: Coronavirus

Tim Loughton:

[\[38864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance has been issued to local authorities on the redeployment of health visitors during the covid-19 outbreak; and whether Public Health England has taken steps to (a) scrutinise and (b) challenge local decisions on redeployment.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: The 'COVID-19 Prioritisation within Community Health Services' guidance was published on 19 March and provides advice to National Health Service organisations and to local authorities on the provision of community services at this time.

Decisions regarding redeployment of staff during COVID-19 are for health organisations and local authorities.

■ Hydroxychloroquine

Daniel Zeichner:

[\[34365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure a robust supply of hydroxychloroquine to patients reliant on that medication to manage (a) lupus, (b) scleroderma, (c) rheumatoid arthritis and (d) other serious autoimmune rheumatic conditions during the covid-19 pandemic.

Jo Churchill:

The Department is working closely with industry, the National Health Service and others in the supply chain to help ensure patients can access the medicines they need, including hydroxychloroquine, and precautions are in place to reduce the likelihood of future shortages.

Clinical trials are being established to test hydroxychloroquine as an agent in the treatment of COVID-19. There are centrally held supplies of hydroxychloroquine for those clinical trials. Separate supplies of hydroxychloroquine for patients that are already using the medicine for its licensed indications can be accessed through usual routes. In addition, there is an export ban in place to protect United Kingdom stocks of hydroxychloroquine that is intended for UK patients.

■ Industrial Diseases: Rotherham

Alexander Stafford:

[\[40817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have been diagnosed with industrial diseases in (a) England, (b) Yorkshire, (c) the borough of Rotherham and (d) Rother Valley constituency in the last calendar year.

Jo Churchill:

The information is not available.

■ Lupus: Hydroxychloroquine**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[38644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that patients suffering with lupus are able to access adequate supplies of hydroxychloroquine.

Jo Churchill:

The Department is working closely with industry, the National Health Service and others in the supply chain to help ensure patients can access the medicines they need, including hydroxychloroquine, and precautions are in place to reduce the likelihood of future shortages.

Hydroxychloroquine is not currently licensed to treat COVID-19 related symptoms or prevent infection. Clinical trials are being established to test hydroxychloroquine as an agent in the treatment of COVID-19. There are centrally held supplies of hydroxychloroquine for those clinical trials.

Separate supplies of hydroxychloroquine for patients that are already using the medicine for its licensed indications can be accessed through usual routes. The Department is in regular contact with suppliers to ensure stock continues to remain available in the supply chain. In addition, there is an export ban in place to protect United Kingdom stocks of hydroxychloroquine that is intended for UK patients.

■ Motor Neurone Disease: Coronavirus**Seema Malhotra:**[\[37688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the guidance published by Public Health England on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from covid-19, if he will take steps to include people with motor neurone disease in the extremely vulnerable group.

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 the severity of their symptoms means they may be clinically extremely vulnerable, should contact their GP to discuss.

■ Primary Health Care: Coronavirus

Alex Norris:

[38663]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what mental health support has been provided to primary care providers in England in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

On 23 April, NHS England and NHS Improvement, in collaboration with the Royal College of General Practitioners, launched #LookingAfterYouToo: Coaching Support for Primary Care Staff service. This service provides access to individual coaching support by video link or telephone with highly trained, experienced coaches and it is available to all clinical and non-clinical primary care workers employed or contracted to deliver work on behalf of the National Health Service.

The aim of the services is to provide staff with the opportunities to process experiences, develop coping skills, deal with difficult conversations and develop strategies for self-management in difficult circumstances. This is on top of the wider range of health and wellbeing resources available on the NHS people website at the following link:

www.people.nhs.uk

■ Protective Clothing

Rachael Maskell:

[39577]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) ffp2 and (b) ffp3 masks have been distributed to each (i) local authority area and (ii) NHS Trust since 1 March 2020.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 29 April 2020]: The NHS Supply Chain and Clipper Logistics supported by the Armed Forces, are working to regularly push personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies to every National Health Service trust in England. From 25 February to 26 April we delivered over 997 million items of PPE across the health and social care system within England, plus tens of millions more will have been distributed by the devolved administrations. This figure includes 143 million masks.

We are working round the clock to support the NHS supply chain and to better enable the service respond to the unprecedented demand for PPE.

■ Protective Clothing: Charities

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[37459]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that charities operating in the medical sector are equipped with adequate personal protective equipment during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[37462]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the extent of the need for personal protective equipment for people who work in the charity sector who are also working in frontline health services.

Jo Churchill:

The Department is taking steps to ensure that all staff operating in the medical sector can access adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), and as such has delivered millions of items of personal protective equipment for staff at care homes, home care providers and hospices as well as to hospitals, ambulance trusts, general practitioner practices and pharmacists.

The needs of staff in frontline health services are covered in the United Kingdom-wide PPE Plan published on 10 April 2020. This provides clear guidance on who needs PPE and in what circumstances they need to use it, and how sufficient supplies will be secured to manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan can be accessed on the following link:

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

■ Remote Working: Musculoskeletal Disorders

Stephen Timms:

[40469]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the effect of home working on people's musculoskeletal health.

Jo Churchill:

Improving musculoskeletal health is a key priority for this Government and we made specific commitments to tackle musculoskeletal ill-health last year in the Prevention Green Paper. We recognise that homeworking and other specific working practices may affect physical and mental health and wellbeing. Working with partners, we will continue to monitor available data and shape new data to ensure that the association between work circumstances and a range of health effects can be examined.

■ Social Services: Pay

Alex Sobel:

[39768]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans the Government has to increase the (a) pay and (b) statutory sick pay of carers during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

We are incredibly proud of all our staff in social care. We are working hard to ensure that carers feel supported and safe to continue the fight against COVID-19.

We have announced £1.6 billion of funding for local authorities to help support adult social care providers and staff to respond to COVID-19. This includes the cost of maintaining income as far as possible for those that are unable to work. This aims to ensure that carers who are unwell or self-isolating do not lose out financially because

they are doing the right thing. This is on top of measures that allow the payment of Statutory Sick Pay from the first day of sickness or isolation.

In addition, eligible employers will be able to reclaim up to two weeks of statutory sick pay paid for absences relating to COVID-19.

■ Vaccination: Manufacturing Industries

Rosie Cooper: [\[37533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the capacity of the vaccine manufacturing industry.

Anne Marie Morris: [\[37682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the UK's vaccine manufacturing capacity.

Jo Churchill:

The new Government 'Vaccines Taskforce' is working with the BioIndustry Association Taskforce to review existing domestic capability to manufacture vaccines, in response to COVID-19. The Taskforce is also reviewing options for increasing this capacity, including how to support the acceleration and expand the capacity of the Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, so that it becomes operational earlier than planned and is able to manufacture population level doses.

For COVID-19, the type of vaccine manufacturing capacity needed will be determined by the nature of the vaccine that is developed and the technology used to produce the vaccines. This work is proceeding at pace, with the support of industry and academic partners, to ensure that we are identifying suitable capacity across different vaccine types, while those vaccines are still under development.

■ Ventilators

Dr Dan Poulter: [\[37570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many new ventilators have been supplied to the NHS as a result of the Prime Minister's UK ventilator challenge.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: At the start of the COVID-19 outbreak in March there were more than 8,000 ventilators in hospitals across the United Kingdom. Today, we have over 10,800 mechanical ventilators available to National Health Service patients. There are another 2,000 mechanical ventilators on order that are expected to be available shortly, comprising 1,500 sourced from existing providers and 500 from new UK suppliers responding to the Prime Minister's ventilator challenge.

This figure will continue to rise as we procure further equipment and more products from the Prime Minister's ventilator challenge become available.

■ Ventilators: EU Action**Geraint Davies:** [\[37386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reasons the UK did not join the EU scheme for purchasing ventilators.

Edward Argar:

The United Kingdom has been a signatory to the EU Joint Procurement Agreement since 2014. Owing to an initial communication problem, the UK did not receive an invitation in time to take part in the first four European 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. We are working around the clock to deliver a strategy that provides the best outcome for the whole UK.

■ World Health Organisation: Coronavirus**Julian Sturdy:** [\[37620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to make an assessment of the adequacy of the World Health Organisation's response to initial evidence of the covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan.

Julian Sturdy: [\[37621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to make an assessment of whether the World Health Organisation's decision-making regarding the covid-19 outbreak has been influenced by political considerations.

Jo Churchill:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has an important role to play in leading the global health response. We want to see WHO continue to learn lessons on how to improve its response to global health emergencies and as such would expect a full review of all elements of their response to COVID-19 to take place once they are out of response mode, as has occurred after previous Public Health Emergencies of International Concern.

HOME OFFICE**■ Asylum: Applications****Mr Laurence Robertson:** [\[41379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 28 April 2020 to Question 37427 on Asylum: Applications, for what reasons only those medically qualified asylum seekers who have been waiting for 12 months or more for

decisions on their applications can apply to work for the NHS during the covid-19 outbreak; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

Current policy allowing medically qualified asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting for 12 months or more on a decision is fully compliant with our domestic and international obligations.

Asylum seeker right to work is a complex issue. We are continuing to monitor the wider situation closely and, in compliance with Public Health England advice, are making continuous adjustments to our processes and procedures where appropriate and necessary to do so.

■ **Biometrics: Registration**

Alison Thewliss:

[\[32207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make changes to the system of registering biometrics during the period of the covid-19 outbreak.

Kevin Foster:

Changes have already been made to the system – UKVI Service and Support Centres (SSCs) and Visas & Citizenship Application Services (VCAS) suspended customer facing services on 24 March 2020 and 27 March 2020 respectively as part of the response to Covid-19.

From 20 April 2020 we began offering reduced biometric enrolment service only to those customers where it is absolutely necessary. All other customers have been deferred from having to provide their biometrics after the lockdown period is over.

■ **Detention Centres: Coronavirus**

Alex Sobel:

[\[39786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure migrants in immigration detention are able to access soap and sanitiser.

Chris Philp:

The safety and health of people in the detention estate is of the utmost importance. We are following all Public Health England guidance on COVID-19 and have robust contingency plans in place, including measures such as shielding and use of personal protective equipment.

Basic hygiene is a key part of tackling COVID-19. Handwashing facilities are available in all immigration removal centres and we are working closely with suppliers to ensure we have an adequate supply of soap and cleaning materials. In addition, each centre has posters and leaflets to inform staff and 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 protective measures in place.

immigrants**Stephen Doughty:** [\[41458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many individuals arrived at the UK border from (a) Spain, (b) China, (c) Italy, (d) USA, (e) Iran, (f) Turkey and (g) France in each week since 1 January 2020.

Stephen Doughty: [\[41461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many individuals arriving at the UK border from (a) Spain, (b) China, (c) Italy, (d) USA, (e) Iran, (f) Turkey and (g) France were (i) assessed for symptoms of and (ii) tested for covid-19 in each week from 1 January to 23 March 2020.

Chris Philp:

Border Force are unable to provide the arrival data requested, as it would require a manual review of thousands of records and this would be cost prohibitive.

Border Force are not responsible for making any medical assessments or medical interventions when dealing with individuals at the border.

Our approach to tackling coronavirus is and has always been driven by the latest scientific and medical advice, and procedures at the border have been strictly following the latest PHE guidance throughout.

In line with that advice, no changes have been required at the UK border.

To bolster public health measures already in place, passengers at airports are provided with information on symptoms and the social distancing processes.

Border Force continues to work collaboratively with devolved administrations, including Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England, to support the COVID 19 response.

Immigrants: Finance**Rachel Hopkins:** [\[39718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has undertaken an assessment of the financial effect of the covid-19 outbreak on people who have no recourse to public funds.

Rachel Hopkins: [\[39719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to suspend the no recourse to public funds status during the covid-19 outbreak.

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.

In addition, the Government has made in excess of £3.2 billion of funding to local authorities in England, and additional funding under the Barnett formula to the devolved administrations to enable them to respond to Covid-19 pressures across all the services they deliver, including services helping the most vulnerable.

More information on the support available to migrants, including those with NRPF, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrant-living-in-the-uk>.

Neil Coyle: **[40642]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress her Department has made on its reassessment of the restrictions on no recourse to public funds which are preventing some people accessing benefits and other support during the covid-19 outbreak.

Neil Coyle: **[40643]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions her Department has had with the Department for Work and Pensions on ending no recourse to public funds restrictions during the covid-19 outbreak.

Neil Coyle: **[40644]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions her Department has had with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on ending no recourse to public funds restrictions during the covid-19 outbreak.

Neil Coyle:

[40645]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the process is for local authorities to reclaim funding spent on housing homeless people under no recourse to public funds conditions during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office is working closely with other government departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 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.

In addition, the Government has made in excess of £3.2 billion of funding to local authorities in England, and additional funding under the Barnett formula to the devolved administrations to enable them to respond to Covid-19 pressures across all the services they deliver, including services helping the most vulnerable.

Funding provided to local authorities under the Covid-19 emergency response will be paid through a grant that is not ring-fenced, recognising that local authorities are best placed to decide how this funding is spent.

More information on the support available to migrants, including those with NRPF, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrant-living-in-the-uk>.

■ Immigration Controls: Coronavirus

Stephen Doughty:

[41462]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish scientific assessments provided to her Department on the efficacy of closing or restricting the UK

border to people arriving at the UK Border from (a) Spain, (b) China, (c) Italy, (d) USA, (e) Iran, (f) Turkey and (g) France to prevent the spread of covid-19 in the UK from 1 January 2020 to 23 March 2020.

Chris Philp:

SAGE advice and reports in response to the Covid 19 outbreak will be published in accordance with requirements.

■ **Immigration: Married People**

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[40657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will ask the Migration Advisory Committee to consider and make recommendations on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the ability of non-EEA spouses and partners to meet Minimum Income Requirements.

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, which was set following advice from the Migration Advisory Committee, 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.

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

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Alison Thewliss:

[\[37980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to respond to the letter of 27 March 2020 from the hon. Member for Glasgow Central on the effect of Covid-19 on people in immigration detention.

Chris Philp:

I can confirm that a response was dispatched on 30 April 2020.

■ **Migrants: Quarantine**

Stephen Doughty:

[\[41459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people arriving at the UK Border from (a) Spain, (b) China, (c) Italy, (d) USA, (e) Iran, (f) Turkey and (g) France were taken to Government supported covid-19 quarantine centres in each week from 1 January 2020 to 23 March 2020; and how many of those people were required to remain at those quarantine centres for a defined period of time.

Stephen Doughty:[\[41460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, from which countries or specific locations, individuals arriving in the UK from 1 January to 23 March 2020 were taken to Government supported covid-19 quarantine centres and required to remain there.

Chris Philp:

Individuals arriving from Wuhan and Tokyo were taken to Government supported isolation facilities.

On 31/01, a total of 83 passengers arrived in the UK on an evacuation flight arranged by the FCO from Wuhan. Upon arrival, these passengers were taken to an isolation facility at Arrowe Park, The Wirral, Merseyside.

On 02/02, a further 11 passengers arrived in the UK on a French led flight evacuation from Wuhan. These passengers were also taken to the isolation facility at Arrowe Park.

09/02, a total of 147 passengers arrived in the UK on a final evacuation flight arranged by the FCO from Wuhan. Upon arrival, these passengers were taken to an isolation facility at Kents Hill Park conference Centre in Milton Keynes. On this flight were an additional 104 passengers who were transferred onto further aircraft for onward travel to Germany, Italy and France.

On 22/02, a total of 32 passengers arrived in the UK on an evacuation flight arranged by the FCO from Tokyo. These passengers had been aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship. Upon arrival, these passengers were taken to the isolation facility at Arrowe Park.

■ Modern Slavery Act 2015 Independent Review**Yasmin Qureshi:**[\[40825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when the Government will publish its response to the Transparency in Supply Chains consultation which closed in September 2019.

Victoria Atkins:

In response to recommendations of the Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, ([published on 22 May 2019](#)), the Home Office ran a public consultation ahead of potential changes to section 54 (transparency in supply chains requirements) of the Modern Slavery Act. The consultation ran from 9 July to 17 September 2019 and sought views on a range of proposals intended to strengthen the reporting requirement. The Government is currently considering the findings of this consultation and will publish a response in due course.

■ NHS: Migrant Workers**Gavin Robinson:**[\[40640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of (a) providing financial support for, (b) extending the terms of the

visas of and (c) granting leave to remain to family members of key NHS workers residing in the UK on a Tier 2 visa in the event that those key NHS workers die as a result of covid-19.

Kevin Foster:

As set out in the announcement by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on 27 April, family members of NHS workers who die as a result of contracting Coronavirus (Covid-19) will receive £60,000.

The Home Secretary has also confirmed the Home Office will grant Indefinite Leave to Remain to family members of migrant NHS workers who die as a result of contracting Coronavirus (Covid-19).

■ **Offences against Children: Netherlands**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[40520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government is taking in co-operation with the Netherlands Government to ensure the prosecution of people posting online child sexual abuse material that is held in, and distributed from, the Netherlands and available in the UK.

Victoria Atkins:

The Government is committed to tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse wherever and however it occurs. There can be no safe space for paedophiles to operate either here or abroad and we will do all we can to keep children safe. We continue to work closely with law enforcement in the UK and international partners to close down online networks and bring offenders to justice. We announced in the 2019 Spending Round an investment of an £30 million to support UK law enforcement to bear down on child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Government is working closely with the Netherlands to tackle online child sexual abuse material that is held in, and distributed from, the Netherlands and available in the UK. The Dutch approach to addressing the threat of online child sexual exploitation and abuse was outlined in a letter from their Ministry of Justice and Security to the European Union. This provided a useful platform for our engagement on how we can work together on this issue, identify areas of common interest, best practice and ways to coordinate our efforts to tackle the threat.

The Dutch hotline, EOKM, will also be working with the UK's Internet Watch Foundation to combat the issue of child sexual abuse material. In 1996 when the Internet Watch Foundation was founded, the UK hosted 18% of the global total of online child sexual abuse content; in 2019 this figure was just 0.1%.

UK police have existing powers under section 72 and Schedule 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 which provides for extra-territorial jurisdiction in relation to certain offences under the 2003 Act where the victim is under the age of 18 years old. We continue to look at what more we can do with our international partners giving due consideration to the findings of the "Children Outside the UK report" published by the Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Abuse in January 2020.

■ Refugees: Children**Rachel Hopkins:** [\[39717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the UK meets its obligation to reunite child refugees with family members in the UK where their applications have been accepted.

Chris Philp:

The UK remains fully committed to meeting our obligations under the Dublin III Regulation. The Regulation makes it very clear that once a take charge request has been accepted for an unaccompanied child, the transfer is the responsibility of the requesting State.

Despite covid-19 restrictions the UK remains ready to accept transfers under Dublin whenever Member States are in a position to make those arrangements. We are continuing to liaise with our counterparts in Member States so that we can effect transfers as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

Tommy Sheppard: [\[41086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure child refugees with family in the UK are able to access flights to enter the UK.

Chris Philp:

The UK remains fully committed to meeting our obligations under the Dublin III Regulation. Despite covid-19 restrictions the UK remains ready to accept transfers under Dublin whenever Member States are in a position to make those arrangements.

The Dublin Regulation makes it very clear that once a take charge request has been accepted for an unaccompanied child, the transfer is the responsibility of the requesting State. We are continuing to liaise with our counterparts in Member States so that we can effect transfers as soon as it is safe and practical to do so.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel**Tracey Crouch:** [\[37580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help prevent illegal migrants from crossing the English Channel to enter the UK.

Chris Philp:

Keeping our border secure is the Government's highest priority and it is committed to doing everything it can to stop these dangerous Channel crossings which are putting vulnerable lives at risk.

The Home Office liaises directly with the French Interior Ministry on addressing the issue of illegal migration, engaging at an official, diplomatic level and supported at an operational level through regular UK-French Migration Committees.

Through this joint-working, the UK has funded the continued deployment of gendarme reservists along the coast of northern France, who are patrolling constantly

in order to detect attempted crossings by migrants. Funding has been allocated, among other projects, for further improvements at ports in northern France and on the ground, this now includes drones, specialist vehicles and detection equipment to stop small boats leaving European shores.

Intelligence flows are also key to dismantling the organised crime groups behind crossings. We have restructured and repurposed our approach to support the growing intelligence feeds which is used to inform and direct how and where resource is deployed.

■ **Visas: Married People**

Dan Jarvis:

[\[40621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to grant extensions to family visas for visa holders that are unable to marry before those visas expire 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.

The current family Immigration Rules allow a fiancé(e) or proposed civil partner to apply for an extension of leave for a further six-months if there is good reason for their wedding or civil partnership not taking place during the initial six-month period of leave to enter. Cancellation of a wedding due to Covid-19 will be considered a good reason under this policy.

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.

■ **Windrush Generation Compensation**

Catherine West:

[\[41561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent progress has been made on the Windrush compensation scheme; and what further steps she plans to take to speed up the compensation process for claimants.

Priti Patel:

We publish information on the total number of claims submitted, claims paid and the overall amount paid out by the Windrush Compensation Scheme on a quarterly basis. The latest set of data can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/windrush-compensation-scheme-data-february-2020>.

We are processing claims as quickly as possible, but all claims are different, and the time taken will depend on many factors, including the complexity of the case. We are committed to working with the claimant to ensure all possible information is taken into

account and this will have an impact on the length of time it takes to process the claim. Wherever possible, we will make interim payments on parts of the claim that are straightforward to determine, such as immigration fees, thereby speeding up the provision of compensation.

In recent months, we have made several announcements in relation to the Windrush Compensation Scheme to encourage more people to submit a claim, and to help those who already have. We have extended the length of the Scheme by two years, to April 2023, to give individuals more time to submit a claim for compensation. We have also amended the mitigation policy – the criteria by which financial settlements are made – to take a wider range of circumstances into account when deciding awards. This change may help some people qualify for higher awards, particularly relating to loss of employment.

We recently announced that we will launch a dedicated national communications campaign, targeting individuals affected by Windrush across the UK. Further to this, we will open a £500k fund for grassroots organisations to promote the schemes. The fund and communications campaign will help to raise awareness of the Windrush Compensation Scheme and encourage eligible people to apply.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Beaches: Litter

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[38898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information his Department holds on the amount of money spent by local authorities on cleaning litter from beaches.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The 2020-21 Settlement for local government provides access to the largest year on year increase in spending power in a decade. Core Spending Power is expected to rise from £46.2 billion to £49.2 billion in 2020-21, an estimated 4.4 per cent real terms increase. The Government recognises that local authorities are best placed to decide on local spending priorities.

The Department does not collect data from local authorities on cleaning litter from beaches.

■ Buildings: Safety

Matthew Pennycook:

[\[41128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether it remains his policy to publish the prospectus for the Building Safety Fund in May 2020.

Christopher Pincher:

The prospectus for the Building Safety Fund will be published in May and we will open for registrations soon after.

■ Business Improvement Districts: Coronavirus

Steve Brine:

[\[41437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to provide support to Business Improvement Districts during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Government is committed to supporting Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and recognises the important role they play in rebuilding our high streets and towns, and that they will be even more important now as we look forward to the recovery phase from the current crisis. On 1 May, Government announced that we will be making available up to £6.1 million of support to BIDs to cover the equivalent of core operational costs for three months. This funding will be based on a fair percentage of a BID's levy income from each BID's operating year ending in 2019/20.

This is in addition to legislation included in the Coronavirus Act 2020 on 25 March. The clause enables BIDs to extend the maximum duration of their BID arrangements until 31 March 2021, delaying BID ballots due to take place between now and 31 December 2020 until March 2021. This will ensure that they are conducted in a safe and effective way.

■ Business: Coronavirus

Selaine Saxby:

[\[37940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he plans to take to support (a) small businesses and (b) the high street to recover from the covid-19 outbreak.

Selaine Saxby:

[\[37941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to provide support to local authorities to support SMEs during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government has announced a package of support for businesses to help with their ongoing business costs in recognition of the disruption caused by Covid-19. In particular, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has been working across Government to provide £12.33 billion of grant funding to help small and rural businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors manage their cashflow through this period. This support will take the form of two grant funding schemes, the Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF).

Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF):

- All businesses in England in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief (SBRR) and Rural Rates Relief (RRR) in the business rates system will be eligible for a payment of £10,000.

- This is estimated to apply to around 730,000 businesses across England.

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLCF):

- Businesses in England that would have been in receipt of the Expanded Retail Discount (which covers retail, hospitality and leisure) on 11 March with a rateable value of less than £51,000 will be eligible for the following cash grants per property:
- 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.
- 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.

Through Section 82 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Government has also made provision for a three-month moratorium on the ability of landlords of commercial properties to exercise any right of forfeiture that they may have due to the non-payment of rent by tenants. The provision delays the right to forfeiture; it does not otherwise impinge on a landlord's right to claim forfeiture at the end of that period. The objective of the clause is to provide much-needed certainty to those businesses hit hard by the Coronavirus and worried about security of tenure during this difficult period. The moratorium is in effect until 30 June, a period that can be extended by Government if necessary.

■ Community Development: Coronavirus

Saqib Bhatti:

[\[41191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he has taken to provide (a) financial and (b) other support to places of worship and community groups affected financially by the covid-19 lockdown.

Luke Hall:

As the Department responsible for Faith, MHCLG continues to play a facilitative role in ensuring Government understands the needs of faith communities and the challenges they may be currently facing due to the pandemic. We are working closely with a range of faith and community groups to better understand how Government can support them to respond to the pressures they face on sustaining their organisations during this period of time.

There are a range of Government-backed financial support measures that these organisations can access.

The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Scheme are both available to registered charities, and therefore places of worship registered with the Charities Commission. Registered charities have now been exempted from the requirement that the applicant derives at least 50 per cent of its income from its trading activity, so that more charities can access the scheme.

Any person or organisation, including places of worship, that is unable to pay any HMRC bill due to Covid-19 should get in contact through the HMRC Coronavirus

helpline. HMRC will be able to agree payment plans, which can include a gap before any initial payment is required. If charities or places of worship are VAT registered, they are also able to use the VAT deferral scheme.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme provides support for entity with a UK payroll - small or large, charitable or non-profit, to be reimbursed 80 per cent of furloughed worker wages by HMRC, up to a cap of £2500 per month.

However, we know that some charities cannot furlough staff as they are contributing to the frontline response. There is a substantial package of targeted support for charities on the frontline of responding to Covid-19. The Chancellor on 9 April announced £750 million of funding for charities providing key frontline services to vulnerable people affected by the pandemic. Further details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-sets-out-extra-750-million-coronavirus-funding-for-frontline-charities>

■ Community Housing Fund

Anthony Mangnall:

[39747]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will extend the Community Housing Fund for a further five years.

Christopher Pincher:

The Community Housing Fund closed at the end of March. Ministers are considering all budgets in the round and allocations for 2020/21 will be confirmed at Main Estimates later in the Spring. Allocations for future years will be considered at the next Spending Review.

The Government recognises that the community-led housing sector offers significant potential for helping to meet housing need across England. In addition to helping increase the rate of delivery of new housing, it can help deliver a range of benefits including diversifying the housebuilding sector, improving design and construction quality, developing modern methods of construction, and sustaining local communities and local economies. The support and close involvement of the local community enables the community-led approach to secure planning permission and deliver housing that may not be brought forward through speculative development.

■ Cooperatives and Social Enterprises: Coronavirus

Dr Matthew Offord:

[38905]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to extend access to the Small Business Coronavirus Business Grants to (a) social enterprises and (b) co-operatives.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government has announced a package of support for businesses to help with their ongoing business costs in recognition of the disruption caused by Covid-19. In particular, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has been working across Government to provide £12.3 billion of grant funding to help small and

rural businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors manage their cashflow through this period.

Under the Small Business Grants Fund, all businesses in England in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief (SBRR) and Rural Rates Relief (RRR) in the business rates system will be eligible for a payment of £10,000. This is estimated to apply to around 730,000 businesses across England.

If a social enterprise or a co-operative meets the eligibility criteria then they will be able to access a grant under the SBRR. Local authorities are responsible for administering the scheme and are making contact with eligible businesses directly.

■ Crematoriums: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher: [\[41058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether his Department plans to provide grant funding to local authorities to help with the costs of installing live web streaming facilities at crematoria to allow mourners to pay their respects remotely amid restrictions on funeral gatherings during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

On 18 April an additional £1.6 billion of funding was made available to support local authorities with costs of responding to Covid-19, bringing the total of additional funding to more than £3.2 billion. This funding is to support local authorities with the additional cost pressures from the extra work we have asked them to carry out as a result of the epidemic, which includes death management.

■ Crematoriums: York

Rachael Maskell: [\[39587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he has had discussions with City of York council on the provision of funerals at crematoriums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Secretary of State regularly engages with all councils and has been clear that funerals should continue to be held to allow families and loved ones to say goodbye and respect the wishes, religion and beliefs of the deceased. The Government issued Guidance for Managing Funerals on 19 April, advising councils on how to facilitate funeral arrangements so the physical attendance of mourners can continue as long as those attending adhere to the guidance, which details how the risk of Coronavirus transmission can be reduced.

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government spoke to the Leader of City of York Council on 13 April, and provided the Honourable Lady with an update following that conversation. My Department also wrote to all councils in England [on 17 April](#) reiterating the need for the bereaved to have the opportunity to pay their final respects as a fundamental part of the grieving process.

■ Estate Agents: Coronavirus

Sarah Olney:

[\[39714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he has assessed the service provided by estate agents as essential service to (a) the public and (b) the economy.

Christopher Pincher:

Estate Agents play an important role both in supporting home moves where these have to take place, and in helping their existing clients to delay moves wherever possible. However, Estate Agents are not defined as essential workers and should work from home wherever it is possible for them to do so, as long as the current stay-at-home measures apply.

■ Food Supply: Coronavirus

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[39632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment is made of the suitability of the contents of food parcels, provided to vulnerable people, in regard to their (a) medical, (b) religious and (c) ethical preferences.

Christopher Pincher:

This offer is an emergency response to a very fast-moving situation, to support those in greatest medical need. Some of the boxes may contain some products that are not permitted culturally or for faith reasons by some groups.

In the standardised box which is delivered to individuals there is an A4 note which explains that should the individual have any allergies or religious/cultural dietary requirements and are not able to eat some of the food and feel that the remaining contents of the package are not enough to provide food for 1 week, they should contact their local authority.

The packages include tinned meat and tinned tuna, but as the product is packaged there is no risk of individuals having to touch foodstuffs that are unsuitable.

Simon Baynes:

[\[39814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department has taken provide food and support to people identified by the NHS as the most vulnerable in society.

Christopher Pincher:

On 22 March, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government asked clinically extremely vulnerable individuals to shield and announced steps to support them to stay at home.

To support these individuals, we are working closely with local authorities, the food industry, local resilience and emergency partners, and voluntary groups to ensure these individuals have both support and access to essential items such as groceries

and medicines through deliveries and priority supermarket delivery slots, if they do not have alternative means of accessing these.

The system to deliver food packages is now up and running and capacity is building in line with current demand.

■ Future High Streets Fund

Fleur Anderson: [\[41603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent progress has been made under the Future High Streets Fund.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Local authorities have been working on business cases for the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) for over eight months and we are pleased to see the progress that has been made to date. Additionally, all shortlisted places have now received feedback on their draft business cases to support councils to make clear and evidence-based funding proposals within their final business cases.

You may also wish to note that in response to a significant number of calls from local authorities whose staff have been mobilised to respond to Covid-19, we have granted an extension to the deadline. MHCLG officials were in direct contact with all shortlisted local authorities last month to inform them of this extension to the deadline.

■ Holiday Accommodation and Second Homes: Coronavirus

Dr Dan Poulter: [\[40563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government how much money has been claimed under the Coronavirus Business Rates Retention Scheme (a) by second home owners and (b) for holiday lets in Suffolk.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Government has made £12.3 billion available to businesses under the Small Business Grants Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund. As stated in the Grant Funding Schemes guidance, businesses in scope of the Small Business Grants Fund are those which, on 11 March 2020, were eligible for relief under the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (including those with a Rateable Value between £12,000 and £15,000 which receive tapered relief) or the Rural Rate Relief Scheme. Businesses in scope of the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund are those that were eligible on 11 March 2020 for a discount under the Expanded Retail Discount scheme and with a rateable value of less than £51,000. The grant funding replicates the eligibility for the specific rate relief schemes. It is for local authorities to determine eligibility for reliefs, having regard to guidance issued by the Government, and they are contacting businesses directly to deliver these grants.

As of 26 April, over 610,000 business premises have received grants across the Small Business Grants Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund, totalling over £7.59 billion. We do not hold data from local authorities broken down by

sector. We have, however, published, a full breakdown of grant funding allocated to and distributed by each local authority here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-grant-funding-local-authority-payments-to-small-and-medium-businesses>.

■ **Holiday Accommodation: Non-domestic Rates**

Anthony Mangnall:

[39746]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what progress he has made on considering responses to the 2018 consultation on the business rates treatment of self-catering accommodation.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government is considering the responses to the consultation and what further steps might be appropriate, taking into account a range of factors including the impact of coronavirus on the UK's tourism industry.

■ **Homelessness: Coronavirus**

Helen Hayes:

[40702]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what (a) support and (b) accommodation the Government is making available to people who are homeless or who become homeless during the covid-19 outbreak and who (i) do not have recourse to public funds, (ii) are not considered to have a priority need and (iii) are otherwise not ordinarily eligible for emergency accommodation under the Housing Act 1996.

Luke Hall:

The Government is aware of concerns about those with no recourse to public funds experiencing homelessness during the Covid-19 crisis.

We are ensuring local authorities are supported, with £3.2 million in targeted funding to help support individuals who are sleeping rough off the streets, and an additional £3.2 billion provided to local authorities as part of the wider government response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This funding has been provided to help local authorities to reduce risks to public health and to support individuals on the basis of need.

The legal position on those with no recourse to public funds has not been amended.

The Government recognises that these are unprecedented times and expects local authorities to support people who are sleeping rough, and also to minimise unnecessary risks to public health, acting within the law.

Crispin Blunt:

[40957]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how the specific needs of (a) LGBT+ homeless people and (b) other homeless people with

protected characteristics have been taken into account in the steps the Government is taking to tackle the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

We have provided funding to assist local authorities to provide accommodation and support to vulnerable people who are at risk of, or who have been diagnosed with, coronavirus. This may include people identifying as LGBT+, as well as those who identify as having another protected characteristic.

£3.2 billion of additional funding was provided to local authorities to enable them to respond to Covid-19 pressures across the services they deliver. This is in addition to £3.2 million in targeted funding to ensure that we minimise the risk to those rough sleepers unable to self-isolate.

The Chancellor also announced a £750 million package of support for frontline charities across the UK. This will help charities to provide support to vulnerable people during the pandemic, including those whose beneficiaries have a protected characteristic.

Fleur Anderson:

[\[41604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans his Department has to support homeless people that will be leaving hostels after the covid-19 lockdown has been lifted.

Luke Hall:

Over 90 per cent of those on the streets and in communal night shelters known to local authorities at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis have now been made offers of safe accommodation – ensuring some of the most vulnerable in society are protected from the pandemic.

We have already committed significant funding to help people who sleep rough. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the Government announced £437 million in funding to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in 2020/21. And our Rough Sleeping Initiative is continuing to fund 276 authorities in 2020/2021 to deliver interventions to support rough sleepers.

■ **Horticulture**

Nadia Whittome:

[\[39802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the viability of allowing shops selling domestic garden supplies that have closed due to the covid-19 outbreak to re-open.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Shops selling domestic garden supplies such as garden centres, are being asked to close along with many other retail premises to minimise the risk of the spread of the coronavirus.

At all times we have been consistently guided by scientific advice to protect lives. The current advice from SAGE is that relaxing any of the measures could risk damage to public health, our economy, and the sacrifices we have all made. The Government has set up five tests that must be met before the lockdown measures (including the closure of certain retail businesses) can be lifted. These consider NHS capacity, death rates, transmission rates, availability of PPE, and avoidance of a second peak of the virus.

It is positive to see the emerging thoughts on how businesses such as garden centres can reopen safely, and in line with wider social distancing measures – we will need to continue to work together on how easing measures could work when it is the right time to do so.

■ Horticulture: Coronavirus

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[40962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reasons garden centres that have taken steps to comply with social distancing measures are not allowed to re-open for business during the covid-19 lockdown; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Garden centres are being asked to close along with many other retail premises to minimise the spread of the coronavirus. The Government has set up five tests that must be met before the lockdown measures can be lifted. These consider NHS capacity, death rates, transmission rates, availability of PPE, and avoidance of a second peak of the virus.

It is positive to see the emerging thoughts on how businesses such as garden centres can reopen safely – we will need to continue to work together on how easing measures could work when it is the right time to do so. Online retail is still open and encouraged, and postal and delivery services will continue to run.

■ Housing: Carbon Emissions

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[39809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) building regulations and (b) thermal insulation standards facilitate the development of zero carbon heated homes.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government is fully committed to meeting its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and recognises the important contribution that the energy efficiency of buildings has to make in meeting it.

We have committed to introduce a Future Homes Standard from 2025 which means that new homes in England will be fit for the future, with low carbon heating and lower energy use through high levels of thermal insulation. In October 2019 we published a consultation on the Future Homes Standard which proposed that new homes built to

this standard should have carbon dioxide emissions 75-80 per cent lower than those built to current building regulations standards. These homes will be zero carbon ready: once the electricity grid decarbonises they will become zero carbon heated homes.

As a stepping stone to the Future Homes Standard, we have also consulted on a meaningful and achievable increase to the energy efficiency standards for new homes to be introduced through the Building Regulations in 2020.

The Future Homes Standard consultation closed on 7 February 2020. The responses we have received will be considered carefully and a Government response will be published in due course.

■ Housing: Coronavirus

Sir John Hayes:

[\[40499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to support the recovery of the housing market in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) the UK.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government has been engaging closely with the housing industry across the country and stands ready to support its recovery. Ministers have dedicated time to listening to our stakeholders and will continue to do so

Building on the immediate support we've already provided; we will bring forward measures to support renters and buyers as well as continuing to drive forward a package of housing reforms to get Britain building.

■ Housing: Domestic Abuse

Christine Jardine:

[\[39694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if his Department will allocate ring-fenced funding to local authorities for the housing of domestic abuse survivors.

Luke Hall:

Following an announcement on 17 February, my Department has now paid £16.6 million to 75 local authority-led projects in England for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse, and their children, within safe accommodation, helping up to 43,000 survivors.

The Government is providing a total of £3.2 billion to local authorities to help them meet additional pressures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, such as by supporting survivors of domestic abuse into safe accommodation.

■ Landlords: Electrical Safety

Darren Jones:

[\[40730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to amend section 122(1) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to impose duties on public landlords as well as private landlords of residential premises in England for the purposes of ensuring that electrical safety standards are met during any period when the premises are occupied under a tenancy.

Christopher Pincher:

In the Social Housing Green Paper we asked whether safety standards, including electrical safety, that apply in the private rented sector should also apply to social housing.

We will bring forward a Social Housing White Paper, which will set out further measures to ensure social homes are safe and decent. This will include measures to provide greater redress, better regulation and improve the quality of social housing. We will publish the White Paper in due course.

■ Leasehold: Coronavirus

Thangam Debbonaire:

[\[40673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will take steps to ensure that leaseholders are consistently able to access invoices and receipts as set out in Section 21 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government believes very strongly that service charges should be transparent and communicated effectively to leaseholders, and that there should be a clear route to challenge or redress if things go wrong.

Under Section 21 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 a leaseholder has the right to request a summary of the service charge account. Obligations to comply with this legislation have not changed. In these unprecedented times we encourage leaseholders, landlords and managing agents to take a pragmatic, common-sense approach to non-urgent issues which are affected by Covid-19 related restrictions.

Leaseholders having difficulties in obtaining information from their landlord or managing agent may benefit from seeking free initial advice via the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE), the specialist advisory body funded by the Department to provide assistance to leaseholders. Further information on leasehold matters can be provided through the website (<https://www.lease-advice.org/>), via a telephone appointment with one of LEASE's advisers (020 7832 2500) or by email (info@lease-advice.org).

Local Government Finance: Coronavirus**Steve Reed:**[\[41468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 29 April 2020 to Question 39552, on Local Government Finance: Coronavirus, if his Department will publish a summary of the referenced data that councils have provided to his Department.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Councils have provided data to MHCLG on finance pressures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collection was not a formal return but best estimates to inform work in Government on supporting local authorities. The April collection was the first in a monthly series to provide ongoing information on financial pressures. We will seek to publish a summary in due course to share understanding of the evolving situation.

Local Government Finance: Northern Ireland**Simon Hoare:**[\[40701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to his Department's press release of 18 April 2020 entitled Government pledges extra £1.6 billion for councils, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the equitable allocation of that extra funding between local authorities in Northern Ireland.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government continues to work closely with local authorities in the UK to manage the impacts of Covid-19 on households and the most vulnerable in our society.

On 18 April, the UK Government announced an additional £1.6 billion for councils in England, with an extra £300 million allocated for the devolved administrations in Barnett consequentials. Of this, £50 million has been allocated to Northern Ireland.

The allocation of additional funds to Northern Ireland that arise from this announcement are unhypothecated. This means it is for the locally accountable Northern Ireland Executive to determine the most appropriate allocation, rather than the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The functions of Northern Ireland District Councils and their funding arrangements differ to that of local councils elsewhere in the UK. Whilst English councils have responsibility for the provision of social care, education, libraries, road-building and housing, in Northern Ireland the equivalent functions are carried out by the Northern Ireland Executive.

It is for the Northern Ireland Executive to consider these differences in function in allocating the additional funding made available to Northern Ireland in this announcement.

Local Government: Coronavirus**Tim Farron:**[\[40541\]](#)

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 income lost from car parking charges as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Tim Farron:[\[40542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much income he estimates local authorities have lost since the beginning of the covid-19 lockdown due to a reduction in income received from car parking charges.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government recognises the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on local authorities' finances and capacity. On 28 April the Secretary of State announced allocations to individual local authorities of the additional £1.6 billion of funding to support councils in delivering essential front line services that was announced on 18 April. The grant will be paid in May as an un-ringfenced amount, recognising local authorities are best placed to decide how to meet the additional Covid-19 service pressures in their area. This funding is in addition to the £1.6 billion announced on 19 March.

The Government has asked local authorities to monitor changes in their income and expenditure as a result of Covid-19, including car parking income, through a data collection exercise. We are at the beginning of analysing what those returns tell us, and will continue to work with councils over the coming weeks to ensure they are managing as the pandemic progresses.

Steve Reed:[\[41467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that Local Resilience Forums receive advance notice of (a) how much and (b) what types of personal protective equipment will be delivered in their respective areas.

Mr Simon Clarke:

MHCLG is working with DHSC to ensure that Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) receive the PPE needed in their areas and over 53 million items of PPE have been delivered to LRFs since the beginning of April. This is a large scale and complex logistical challenge supported by military planners who aim to give LRFs as much notice of how much and what types of PPE are being delivered to their respective areas as possible. We have further refined the daily LRF PPE drops process with DHSC using our improved data analysis and continue to identify any outstanding issues to inform future PPE drops.

■ Multiple Occupation: Coronavirus**Tulip Siddiq:**[\[40709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department has taken to provide financial assistance to tenants in a house of multiple occupation who are unable to replace a departed tenant during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government has introduced significant financial measures to help support tenants to continue to pay their living costs, including rental payments. This includes support for businesses to pay staff salaries, strengthening the welfare safety-net with a £7 billion boost to Universal Credit, and increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents in each area. We have also made £500 million available to fund households experiencing financial hardship.

Emergency legislation is now in place so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict their tenants for at least a three-month period. The courts have also suspended housing possession proceedings. As a result of these measures, no tenant in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction during this time.

We have also been clear in guidance that there is a need for landlords to offer support and understanding to tenants – and any guarantor – who may see their income fluctuate.

■ Private Rented Housing: Coronavirus**Sir John Hayes:**[\[40500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to protect private renters during the covid-19 outbreak in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) the UK.

Christopher Pincher:

On 18 March, we announced a significant package of measures to protect renters and landlords affected by coronavirus. Emergency legislation is now in place so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict their tenants for at least a three-month period. The courts have also suspended housing possession proceedings. As a result of these measures, no tenant in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction during this time.

The Government also has introduced significant financial measures to help support tenants to continue to pay their living costs, including rental payments. This includes support for businesses to pay staff salaries, strengthening the welfare safety-net with a £7 billion boost to Universal Credit, and increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents in each area.

Thangam Debonnaire:**[40672]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the number of people who are voluntarily leaving their privately rented home as a result of loss of income due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government routinely collects information on the movement between housing sectors through the annual English Housing Survey, the last of which was published in January 2020.

The Government has introduced a package of measures to protect renters and landlords affected by coronavirus.. Emergency legislation is now in place so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict their tenants for at least a three-month period. The courts have also suspended housing possession proceedings.

The Government also has introduced significant financial measures to help support tenants to continue to pay their living costs, including rental payments. This includes support for businesses to pay staff salaries, strengthening the welfare safety-net with a £7 billion boost to Universal Credit, and increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents in each area.

These measures support Public Health England recommendation that people should stay in their current home unless absolutely necessary.

■ Private Rented Housing: Natural Gas**Dan Jarvis:****[41454]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending CP12 certificate dates to suspend routine gas safety inspections for three months to reduce the potential transmission of covid-19.

Christopher Pincher:

Gas safety inspections save lives and the Health & Safety Executive has made clear that extending the period of gas safety inspections at this time could put tenants at risk of serious illness or fatalities from gas explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Landlords should make every effort to abide by statutory gas safety obligations. However, we recognise that the current restrictions may be making it harder to carry out these checks. There are provisions in the regulations for landlords to account for situations in which they cannot carry out inspections, however they must demonstrate they have taken all reasonable steps to comply with the law. Recognising the concern among landlords, residents and inspectors, on 7 April 2020, the Health & Safety Executive published further guidance setting out detailed advice for a range of scenarios. This can be found here: <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/help-and-advice/covid-19-advice-and-guidance/landlords/>

Our guidance is clear that no work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless the work is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household. Where entry is required for emergency repairs landlords should take every possible step to minimise contact with residents and follow government guidance on tradespeople working in people homes, which may be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19#social-distancing-in-the-workplace---principles>

■ Rented Housing: Coronavirus

Dr Luke Evans:

[39810]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) private and (b) social renters are able to remain in their homes after the covid-19 outbreak in the event of (i) redundancy and (ii) other changes in their financial and personal circumstances.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government has introduced significant financial measures to help support tenants to continue to pay their living costs, including rental payments. This includes support for businesses to pay staff salaries, strengthening the welfare safety-net with a £7 billion boost to Universal Credit, and increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents in each area.

Emergency legislation is now in place so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict their tenants for at least a three-month period. The courts have also suspended housing possession proceedings. As a result of these measures, no tenant in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction during this time. We have also been clear in guidance that there is a need for landlords to offer support and understanding to tenants – and any guarantor – who may see their income fluctuate.

■ Second Homes

Anthony Mangnall:

[39749]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the number of second homes that are (a) liable to pay council tax and (b) liable to pay business rates.

Mr Simon Clarke:

Second homes are liable for council tax rather than business rates. 253,000 properties were treated as second homes for council tax purposes as at September 2019. 56,000 properties that are available commercially as self-catering holiday accommodation are subject to business rates.

■ **Sleeping Rough: Coronavirus**

Alex Cunningham:

[\[40599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 27 April 2020 to Question 34975 on Homelessness: Coronavirus, what proportion of rough sleepers known to local authorities have accepted the offer of accommodation.

Luke Hall:

Over 90% of those on the streets and in communal night shelters known to local authorities at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis have now been made offers of safe accommodation – ensuring some of the most vulnerable in society are protected from the pandemic.

This data is based on information provided to MHCLG by local authorities. We do not currently hold information on how many accepted these offers.

We announced that councils across England will receive another £1.6 billion in additional funding to enable them to respond to Covid-19 pressures across the services they deliver, stepping up support for services helping the most vulnerable, including homeless people. This takes the total funding to support councils to respond to the pandemic to £3.2 billion. This is in addition to £3.2 million in targeted funding to ensure that we minimise the risk to those currently unable to self-isolate. With this funding councils can provide support to those who need it most, including getting rough sleepers off the street.

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.

■ **Small Businesses: Beer**

Alex Sobel:

[\[39788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to support small, independent breweries during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Simon Clarke:

The Government has announced a package of support for businesses to help with their ongoing business costs in recognition of the disruption caused by Covid-19. In particular, my Department has been working across Government to provide £13 billion of grant funding to help small and rural businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors manage their cashflow through this period.

This support takes the form of two grant funding schemes, the Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF).

All businesses in England in receipt of Small Business Rates Relief (SBRR) and Rural Rates Relief (RRR) in the business rates system will be eligible for a payment of £10,000. This is estimated to apply to around 730,000 businesses across England.

Businesses in England that would have been in receipt of the Expanded Retail Discount - which covers retail, hospitality and leisure - on 11 March with a rateable value of less than £51,000 will be eligible for a cash grant for each eligible property of (a) £10,000 if the rateable value is up to and including £15,000 per annum, or (b) £25,000 if the rateable value is greater than £15,000 and not greater than £51,000.

Local authorities will determine which businesses in their area qualify for a grant and are making contact with eligible businesses directly as a matter of urgency.

■ Social Rented Housing: Natural Gas

Alexander Stafford:

[39818]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, is he will grant a (a) 3 and (b) 6 month extension to the deadline for completion of an annual gas safety check for housing association properties during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

Gas safety inspections save lives and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has made clear that extending the period of gas safety inspections at this time could put tenants at risk of serious illness or fatalities from gas explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Landlords should make every effort to abide by statutory gas safety obligations. However, we recognise that the current restrictions may be making it harder to carry out these checks. There are provisions in the regulations for landlords to account for situations in which they cannot carry out inspections, however they must demonstrate they have taken all reasonable steps to comply with the law. Recognising the concern among social landlords, residents and inspectors, on 7 April 2020, HSE published further guidance setting out detailed advice for a range of scenarios. This can be found here: <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/help-and-advice/covid-19-advice-and-guidance/landlords/>.

Alexander Stafford:

[39819]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Regulator of Social Housing plans will relax requirements for in-date gas safety certificates until the end of 2020 to account for the backlog of gas inspections in (a) housing association and (b) other social housing properties during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

The Regulator of Social Housing's approach to regulating gas safety during the coronavirus pandemic is published on their website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rsh-statement-on-coronavirus>

The regulator is gathering information on the impact of coronavirus on provider's operations via the Coronavirus Operational Response Survey and has advised that where providers believe tenant safety is threatened, they should contact the regulator as a matter of urgency.

Alexander Stafford:

[39820]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether housing providers are required to visit their properties to (a) undertake emergency inspections for dangerous gas issues and (b) facilitate repairs during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

During this period housing providers' repair obligations have not changed. Tenants have a right to a decent, warm and safe place to live and it is in the best interests of both tenants and landlords to ensure that properties are kept in good repair and free from hazards. Good management requires regular review and maintenance of a property, but we understand that planned inspections may be more difficult at this time. However, that is no reason to allow dangerous conditions to persist.

No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless the work is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing or repairs. Where entry is required for emergency repairs, landlords should take every possible step to minimise contact with residents and follow Government guidance which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19#social-distancing-in-the-workplace---principles>

Alexander Stafford:

[39821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether social housing tenants retain the right to request a gas safety check when practical to complete during and after the period of lockdown, provided that (a) a risk assessment has been carried out and (b) the inspection can be completed in line with Public Health England guidelines.

Christopher Pincher:

We are committed to helping to ensure that everyone renting their home has a safe and decent place to live. Landlords' repair obligations have not changed, and they should make every effort to comply with gas safety regulations, including annual gas safety checks in residents' homes every year. Our guidance is clear that housing providers should make arrangements to enter people's homes for urgent or essential repairs and maintenance and no work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless the work is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household. Where entry is required for emergency repairs landlords should take every possible step to minimise contact with residents and follow government guidance on tradespeople working in people homes, which may be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19#social-distancing-in-the-workplace---principles>.

If a resident is self-isolating, routine gas safety checks should be rearranged after the 14-day self-isolation period has ended. If after the 14-day isolation period, it is not

possible to complete the checks because another member is now self-isolating, landlords should again agree a new date for the checks to take place.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

■ CDC Group: Coronavirus

Preet Kaur Gill:

[39727]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent discussions she has had with Nick O'Donohoe, CEO of the CDC, about the role CDC investments can play in ensuring private sector health companies provide free treatment and care to tackle the covid-19 outbreak.

James Duddridge:

The Secretary of State and members of her Ministerial team have had a number of calls with the CDC Chair which have included CDC's response to COVID-19. The primary line of communication between the Secretary of State and CDC is through the Chair of the board, and DFID Officials engage with CDC Management.

Department Officials are engaging closely with CDC Board and Management on its response to COVID-19. CDC is supporting its existing portfolio, including in the healthcare sector, to safeguard impact and help firms and their workforces weather the crisis. CDC is also looking to make new investments that can provide systemic liquidity to companies, especially Small Medium Enterprises, and at investments that can directly mitigate some of the adverse health impacts of COVID-19 by increasing access to healthcare and equipment. The latest updates on CDC's response are available on its website (<https://www.cdcgroup.com/covid-19>).

■ CDC Group: Hospitals

Preet Kaur Gill:

[40722]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, which private hospitals CDC Group holds investments in; and what steps those private hospitals are taking to tackle the covid-19 outbreak.

James Duddridge:

Healthcare providers in CDC's portfolio are undertaking numerous steps to support national governments in their efforts to respond to COVID-19. They are working with governments on requests for specific support such as designating isolation wards or units, equipping themselves with COVID-19 clinical practices and ensuring the safety and security of their staff.

CDC's investments, both direct and intermediated via funds, into hospitals include: Asian Institute of Medical Sciences; Rainbow Hospitals; CARE; STS Holdings / Evercare Hospital, Dhaka; HCG Africa; Abraaj Admiralty; Metropolitan Hospital; Avenue Group; Nairobi Women's Hospital; Evercare Lahore; Rome; Sante; Vaatsalya; BSR Hospital; Vikram Hospitals; TMR International Hospital; Medecins de

Nuit (MDN); Joint Medical Holdings; Medical Investments Limited (MIL); Professional Services Inc. (PSI); Gate Healthcare 1 Pak (Private) Limited; Avicenna Healthcare 1 Pak (Private) Limited.

■ Coronavirus

Fleur Anderson: [\[41181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to engage with (a) international NGOs and (b) UK charities on their response to the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

DFID is committed to working with and alongside international NGOs and UK charities to meet the challenges posed to both the UK and internationally by COVID-19. DFID is taking forward a structured approach to engagement with UK and international Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), incorporating strategic and technical discussions to help inform the sector's response to the pandemic. Specifically, Baroness Sugg has chaired two round table discussions with the Chief Executive Officers from key CSOs on 3 April and the 1 May to update the sector on DFID's COVID-19 response to date, engage with concerns across the sector, and explore how to mitigate the threats posed by COVID-19 to sector resilience.

DFID has pledged new funding specifically for civil society, including UK-based CSOs, to support the response. This includes £20 million, the majority of which will be allocated through the Rapid Response Facility, and significant funding through the DFID Unilever COVID-19 Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition. In addition, INGOs will receive funding through multilateral organisations as downstream partners as part of the UK's response.

DFID is offering support to suppliers and partners where this is appropriate, in line with the UK government position and will apply the provisions of the Cabinet Office Procurement Policy Note and associated guidance for grants, which allows for relief on services and goods provided in the UK, to DFID aid programmes as a last resort and on a case-by-case basis for DFID contracts and grants.

■ Credit Facility for Access to Medicines: Coronavirus

Christian Matheson: [\[40654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how the Credit Facility for Access to Medicines is contributing to efforts to tackle covid-19 by making treatments and vaccines affordable.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is at the forefront of efforts to develop a COVID-19 vaccine. At the G20 last month, the Prime Minister called on all governments to work together to develop a vaccine as quickly as possible and make it globally available.

MedAccess, initially called the Credit Facility for Access to Medicines, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of CDC, the UK's Development Finance Institution, which in turn is

owned and funded by DFID. MedAccess provides 'volume guarantees' to manufacturers to stimulate production and increase the availability and affordability of medical supplies in developing country markets across Africa and Asia. It has a track record of success with viral testing kits to combat HIV and insecticide treated bednets to combat malaria. MedAccess is in discussions with UN agencies and manufacturers to establish whether it can provide financial guarantees to increase production and enable more rapid procurement of much needed medical supplies at affordable prices to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in low- and middle-income countries.

■ **Department for International Development: Ministers' Private Offices**

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[41134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, which of her Ministers' private offices are based in the (a) Foreign Office or (b) Department for international Development.

Wendy Morton:

There are seven joint Private Offices - four are in FCO at King Charles St, two are in DFID at 22 Whitehall, and one at DEFRA at 2 Marsham St. There are also shared offices in DFID and FCO where Private Offices can work.

■ **Department for International Development: Standards**

Stephen Doughty: [\[40632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when her Department's Partnership Principles were last updated.

Wendy Morton:

DFID's Partnership Principles underpin our development relationships with partner country governments. The last major update to the Principles was made in 2015.

The Principles continue to reflect core UK values on human rights and good governance and are an essential tool in providing a balanced judgement of a partner government's shared commitment to those values.

They allow UK Ministers to make informed choices on our aid relationships on a case by case basis, and they improve the effectiveness of our aid, ultimately supporting countries receiving it to become self-sufficient.

■ **Department of International Development: Coronavirus**

Wendy Chamberlain: [\[41170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support civil society organisations in receipt of grants and contracts from her Department during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

DFID is engaging with supply partners to address the challenges posed to them and DFID-funded projects by COVID-19. We will work collaboratively with supply partners

to find pragmatic solutions to support both our partners and continuation of our programmes where appropriate.

DFID is offering support to suppliers and partners where this is appropriate, in line with the UK government position and will apply the provisions of the Cabinet Office Procurement Policy Note and associated guidance for grants, which allows for relief on services and goods provided in the UK, to DFID aid programmes as a last resort and on a case-by-case basis for DFID contracts and grants.

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[41171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support UK civil society organisations not currently in receipt of her Department's (a) grants and (b) contracts during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are key partners for DFID in our response to COVID-19. We have pledged new funding specifically for civil society, including UK-based CSOs, to support the international COVID-19 response, including £20 million, the majority of which will be allocated through the Rapid Response Facility, and funding through the DFID Unilever COVID-19 Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition. The Small Charities Challenge Fund is open for grant applications from small UK-based development charities.

Aside from new opportunities to gain funding through grants and contracts, there are no plans for DFID to support organisations it does not fund. UK-based CSOs are also eligible for the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

■ Developing Countries: Coronavirus

Chris Law:

[\[40651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that user fees are not a barrier to the treatment of covid-19 in developing countries.

Wendy Morton:

I refer my honourable friend to the answer to question 39671, on 1 May.

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[41172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps she is taking to support local civil society organisations providing front line services in the Global South to tackle the (a) spread and (b) consequences of the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in the global south are key partners for DFID. Many of DFID's programmes support local CSOs in order to deliver humanitarian and development outcomes, including providing humanitarian support to tackle the spread and consequences of COVID-19. As DFID's country network adapts programming to respond to COVID-19, country teams are considering how they can do this through partners, including local CSOs.

In addition to direct funding from DFID, there are funds available through our global multilateral support, with southern-based CSOs acting as delivery partners. A key funding avenue is the Country-Based Pooled Funds, to which DFID is a major donor. CSOs receive significant funding through these. COVID-19 allocations have been made through these funds, including in Myanmar, Afghanistan and Sudan so far. We expect further allocations soon.

■ Developing Countries: Debts

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[40721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of cancelling bilateral and multilateral debt repayments for countries in the global south in tackling the covid-19 pandemic.

James Duddridge:

The UK Government is deeply concerned about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public finances of low-income developing countries. During 2020, developing countries were projected to spend around \$26 billion on servicing external debts to bilateral and multilateral creditors. In this time of crisis, it is vital that creditors work together to ensure that servicing debts does not prevent countries protecting their citizens and economies.

The UK, alongside the G20 and the Paris Club of official creditors, has committed to a temporary suspension of debt service repayments from the poorest countries. This official sector effort could provide up to \$12 billion of additional fiscal space until the end of the year, allowing countries to redirect finances towards mitigating the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. This initiative provides time to assess what further assistance these countries may need.

The G20 has asked the Multilateral Development Banks to explore whether there are options for them to participate in a suspension of debt service payments over the same period as the G20 initiative, while maintaining their current credit ratings and low cost of funding, which are important for supporting their client countries.

■ Developing Countries: Genito-urinary medicine

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[40824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the provision of sexual and reproductive health services in lower income countries; and which international NGOs she is working with to minimise the effect on those services.

Wendy Morton:

Evidence shows that women and girls' sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR) are under pressure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Guttmacher Institute has estimated that a 10% decline in reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health services over the course of a year in low and low-middle income countries could lead to 49 million women with an unmet need for contraceptives and 15 million unintended

pregnancies. We are tracking this and other assessments as they emerge, and are in frequent touch with our NGO and UN partners in countries to monitor the constraints and the barriers women, girls and marginalised groups may be facing as a direct or indirect impact of COVID-19.

UK leadership on sexual and reproductive health and rights is needed now more than ever. We will continue to be a progressive voice internationally on this issue, and work with our partners through the crisis so they can continue to provide SRHR services and ensure that every woman and girl can continue to realise her right to choose. For example, 'WISH', our regional women's sexual & reproductive health programme, operates in 27 countries around the world, working with partners Marie Stopes International and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation. WISH is finding innovative ways to keep delivering desperately-needed services and supplies during COVID-19, while also supporting efforts to stop the spread of the disease .

■ **Developing Countries: Health Services**

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[39729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent discussions she has had with private creditors on cancelling the debt repayments of countries in the global south to enable those countries to focus their finances on resourcing their health systems.

James Duddridge:

The UK Government is deeply concerned about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income developing countries. In this time of crisis, it is vital that creditors work together to ensure that countries especially vulnerable to the pandemic are able to protect their citizens and economies.

The UK, alongside the G20 and the Paris Club of official creditors has committed to a temporary suspension of debt service repayments from the poorest countries.

The G20 has called on the private sector to participate and the UK is working with the Paris Club and Institute of International Finance, which represents nearly 450 financial services institutions from over 70 countries, to ensure a coordinated approach to comparable treatment.

Chris Law:

[\[41062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support countries with weak health systems to ensure they have the resilience to respond to the covid-19 pandemic and maintain pre-existing health priorities.

Wendy Morton:

The UK has, so far, pledged £744 million of UK aid to help end the COVID-19 pandemic as quickly as possible. This includes a package of £200 million to support UK charities and international organisations to help prevent infections and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in developing countries, including maintaining essential health services.

DFID recognises strong and resilient health systems are vital to national and global health security and helping to protect the world from health threats, including COVID-19, and to maintaining the delivery of essential health services.

Through our multilateral partnerships, and our regional and national programmes, we support developing countries to make their health systems stronger and more resilient, and prepared to detect, prevent and respond to health threats, such as COVID-19.

■ Developing Countries: LGBT People

Crispin Blunt:

[\[40958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps she is taking to ensure that the most vulnerable LGBTI+ people in developing countries (a) have fair and equal access and (b) receive non-discriminatory treatment in clinics and other healthcare settings in relation to (i) covid-19, (ii) hormone, (ii) antiretroviral, (iii) PrEP, (iv) PEP and (v) condom provision during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government works to ensure that all aid reaches the most vulnerable including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Vulnerable populations will experience COVID 19 outbreaks differently. COVID 19 is likely to reinforce their marginalised position in society, their experience of discrimination, violence and stigma, and further limit their access to essential support and services. For this reason, on 9 April, further guidance was circulated across DFID highlighting that inclusion must be central to our response to COVID 19 and the specific contexts and needs of vulnerable people such as LGBT people should be taken into account when developing practical programmes to tackle COVID 19.

■ Developing Countries: Overseas Aid

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[40549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps she has taken to ensure that existing, non-covid-19 related programmes will be continue as far as possible in the Global South; and whether the budget for those programmes will be increased in response to potential increases in capacity and logistical problems as a result of staff-sickness.

Wendy Morton:

DFID programme leads are assessing the impacts of the pandemic on each of our programmes, based on their expert understanding of the delivery context. We have ensured that they have access to advice on how to adapt programmes, including extending end dates and budgets where appropriate, to recognise the challenges that COVID-19 is placing on staff and partners.

I am working with officials to ensure that we balance our support to the COVID-19 response with a need to continue other programmes that are helping deliver the

Global Goals and will enable longer-term recovery through rebuilding livelihoods, economies and health systems.

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[40725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps she is taking to provide additional funding in response to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's estimate of a \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion financing gap for developing countries over the next two years.

Nigel Adams:

The UK has led the way in responding to the economic impact of coronavirus, producing a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business in the UK and help to avert the global slowdown that the UN Conference on Trade and Development describes.

There has never been a more important time to deliver our UK aid commitment and we have so far pledged £744 million of UK aid to support the global efforts to combat the COVID-19 outbreak. This includes giving up to £150million to the International Monetary Fund's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust to support vulnerable economies. We also support the suspension of debt repayments from the poorest countries by G20 and Paris Club creditors.

We are helping to prevent the poorest countries from collapse by supporting their economies and access to skills and education. Economic disruption hits the world's poor the most, and would deepen a global recession, making it harder for all of us to bounce back and prosper.

■ Disaster Relief

Fleur Anderson:

[\[41184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what criteria were used to select the 15 countries which are eligible for Rapid Response Facility (RRF) funding.

Wendy Morton:

DFID launched a call under the Rapid Response Facility to support the preparedness, mitigation and response to COVID-19 among vulnerable populations. The fifteen countries selected were prioritised on the basis of need, vulnerability, and risk.

DFID is also adapting its programmes across its country network to respond to COVID-19 and has also committed significant funding through the multilateral system to ensure our support reaches the most vulnerable.

■ Equality: Gender

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[40829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent assessment she has made of the effect of covid-19 on her Department's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality.

Wendy Morton:

DFID is proud to be a global leader on gender equality. UKaid has helped millions of women access family planning services, enabled 5.6 million girls go to school so they can realise their full potential, and supported the Africa-led movement to end FGM. The Strategic Vision for Gender Equality enables us to take a dynamic approach to maximise our impact in the face of changing global challenges. Emerging evidence from the COVID-19 crisis reinforces just how critical the priorities of the Strategic Vision remain, for example the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is reinforced by the worrying increase we are currently seeing in reported cases of VAWG, globally.

DFID is supporting an effective whole-of-system international response to COVID-19. This includes providing £10 million additional funding to the United Nations Population Fund and £20 million to the UN Children's Fund to scale up protection and support services for women and girls and working with partners to encourage a gender-centred and responsive approach across the international community. This is the latest example of how the UK continues to be a progressive force for women and girls internationally.

■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**Chris Law:**[\[40649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what her Department's policy is on the Gavi replenishment period and strategy review.

Wendy Morton:

As Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance's largest donor, the UK fully supports the Gavi 5.0 strategy for 2021-2025 to 'leave no one behind with immunisation'. The UK has committed £1.65 billion, the equivalent of £330 million per year, to support Gavi's goal to immunise a further 300 million children and save up to 8 million lives.

The UK is hosting the Global Vaccine Summit on 4 June, which will bring countries together to raise the funds required to save millions of lives. The Gavi replenishment period is vital to raise at least \$7.4 billion to fund Gavi's investment case for its next five years of work (2021-2025).

Gavi's strategy for the next five years was approved by the Gavi Board in June 2019, with a focus on equity and increasing vaccination coverage to unreached and under-immunised children. Gavi is adapting its strategy to support countries' responses to the impacts of COVID-19 on routine immunisation.

■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance: Finance**Chris Law:**[\[40650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what level of funding she plans to allocate to the replenishment of Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance.

Wendy Morton:

The Secretary of State announced the UK's support to Gavi in Parliament on Wednesday 29 April. Our pledge of £1.65 billion to Gavi over the next five years will immunise up to 75 million children against vaccine preventable diseases, strengthen health systems, build resilience against coronavirus and other diseases and support global access to any future coronavirus vaccine.

Humanitarian Aid: Coronavirus**Chris Law:**[\[41063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that humanitarian (a) access and (b) principles are protected in the global covid-19 response.

James Cleverly:

To date, the UK has committed £744 million of UK Aid to support global efforts to combat COVID-19. We are working with all our international partners to ensure aid is effectively distributed to vulnerable countries.

The UK is a key contributor to the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), which focuses on humanitarian access, through securing the continuity of the supply chains for essential commodities and services, and supporting the most vulnerable, including protecting and assisting refugees, Internally Displaced Peoples, migrants and host communities.

We are co-leading work with Italy through the G7 to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable countries. A large part of this work is to ensure unhindered humanitarian access for vulnerable populations, and to make sure the global response is prioritising the most in need.

We are also using diplomatic channels to ensure that international humanitarian law and global commitments regarding the rights and protection of refugees and access to asylum are upheld in this crisis.

India: Ventilators**Christian Matheson:**[\[40653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what support the CDC Group has provided to the ventilator manufacturer Skanray Technologies; and how that investment is supporting public health systems in India respond to the covid-19 outbreak.

James Duddridge:

CDC is an investor in Skanray Technologies Private Limited through the investment fund Ascent India Fund III managed by Ascent Capital Advisors Private Limited. The investment was made by the fund manager in 2013 with the purpose of expanding access to medical equipment in India and across South Asia. CDC continues to work closely with the company which is exploring options to scale-up its production capacity of ventilators in support of the public health response to Covid-19 in India.

■ Maternity Services: Coronavirus**Chris Law:**[\[40652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that services to help prevent maternal, new-born and child deaths that may be under pressure as a result of covid-19 are protected.

Wendy Morton:

The UK government's commitment to end the preventable deaths of mothers, new-born babies and children by 2030 is more essential now than ever given the COVID-19 outbreak. DFID is stepping up efforts to ensure sexual, reproductive, maternal and new-born health services continue to be prioritised in our response to the pandemic, to stop mothers and babies dying unnecessarily.

Globally we are working with agencies such as the World Health Organisation, UNFPA, the Partnership for Maternal New-born and Child Health and the Global Financing Facility (GFF) to support governments to maintain health systems in affected countries, provide technical guidance and advocate for sustained reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health services. This may include filling essential supply chain gaps and supporting frontline health workers. The UK supported the GFF Investors Group press release last week that called for strong, collective action to avoid a potential secondary health crisis from disruptions in health services from COVID-19.

The UK has committed £1.65 billion, the equivalent of £330 million per year, to support Gavi's goal to immunise a further 300 million children and save up to 8 million lives. The UK is hosting the Global Vaccine Summit on 4 June, which will bring countries together to raise the funds required to save millions. The Gavi replenishment period is vital to raise at least \$7.4 billion to fund Gavi's investment case for its next five years of work (2021-2025).

■ Multinational Companies: Charitable Donations**Fleur Anderson:**[\[41180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what proportion of UK donations to multilateral organisations has been spent on (a) personal protective equipment, (b) testing and (c) water, sanitation and hygiene during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The UK has so far committed £744 million of aid to the global fight against COVID-19. Along with other donors we are supporting UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs to respond to COVID-19 in developing countries. This includes helping the world's poorest countries in a range of ways including accessing critical medical supplies. By supporting developing countries to properly respond to COVID-19, the UK is helping end the global pandemic sooner and prevent future waves of infection coming to the UK.

As part of our overall package, up to £318 million will support finding a vaccine, new drugs, therapeutics and research and development for COVID-19.

The UK government is also working with Unilever to fund a global hygiene programme, with £50 million of support from DFID, to urgently tackle the spread of COVID-19. It will reach up to a billion people worldwide, raising awareness and changing behaviour, to make sure people are washing their hands with soap regularly and disinfecting surfaces. The programme will also provide over 20 million hygiene products in the developing world, including in areas where there is little or no sanitation. This is in addition to our many existing projects on water, sanitation and hygiene.

■ Overseas Aid: Coronavirus

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[40723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the effect of her Department's work responding to the covid-19 outbreak on her Department's objectives and priorities.

Wendy Morton:

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest threat we have faced in our lifetimes, and here in the UK and across the globe we are seeing the devastating impact of this virus. The UK is at the forefront of the international response, having so far pledged £744 million of UK aid.

In order to ensure we can divert sufficient resources to HMG's COVID-19 response, DFID is reprioritising its planned spend and objectives for this financial year and beyond. This is both for our immediate COVID-19 response and to support longer-term recovery through rebuilding livelihoods, economies and health systems.

We will continue to work to deliver the 2019 Manifesto priorities, for example on girls' education, and help vulnerable people, systems, and economies whilst prioritising the global COVID-19 response.

Fleur Anderson:

[\[41182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will publish the monitoring and evaluation framework her Department is using to assess the efficacy of UK overseas aid in tackling the spread of covid-19.

Wendy Morton:

The UK has so far pledged £744 million of UK aid to end the coronavirus pandemic as quickly as possible: tracking the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of that spend is essential.

We have a strong, coordinated monitoring, evaluation and learning system to ensure accountability for decision making and resource allocation to these priorities. This will also ensure DFID and other government departments learn from and use evidence to improve current and future responses to crises in developing contexts. This is part of

DFID's overall approach to ensuring that our investments in tackling COVID-19 are driven by the best evidence and latest scientific advances.

As programmes adapt and mobilise to tackle the impact of COVID-19, so too will our monitoring, evaluation, and learning approach and framework. The COVID-19 response will draw on the systems and expertise we already have on monitoring, evaluation and learning. Our existing Evaluation Strategy, the key points of which were published in the [Evaluation Annual Report 18-19](#), will direct our monitoring, evaluation and learning response to COVID-19 interventions. This Strategy enables DFID to use the best evidence tools for learning and improving throughout our programmes, as well as prioritising investment in rigorous central evaluations in the most strategic areas.

DFID's overarching results indicators under the Single Departmental Plan are public. We will also publish information on our monitoring, evaluation and learning approach to COVID-19 as part of our Evaluation Annual Report.

Fleur Anderson:

[\[41183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, which (a) international NGOs and (b) UK charities have been allocated funding from the public purse to tackle the spread of covid-19; and how much funding each of those organisations has received.

Wendy Morton:

The UK has so far pledged up to £744 million of UK aid to support the global effort to combat COVID-19. As part of this package, we are providing funding for a range of international NGOs, including UK charities, in particular through the Rapid Response Facility. We expect to make announcements on the detailed allocations and successful Rapid Response Facility partners in due course.

DFID is also adapting its programmes across our country network to respond to COVID-19 and we have committed significant new funding through the multilateral system - we expect NGOs to play a key role in delivery through both these channels but are not able to give an exact breakdown given that, in many cases, funding will go indirectly to NGOs through partners such as the UN. In addition, extra funding has also been allocated to NGOs through the DFID Unilever COVID-19 Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition.

■ Overseas Aid: Females

Chris Law:

[\[40648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support women and girls as part of its response to covid-19.

Wendy Morton:

There must be an explicit and visible consideration of, and support to, women and girls across DFID's response to COVID-19. DFID has committed an additional £10 million to the United Nation's Population Fund COVID-19 response to strengthen health systems to deliver sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence

services, support supply chains for lifesaving commodities and deliver community engagement activities. We also recently committed £20 million to the UN Children's Fund to help keep children in developing countries safe and learning throughout the crisis. DFID has also launched a call for proposals under our Rapid Response Facility, which required all projects to mainstream gender, protection and safeguarding.

DFID is flexing existing programmes to ensure we can better respond to the specific impacts women and girls are facing as a result of COVID-19. For example, the Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme is our flagship women's sexual and reproductive health programme and provides lifesaving services to women in 27 countries around the world. WISH is finding innovative ways to keep delivering desperately-needed services and supplies during this pandemic, while also supporting efforts to stop the spread of the disease.

■ Overseas Aid: LGBT People

Crispin Blunt:

[\[41365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps she is taking to ensure that support for LGBT+ initiatives are adequately resourced during the covid-19 outbreak.

Wendy Morton:

Working on LGBT rights is essential to meet DFID's vision of a world where no one is left behind. This is central to the Global Goals and a secure and prosperous world. Organisations implementing LGBT initiatives are facing significant challenges as a result of COVID-19. DFID supports many programmes on access to services for all, including vulnerable and persecuted minorities, promotion and protection of rights and tackling stigma and discrimination. These programmes include initiatives on LGBT inclusion. DFID is in discussion with partners to find flexible solutions to ensure they can use the resources allocated to implement these programmes effectively.

■ Palestinians: Health Services

Christian Matheson:

[\[39660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of Palestinians' access to healthcare throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories during the covid-19 pandemic.

James Cleverly:

The UK has pledged £744 million to support the global humanitarian response to COVID-19, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We have delivered additional vital support in the OPTs by providing £840,000 to World Health Organisation and UNICEF to purchase and co-ordinate the delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline public health personnel and scale up laboratory testing capacity.

The UN assesses that although the current number of detected cases remains relatively low, the capacity of the Palestinian health system to cope with an expected increase in COVID-19 cases is poor. The situation is particularly severe in Gaza, where the health system has shortages in specialised staff, drugs and equipment. We continue to monitor the situation and are working closely with the UN and the international community to ensure a co-ordinated response.

■ **World Health Organisation: Overseas Aid**

Henry Smith: [\[40582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to Answer of 27 April 2020 to Question 37585 on World Health Organisation: Overseas Aid, what reforms to the World Health Organisation her Department is seeking as a result of that agency's response to the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

DFID expects WHO's Health Emergencies Programme (WHE), established in 2016, to continuously improve and develop its critical work.

As an example, in our annual reviews of performance, we have noted the need for WHE to continue to develop its capabilities around human resources – to ensure it can get the right people, in the right place at the right time.

Any review of WHE's should come after the world has successfully addressed the COVID-19 pandemic and should consider the whole global response across countries and the international system, as well as WHO. The UK will engage on any review with a detailed position when this is forthcoming.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ **Agriculture: Technology**

Angus Brendan MacNeil: [\[41011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, which Minister of her Department is responsible for international trade relating to agri-tech.

Graham Stuart:

I am responsible for UK Agri-Tech exports overseas and my noble Friend the Minister of State for Investment, Lord Grimstone, for foreign direct investment in the UK Agri-Tech sector.

■ **Arms Trade: Yemen**

Zarah Sultana: [\[39813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made of the effect on UK export licensing of the 11 December 2019 communication to the ICC calling on it to investigate UK Government-authorized exports of arms to members of the Saudi/UAE-led coalition in Yemen.

Greg Hands:

The Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, last updated in a Written Ministerial Statement on 25 March 2014, remains the policy for assessing all licence applications.

Our assessment of each export licence against the Consolidated Criteria takes into account our obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and other relevant rules of international law.

■ Coronavirus: Screening**Gareth Thomas:**[\[39459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions the Government has had with the Chinese Government on the two million covid-19 antibody tests ordered from AllTest Biotech and Wondfo Biotech (a) before and (b) after those tests were discovered to be insufficiently accurate by a University of Oxford laboratory; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

The UK Government engages regularly with the Chinese Government through our extensive diplomatic network in China. In more recent times, this has included dialogue on our response to Covid-19, including on testing.

Gareth Thomas:[\[39460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions ministers in her Department have had with ministers in the Department for Health and Social Care on the two million covid-19 antibody tests ordered from AllTest Biotech and Wondfo Biotech (a) before and (b) after those tests were discovered to be insufficiently accurate by a University of Oxford laboratory; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

The Department for International Trade is working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care in relation to the UK's response to Covid-19. It has been the practice of successive administrations that the Government does not disclose details of internal meetings.

■ Medical Equipment: Export Controls**Bill Esterson:**[\[41034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions she has had with her international counterparts on the lifting of export controls on medical devices throughout the world during the covid-19 pandemic.

Greg Hands:

The Coronavirus crisis highlights the importance of free trade and open supply chains. I and my Ministerial colleagues are engaging on a daily basis with international partners and multilaterally through the G7, G20 and WTO to support free trade and resilient supply chains.

■ Medical Equipment: Germany**Gareth Thomas:** [\[39463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has held with her German counterpart to secure the import of essential medical supplies to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[39464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions she has had with her Spanish counterpart on the import of essential medical supplies to the UK from that country; and if she will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[39465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions her Department has had with commissioners in the European Commission to secure the import of essential medical supplies to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

This department's ministerial team and I have held conversations with a wide range of international partners during the global response to Covid-19, including the European Commission and EU member states. The UK has provided much needed leadership on sustaining vital supply chains, as well as lobbying against any export restrictions which may impact on the import of medical supplies to the UK.

■ Medical Equipment: India**Gareth Thomas:** [\[39462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has had with her Indian counterpart to help secure the import of essential medical supplies to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade spoke with her Indian counterpart, Minister Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry, on the 23 March, 30 March and 17 April. They also both attended an extraordinary virtual G20 Trade ministerial meeting on the 30 March. The Secretary of State highlighted the importance of ensuring supply chains remain open and any trade restrictive measures introduced in response to Covid-19 are proportionate, transparent and time limited. They also discussed export approval for essential shipments of medical supplies and medicines bound for the UK from India, including 2.8 million packets of over-the-counter Paracetamol tablets.

■ Medical Equipment: Turkey

Gareth Thomas: [\[39461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has had with her Turkish counterpart to secure the import of essential medical supplies to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[39469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions (a) she and (b) other Ministers in her Department have had with their Turkish counterparts on facilitating the departure from that country of the RAF aircraft containing personal protective equipment that arrived in the UK on 22 April 2020; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State and the Ministerial team have regular ongoing discussions with the Turkish Government on a variety of issues. Most recently, the Secretary of State held a discussion with her counterpart in Turkey, Ruhsar Pekcan, Minister of Trade, on COVID-19, personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies and our ongoing bilateral trade relationship. The Government wishes to place on record its thanks for the support received by the Turkish Government in securing vital PPE equipment for the NHS.

■ Medical Equipment: United Arab Emirates

Gareth Thomas: [\[39466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has had with her Emirati counterpart to help secure the import of essential medical supplies to the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

My Rt Hon Friend for Bournemouth West, the former Minister of State for Trade Policy, held discussions with H.E. Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, Minister of Economy for the United Arab Emirates, on 6 April 2020, discussing the UK and UAE response and collaboration in relation to Covid-19, and our wider trading relationship. The Minister of State highlighted the immediate challenges facing nations around the globe due to Covid-19, particularly around medical supplies. This forms part of our wide-ranging healthcare partnership with the UAE.

■ Protective Clothing: Exports

Gareth Thomas: [\[39467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions her Department has had with the Department of Health on the export of personal protective equipment from the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

This Department has engaged regularly with the Department for Health and Social Care in relation to the UK's response to Covid-19. This has included assistance to

establish their export authorisation processes under the European Commission's Regulation for the export of Personal Protective Equipment. The Government's policy is now outlined here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-protective-equipment-ppe-export-control-process>.

■ **Small Businesses: Exports**

Barry Gardiner: [\[40465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what the cost of the Small Deals Initiative has been to the public purse in each year since its establishment.

Graham Stuart:

UK Export Finance (UKEF) operates at no net cost to the taxpayer. UKEF's Smaller Deals Initiative is staffed by civil servants employed on standard terms and conditions by UKEF. No costs outside of UKEF's normal core business have been incurred since the Initiative's inception.

The Smaller Deals Initiative works on the same "no net cost to the taxpayer" basis as UKEF generally. It collects premiums from transactions supported in exchange for taking on risk on behalf of the taxpayer and to cover the Initiative's administrative costs.

■ **Trade Agreements: Trade Unions**

Bill Esterson: [\[40586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps the Government is taking to consult with trade unions on the text of trade negotiations with (a) the EU and (ii) non-EU countries.

Greg Hands:

Task Force Europe, working within No10, leads on the UK's future relationship with the EU, including our trading relationship, and this is set out in "Our Approach to the Future Relationship with the EU" published on 27 February.

The Department for International Trade leads on negotiations with countries beyond the EU and its approach to engagement is set out in more detail in my answer to the Hon Member for Harrow West on 26 March, UIN: 33395.

The Government is committed to seeking views from a wide range of stakeholder groups, including trades unions, to develop a future relationship with the EU and negotiate new trade deals with other partners.

■ **Trade Bill 2019-21**

Bill Esterson: [\[40588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that witnesses are able to give evidence at the Committee Stage of the Trade Bill while complying with the Government's social distancing measures.

Conor Burns:

The House Authorities are working with all parties to ensure that legislation can proceed through all parliamentary stages in accordance with guidelines on social distancing. The Government will adhere to these guidelines.

■ Trade Remedies Authority: Trade Unions**Bill Esterson:**[\[40587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if she will make it her policy to ensure representation of trade unions on the board of the Trade Remedies Authority.

Conor Burns:

The independence of the Trade Remedies Authority (TRA) Board will be crucial to safeguarding the impartiality and objectivity of the TRA, and to ensure it acts in the national interest. We are committed to staffing the TRA Board with an appropriate range of backgrounds and experience. It is essential that Board members are appointed on merit to ensure that the Board has the right blend of skills and expertise, rather than due to affiliations with any specific interest group.

■ World Trade Organisation: Meetings**Bill Esterson:**[\[40589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent representations she has made to ensure that a formal meeting of the World Trade Organisation takes place within a timeframe commensurate with that normally in place for the organisation.

Greg Hands:

We are living in unprecedented times. We must all rise to the challenge of COVID-19 and continue the vital work the WTO is doing. This requires Members to be flexible, agile and innovative.

At the WTO Heads of Delegation (17/04), the UK encouraged the WTO Secretariat to work with Members quickly to establish accessible and inclusive virtual ways of working, to allow WTO discussions to continue and agree to a new date for the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference.

Bill Esterson:[\[40590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made of the importance for international trade of the World Trade Organisation meeting in the near future.

Greg Hands:

The UK believes a strong, rules based, trading system is in the best interests of all nations.

We need to collectively strengthen and reform the WTO, so it delivers a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent framework for trade between countries. This will play an important role in resolving the effects of the global pandemic.

This will require WTO Members being able to make decisions and WTO business to continue this year. The UK will continue to support WTO's efforts to identify technology-driven solutions that ensure all members are able to participate in the spirit of inclusivity.

JUSTICE

■ Child Rearing

Sarah Olney:

[\[41131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps are the Government taking to tackle parental alienation.

Alex Chalk:

The Government is aware of the difficulties that parents can face in continuing a relationship with their child following parental separation or divorce, sometimes because of the obstructive behaviour of the other parent.

The Government is confident that the family justice system can robustly address such behaviour when it is alleged in child arrangements cases. The child's welfare is the paramount consideration when considering this issue. In assessing the child's best interests, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) reports any concerns about alienating behaviours to the court. Parents are also able to inform the court of any concerns they may have about the other parent.

Cafcass is continuing to develop its work in addressing parental alienation when it arises in child arrangements cases. Launched in October 2018, its Child Impact Assessment Framework (CIAF) includes various tools and guidance that further support social work practitioners in identifying how individual children are experiencing parental separation, including any alienating behaviour by one parent against the other. Further information about the Framework is available on the Cafcass website at www.Cafcass.gov.uk.

■ Civil Proceedings: Disability

Daisy Cooper:

[\[40769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service are taking to ensure that (a) telephone and video hearings are accessible to all disabled participants, (b) disabled defendants can understand and effectively participate in legal proceedings against them, and (c) disabled defendants have accessible guidance on their participation rights in such hearings.

Chris Philp:

In response to the current pandemic HMCTS have increased the capacity for telephone and video hearings so that hearings can take place remotely where appropriate. We are clear that audio and video hearings provide an additional channel for conducting a hearing and should be as accessible as possible. However,

they may not be suitable for everyone. The decision to hold a hearing by telephone or video is for the judge, panel or magistrate, taking into account the needs of the parties, including any disability or difficulties with access.

We ask participants to tell the court or tribunal if they need support or cannot participate effectively in the telephone or video hearing. The judiciary can then determine how to proceed, and whether to change the method of the hearing or put in place reasonable adjustments or alternative arrangements to ensure disabled users can participate.

We are working with the advice sector to fully understand the impacts on vulnerable people, reasonable adjustments, and reflecting up to date advice from the sector in our processes for court users to join hearings and related staff guidance. We have improved our GOV.UK content which includes easy read guidance to understand legal terms used in court hearings and support for defendants charged with a crime. We have set up a technical support phone line for remote hearings and included additional information in hearing notices.

■ **Funerals: Coronavirus**

Laura Farris:

[40791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to support the funeral industry during the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

The department has ongoing engagement with the death management sector focusing on the pressure of increased demand, maintaining the welfare of staff, ensuring the deceased are treated with dignity and respect and the bereaved with compassion.

As part of this work, organisations across the funeral sector are sharing key information with Government and in turn the Government is sharing relevant information and exploring whether additional support may be needed. The Government has produced an online hub collating government guidance for the funeral sector and those involved in the management of deaths (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-those-involved-in-managing-covid-19-deaths>) so that it is easily accessible for those who need it.

■ **Joseph McCann**

Ms Lyn Brown:

[39519]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Serious Further Offence Review in the case of Joseph McCann, published on the 5 March 2020, what assessment he has made of the role of caseloads for probation staff in criminal justice system failures in the case of Joseph McCann.

Ms Lyn Brown: [39520]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Serious Further Offence Review in the case of Joseph McCann published on the 5 March 2020, what steps he plans to take to reduce caseloads for probation staff.

Ms Lyn Brown: [39521]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Serious Further Offence Review in the case of Joseph McCann published on the 5 March 2020, what assessment he has made of the role of (a) the loss of experience and (b) inadequacies in training within probation teams in criminal justice system failures in the case of Joseph McCann.

Ms Lyn Brown: [39522]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Serious Further Offence Review in the case of Joseph McCann published on the 5 March 2020, what steps he plans to take to (a) improve retention of experienced staff and (b) improve training within probation teams.

Lucy Frazer:

The crimes committed by Joseph McCann were appalling and our thoughts and sympathies are with the victims and their families. We recognise that there were failings and we apologise for our part in this. We are committed ensuring we learn from this terrible case. The National Probation Service undertook a Serious Case Review which considered issues related to caseloads, staff experience and training and can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-into-the-case-of-joseph-mccann>

The Secretary of State for Justice has asked Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation to conduct an independent review into the case, which will also consider the wider culture and understanding of recall in probation services. When the Chief Inspector reports back, we will consider what further action is required

In January, we launched new mandatory learning and development tools to ensure that we have effective and robust processes in place that are understood and implemented by all staff. This includes training on the mandatory requirements and guidance for all prison and probation staff involved in the recall, review and re-release of recalled prisoners and updated guidance on managing the compliance and engagement of offenders on licence. We are committed to being an open, learning organisation and are currently developing a new L&D delivery model to deliver more effective training. Our staff are the greatest asset to the probation system, and vital in ensuring that we keep the public safe and help turn around the lives of offenders.

We know that workloads for many probation officers are too high and we have been recruiting more staff into the National Probation Service (NPS). As at 31 March 2020 we had 1036 new probation officers in training, who will make a real difference as they qualify. We are also working on a new plan to ensure we recruit sufficient staff, diversify the workforce, raise professional standards and properly recognise probation qualifications.

NPS Pay Modernisation included a 2-year pensionable pay award for all staff, with approximately 9,500 staff receiving a minimum pay award of 3% in each year. More beneficial pay on promotion for NPS staff was also introduced to support career progression and help fill vacancies. Work to strengthen the existing wellbeing and engagement provision to ensure staff are supported is also ongoing. We are currently reviewing what other mechanisms are available to support retention in areas with higher turnover.

■ Law Centres: Coronavirus

Nadia Whittome:

[\[39803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to support law centres that have been financially adversely affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

We recognise the valuable role that Law Centres, and the wider not-for-profit advice sector, play in local communities across the country, and we support them in this vital work.

We are aware that Law Centres may experience financial issues due to the Covid-19 outbreak and have been working at pace to consider options to support them and other not-for-profits who provide this important service.

I am therefore pleased to say that the Government is allocating £5.4 million in funding to the not for profit providers of specialist legal advice.

£3 million of this will be earmarked specifically for Law Centres.

This is in addition to the £370m of funding that the National Lottery Communities Fund is administering, which qualifying third sector organisations, including those within the advice sector, will be able to bid for directly.

■ National Probation Service for England and Wales: Pay

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[40710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 33718 on National Probation Service for England and Wales: Pay, for what reasons the development of the new scheme has been delayed.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[40711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 33718 on National Probation Service for England and Wales: Pay, in what ways probation pay is linked to professional development.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[40712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 33718 on National Probation Service for England and Wales: Pay, what the evidential basis is for his statement that NPS Trade Unions have agreed to link pay to professional development.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[40713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 33718, National Probation Service for England and Wales: Pay, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on delays to the development of the new scheme.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[40714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April 2020 to Question 33718, National Probation Service for England and Wales: Pay, what assessment he has made of the effect on probation staff morale of the delay to their contractual pay increments.

Lucy Frazer:

In line with the NPS Pay Modernisation Agreement of 2018, the NPS is committed to working in partnership with Trade Union colleagues to develop a pay progression framework that is fair, fit for purpose and sustainable. Collectively, we have experienced delays due to the complex and detailed nature of the work, as we need to get any new framework right for our staff. We are continuing our work on proposals for the future strategy and framework with Trade Union colleagues to ensure that it is suitable for the entire workforce.

The NPS Pay Modernisation Agreement of 2018 outlines that the proposed competency-based framework is to, among other considerations, account for professional development as one of its design principles. It notes agreement to further talks recognising that HMPPS is committed to ensuring NPS pay modernisation reflects the probation profession and rewards continuous professional development. Professional development is intrinsically linked with competency. To build and demonstrate competence, staff will need to access learning and development opportunities throughout their careers. That is why we are improving our training and development offer to staff as part of the Probation Workforce Programme.

The consideration of professional development as part of a new pay progression scheme was outlined in the NPS Pay Modernisation Agreement of 2018, to be developed in partnership with Trade Unions. As part of the work to develop a new pay progression scheme, the NPS is considering the various constituent parts of what determines competency to best ensure that the scheme is fair, fit for purpose and sustainable. Professional development is a significant part of that consideration, which will help drive the development of a new strategy and framework to ensure that it is suitable for the entire workforce.

As per normal practices, MoJ and HM Treasury officials are aware of the issues faced by the NPS and trade unions partnership, and are supportive of the ongoing constructive engagement between colleagues.

I am extremely grateful for the hard working and committed staff across the National Probation Service, especially during this challenging time.

We appreciate that some National Probation Service staff were expecting their pay award on 1 April 2020 and it is with regret that this has not been possible. We are committed to commencing formal negotiations with our Trade Union colleagues once the Public Sector pay guidance has been published and unfortunately the impact of COVID-19 has delayed this process. We are committed to making sure that payments due to our staff are made as soon as is practicable and any pay award due will be backdated to 1 April 2020.

■ Prisoners' Release: Children

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[41013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many children had been released under the Prison and Young Offender Institution (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Rules 2020 as of 28 April 2020.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[41017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the feasibility of releasing children held on remand in (a) youth offending institutions, (b) secure training centres and (c) other secure units during the covid-19 outbreak.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[41018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many children have been (a) considered for release and (b) released under the Government's early release scheme.

Lucy Frazer:

Our priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in custody, both sentenced and on remand, whilst ensuring the public is protected and we are considering all the options available to maintain this approach. I can assure you we will take the necessary actions in the interests of children in custody and the wider community. That is why we have been progressing work to review the cases of those children serving a custodial sentence in the youth estate who may be eligible for early release under the End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) programme. Work has been taking place alongside NHS England & NHS Improvement and the Youth Justice Board to produce joint operational guidance, with the appropriate Youth Offending Teams (YOT) and local authorities updated accordingly. Eligibility for the ECTR programme is determined by the offence type and level of risk that children and young people pose to themselves and others. In addition to this, children will only be eligible if they are serving a custodial sentence.

We are continually reviewing procedures to support access to justice during the emergency period due to Covid-19, particularly for the most time-critical and sensitive cases, such as youth custodial remand cases. Custodial remand should only be used as a last resort for children and only in the most serious cases. When a child is remanded to custody, the child's case is regularly reviewed by the local Youth Offending Team which, if appropriate, will apply to the court for a bail hearing. The court will then carefully consider the circumstances of the case and reach a decision of whether to bail a child into the community, or remand the child back to custody.

These decisions must be considered by the court on a case by case basis, and a child will only be released from custodial remand into the community, if the court deems it is safe to do so. Courts are working very closely with the judiciary to prioritise caseload and case types.

Those who meet the ECTR criteria will only be released if their YOT manager confirms that their accommodation is safe, suitable and sustainable. All children released under ECTR will be subject to electronic monitoring. If children and young people do not already have their own phone, or access to one then they can be provided with a basic non- internet enabled mobile phone. This will enable them to maintain contact with their YOT, family/carer and establishment from the moment of release. No child will be released without accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation will not be deemed suitable.

Given these necessary safeguards for the child and the public, and the higher threshold for custodial sentences in youth justice in the first place, this means that only a small number of children are in scope for this release. None have yet completed the process and fewer than ten will be eligible in the next three months, but children do also continue to be released from custody in the usual way.

■ Prisoners' Release: Foreign Nationals

Nick Thomas-Symonds: [\[39595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what criteria his Department uses to choose destinations for relocation of people released from custody early on licence (with conditions) with no fixed abode, and who are classified as foreign national offenders.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: [\[39596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how local authorities are (a) notified and (b) supported by his Department when foreign national offenders are released from custody early on licence (with conditions) with no fixed abode.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: [\[39597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many foreign national offenders who have been released from custody early on licence (with conditions) with no fixed abode have been relocated in the last 12 months.

Lucy Frazer:

The Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme allows for the early release of offenders serving sentences of at least 12 weeks but no more than four years. Eligible prisoners can be released up to 135 days before their automatic release date but HDC is only permitted where the offender can provide a suitable, probation approved address to which they can be curfewed. Foreign National Offenders who have received a decision to deport are statutorily excluded from HDC, and those being considered for removal but whose decision is yet to be made are presumed unsuitable.

The End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) scheme allows for the release of low risk offenders who are within two months of their automatic release date. Foreign national offenders who are being removed from the UK and who have exhausted in-country rights of appeal against removal are statutorily excluded from ECTR.

No prisoner is released through the ECTR scheme is granted this unless suitable accommodation is identified first.

■ Prisoners: Coronavirus

Peter Kyle:

[41126]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people have been admitted to prison since the start of the covid-19 lockdown on 23 March 2020; and how many of those prisoners were tested for covid-19 as part of the prison admission process.

Lucy Frazer:

Prison receptions data covering January – March 2020 is planned for publication in July 2020 and receptions data covering April – June 2020 is planned for publication in October 2020.

Although official statistical prison receptions data is unavailable at this time, our published management information suggests that as of 24th April, the prison population is 81,124^[1], showing a reduction of 2,744 since 28th February 2020 and giving the estate headroom of 4,381. This data is not yet verified.

Although tests are conducted on symptomatic prisoners, COVID-19 testing is not as yet a routine part of the prison reception process. New cohorting strategies have been developed however, and as a result prisons are implementing units to isolate the sick, shield the vulnerable and cohort new arrivals to reduce risk of transmission.

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-figures-2020>

■ Prisons: Coronavirus

Dr James Davies:

[40678]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans the Government has to (a) conduct covid-19 testing among prison staff and prisoners and to (b) reduce transfer of staff and prisoners between sites during the covid-19 outbreak.

Lucy Frazer:

On 24 April, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, announced the rollout of COVID-19 testing for all essential workers and symptomatic members of their household, including prison and probation staff in England. To date, we have referred more than 2,000 staff working for HM Prison and Probation Service for testing.

As healthcare is devolved in Wales, testing for prison and probation staff, and symptomatic members of their household, is being delivered through local resilience forum arrangements and local health boards.

Tests will be conducted on symptomatic prisoners on site and are carried out by qualified healthcare practitioners. Those who are well enough to be safely managed by prison healthcare teams will remain in prisons, and those requiring hospital care will be transferred to the appropriate medical facility.

The testing capacity and availability can vary between establishments, depending on local circumstances at the time. This means that the total number of potential cases at any establishment can include clinically diagnosed but untested cases, as well as those who have a confirmed COVID-19 positive result. Outbreak control teams monitor and take account of these matters in their advice on the management of prison cases.

Routine transfers of both staff and prisoners are being minimised to reduce opportunities for transmission of COVID-19 between prisons and prevent the introduction of infection into prisons where there is no outbreak.

Some controlled prisoner movements between establishments have been authorised in order to utilise the headroom created by population control measures. All such moves require COVID-19 Gold Command authorisation and only take place once the receiving prison has a Reverse Cohorting Unit established to receive incoming prisoners.

Staff detached duty has been minimised and used only in exceptional circumstances.

■ Prisons: Grants

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[41012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisons had implemented the £34 increase in the subsistence grant as of 28 April 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

All those being released under the End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) scheme are eligible for the Subsistence Grant of £80. The Subsistence Grant has been set at this amount for the ECTR cohort because these individuals will not have had the full amount of time and resources they would usually have had to prepare for release.

The End of Custody Temporary Release scheme is currently operating estate-wide subject to individual checks to determine which prisoners are eligible. All prisoners released under this scheme will receive the Subsistence Grant on release from prison.

■ Young Offender Institutions: Children

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[41014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many children remain in young offenders institutions on remand as at the 28 April 2020.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[41016]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many children are held on remand in (a) youth offending institutions, (b) secure training centres and (c) other secure units.

Lucy Frazer:

Custodial remand should only be used as a last resort for children and only in the most serious cases. When a child is remanded to custody, the child's case is regularly reviewed by the local Youth Offending Team which, if appropriate, will apply to the court for a bail hearing. The court will then carefully consider the circumstances of the case and reach a decision on whether to bail a child into the community, or remand the child back to custody. These decisions must be considered by the court on a case by case basis, and a child will only be released from custodial remand into the community, if the court deems it is safe to do so. Courts are working very closely with the judiciary to prioritise caseload and case types. We are continually reviewing procedures to support access to justice during the emergency period due to Covid-19, particularly for the most time-critical and sensitive cases, such as youth custodial remand cases.

Information on the number of children held in remand across the Youth Secure Estate is published regularly as part of the Youth Custody Data series, via <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-custody-data>

The latest available published data from the end of February 2020 show that 293 young people were on remand at this time. Analysis of this data provides the following breakdown per sector:

Young Offender Institutions – 214

Secure Training Centres – 39

Secure Children's Homes – 40

Total – 293

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ Proxy Voting: Coronavirus

Dr Dan Poulter:

[R] [41424]

To ask the Leader of the House, what recent discussions he has had on allowing the proxy voting system in the House of Commons to be extended during the covid-19 outbreak to include hon Members who also work as NHS clinicians.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg:

While proxy voting is ultimately a matter for the House, the Government does not intend to extend the scope of the pilot scheme. We of course owe a huge debt of gratitude to the NHS workforce, especially those who are also Members of Parliament. I hope the arrangements for remote voting, agreed by the House on 22

April 2020, will help support those Hon. Members who also work as NHS clinicians during the continuing hybrid procedures in Parliament.

However, the Government is aware that some of those Hon. Members working in the NHS may be unable to take part in the remote voting process. Therefore the Government will ensure that these MPs are paired, so their absence does not affect the outcome of any votes.

The Government is committed to listening carefully to the views of Members across the House, including those of the Procedure Committee, as we develop these new and temporary ways of working. However, it is the Government's clear view that the current arrangements are temporary and the House will return to the normal tried and tested ways of working as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Northern Ireland Government

Louise Haigh: [\[41534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will publish a human rights explanatory memorandum with the legislative proposals relating to legacy investigations.

Mr Robin Walker:

The recognition and protection of rights are fundamental values of the UK. Our human rights framework offers comprehensive, well-established, and effective protections within a clear constitutional and legal system.

We fully intend to maintain our leading role in the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law; and the UK remains committed to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), including conducting Article 2 compliant investigations where these are needed.

Explanatory notes and a statement as to the Bill's compatibility with the ECHR will be published on introduction of the Bill.

Louise Haigh: [\[41535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether the Government plans to seek legislative consent from the Northern Ireland Assembly on legislative proposals relating to legacy investigations.

Louise Haigh: [\[41536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether the Government would proceed with legislative proposals on legacy investigations without legislative consent from the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Robin Walker:

The Government intends to request legislative consent for legislative proposals relating to legacy investigations in accordance with Standing Order 42A of the Northern Ireland Assembly and in line with the Sewel Convention.

Louise Haigh: [\[41537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if the Government will conduct pre-legislative scrutiny of proposals on legacy investigations.

Mr Robin Walker:

In 2018, the UK Government public consultation, 'Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past', sought views on the original Stormont House Agreement proposals, and received over 17,000 responses. Careful consideration of all views provided in this consultation have informed our revised proposals for addressing legacy issues.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland set out for scrutiny in Parliament the Government's proposals for legacy reform in a Written Ministerial Statement on 18 March.

The statement set out our high level proposals for dealing with legacy issues, and signalled the beginning of a period of engagement with the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland parties and others. We have begun the engagement process and remain committed to making progress on this important issue, whilst being sensitive to the challenging context in which we are all working.

Louise Haigh: [\[41538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to the Written Statement of the 18 March 2020, Addressing Northern Ireland Legacy Issues, HCWS168, what the timetable is for publishing proposals relating to the investigations set out in that Written Statement.

Mr Robin Walker:

In line with our commitment in *New Decade, New Approach*, we published a Written Ministerial Statement on 18 March setting out a framework for legislation to address the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. As set out in this statement, we have started engagement with a range of stakeholders on the legacy proposals, including victims' groups, the NI parties and the Irish Government.

The wider context in which we are currently working is very challenging and has unsurprisingly had an impact on our planned timetable, as the repercussions of dealing with the Covid-19 crisis have been extensively felt. However, we continue with the engagement process, as promised, and remain fully committed to making progress on this important issue.

TRANSPORT

■ Bus Services: Coronavirus

Sir Christopher Chope: [\[40961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what support the Government is providing to coach operators in the tourism industry to enable those drivers to continue to finance the

capital cost of vehicles which are idle during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

The Chancellor announced £330 billion of guarantees, which includes the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme so businesses, such as coach operators, have access to loans, overdrafts, invoice finance and asset finance to pay essential bills

■ **Cycling and Walking: Coronavirus**

Dan Jarvis:

[R] [\[41457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of providing additional funding for (a) walking and (b) cycling routes to increase active travel capacity in response to the challenges of operating public transport networks during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government agrees that reallocating road space to give pedestrians and cyclists more room can be a good way of enabling more people to move around safely while maintaining social distancing, thus helping to relieve pressures on public transport as well as delivering other benefits. It supports the steps many local authorities are taking to deliver this, but decisions on where and how to do it are a matter for local authorities who are responsible for managing their roads, and who already have the necessary powers. The Government has provided over £3.2 billion of additional funding to local authorities to help them respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) pressures across all the services they deliver, and will continue to consider the case for further support.

■ **Driving Instruction: Coronavirus**

Robert Halfon:

[\[41029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to extend the duration of provisional driving instructor licences during the covid-19 outbreak to ensure that those licenses do not expire while trainee driving instructors are unable to undertake training.

Rachel Maclean:

There is no provision in legislation to extend the period of a provisional driving instructor trainee licence beyond six months.

■ **Driving under Influence: Training**

Kenny MacAskill:

[\[39758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to allow participants in drink driving awareness courses to complete their required attendance.

Rachel Maclean:

In line with the Government's guidance on social distancing, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency has advised drink drive rehabilitation (DDR) course providers not to start any new classroom-based rehabilitation courses, until further notice.

Offenders who have already taken the first, or first and second day of a three-day DDR course, can complete their course remotely on a suitable digital platform.

■ Driving: Licensing**Dr Julian Lewis:**[\[40455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 21 April to Question 34894 on renewal of driving licences for volunteers who cannot obtain medical certificates from their general practitioners, if he will make appropriate arrangements for drivers of passenger-carrying vehicles, in addition to the arrangements for bus and lorry drivers.

Rachel Maclean:

The temporary provisions for bus and lorry drivers outlined in the answer to Question 34894 extend to drivers of passenger carrying vehicles, providing the licence holder has passed the required driving test.

Drivers who have passed a car test and wish to drive a minibus as a volunteer can do so without obtaining a medical report, provided they can meet certain criteria. These are:

- that they are driving on behalf of a non-commercial body for social purposes but not for hire or reward (unless operating under a permit)
- they are 21 years old or over
- they have held a category B (car) licence for at least two years
- they are providing their services on a voluntary basis
- the minibus has a maximum weight of no more than 3.5 tonnes (excluding any specialist equipment for the carriage of disabled passengers) and is not towing a trailer.

■ Ferries: Coronavirus**Hywel Williams:**[\[41394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the criteria was for the allocation of funding to protect routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; when he plans to publish details of further support for (a) routes between Wales and the Republic of Ireland and (b) other ferry routes; and if he will publish details of the financial commitments made under the joint statement between the UK, France and Ireland, published on 24 April 2020.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Government has announced potential support for routes that ensure the flow of critical goods into and within the UK.

Discussions are ongoing with operators on eligible routes to determine whether those routes are no-longer economically viable. We will keep the scheme under review and we are working closely with the Devolved Administrations.

There are no financial commitments as part of the Joint Statement with France and Ireland.

■ Ferries: Gosport

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[41581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the financial security of Gosport ferry.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[41582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid19 outbreak on the ability of Gosport Ferry company to continue providing transport services.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [\[41583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the potential closure of Gosport ferry as a result of the covid-19 outbreak on (a) the economy, (b) jobs and (c) integration of the South East region.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Government has announced an unprecedented package of financial measures to support businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic, worth £350 billion. This includes providing local authorities with a total of £3.2bn to support the COVID-19 response to the pandemic at the local level. These wide-ranging measures are providing support for businesses of all sizes.

The Department's officials and I have been working closely with operators across the maritime sector, including Gosport Ferry Company, to understand how these measures can be applied. The Department recognises the important role the Ferry provides to the region, alongside other transport options that are available to access Portsmouth from Gosport and vice versa, ensuring that the South-East region remains well connected during this period.

■ Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Coronavirus

David Mundell: [\[39495\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure that there is a national network of truckstops open to lorry drivers while covid-19 lockdown measures are in place that are able to provide hot food, shower and toilet facilities.

Rachel Maclean:

Truck stops and garages can provide some facilities subject to general cross-sector rules, including about social distancing. The Department has asked for, receives and acts on intelligence received from the Road Haulage Association (RHA) and others. Concerns have focused on several areas. Ministers and officials have contacted representative organisations for petrol retailers and distribution centres about access arrangements.

We have been actively working with Motorway Service Areas to ensure facilities continue to be available to drivers.

We have also been working with large Regional Distribution Centres, who have implemented hygiene procedures and social distancing in line with the RHA and government guidelines.

Where access to toilet or handwashing facilities is denied, and proper social distancing measures are not in place, this can be reported via e-mail to covid19info@rha.uk.net

■ Logistics: Republic of Ireland**Stephen Farry:**[\[39784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to support logistics networks between the UK and Ireland during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Kelly Tolhurst:

On 24 April we announced a package of funding to support the movement of critical goods on freight routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Up to £17m of funding will be available to support up to 5 routes over the next 2 months, with the Northern Ireland Executive contributing 40%.

Furthermore, the Governments of Ireland, France and the United Kingdom have committed to supporting the continued movement of freight. Both the Irish and French governments have introduced measures to support freight movements, as we have.

These measures are in addition to the unprecedented support provided to UK companies in all sectors worth £350 billion.

■ Public Transport: Coronavirus**Dan Jarvis:**[\[41455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the potential merits of wearing (a) face masks and (b) other personal protective equipment to reduce the transmission of covid-19 on public transport.

Dan Jarvis: [\[41456\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he is taking steps to issue guidance on wearing (a) face masks and (b) other personal protective equipment on public transport as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Keeping transport workers and passengers safe is of paramount importance, and we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care at Ministerial and official level to ensure that we continue to take an evidence-based approach to the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

The UK continues to be led by the evidence on the use of face masks by the general population and is in alignment with the World Health Organization who do not currently recommend the wide spread use of face masks in the community. We will of course keep this under review, which includes considering advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

■ Railways: Coronavirus

Henry Smith: [\[39543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans the Government has to amend the system of refunds for rail season tickets to ensure that commuters are not adversely affected when claiming refunds as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

All season ticket holders are entitled to claim a refund for time unused on their tickets in accordance with the National Rail Conditions of Travel.

We have worked with the rail industry to make the process for claiming season ticket refunds easier during this crisis, for example by allowing passengers to claim refunds remotely rather than returning their ticket to a ticket office. We have also allowed passengers to backdate their season ticket refund claim to 17th March, when 'do not travel' advice was first introduced, or the date their ticket was last used, whichever is later. The refund acceptance period for passengers has also been extended from 28 to 56 days.

Caroline Lucas: [\[39619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make it his policy to fund an extension scheme for railway season ticket holders who have not used their season tickets as a result of the Government's measures to prevent the transmission of covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We have no plans to offer an extension scheme for rail season ticket holders as they are entitled to claim a refund for time unused on their tickets, in accordance with the National Rail Conditions of Travel.

We have worked with the rail industry to make the process for claiming refunds easier during this crisis, for example by allowing passengers to claim refunds remotely

rather than returning their ticket to a ticket office. We have also allowed passengers to backdate their season ticket refund claim to 17th March, when 'do not travel' advice was first introduced, or the date their ticket was last used, whichever is later. The refund acceptance period for passengers has also been extended from 28 to 56 days.

TREASURY

■ **Bureaux de Change: Coronavirus**

Ian Mearns:

[\[41432\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason the Expanded Retail Discount Scheme excludes bureaux de change premises.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors.

While financial services providers are excluded from business rates relief, a range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, has also been made available.

For example, the Government has launched the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank, and the deferral of VAT payments for this quarter.

■ **Business: Insurance**

Claire Hanna:

[\[41193\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to help ensure that businesses can claim on their insurance for business interruption due to the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

For those businesses which have an appropriate policy that covers government ordered closure and unspecified notifiable diseases, the Government's social distancing instructions are sufficient to allow businesses to make a claim against their insurance, provided the other terms and conditions in their policy are met.

However, it is important to note that most businesses have not purchased insurance that covers losses from unspecified notifiable diseases, such as COVID-19. Insurance policies differ significantly, so businesses are encouraged to check the terms and conditions of their specific policy and contact their providers. Some policies cover losses arising from any disease classed as notifiable by the Government, however, most policies only cover a specific list of notifiable diseases. The terms of a policy cannot be changed retrospectively.

The Government recognises that businesses who do not have appropriate insurance cover will require support from elsewhere. The Government encourages businesses to seek assistance through the wider support package if they are in financial difficulty. Businesses should explore the full package of support set out by the Chancellor in recent weeks, which includes measures such as business rates holidays, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and wage support.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[41412\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that insurance companies offer business insurance pay-out insurance claims related to covid-19 in circumstances where there is no provable case of that virus within that company premises.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[41413\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what correspondence he has had with major insurance companies on the rate of pay-outs of business insurance in response claims relating to covid-19.

Shabana Mahmood: [\[41414\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that insurance companies act in accordance with corporate responsibility in response to claims in relation to covid-19.

John Glen:

The Government is in continual dialogue with the insurance sector about its contribution to handling this unprecedented situation. The Government is also working closely with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to ensure that the rules are being upheld during this crisis.

For those businesses which have an appropriate policy that covers government ordered closure and unspecified notifiable diseases, the Government's social distancing instructions are sufficient to allow businesses to make a claim against their insurance, provided the other terms and conditions in their policy are met.

The FCA's rules require insurers to handle claims fairly and promptly; provide reasonable guidance to help a policyholder make a claim, and appropriate information on its progress; not reject a claim unreasonably; and settle claims promptly once settlement terms are agreed. In addition, the FCA has said that, in light of COVID-19, insurers must consider very carefully the needs of their customers and show flexibility in their treatment of them.

Furthermore, on 15 April, FCA sent a letter to the insurance industry, setting out the FCA's expectation of firms regarding their handling of business interruption insurance claims, urging insurers to settle claims quickly in cases where there was a clear obligation to pay the claim in full or in part.

In addition, on 1 May, the FCA published a statement setting out their intention to seek legal clarity on the handling of business interruption insurance claims, in order

to resolve any doubt for businesses facing uncertainty on their claims. In their statement the FCA also noted that insurers should look at how they can help consumers who are experiencing financial distress as a result of COVID-19.

However, most businesses have not purchased insurance that covers losses from COVID-19. Insurance policies differ significantly, so businesses are encouraged to check the terms and conditions of their specific policy and contact their providers.

The Government recognises that businesses who do not have appropriate insurance cover will require support from elsewhere. As such, businesses should explore the full package of support set out by the Chancellor, which includes measures such as business rates holidays, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and wage support.

■ **Cash Dispensing: Fees and Charges**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[40522\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure the longer term availability of free to use ATM's (a) in rural areas and (b) throughout the UK.

John Glen:

The Government recognises that widespread access to cash remains extremely important for consumers and businesses across the whole of the United Kingdom, particularly in rural areas.

That is why, at the March 2020 Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to protect access to cash. This will ensure that millions of people can get the cash they need when they need it.

This announcement builds upon existing initiatives from industry. LINK, the scheme that runs the UK's largest ATM network, has acted to protect remote free-to-use ATMs which are one kilometre or further from the next nearest free-to-use ATM or Post Office. Furthermore, LINK continue to support the viability of ATMs in rural areas through premium fees paid to ATM deployers.

■ **Cash Dispensing: Rural Areas**

Jamie Stone:

[\[39738\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will meet with representatives of the high street banking sector to discuss access to cash in rural areas following Clydesdale Bank's decision to reverse planned branch closures.

John Glen:

The Government recognises the importance of cash to the daily lives of millions of people across the UK, particularly in rural areas.

In the context of COVID-19, banks, building societies, the Post Office and credit unions are working closely with the Treasury, the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority to maintain branch access for essential services while

balancing the needs of their customers with the safety and welfare of staff. Individual decisions on firms' branch networks remain commercial decisions for the firms.

The Government is also working closely with the cash industry and regulators to ensure that the cash system continues to serve the needs of customers. Customers can continue to use ATMs or cash machines as normal for cash withdrawals and balance enquiries. The Financial Conduct Authority is working with regulated firms to ensure that they are providing clear information about alternative payment methods.

Jamie Stone:

[\[39822\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the effect on access to cash in rural areas of bank branch closures during the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

The Government recognises the importance of cash to the daily lives of millions of people across the UK, particularly in rural areas.

Throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, the Government has been working closely with industry and regulators to ensure customers continue to have access to essential banking services, including access to cash, while balancing the needs of their customers with the safety and welfare of staff.

Customers can continue to use ATMs or cash machines as normal for cash withdrawals and balance enquiries. However, we would encourage customers, wherever possible, to use online services for their banking and to find the latest information. Bank customers can also use the Post Office for essential banking services as an alternative to a bank branch.

■ Charities: Coronavirus

Amy Callaghan:

[\[39762\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he plans to publish further guidance for charities who are struggling financially due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

Many charities and social enterprises will benefit from the existing measures announced to support employers and businesses. Under these measures, like other businesses, charities can defer their VAT bills and pay no business rates for their shops next year. All charities are eligible for the job retention scheme and the right answer for many charities will be to furlough their employees with the government paying 80% of wages. 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>.

However, we know that some charities are providing critical services and wider support to vulnerable people and communities during the pandemic. They have never been more needed than they are now. 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 new package of support will enable such organisations to continue providing essential services to those most in need.

Funding for charities is being made available 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.

■ Companies: Coronavirus

Dan Carden:

[\[40744\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to make access to covid-19 support packages contingent on companies meeting their tax obligations; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has introduced an unprecedented support package that is well-targeted at the businesses and individuals who most need support, bearing in mind the need to act very quickly to protect livelihoods from the current crisis.

Where businesses fail to meet their tax obligations, HMRC challenge them using their compliance powers. That is the right way to challenge rule-breaking, not by denying access to measures that support the British economy and workers who pay their taxes, and who would otherwise lose their jobs.

The Government expects everyone to act responsibly and in the spirit of the package, and only claim and use support as intended. The Government is keeping measures under constant review.

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Julian Sturdy:

[\[39655\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the use of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme by businesses that are able to continue operating at full staff strength during the covid-19 outbreak to ensure that resources are prioritised for the businesses and employees in most need.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is designed to help employers whose operations have been severely affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) to retain their employees and protect the UK economy. The Government recognises that businesses will face different impacts from coronavirus.

The scheme is open to employers that had created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 19 March 2020, are enrolled for PAYE online and have a UK bank account. It is for employers to decide whether to offer to furlough employees. There is no limit on the amount of funding available for the scheme.

The Government expects employers to do the right thing, but HMRC reserve the right to follow up on claims and take whatever action is necessary if people abuse the CJRS scheme.

Ben Lake:

[40732]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of adapting the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to provide further support for businesses who are unable to furlough staff due to the critical nature of their work yet are facing severe financial difficulties as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The purpose of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is to support people who would otherwise have been made redundant. Furloughed employees cannot work for their employer and must remain on furlough for a minimum of three weeks. This is consistent with public health guidance seeking to minimise the number of people outside their homes on a regular basis.

This scheme supplements the other significant support announced for UK businesses, including the Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses, 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/

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[40953]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to support employers that have re-employed staff who left their employment after the 28 February 2020 for the purposes of eligibility for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Where an employer subsequently re-employs a member of staff who left their employment on or after 28 February 2020, upon re-employment the employee may be furloughed.

From the date the employee is furloughed, the employer is then eligible to claim towards the wages of their employee under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. This applies regardless of when they are re-employed.

In order to qualify, the employee must have been on the employer's PAYE payroll as of 28 February 2020. This means a Real Time Information (RTI) submission notifying payment in respect of that employee to HMRC must have been made on or before 28 February 2020.

An employee on a fixed term contract can also be re-employed, furloughed and claimed for, if either:

- their contract expired after 28 February 2020 and an RTI payment submission for the employee was notified to HMRC on or before 28 February 2020, or
- their contract expired after 19 March 2020 and an RTI payment submission for the employee was notified to HMRC on or before 19 March 2020

In these circumstances, employers can apply for a grant that covers 80% of the usual monthly wage costs for their furloughed, re-employed member of staff, up to £2,500 a month. In addition, the employer can also claim the associated Employer National

Insurance contributions and pension contributions (up to the level of the minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contribution) on that subsidised furlough pay.

Hywel Williams:

[\[40994\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will amend the Treasury Direction in relation to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to enable employers to furlough employees (a) on sick leave and (b) that were pregnant women and sent home on sick leave following the Prime Minister's public advice statement of 16 March 2020.

Jesse Norman:

The Direction does not prevent someone from being furloughed if they are pregnant, on Statutory Sick Pay or are eligible for Statutory Sick Pay, including if they are following shielding measures in line with public health guidance. This is consistent with the published guidance and the Prime Minister's public advice statement.

The Government is grateful for the feedback it has received on both the HM Treasury Direction and HMRC's guidance. HMRC and HM Treasury will continue to consider these comments and will provide appropriate clarification if necessary.

Ian Mearns:

[\[41032\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department plans to take steps to tackle employers that refuse to furlough employees who were on payroll on 19 March 2020 and have subsequently left that employment, in circumstances where those former employees have contacted their former employers for support through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Government guidance makes clear that, as long as eligible for the scheme, employers can re-employ employees they made redundant or who stopped working for them on or after 19 March 2020, put them on furlough, and claim for their wages through the scheme from the date on which they furloughed them.

The Government encourages all those firms affected by coronavirus to do the right thing for their employees. The scheme will help firms keep millions of people in employment by covering most employers' wage costs. Firms should receive their grant within 6 working days of submitting claims.

The Government is also supporting those on low incomes who need to rely on the welfare system, through a significant package of temporary measures which benefit new and existing claimants. The measures include a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit (UC) standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element, and nearly £1 billion of additional support for renters through increases to the Local Housing Allowance rates for UC and Housing Benefit claimants.

Stephanie Peacock:

[\[41138\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many applications have been made to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in each region of the UK.

Stephanie Peacock: [\[41139\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department holds data on the number of applications by region made to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme after the eligibility date was extended to 19 March 2020.

Jesse Norman:

Applications for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) opened on Monday 20th April.

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.

Charlotte Nichols: [\[41188\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy that employees whose wages are supported through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will be paid no less than minimum wage rates for their normal hours of work over the salary reference period for that scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Furloughed workers will be eligible for 80% of their regular wages, up to a cap of £2,500 a month, even if based on their usual working hours this would be less than the minimum wage. However, employers can top up these payments voluntarily if they wish.

If training is undertaken by furloughed employees at the request of their employer, then they are entitled to be paid at least the appropriate national minimum wage for this time, even if this is more than the 80% of their regular wages that will be subsidised. Employers will need to pay the additional wages.

Charlotte Nichols: [\[41189\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether employees who are members of a final salary pension scheme and whose wages are supported at less than 100 per cent under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will experience a reduction to their pension entitlement if they retire while they are furloughed.

John Glen:

On Friday 20 March, the Government announced the unprecedented Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms keep millions of people in employment. All UK employers can apply for a grant that covers 80% of furloughed employees' usual monthly wage costs, up to £2500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions and the equivalent of the minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contribution for a defined contribution scheme.

For members of final salary pension schemes, whether or not the act of being furloughed will affect member benefits will be dependent on individual scheme rules. Many schemes have provisions in place to account for reductions in income in the years leading up to retirement without it affecting their pension if, for example,

members choose to work fewer hours ahead of retiring. How each scheme works is a matter for the trustees and the sponsoring employer.

Ben Lake:

[\[41577\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to support small businesses by relaxing the three-week furlough period requirement for small businesses with small workforces to provide flexibility.

Jesse Norman:

Employees must remain on furlough for a minimum of three weeks. This was a difficult decision but it is important that the scheme is consistent with public health guidance seeking to minimise the number of people outside their homes on a regular basis. It also protects employees by providing some certainty over their working arrangement. However, employees can be placed on furlough more than once while the scheme is open, and employers may rotate staff on furlough (for the minimum of three weeks each) if they choose.

This scheme supplements the other significant support announced for UK businesses, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the deferral of tax payments.

■ **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Directors**

David Mundell:

[\[39497\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will allow dividend income from an employer to be taken into account when calculating the income of directors of small private companies for the purposes of the Coronavirus Job retention scheme.

Stephen Farry:

[\[39791\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department plans to consider dividends in determining income of business owners under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Stephen Hammond:

[\[41410\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to provide support for people who are self-employed and who are paid primarily through dividends.

Jesse Norman:

Those who pay themselves a salary through their own company may be eligible to claim for 80% of usual monthly wages, 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.

The Government's priority has been to support as many people as it possibly can, and as quickly as possible. 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 and any such proposal would need to be considered against 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 may be able to access 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/

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Voluntary Work

Ben Lake: **[41576]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will add an exemption to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance allowing furloughed workers employed by faith-based organisations to participate in activities usually undertaken by volunteers in their faith community.

Jesse Norman:

The purpose of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is to support people who would otherwise have been made redundant. To prevent fraudulent claims, the Government made clear that individuals cannot work or volunteer for their organisation. This aims to protect individuals too; if workers were allowed to volunteer for their employer, the employer could ask them to effectively work full time while only paying them 80% of their wages. DCMS is working with other Government departments and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to identify areas where volunteers can contribute to the COVID-19 response.

■ Customs Declaration Services Programme: Coronavirus

Mr Gregory Campbell: **[40521]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what effect the covid-19 outbreak will have on traders being transferred to the Customs Declaration Service by late 2020.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC have confirmed to businesses that to preserve the integrity of the customs platform, both CHIEF and CDS will continue to be dual run beyond the end of the Transition Period. This decision was based on delivery partner assessment of achieving the 2020 migration target prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. As is the case for all businesses, the COVID-19 outbreak is having an impact on delivery partner capacity and HMRC continue to work closely with the sector on the delivery of CDS.

■ Customs: Standards

Bill Esterson:

[\[41035\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the average time taken was for goods to clear customs (a) entering and (b) leaving the UK in each month in 2020.

Jesse Norman:

95% of Import Frontier Declarations and 99% of Export Declarations receive clearance from customs in 10 minutes. The 10 minutes relate to a trade facilitation time agreed by HMRC to enable traders to be able to amend their declarations within this 10-minute period, before clearance is granted.

The remaining 5% for Imports and 1% for Exports are accounted for by Declarations that are held in order to perform Documentary or Physical Controls on the goods or to deal with other matters such as the collection of revenue.

■ Dental Services

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[39475\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to protect the long-term financial future of dental practices throughout the UK.

Steve Barclay:

The Government recognises the important role all dental practices in the UK play to maintain and improve the oral health of the population and is taking many steps to protect their long-term financial future during the Covid-19 outbreak.

NHS England has put out clear guidance that dentists will be fully remunerated for the NHS work they would have otherwise undertaken during the outbreak, subject to some basic requirements. The Devolved Administrations have devolved responsibilities for this in their own territories.

As regards non-NHS activity, the Government has set out a range of UK-wide measures which will support private income for dentists. If they meet the criteria, private dentists who are self-employed could be eligible for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme and 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 dental practices, including support staff, could also be eligible for this scheme. In addition, private dentists can access the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, if they can channel their activity through a business account.

■ Dental Services: Coronavirus

Ben Lake:

[\[40734\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the need to introduce a package of financial support for dental practices in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

The Government has announced unprecedented support for business and workers to protect them against the current economic emergency. This support 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. All employed staff in dental practices, including support staff, could also be eligible for these schemes.

Dental and other healthcare practices may also benefit from 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>.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Loans

Neil Coyle: [\[40456\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps the Financial Conduct Authority takes to oversee and regulate loans made by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Neil Coyle: [\[40457\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what proportion of short term loans are made by the Department for Work and Pensions; and what assessment the Financial Conduct Authority has made of the effect of those loans on the functioning of the market.

John Glen:

In 2014, regulatory responsibility for the consumer credit market was transferred to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). Whilst the FCA is responsible for regulating this market, HM Treasury sets the regulatory perimeter which informs the types of agreements that fall under the FCA's remit. Loans made by the Department for Work

and Pensions (DWP) do not fall within the FCA's regulatory remit. For that reason, the FCA has not assessed the impact of these loans on the functioning of the market.

■ Employment: Pregnancy

Hywel Williams:

[40995]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to issue guidance to (a) businesses and (b) employers on the (i) support they are required to provide to pregnant employees and (ii) the furloughing of pregnant employees who are unable to work safely or work from home during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of being pregnant. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 continue to apply, and guidance can be found here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/law.htm>.

An employee can be furloughed if they are pregnant, including if they are following shielding measures in line with public health guidance. When furloughing pregnant employees, the normal rules for maternity and other forms of parental leave and pay apply. Employers can claim through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) for enhanced (earnings related) contractual pay for employees who qualify for maternity pay.

All employers are eligible to claim under the scheme and the Government recognises different businesses will face different impacts from coronavirus. Guidance on the scheme is available for employers at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-step-by-step-guide-for-employers>, and for employees at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>.

■ Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

Mr Laurence Robertson:

[40483]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with hon. Members and the Equitable Members Action Group on providing further compensation to victims of the collapse of Equitable Life; and if he will make a statement.

John Glen:

There are no plans to reopen the Payment Scheme or review the £1.5 billion funding allocation previously made to it. The Equitable Life Payment Scheme closed to claims in 2015 and further guidance on the status of the Payment Scheme after closure is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equitable-life-payment-scheme#closure-of-the-scheme>.

■ Government Assistance: Coronavirus**Dan Jarvis:****[39628]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans his Department has to offer additional financial support, beyond Statutory Sick Pay, to front-line staff who are self-isolating as a result of covid-19.

Jesse Norman:

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) has been extended to those in self-isolation, those in the same household caring for those in self-isolation, and shielders. For people self-isolating as a result of COVID-19, SSP is now payable from the first day of sickness, rather than the fourth. It is important to note that Statutory Sick Pay is the minimum amount an employee is entitled to, but many people receive much more, with over half of employees receiving more than the statutory minimum. This is true for front-line staff; for example, NHS staff on the national Agenda for Change contract, whose sick pay is usually calculated only using their basic salary, will be paid sick pay as though they are working for the duration of the pandemic if they are off sick with COVID-19. This aims to ensure that NHS staff on Agenda for Change receive 'full' sick pay.

Contributory Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is available for people unable to work because they are ill with COVID-19 or self-isolating according to Government advice. This is now available from the first day of sickness, rather than the eighth.

To support those on low incomes who may need to rely on the welfare system, the Government has announced a significant package of temporary measures. This includes a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element and a nearly £1bn increase in support for renters through increases to the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants. Taken together, these measures and those announced at Budget provide over £6.5bn additional support through the welfare system for people affected by Covid-19. These changes will benefit all new and existing claimants. Anyone can check their eligibility and apply for Universal Credit by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>.

Sarah Olney:**[39712]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to extend access to the (a) Covid-19 Small Business Grant Fund and (b) the Retail, Hospitality, and Leisure Grant Fund to businesses (i) occupying shared premises or (ii) that pay their rent via their landlord on a Rent plus Rates basis.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Small Business Grant Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund have been designed to support the smallest businesses, and small businesses in some of the sectors which have been hit hardest by the measures taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

These schemes have been tied to the business rates system and rating assessments, which together provide a framework for Local Authorities to make payments as quickly as possible. Businesses in the business rates system are also likely to face particularly high fixed costs, such as fixed rents.

We are listening to the concerns of business, including that businesses in shared offices which may still be paying business rates via “rent, rates and service charges” payments to their landlords are excluded from the grants scheme, but also often face high fixed costs.

■ Health Services and Social Services: Coronavirus

Colum Eastwood:

[\[40792\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will provide financial support to front line NHS, care sector and emergency service workers during the covid-19 outbreak by (a) reducing income tax and (b) making a one-off payment.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is proud of the extraordinary commitment shown by all health and care staff. The Government is working hard to ensure that staff feel supported and safe to continue the fight against COVID-19.

More than one million NHS staff continue to benefit from the Agenda for Change deal, under which the starting pay for a newly qualified nurse has risen by over 12% since 2017/18. The Government has also agreed a pay deal that provides junior doctors with a minimum 8.2% pay rise over four years. The Government will work to ensure that the NHS employment offer continues to attract, retain and reward staff, and this continues to be kept under review.

The Government is also taking action to reduce the tax that individuals pay and to support those with limited incomes. For example, it raised the personal allowance to £12,500 from April 2019. As a result, a typical basic rate taxpayer pays over £1,200 less this year than in 2010.

■ Hospices: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[39674\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the hospice sector; and what financial support he is providing to (a) hospices and (b) health charities to ensure that they can provide services during that outbreak.

Steve Barclay:

Charities across the sector continue to play a crucial role in the national fight against Covid-19, supporting those who are most in need. This month we announced a £750 million pot intended to support charities providing key services and supporting vulnerable people during the Covid-19 crisis.

This included providing up to £200 million of funding this quarter to hospices, to support the NHS COVID-19 response. Further health charities will be eligible for support from the £750 million pot and last month we also provided an additional £5m to leading mental health charities.

Charities continue to have access to cross-cutting support already announced, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme which enables them to furlough staff.

■ Insurance: Coronavirus

Damian Green:

[\[41364\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will take steps to enforce the payment of insurance claims arising from the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

The Government is in continual dialogue with the insurance sector about its contribution to handling this unprecedented situation. The Government is also working closely with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to ensure that the rules are being upheld during this crisis.

The FCA's rules require insurers to handle claims fairly and promptly; provide reasonable guidance to help a policyholder make a claim, and appropriate information on its progress; not reject a claim unreasonably; and settle claims promptly once settlement terms are agreed. In addition, the FCA has said that, in light of COVID-19, insurers must consider very carefully the needs of their customers and show flexibility in their treatment of them.

Furthermore, on 1 May, the FCA published guidance for firms, which sets out their expectations of firms when considering the fair treatment of existing customers, and in particular those customers experiencing or reasonably expecting to experience temporary financial difficulties due to circumstances arising from COVID-19.

The FCA is working closely with the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), an independent body set up to provide arbitration in cases where consumers feel they have been unfairly treated. The decision of the FOS is binding on insurers up to £350,000.

The Government recognises that consumers facing financial difficulty will require support from elsewhere. The Government has announced unprecedented support for businesses and workers to protect them against the current economic emergency including an initial £330 billion of guarantees equivalent to 15% of UK GDP.

We have made significant changes to the operation of statutory sick pay, universal credit, and employment and support allowance to ensure that people have quicker and more generous access to a support system, and we have taken further immediate steps to give businesses access to cash to pay their rent, salaries or suppliers.

■ Multinational Companies: Disclosure of Information

Dan Carden:

[\[41579\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 29 April 2020 to Question 39777, on Multinational Companies: Disclosure of Information, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) accuracy and (b) reliability of country by country reporting data that is (i) supplied to the UK by multinational companies and (ii) supplied by the UK to the OECD.

Jesse Norman:

UK multinational groups have provided their Country-by-Country Reporting (CbCR) data to HMRC from 2016 onwards, prepared in accordance with the OECD Action 13 framework.

This data has been beneficial as a risk assessment tool in supporting HMRC's compliance activities.

However, alongside errors that necessitate correction, there have been issues with the consistency of data being submitted by UK multinational groups within Country-by-Country reports.

In particular, in the absence of OECD guidance on this point, multinational groups have taken different approaches in relation to the inclusion of intragroup dividends receivable within CbCR profit.

While this does not compromise the value of Country-by-Country Reports for individual group compliance purposes, it does compromise how representative and comparable the aggregate CbCR data is for UK multinational groups.

Dan Carden:

[\[41580\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 29 April 2020 to Question 39777 on Multinational Companies: Disclosure of Information, what discussions he has had with the OECD on the (a) accuracy and reliability of country-by-country reporting data and (b) the UK's consent for the aggregate data to be published by the OECD.

Jesse Norman:

Officials attended OECD meetings on this topic over the course of the last year, where data quality issues concerning the aggregated and anonymised CbCR statistics were discussed in detail.

One of those issues was the distortive effect of the inclusion of intragroup dividends receivable within CbCR profit, where globally multinational groups had been taking different approaches in the absence of OECD guidance.

An outcome of those discussions was the publication of new OECD CbCR guidance which clarifies the approach that should be taken by multinationals in relation to intragroup dividends when preparing their future Country-by-Country Reports.

This is an important step in increasing the reliability and consistency of future CbCR data.

However, it does not address the data quality and consistency issues in previously submitted Country-by-Country Reports, and the Government has been clear that it will not consent to publication of aggregated UK CbCR information unless those issues are addressed.

■ Non-domestic Rates: Coronavirus

Andy Slaughter: [\[39500\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the business rates holiday for 2020-21 to supply chain businesses servicing the retail, leisure, and hospitality sector that ceased trading as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through the business rates holiday, given the acute impacts of COVID-19. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has published guidance for local authorities on eligibility for the relief, which excludes properties that are not reasonably accessible to visiting members of the public.

A range of measures to support all businesses has also been made available, including the new Bounce Back Loans scheme, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan scheme, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment.

Sir Christopher Chope: [\[41377\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to extend the small business rates relief for covid-19 to (a) independent mortgage advisors (b) private dental practices and (c) small veterinary practices; and if he will make a statement.

Fleur Anderson: [\[41602\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to provide additional financial support for (a) dental, (b) physiotherapy and (c) veterinary practices during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is providing funding for Local Authorities to support small businesses that benefit from small business rates relief (SBRR), rural rate relief (RRR) and tapered relief. This will provide a one-off grant of £10,000 per property in receipt of these reliefs, to help meet their continuing business costs. There is no restriction on the type of small business which may be eligible.

In addition to these grants, small businesses may also be able to benefit from the new Discretionary Grant Fund announced by the Government on 1 May. The Government has provided up to an additional £617m for Local Authorities in England to enable them to make grants payments to businesses which are facing high fixed property-related costs, but have been excluded from the existing grants schemes because of the way they are treated by the business rates system. Local Authorities are responsible for defining precise eligibility for these funds, and businesses will

need to apply to their Local Authority in order to receive grants. Businesses which think they may be eligible for a discretionary grant should contact their Local Authority.

Businesses not eligible for grant funding have access to other support measures which the Government has introduced, including:

- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme for SMEs
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- The Time To Pay scheme, through which 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 30 June 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>.

■ Non-domestic Rates: Empty Property

Emma Hardy:

[41157]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the eligibility period for Business rate relief to landlords of empty buildings during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The Government maintains an Empty Property Relief (EPR) to support property owners between the reoccupation of vacated premises. Under EPR, owners of properties do not normally have to pay business rates on newly vacated buildings for three months. Certain properties are also eligible for extended empty property relief, such as industrial premises which are exempt for up to six months.

Properties which have closed temporarily due to the Government's advice on COVID-19 should be treated as occupied for the purposes of 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.

■ Non-domestic Rates: Food**Dan Jarvis:** [\[41046\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend business rates relief to suppliers to the food service sector during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors.

A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, such as the food service sector, has also been made available. For example, the Government has launched the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank, and has deferred VAT payments for this quarter.

The Government will consider any further financial assistance necessary to help businesses get through this period.

■ Non-domestic Rates: Veterinary Services**Angus Brendan MacNeil:** [\[41010\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has plans to extend eligibility to veterinary practises to business rates relief during the covid-19 outbreak.

Henry Smith: [\[41429\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to support veterinary practices affected by the covid-19 lockdown through business rate relief.

Jesse Norman:

Business rates are devolved in Scotland.

In England, the Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors.

A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, such as veterinary practices, has also been made available. For example, the Government has launched the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms continue to keep people in employment, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank backed by an 80% Government guarantee, and the deferral of VAT payments for this quarter.

The Government will consider any further financial assistance necessary to help businesses get through this period.

■ Pensions: Coronavirus

Emma Hardy:

[\[40743\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the economic downturn caused by the covid-19 pandemic on (a) pension funds and (b) the incomes of people who are reliant on pension payments.

John Glen:

The government continues to actively consider what appropriate actions it can take to protect both the markets and the general public from the impacts of COVID-19. The government is already taking a wide range of steps to support the macro-economy, ensure financial stability and the provision of social safety nets.

Consumers who are already taking a retirement income via an annuity will not be affected by the current situation and any who are reliant on a DB pension will not see a decline in the value of the income they are paid. The state pension is also unaffected and continues to be paid.

In relation to other types of pensions, the value of many investments has fallen significantly and investment volatility is expected for some time to come. However, investments are for the long term. The Financial Conduct Authority, The Pensions Regulator and the Money and Pensions Service published a joint statement urging savers to take their time and visit the Pensions Advisory Service website for free pensions guidance before making any decisions about their retirement savings.

■ Pre-school Education: Government Assistance

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[39488\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment with the Secretary of State for Education of the potential merits of extending eligibility to early-years providers to benefit from both Early Years Entitlement Funding and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[39489\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of further fiscal steps to support nurseries during the covid-19 outbreak.

Steve Barclay:

The Government has announced unprecedented support for businesses, including the early years sector, to protect against the current economic emergency. This economic response is one of the most generous and comprehensive globally. For childcare providers, this includes business rates relief for nurseries, a range of loans and grants, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and continued early years entitlement funding. The government is monitoring the impact these measures are having and keeps all policies under review.

The Department for Education has already published guidance for the early years sector on the eligibility criteria for this support, including the interaction between early

years entitlements funding and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care#sector-specific-guidance>.

■ **Protective Clothing: VAT**

Andrew Rosindell: [39485]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of a temporary VAT exemption on personal protection equipment orders for the social care sector during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

A temporary zero-rate of VAT will apply to sales of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for protection from COVID-19 from 1 May 2020 until 31 July 2020.

■ **Public Houses: Coronavirus**

Daisy Cooper: [41174]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what correspondence he has had with (a) Star Pubs and Bars (Heineken), (b) Punch Taverns, (c) Greene King, (d) Marston's, and (e) El Group (Stonegate Pubs) on those companies continuing to charge rent to pub tenants during the covid-19 lockdown; and if he will publish that correspondence.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises the current challenges facing commercial tenants and the significant impact on communities, town centres and businesses. The Chancellor has announced unprecedented support for businesses including grants for those occupying properties for retail, hospitality and leisure as well as business rates holidays for this sector. Building on this, the Government has also taken steps to protect commercial tenants from eviction as well as to safeguard UK high streets against aggressive debt recovery actions during the coronavirus pandemic.

■ **Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund and Small Business Grants Fund**

James Wild: [41601]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will amend the Small Business Grant and Leisure, Hospitality and Retail Grant rules to allow local authorities greater discretion in supporting local businesses consistent with the purpose of those grant schemes.

Kemi Badenoch:

As of 1st May, Government has provided up to an additional £617m for Local Authorities in England to create a Discretionary Grants Fund, in order to help those small businesses which are excluded from the current grants schemes due to the way they interact with the business rates system.

Local Authorities are responsible for defining precise eligibility for this funding in their areas. And businesses will need to apply to their Local Authority in order to receive grants – each LA will need time to create their own process.

However, it is our intention that the following businesses should be considered as a priority for these funds:

- Businesses in shared offices;
- Regular market traders who do not have their own business rates assessment;
- B&Bs which pay Council Tax instead of business rates; and
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rates relief which would otherwise have been eligible for Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rate Relief.

■ Revenue and Customs: Remote Working

Chris Stephens:

[R] [\[40674\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason HMRC is not rolling out telephony homeworking first to employees already working from home; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC's frontline teams of key workers are doing a very important job to support the UK; protecting people's livelihoods, keeping cash in businesses, helping people to stay employed and supporting families.

The safety of their staff is HMRC's top priority. Staff who do not need to be in the office are working from home, and HMRC are following public health advice to keep their offices safe where services cannot be delivered from home.

HMRC took steps quickly to enable as many colleagues as possible to work from home at this time, expanding their remote working network, moving work around, and training hundreds of their customer advisers on webchat, which can be worked on from home. This means that about 75% of HMRC's people are working at home.

Working telephony at home has been largely untested and presents potential risks that need to be managed carefully. In March, HMRC started a small-scale trial to look at this, and to understand in detail aspects like the experience and wellbeing of colleagues doing it, the customer experience, how secure and suitable home environments are for this type of work, and what extra equipment and network capacity would be needed.

HMRC's original plan was to evaluate their initial small-scale trial of home telephony before looking at next steps. However, as HMRC prepared for a large surge in customer calls for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), HMRC decided that there was an opportunity to push the home telephony trial further and faster than planned. HMRC have now expanded the home telephony testing to about 7,000 colleagues, supporting CJRS and some of their business as usual lines.

The findings from this trial will help HMRC to understand how far they can increase the number of roles that can be done from home at any one time.

HMRC remain focused on and committed to keeping their people safe, whether in an office or at home, while also protecting their vital services to taxpayers.

■ Revenue and Customs: Repairs and Maintenance

Chris Stephens: [R] [\[40675\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which HMRC Regional Centre has construction work continued since the 17 March 2020; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

Construction or fit out work currently continues at HMRC's Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Cardiff, Birmingham and Stratford construction sites, in line with the guidance issued to employers and businesses on COVID-19 from the UK Government.

HMRC are working with contractors across all UK sites to ensure that where work is continuing they are working diligently in line with the Safe Operating Procedures as issued by the Construction Leadership Council, in conjunction with BuildUK.

All sites listed have been assessed in relation to Government guidelines in response to COVID-19, and procedures put in place. This meant that work was suspended initially at most sites. Where work continues, it does so under close management, and the strict controls are regularly reviewed to ensure social distancing on site. Controls in place include a cap on the number of people allowed on site, introduction of one-way systems, use of stairs not lifts, and staggered break times.

■ Revenue and Customs: Staff

Chris Stephens: [R] [\[40676\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the amount of additional (a) staff and (b) labour required by HMRC to enable that organisation to implement the (i) Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and (ii) Self-employment Income Scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC have implemented the CJRS scheme with the resources already within HMRC. HMRC are determining the number required for the SEISS, but that will come from existing HMRC resource.

■ Self-employed and Small Businesses: Government Assistance

Feryal Clark: [\[41192\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether businesses set up under the European Community Ankara Agreement visa are eligible to access financial support packages provided by the Government for small businesses, freelance and self-employed workers.

John Glen:

The Government has announced unprecedented support for business and workers to protect them against the current economic emergency including an initial £330 billion of guarantees – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP. Our current support measures are well-targeted at the businesses and individuals who most need support, bearing in mind the need to act very quickly to deliver this unprecedented package.

Businesses and businesspersons operating in the UK under the terms of the European Community Ankara Agreement (ECAA) are eligible for this support which includes:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)
- The Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- Rebates for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for SMEs
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBL) for SMEs
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- The Time To Pay scheme, through which 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>.

Details of the range of support for individuals affected by COVID-19 is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19>.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme**David Mundell:****[39498]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the Government's self-employed income support scheme to director-owned small private companies where the directors of those companies cannot be furloughed due to ongoing business commitments.

Fleur Anderson:**[40777]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme to self-employed people who receive income through a combination of sole trader and PAYE contracts with employers.

Fleur Anderson: [\[40778\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme to self-employed people who have set up as one to two person limited companies.

Jesse Norman:

Self-employed people who pay themselves a salary through their own company may be eligible for 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.

Employers can use a portal to claim for 80% of the usual monthly wage costs of furloughed employees (employees on a leave of absence) up to £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions for that wage.

This scheme supplements the other significant support announced for UK businesses, including the Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses, 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/

Rachael Maskell: [\[39582\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he plans to take to extend the Self-employment Income Support Scheme to (a) businesses and (b) individuals that do not currently qualify for that scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has designed measures that can be operationalised quickly and effectively. It continues to work with stakeholders to make sure funding reaches those who need it most, keeping all policies under review. Some 95% of people who receive the majority of their income from self-employment stand to benefit from the scheme as it stands and anyone requiring support before the beginning of June should have access to other measures appropriate to their individual circumstances. These include the relaxation of the earnings rules in Universal Credit.

Stephen Farry: [\[39790\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the circumstances in which 2019-20 financial year self-assessment tax returns could be used for the purposes of the self-employed income support scheme.

Fleur Anderson: [\[40779\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme to self-employed people who became self-employed after the deadline for submitting a 2018-19 tax return.

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 will 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 Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses, 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: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Stephen Farry: **[39793]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has plans to review the £50,000 trading profit threshold for eligibility for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

Ben Lake: **[40735]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish the evidential basis for his decision to set £50,000 as the threshold for the Self-employed Income Support Scheme.

Ben Lake: **[41140]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to ensure that dentists are not adversely affected by the £50,000 threshold for the Self-employed Income Support Scheme.

Stephen Hammond: **[41409]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to introduce a London weighting to increase the £50,000 trading profit cap on eligibility for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The new Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) will help those adversely affected by COVID-19. Some 95% of people who are mainly self-employed could benefit from this scheme, based on 2017-18 data.

The design of the SEISS, including the £50,000 threshold, means it is targeted at those who need it the most, and who are most reliant on their self-employment

income. Those who had more than £50,000 from self-employment profits in 2017-18 had an average total income of more than £200,000.

Those with average trading 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, including the Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and the deferral of tax payments.

Ben Lake: [\[40736\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether a regional impact assessment was conducted to inform the Self-employed Income Support scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) applies to eligible self-employed individuals across the UK. The scale of the support in different regions and nations of the UK will be dependent on the number of eligible individuals applying for the SEISS because they have been adversely affected by COVID-19.

■ Small Businesses: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas: [\[40554\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are excluded from the Small Business Grants Fund and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund because those SMEs have a rateable value of more than £51,000; and whether it is the Government's policy that not all SMEs are eligible to access financial support made available in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

According to the VOA, there are 299,000 business properties in England with a rateable value over £51,000. Of these, 116,000 are retail, hospitality and leisure properties.

The Small Business Grants Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund have been designed to support the smallest businesses, and smaller businesses in the some of the sectors which have been hit hardest by measures taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Around 1 million small and medium businesses will receive cash grants as a result of these schemes, and over £12 billion will be paid out to these businesses.

The two schemes have been tied to the business rates system and rating assessments, which together provide a framework for Local Authorities to make payments as quickly as possible. Businesses in the business rates system are also likely to face particularly high fixed costs, such as fixed rents.

In addition to the main grants schemes, Government has made available up to an additional £617m for Local Authorities in England to enable them to pay grants to small businesses which also face high fixed building-related costs but which are

excluded from the current system due to the way they fit into the business rates system.

Businesses which are not eligible for the grants schemes should be able to benefit from other measures in the Government's unprecedented package of support for business, including:

- An option to defer VAT payments by up to twelve months;
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, now extended to cover all businesses including those which would be able to access commercial credit;
- The Bounce Back Loan 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;
- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, to support businesses with their wage bills; and
- The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, to provide support to the self-employed.

■ **Small Businesses: Non-domestic Rates**

Richard Burgon:

[\[41552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the number of small businesses renting premises where business rates are included as part of their rental agreement; and what steps he is taking to ensure that such businesses are able to access the Small Business Grants Fund.

Kemi Badenoch:

As of 1st May, Government has provided up to an additional £617m for Local Authorities in England to enable them to make grants payments to businesses in these circumstances.

This funding will be used by Local Authorities to create a Discretionary Grants Fund.

Local Authorities are responsible for defining precise eligibility for these funds. And businesses will need to apply to their Local Authority in order to receive grants – each LA will need time to create their own process.

However, it is our intention that the following businesses should be considered as a priority for these funds:

- Businesses in shared offices;
- Regular market traders who do not have their own business rates assessment;
- B&Bs which pay Council Tax instead of business rates; and
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rates relief which would otherwise have been eligible for Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rate Relief.

■ Social Enterprises and Voluntary Organisations: Wales**Ian Murray:** [\[40583\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to his news story, Chancellor sets out extra £750 million coronavirus funding for frontline charities, published on 8 April 2020, how many additional consequentials will be passed to each of the devolved administrations using the Barnett formula as a result of additional funding announced for hospices.

Stephen Doughty: [\[40625\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the consequential funding is for Wales as a result of the announcement of 8 April 2020 of £750 million for charities, voluntary sector organisations and the social enterprise sector; and on what date that funding was confirmed to the Welsh Government.

Stephen Doughty: [\[40626\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether there is consequential funding for Wales as a result of the announcement of £750 million for charities, voluntary sector organisations and the social enterprise sector; and how much funding will be allocated to the charity hospice sector in Wales.

Steve Barclay:

The UK government is applying the Barnett formula in the normal way to the additional funding for charities announced by the Chancellor.

The devolved administrations are receiving £60 million as a result of funding provided to the National Lottery Communities Fund from the charities pot. This means £30m for the Scottish Government, £18m for the Welsh Government and £10m for the Northern Ireland Executive, as confirmed on the day of the announcement.

Further Barnett allocations will be provided in relation to the £360m direct grant pot. The UK government has agreed to provide Hospices UK with up to £200m from this pot to support hospices in England. The devolved administrations will therefore receive up to £38m in Barnett consequentials on this element of the pot. This means up to £19m for the Scottish Government, £12m for the Welsh Government and £7m for the Northern Ireland Executive. Further consequentials are dependent on the final proposals funded from this pot so will be communicated shortly.

The UK government has so far announced almost £7 billion in Covid-19 Barnett consequentials to the devolved administrations to support people, business and public services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

■ Social Enterprises: Tax Allowances**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[39486\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the combined effect on social enterprises of the covid-19 outbreak and the cessation of social investment tax relief after the sunset clause is reached in 2021.

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[39487\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the operation of social investment tax relief to support social enterprises and charities during and after the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) is intended to support risk finance into social enterprises by offering investors a 30% tax relief on their qualifying investment.

HMRC figures up to 2017-18 show that around 80 social enterprises have used the scheme since its introduction in 2014.

The Government keeps all taxes and reliefs under review to ensure they continue to meet policy objectives and represent value for money for taxpayers. In 2019, the Government comprehensively reviewed the SITR in line with commitments made when SITR was enlarged in 2017. A Summary of Responses to the Call for Evidence will be published in due course.

The Government is committed to helping social enterprises and charities through the COVID-19 outbreak. This is why it has enabled other, more direct forms of support for the sector. Big Society Capital has established and capitalised a Resilience and Recovery Loan Fund which aims to improve access to the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (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.

■ **Telecommunications: Coronavirus**

Julie Elliott:

[\[40604\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the increased telecommunications costs to vulnerable people who are unable to leave their homes during the covid-19 outbreak; and what fiscal support the Government is providing to those people.

Kemi Badenoch:

The government is committed to supporting individuals through this difficult time. We have increased the generosity of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by £20 p/w, as well as raising the Local Housing Allowance rate to 30% of market rents. We have made significant changes to the operation of Statutory Sick Pay, Universal Credit, and new style Employment and Support Allowance to ensure that people have quicker and more generous access to a support system.

The government has also agreed a set of commitments with the UK's major telecommunications providers to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from COVID-19. These measures include, among others, the removal of all data allowance caps on all current fixed broadband services, and a commitment by providers to work fairly with customers who find it difficult to pay their bills as a result of COVID-19.

In addition, the government recently announced that vulnerable and disadvantaged children across England are to receive laptops, tablets and 4G routers to make remote education accessible. We are also working with the country's major telecommunication providers to make it easier for children in vulnerable and disadvantaged families, who are relying on mobile data, to access online educational resources.

WALES

■ Coronavirus: Protective Clothing

Stephen Doughty:

[40631]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many Welsh-based companies are supplying personal protective equipment and other medical supplies to (a) England, (b) Northern Ireland and (c) Scotland in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Simon Hart:

My Department does not hold this information. The Secretary of State for Health has previously written to all Members (23 April) to outline that the UK Government has had over 8,000 offers of PPE since the outbreak began. Approximately 1,000 of these offers have been taken forward.

New offers of support to the UK Government should go through <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-support-from-business>. Offers of support to the Welsh Government should go through <https://gov.wales/provision-of-personal-protection-equipment>.

■ Coronavirus: Wales

Jonathan Edwards:

[39657]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what steps he is taking to ensure that people in Wales who received a hard copy of the letter from the Prime Minister on steps the government is taking to combat coronavirus that was missing a paragraph that appears in the online version are aware of the all advice on social distancing.

Simon Hart:

One paragraph from the Welsh language version of the Prime Minister's letter was missing from the hard copies distributed in Wales. This was a result of human error. The online version of the letter has subsequently been updated so that the Welsh language text is complete and additional quality control measures are now in place to prevent this from happening again.

■ Iron and Steel: Wales

Stephen Doughty:

[\[40630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what steps he is taking to ensure a joint package of financial and other support between the UK and Welsh Governments for the steel industry in Wales.

Simon Hart:

I am involved in ongoing discussions with steel companies in Wales to understand how UK Government can best support the industry during this crisis. I am working closely with the Under-Secretary of State for Industry, the Member for Stratford-upon-Avon, and Welsh Government to discuss support for the steel sector to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19. The Under-Secretary of State for Industry, the Member for Stratford-upon-Avon, has been holding weekly calls with the Devolved Administrations and regular calls with the steel sector, including individual steel companies, trade unions and representatives of the Welsh & Scottish Governments.

The Government will continue to work closely with the Welsh & Scottish Government to support the steel industry throughout the UK, to ensure it can maintain safe production at this time, and ensure they can access the comprehensive package of support made available. The Government has announced an unprecedented financial package to support businesses and has committed to do whatever it takes to get our nation through the impacts of this coronavirus pandemic.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Children: Maintenance

Peter Kyle:

[\[41127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential effect of the covid-19 outbreak on child maintenance payments.

Mims Davies:

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.

■ Flexible Support Fund

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[\[37734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people received support for upfront childcare costs under the Flexible Support Fund in the latest period for which figures are available; and what proportion of that Fund was used for childcare in that period.

Mims Davies:

[Holding answer 28 April 2020]: The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate costs.

In response to the WPSC inquiry on childcare in June 2019 we committed to publish a breakdown of flexible support funds spent on upfront childcare costs at the end of the financial year once accounts audited.

■ Industrial Health and Safety: Coronavirus

David Mundell:

[\[39496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what guidance she has issued to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on the discharge of HSE's responsibilities during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mims Davies:

The Secretary of State and I have had regular meetings with senior officials from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in order to assess in what ways the Department can support HSE on the work it is doing to support the Government during the COVID-19 outbreak. Since the COVID-19 outbreak started the Department has received a weekly written update on the work HSE is doing, this includes:

- maintaining its wide ranging regulatory functions, in particular continuing to investigate work related fatalities and the most serious major injuries, dealing with reported concerns and regulating major hazard industries. Undertaking regulatory activities that do not require site visits such as approvals and permissioning work. Whilst some of HSE's regulatory intervention work can be done remotely, where it is necessary to provide public assurance that hazards are being effectively managed and to secure compliance with the law, site visits are being made;

- working with Public Health England (PHE), other Government departments and Devolved Administrations to ensure the country is geared up to treat people in Great Britain diagnosed with the COVID-19. HSE continues to offer information and advice on workplace and workforce issues to support the government's response, including technical advice on personal protection equipment to ensure that healthcare workers and others are adequately protected;
- working closely with stakeholder groups including trade unions to develop practical guidance to support businesses to continue to operate and, where currently closed, to return to operation whilst ensuring the safety of workers; and
- where it comes to HSE's attention that employers are found not to be complying with PHE's guidelines taking appropriate action, ranging from specific advice through to serving enforcement notices, so as to ensure that practicable measures are implemented to protect workers and others.

■ Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis:

[\[41045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment she has made of the effect of the suspension of post-mortems on patients with suspected cases of industrial chest disease following the outbreak of covid-19 on the ability of the families of those patients to claim Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

Justin Tomlinson:

.Where a posthumous claim is made for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, any relevant medical evidence will be considered to help determine eligibility for benefit. The dependants of the deceased may submit supporting evidence they feel is relevant, including medical evidence which suggests a diagnosis, even where this is not confirmed. In addition, healthcare professionals will contact the deceased's GP or hospital specialist, to obtain further evidence if this is required, as part of their assessment of the claim.

■ Local Housing Allowance

John Healey:

[\[14954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will publish the caseload statistics for local housing allowance for each broad rental market area in each of the last three years.

Will Quince:

[Holding answer 24 February 2020]: We will place a copy of a document in the library which shows the caseload statistics of Local Housing Allowance claimants in Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for each broad rental market area in each of the last three years.

■ Pensions: Advisory Services

Neil Coyle:

[\[39556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) on when the FCA plans to (a) publish and (b) implement regulations directing pension savers to Pension Wise when they choose to access their pension savings.

Guy Opperman:

The Secretary of State has not personally had discussions with the FCA in relation to this matter, however senior officials at the FCA, DWP and MaPS are working closely together on this and will continue to do so.

Existing Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules require firms to signpost to their customers the availability of pensions guidance via Pensions Wise. These include, for example, rules requiring firms to issue wake-up packs, designed to be one of the main sources of information for consumers about their options for accessing their pension savings.

Furthermore, the Money and Pension Service (MaPS) has undertaken trials to gather evidence on the possible ways to help encourage more people to take Pension Wise guidance before accessing their pension, fulfilling the requirement upon Government and the FCA set out in the Financial Guidance and Claims Act 2018.

MaPS, with Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) will publish an evaluation report of the trials in Summer 2020. We will use the evidence provided from the trials to help inform and assess the impact of the trials and conduct a consultation prior to implementing any regulations. For the FCA this also includes a duty to consult on the proposed rules. The due processes that DWP must take to lay regulations and the FCA must take to make rules will be followed.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Females

Jim Shannon:

[\[39620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on granting early access to the state pension for women reaching state pension age in 2020-21 in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Guy Opperman:

Unlike a personal or workplace pension, which is payable at the scheme's normal pension age and that can potentially be drawn earlier on grounds of ill health, it has always been the case that nobody can claim their State Pension before they reach their State Pension age.

The welfare system continues to provide a safety-net for those experiencing hardship, including that caused by unemployment, disability, and coping with caring responsibilities, which affect those unable to work and therefore most in need in the run up to their State Pension age.

■ Universal Credit

Neil Gray:

[\[41470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of ending the five week wait for universal credit by making the advance payment a grant when the claim is confirmed.

Will Quince:

Nobody has to wait five weeks for a payment under Universal Credit. Advances are a mechanism for getting claimants faster access to their entitlement; allowing claimants to receive 13 payments over 12 months with up to 12 months to repay the advance.

New Claims Advances of up to 100% of potential entitlement are available if a claimant needs support during their first assessment period. Face-to-face checks for Universal Credit advances have been scrapped due to Covid-19, so people get the support they need despite COVID-19 restrictions.

The Government has already taken steps to help ease the burden of the repayment of advances.

We have reduced the maximum deduction from 40% to 30% of a claimant's standard allowance. The Budget 2020 set out that the maximum level will be further reduced, so that standard deductions will not exceed 25% of a claimant's Standard Allowance from October 2021.

The repayment time for advances has already been extended from 6 months to 12 months, and a further extension to 24 months from October 2021 was announced in the budget. Claimants can ask for repayments to be delayed for up to 3 months if they can't afford them.

Any further changes to this policy would require significant system development at a time when all resources are rightly focused on processing new claims. We will continue to review our policies but have no further planned changes at this time

■ Universal Credit: Coronavirus

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[38542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of suspending the requirement to complete the online work journal in order to continue receiving universal credit payments for people who do not have computer or internet access from home during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mims Davies:

DWP took the decision to temporarily suspend both the requirement to attend a face to face appointments and to conduct checks on conditionality compliance with work search for 3 months from 19th March 2020. This means no sanctions will be applied for these reasons for the 3 month period, though DWP still encourages people who can work to seek work.

For people that are unable to access or use digital services, assistance to make and maintain their Universal Credit claim is available via the Freephone Universal Credit helpline.

■ Universal Credit: Food Banks

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[28738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the findings in the report by the Tussell Trust, entitled Five weeks too long, published in September 2019, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the finding in that report that referrals to food banks have increased on average by 30 per cent in the 12 months after the roll-out of universal credit in the local authority area in which those food banks are located; and what assessment she has made of the potential link between the roll-out of universal credit and use of food banks.

Will Quince:

The Department does not keep official statistics on food bank use, so no such assessment has been completed.

The Trussell Trust have claimed that there is a 52% growth in food bank demand in areas where Universal Credit (UC) has rolled out, however, the data used in this report is unrepresentative and therefore categorically does not prove that UC is the reason behind increased food bank usage. With UC people can get paid urgently if they need it and we've changed the system so people can receive even more money in the first two weeks than under the old system.

In common with the legacy benefit system, and also the structures used by employers' payroll systems, UC is not paid immediately at the beginning of a claim but follows a predictable payment cycle. Assessment periods ensure UC entitlement is accurately calculated each month, responding efficiently to changes in household circumstances including employment earnings.

The Department continues to design and implement improvements to UC. We have already abolished the 7-day waiting period and continue to pay Housing Benefit for two weeks when people move to Universal Credit. New run-ons will be introduced from July 2020 for claimants transitioning from other DWP legacy benefits, which will be paid during the first assessment period and provide a one-off gain of approximately £200.

■ Universal Credit: ICT

Stephen Timms:

[\[40470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has a documented formal change management process for IT changes to deliver any alterations to universal credit's scope or policy decided by Ministers.

Will Quince:

Yes

■ **Universal Credit: Wales**

Hywel Williams:

[\[41392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many EU citizens holding (a) settled status and (b) pre-settled status in Wales have had their applications for universal credit refused in each month in 2020.

Justin Tomlinson:

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

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

EDUCATION

■ Contingencies Fund Advance

The Minister of State for School Standards (Nick Gibb):

[\[HCWS221\]](#)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) intends to redeploy some employed staff and allocate some contracted inspectors to support government departments, their agencies, local authorities and the education and care sectors (including schools, further education colleges, nurseries and children's homes) during the period in which routine inspection has temporarily paused as a consequence of Covid-19.

The Government supports this approach, and the Secretary of State for Education has assigned an additional function to HM Chief Inspector for this purpose, under section 118(4) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. A copy of the Secretary of State's letter to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector confirming this additional function will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ofsted requires an advance to support the redeployment until the 2020-21 ambit is agreed through the passage of the Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Act 2020 in July.

Parliamentary approval for resources of £32,000,000 for this new expenditure will be sought in a Main Estimate for the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £32,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund

As Ofsted is a non-ministerial department, I am making this statement on behalf of its Accounting Officer, to ensure that Parliament is informed of this advance from the Contingencies Fund in the normal way.