



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 13 November 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:39 P.M., 13 November 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

■ **Consumer Goods: Electrical Safety**

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[111535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to improve the regulation of online marketplaces to better prevent the sale of counterfeit or sub-standard electrical products.

Amanda Solloway:

Officials in the Intellectual Property Office have been holding roundtable meetings with representatives of the online marketplaces to improve the way these platforms respond to the threat posed by the sale of counterfeit goods.

These meetings have been productive and we expect to be in a position to announce a positive outcome in due course.

■ **Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Artificial Intelligence**

Chris Stephens:

[\[112077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what (a) artificial intelligence and (b) machine learning projects are being (i) undertaken and (ii) considered for his Department.

Amanda Solloway:

There are a number of projects currently being undertaken or considered by the Department, in some cases the progression will be dependent on availability of budget from next financial year.

BEIS are exploring AI and machine learning techniques internally to enable more efficient working. Projects are being:

(i) undertaken:

- a proof of concept for the use of virtual assistants to help staff find information regarding corporate policies, whereby the assistant will improve by learning from the enquires responses
- planning a proof of concept using Machine Learning for automatic labelling, setting up retention periods for past and future documents that form the official record.

(ii) considered:

- the use of AI handling of inbound enquiries into the department to create draft responses and to triage requests to the correct teams.

BEIS Analysts use machine learning techniques, under the umbrella of artificial intelligence, where appropriate as part of analysis supporting policy development.

Machine Learning projects are being

(i) undertaken:

- identifying the location of industrial strengths
- pilot for targeting communications about business support
- Categorising internal documents by subject

(ii) considered:

- project to understand the labour market through analysing job adverts
- a pilot for organising internal processes
- a pilot for predicting economic impacts using real time indicators
- exploring automatic text generation
- planning to repeat a machine learning exercise on HMRC data to identify high growth potential businesses, to build on the successful 'DECA pilot' of 2019. This would underpin further operations in 2021, depending on the outcome of the SR process

BEIS policy teams are exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence. AI projects are being:

(ii) considered:

- by the Better Regulation Executive who are looking to convert the stock of regulatory requirements placed on business into machine readable code and pilot hosting this as open source a metadata set on the 'Open Regulation Platform' (ORP), freely available on The National Archives .gov.uk platform. The project is currently in discovery phase to identify all data that government holds on regulatory obligations that could be relevant for this platform. This application is closely related to work that has already been undertaken as part of BEIS GovTech challenge to apply Artificial Intelligence (AI) to understand the cumulative impact of regulation

■ Manufacturing Industries: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[111416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent steps his Department has taken to support manufacturing in Lincolnshire.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Manufacturing is a critical part of our national economy, including in Lincolnshire and South Holland. The Department works closely with industry to support manufacturers. For example, we have made £2 billion available in Government-backed finance through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, £2.3 billion via the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, and £4.78 billion through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

We continue to support manufacturing growth through investments in projects such as Made Smarter, the High Value Manufacturing Catapult network, and innovation programmes such as the Automotive Transformation Fund. Across Greater Lincolnshire, the Government is investing £155.45 million of Local Growth Funding and £25.8 million from the Getting Building Fund.

In South Holland, £9.4 million has supported the Holbeach Food Enterprise Zone development, £2.4 million towards the Agri-Food Centre, and £1.9 million to upgrade the Holbeach Peppermint Junction. Just last month, the Department for International Trade announced that Holbeach Food Enterprise Zone will be one of nineteen UK High Potential Opportunities marketed to global investors to exploit the area's expertise in agri-food manufacturing, automation, and robotics. This will help to develop Holbeach as the manufacturing hub of the UK's Food Valley.

DEFENCE

■ Shipbuilding

Sir John Hayes:

[\[111423\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support shipbuilding in the UK.

Mr Ben Wallace:

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 2 November 2020 to the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) during Defence Oral Questions in the House of Commons.

Attachments:

1. Hansard Extract - British Shipbuilding Support [British Shipbuilding Support.docx]

EDUCATION

■ Assessments: Coronavirus

Carla Lockhart:

[\[112129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he is having with Education Ministers in each of the devolved Administrations to manage the effects of covid-19 on (a) GCSE and (b) A-Level exams to be sat in 2021.

Nick Gibb:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has met the Education Ministers from all devolved administrations to discuss arrangements for 2021 GCSE, AS and A level examinations. Ministers and departmental officials will continue to engage regularly with their counterparts from the devolved administrations in preparing for next summer's examination series.

■ Disabled Students' Allowances**Wendy Chamberlain:** [\[112115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made of the amount of funding made available for the disabled students premium in 2020-21.

Michelle Donelan:

The Disabled Students' Premium is allocated by the Office for Students (OfS) each year.

The budget for the disabled students premium in academic year 2020/21 is £39.7 million.

In his strategic guidance letter to the OfS in January this year, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, asked the OfS to continue to prioritise allocations for the student premium.

■ GCE A-level**Colleen Fletcher:** [\[111550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of attainment of students at A Level in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England in each of the last five years.

Nick Gibb:

The Department publishes pupil attainment data through several headline measures for each local authority and region of England. These figures can be compared to the national (England) average for all pupils.

The headline measures for 16 to 18 study for each local authority and region in England for the academic years 2009/10 to 2018/19 are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-attainment-at-19-years>.

Due to A Level and AS Level reforms and changes to headline measures (including methodological changes), the available figures are only directly comparable between 2009/10 – 2014/15 and 2015/16 – 2018/19.

The last five years' figures for A Level results for England, the West Midlands region, and Coventry Local Authority are summarised in the tables attached. Constituency level information is not published for 16 to 18 performance measures.

Attachments:

1. 111550_table
[111550_Table_showing_A_Level_Results_England_West_Midlands_Coventry.xls]

■ GCSE**Colleen Fletcher:** [\[111539\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of trends in the attainment of pupils at GCSE in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England in each of the last five years.

Nick Gibb:

The information requested is in the attached table. Statistics for 2019/20 will be published on 26 November 2020.

Attachments:

1. 111539_table
[111539_table_showing_attainment_8_score_in_select_geographical_regions.xls]

■ National Careers Service**Daisy Cooper:****[111633]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of whether all adults who are (a) at risk of redundancy or (b) currently unemployed are identified as a priority for the National Careers Service.

Gillian Keegan:

The National Careers Service is available to everyone in England over the age of 13. People can access professional careers advice via the National Careers Service website, web chat or telephone-based advisers.

The National Careers Service works closely with the Department for Work and Pension's rapid response redundancy services, to provide co-ordinated comprehensive support including skills assessments, careers workshops and mapping existing skills to new job opportunities.

In July, as part of our Plan for Jobs, the government announced an additional £32 million investment in the community based National Careers Service. This investment supports all adults affected by COVID-19, and prioritises from day one of their unemployment:

- 18-24 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
- Low-skilled adults without a level 2 qualification.
- Single parents with at least one dependent child living in the same household.
- Adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Adults aged 50 years and over who are unemployed or at demonstrable risk of unemployment.

In addition, the National Careers Service prioritises all adults who have been unemployed over 12 months.

We will continue to monitor performance of the National Careers Service and the support it provides, as we better understand the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ Pupils: Sexual Offences**Nadia Whittome:****[112140]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance is available for schools on best practice for supporting children who have reported child sexual abuse from another child at the school.

Vicky Ford:

The department provides two documents to assist schools in managing any report of sexual violence and sexual harassment. Both provide detailed information on schools' legal responsibilities, advice on managing reports of abuse, victim support and provide links to specialist advice and support.

The statutory guidance, which schools must give regard to, for keeping children safe in education is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>.

Advice on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-between-children-in-schools-and-colleges>.

■ Reading: Males**Colleen Fletcher:****[111534]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to encourage boys of all ages to read more books.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards, ensuring all children can read fluently and with understanding.

In 2014, the Department introduced a new, more rigorous national curriculum. The programme of study for English states that teachers are expected to encourage pupils to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information. There is a focus on reading and a requirement that pupils study a range of books, poems and plays to encourage the development of a life-long love of literature. The programme of study also puts significant emphasis on the importance of early reading and teaching systematic synthetic phonics in Key Stages 1 and 2.

In 2016, England ranked joint 8th of 50 in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Our average score was the highest of the four PIRLS studies to date and statistically higher than our average performance in 2011 and 2006. The 2016 study also indicates that, while girls in England scored significantly higher than boys, the overall improvement in England's average score is largely attributable to increases in the average performance of boys and lower-performing pupils. Further to this, while girls continue to outperform boys in England, there were no countries participating in PIRLS in which boys outperformed girls.

Building on this success, in 2018, the Department launched the English Hubs Programme, establishing 34 hubs in primary schools across England, initially with a £26.3 million funding and with a further £17.1 million awarded in 2020. The programme supports nearly 3,000 schools to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. While early stages focused on systematic synthetic phonics, hubs have now started introducing medium-level support in priority areas, including developing a love of reading. Recognising the importance of reading during the disruption to

education caused by COVID-19 this year, the Department also published a Reading Together Day to celebrate the benefits of reading.

Laying the groundwork for reading standards starts in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with children aged 0-5. Over 3,000 early adopter schools are implementing the reforms to the EYFS statutory framework this September, a year in advance of statutory roll out of the reforms in September 2021. One of the key aims of these reforms is to improve outcomes for all children at age 5, particularly in the areas of early language and literacy which are key predictors of later success.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher:

[111551]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on levels of school attendance in (a) primary and (b) secondary schools.

Nick Gibb:

It is a priority for the Department to keep a close track of the situation in schools regarding suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. The Department collects data from schools on a daily basis, gathers information from local areas and follows up with individual settings. This is also to confirm that procedures for requiring pupils to isolate are well understood and that necessary decisions are made on the basis of public health advice.

Information for school attendance during the COVID-19 outbreak can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>. On 22 October 2020, approximately 90% of pupils on roll in state-funded primary schools were in attendance, and approximately 82% of pupils on roll in state-funded secondary schools were in attendance. These estimates exclude schools on half term or inset days.

Daisy Cooper:

[111631]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of catch-up support given that schools are allowed to use that premium for contingency planning for remote education and the purchasing additional devices or more textbooks.

Nick Gibb:

The Government has announced a catch-up package worth £1 billion, including a catch-up premium worth a total of £650 million, to support schools in making up for lost teaching time. To help schools make the best use of this funding, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has published a support guide for schools, with evidence based approaches to catch-up for all students:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/national-tutoring-programme/covid-19-support-guide-for-schools/#nav-covid-19-support-guide-for-schools1>. It has also published a further school planning guide for the academic year

2020/21: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/guide-to-supporting-schools-planning/>. Alongside this, the Government has also announced a new £350 million National Tutoring Programme, to increase access to high-quality tuition for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Government realises that every school will have different needs as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and we advise schools to tailor the catch-up funding to their specific contexts, and towards the pupils who need it most. As part of their catch-up strategy, schools can spend their premium on contingency planning for remote education: for example, purchasing additional devices or more textbooks. The EEF COVID-19 Support Guide includes advice for schools in how to support effective remote education and access to technology. The Department for Education is also delivering a remote education support package, which includes access to the right technology to deliver remote education, peer to peer training on how to use this technology effectively, and practical tools, guidance and webinars. Additionally, over 340,000 laptops and tablets are being made available by the Department this term to support disadvantaged children in Years 3 to 11, whose face-to-face education may be disrupted.

Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 disruption on the attainment and progress of all pupils is a key research priority for the Government, and we have commissioned an independent research and assessment agency to consider catch-up needs and monitor progress over the course of the academic year.

Julian Sturdy: [\[112044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department has taken to ensure schools put in place (a) enhanced social distancing in classrooms, including through the use of rotas, (b) online learning for the children of extremely clinically vulnerable parents and (c) other measures to prevent the transmission of covid-19 to clinically extremely vulnerable parents whose children are attending school.

Julian Sturdy: [\[112045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the teaching of children of clinically extremely vulnerable parents can continue without exposing their parents to the risk of catching covid-19.

Julian Sturdy: [\[112047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to draw on international best practice, including the use of online teaching, for continuing the teaching of children of clinically extremely vulnerable parents without exposing their parents to the risk of catching covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

Schools continue to remain open for all children and young people, as they have since the start of the autumn term. Being at school is vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. It continues to be the aim of the Department that all pupils, in all year groups, remain in school full-time.

The risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low, and there are negative health impacts of being out of school. For most children, the benefits of being back in the classroom far outweigh the low risk of COVID-19, and schools can take action to further reduce risks.

The Department published actions for schools during the COVID-19 outbreak to support them to welcome back all children from the start of the autumn term. The full guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>.

Schools should continue to undertake risk assessments and implement the system of controls set out in this guidance. These measures provide a framework for school leaders to put in place proportionate protective measures for pupils and staff. If schools follow the guidance and maximise control measures, they can be confident they are managing risk effectively. The measures in place include schools minimising contact between individuals. This can be achieved through keeping groups separate and maintaining distance between individuals.

From 5 November 2020, following guidance on new national restrictions in schools, children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, but who are not clinically extremely vulnerable themselves, should continue to attend education. The full guidance for schools and nurseries can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-and-childcare-settings-new-national-restrictions-from-5-november-2020#schools>.

New guidance for shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 was published on 4 November 2020. The guidance can be viewed here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/advice-for-people-at-high-risk/>

Where a pupil is unable to attend school because they are complying with clinical advice or public health advice, schools are expected to immediately offer them access to remote education.

To support schools in meeting the remote education expectations, the Department announced a further remote education package of support, which can be found on the remote education service at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

Support includes an additional 340,000 laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children, and development resources for staff, including a good practice guide and school-led webinars.

The Department is also investing £1.5 million of additional funding to expand the EdTech Demonstrator programme, which provides peer-to-peer support for schools and colleges.

The Department is in regular contact with officials in British embassies overseas to collect the latest international intelligence and evidence about how other countries have approached distance learning for pupils.

■ Schools: Transport**Daisy Cooper:**[\[111632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the level of financial support required by the school travel sector as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Government has provided £4.6 billion of un-ringfenced funding to local authorities to support them with the pressures they are facing as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Department has also allocated more than £70 million to local transport authorities, enabling them to increase dedicated home to school and college transport capacity over the autumn term. We are reviewing funding arrangements for the spring term.

■ Students: Coronavirus**Stephen Morgan:**[\[110899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a two week period of self-isolation for university students before they return home during or after the November 2020 covid-19 lockdown in England.

Michelle Donelan:

The government is committed to ensuring that students who wish to return home for the winter break are able to do so. It is essential that measures are put in place to ensure this can happen as safely as possible for students, staff and the communities that they return to.

On 11 November, the department published guidance for providers on the plans for the end of the autumn term, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/student-movement-and-plans-for-the-end-of-autumn-2020-term#specific-support-for-students>.

As outlined in the guidance, we expect higher education (HE) providers to support students to return home following the period of national restrictions, whilst mitigating the risk of transmission of the virus. We are asking that students return home once the national restrictions have been lifted, in a "student travel window" lasting from 3-9 December. This should be in line with specific arrangements put in place by their HE provider, which should include a staggered end to face-to-face provision, with learning being moved online by 9 December.

We are also working closely with universities and the Department for Health and Social Care to roll out mass testing for students and we will offer this to as many students as possible before they travel home, targeting this in areas of high prevalence of COVID-19. This will help to provide further confidence that students can leave safely if they test negative. If a student tests positive before their departure,

they will need to remain in self-isolation, following the relevant guidance. Moving all learning online by 9 December allows enough time for students to complete the isolation period before returning home for Christmas.

■ Students: Loans

Stella Creasy:

[\[91878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that the interest charged on Plan 1 student loans during maternity leave does not cause unfair financial hardship on women.

Michelle Donelan:

The system for setting interest rates on student loans is set out in The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) Regulations (2009), as amended. The interest rate on Plan 1 (pre-2012) income-contingent repayment student loans is the Retail Price Index (currently 2.6%), or the Bank of England base rate + 1%, whichever is lower. The current interest rate of 1.1% will remain in place until such time as the Bank of England base rate changes.

The current system protects borrowers, including people on maternity leave and other forms of parental leave, if they see a reduction in their income. Repayments are made based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or amount borrowed, and no repayments are made for earnings below the repayment thresholds. Repayments are calculated as a fixed percentage of earnings above the relevant repayment threshold. The annual repayment threshold for Plan 1 borrowers is currently £19,390, rising to £19,895 from 6 April 2021. Any outstanding debt is written off at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower.

If, at the end of the year, the borrower's total income is below the annual threshold, they may reclaim any repayments from the Student Loans Company made during that year.

■ Supply Teachers: Coronavirus

Daisy Cooper:

[\[111634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what financial support is available to supply teachers who have to self-isolate after a positive covid-19 test.

Nick Gibb:

A Ministerial Directive to encourage and support people having to self-isolate due to COVID-19, now means that if someone has been told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020, they are under a legal obligation to do so, and could be eligible for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment if they live in England and meet all the criteria. The guidance on eligibility is available through the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>.

If a person tests positive for COVID-19, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and receive an NHS Test and Trace account ID. This means they can apply for the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme through their local authority, if they meet the eligibility criteria set out in the guidance.

The Test and Trace Support Payment is paid in addition to any other benefits and Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) that a person currently receives.

The Government has provided guidance on SSP for all employers, which includes specific information on when an employee is off work because of COVID-19. Employees in self-isolation are entitled to SSP for every day they are in isolation, if they meet the eligibility conditions. The guidance on SSP is available through the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/employers-sick-pay>.

■ Universities: Care Leavers

Colleen Fletcher:

[113122]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to improve access to university for children who have been in care.

Michelle Donelan:

I am committed to doing all I can to ensure that we bring down the barriers that prevent care leavers from entering higher education (HE).

It is not good enough that, in 2017-18, only 12% of pupils who were looked after continuously for 12 months or more entered HE compared with 42% of all other pupils.

At the start of this academic year, I wrote to all university Vice-Chancellors to formally invite those who are not yet signatories of the Care Leaver Covenant to make contact about signing up. To help with this, I pointed them to the department's HE principles, setting out key areas where care leavers need additional support to access and succeed in HE, with examples of best practice drawn from across the sector. The departments HE principles are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-to-guide-he-providers-on-improving-care-leavers-access-and-participation-in-he/principles-to-guide-higher-education-providers-on-improving-care-leavers-access-and-participation-in-he>.

I also wrote to local authority Virtual School Heads in September recommending they arranged workshops for care leavers using free resources designed to help young adults prepare for independent student living.

During National Care Leavers' Week, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families and I contributed to sector-led events, including the 'Empathy Summit' staged by Spectra and the Care Leaver Covenant.

Prior to that, I hosted a roundtable for care leavers and estranged students, to discuss the issues they face in both entering and succeeding in HE and I held a summit this month. I brought together universities, HE sector bodies, local authorities, care leaver organisations and other influencers to discuss good practice in support

for care leavers and estranged students, and what part we can all play in bringing support practice up to the levels of the best.

I shall be continuing this discussion at a second summit next month.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes:

[\[111417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) agriculture and (b) horticulture in Lincolnshire.

Victoria Prentis:

We recognise the importance of agriculture and horticulture to Lincolnshire, and the contribution of Lincolnshire producers to UK food production.

This week, the Agriculture Act 2020 received royal assent. This has been welcomed by stakeholders, and will allow us to transform the way that we support farmers. Funds released as a result of the phasing out of the legacy subsidies will fulfil our manifesto pledge to be re-invested in a rollout of our future farming policy, which will be centred around support aimed at incentivising sustainable farming practices, creating habitats for nature recovery and supporting the establishment of new woodland and other ecosystem services to help tackle challenges like climate change. We will support farmers to produce high quality food in a more sustainable way and improve transparency in the supply chain to help food producers strengthen their position at the farm gate and seek a fairer return from the marketplace.

The Defra-led Food is GREAT campaign continues to raise the international profile and reputation of food and drink from across the UK, including Lincolnshire. Defra and the Department for International Trade (DIT) are also working together to offer immediate support to help agri-food businesses grow their trade activity overseas. We jointly announced in June 2020 a package of measures including: GREAT DIT Food and Drink Exporting Masterclasses; a Food and Drink SME E-Commerce Accelerator Pilot; fifty Food and Drink Export Champions to encourage aspiring exporters alongside our International Trade Advisor networks; our first Defra Agri Counsellor based in Dubai and serving the wider Gulf region; a programme of physical and virtual events, using innovative, interactive software to connect buyers, promote the UK and reach international markets; and support from UK Export Finance to identify and respond to the needs of the sector and raise awareness of how UKEF and Trade Finance can help the businesses win and fulfil export contracts.

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, the Government has provided support to businesses operating in agriculture and horticulture. The COVID-19 Business Interruption Loans Scheme is available to the sector. The Government has been in priority discussions with the banking sector to clarify the position for agricultural and horticultural businesses, with clear guidance issued to the banks. In addition, the

Bounce Back Loan Scheme, ensures that the smallest businesses, including those operating in agriculture and horticulture, can access up to £50,000 loans. The Government is providing lenders of this latter scheme with a 100% guarantee on each loan, to provide them with the confidence they need to support the smallest businesses in the country. The Government will also cover the first 12 months of interest payments and fees charged to the business by the lender. We have also launched specific funds to help businesses with particular difficulties, such as our Dairy Response Fund.

■ **Animal Grooming: Coronavirus**

Emma Hardy:

[\[111607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether dog groomers are permitted to continue to work during the period of the new national covid-19 lockdown from 5 November 2020; and if he will issue guidance on that matter.

Victoria Prentis:

Dog grooming businesses are not on the list of businesses required to close. The latest coronavirus regulations permit dog groomers to continue working, subject to distancing, hygiene and other safety requirements being met. This may include dog groomers collecting pets from their owners' homes and then returning them once they have been groomed. Dog owners are permitted to take their dog to a groomer where this journey relates to the care of their pet and is reasonably necessary. The Canine and Feline Sector Group has already issued advice for pet businesses, including dog groomers, on how to operate safely within the new restrictions. This includes a protocol for the handover of pets and may be found online at <https://www.cfsg.org.uk/repository/360/>

■ **Animal Housing: Coronavirus**

Anna McMorrin:

[\[111597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the dog and cat boarding sector.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra has been monitoring the impact that coronavirus restrictions have been having on the companion animal sector and has maintained a regular dialogue with the pet industry, welfare charities, local authorities and the veterinary sector.

We understand that lifestyle changes resulting from measures put in place to control the spread of coronavirus, including cancelled holidays, have affected occupancy rates in boarding establishments as people spend more time at home with their pets. However, the sector continues to provide a valued service for many people, including looking after the pets of key workers, people hospitalised as a result of coronavirus and vulnerable people, all of whom may need their services at this current time.

We have worked with the Canine and Feline Sector Group to agree guidance for pet businesses, including boarding establishments, to enable them to undertake core operations as far as possible, while maintaining compliance with the social distancing rules and need for hygiene precautions to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. We remain committed to engagement with the animal boarding sector to monitor any concerns they have and offer appropriate advice.

■ **Boats: Coronavirus**

Luke Pollard:

[\[111614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what guidance his Department plans to issue to boat owners on access (a) to local marinas for leisure use and (b) for boat owners to attend their craft for maintenance purposes during the November 2020 covid-19 lockdown restrictions; and whether public slipways can be used for launching (i) motor boats, (ii) kayaks, (iii) paddleboards and (iv) other craft during the lockdown period.

Rebecca Pow:

To determine what is and is not permitted during this period of tighter restrictions to slow the spread of the virus and bring down the R number, individuals and businesses, including marinas, should consult the relevant coronavirus regulations and associated guidance on the GOV.UK website to determine what is and is not permitted. Navigation authorities have in many instances also published guidance for their waterways on their websites. Non-essential travel is not permitted anywhere in England at this time, including on waterways. The regulations around essential travel do include some exemptions however boat maintenance is not one of these. It is permitted within the regulations for an individual or company to employ someone to visit their boat to undertake maintenance works.

We fully recognise the importance of sports and physical activity for physical and mental health and well-being. These are a vital weapon against coronavirus, which is why we have ensured that people can get out and exercise. People can exercise outdoors in a public place alone, with the people they live with (or their support or childcare bubble) or with one person from another household and observing social distancing requirements. Further information can be found on the GOV.UK website.

■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Artificial Intelligence**

Chris Stephens:

[\[112083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what (a) artificial intelligence and (b) machine learning projects are being (i) undertaken and (ii) considered for his Department.

Victoria Prentis:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central on 10 September 2020, PQ UIN 83796.

[questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-01/83796]

Defra recognises the potential for artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to play an important part in ensuring that data and science are at the heart of decision making.

All of Defra's ongoing and previous research projects, including a number involving AI and ML, are published on Defra's research and development website:

randd.defra.gov.uk Planned projects are advertised on Bravo:
defra.bravosolution.co.uk.

Areas particularly benefitting from these tools include the interpretation of Earth Observation and automated sensor data, the development of advanced modelling techniques, and improved customer service.

We will continue to work in partnership across Government, with academia and industry to develop the use of AI and ML for Defra.

■ Food Supply: Children

Robert Halfon: [\[112025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Department is taking to redistribute surplus food into Government initiatives to tackle child food insecurity.

Robert Halfon: [\[112026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what representations he has received on the Community Shop initiative to redistribute surplus food waste to help tackle child food insecurity; and whether he plans to make it his policy to support that initiative.

Rebecca Pow:

In 2018, a £15 million food waste fund was announced to do more to tackle food waste and make sure surplus food goes to those who have a need. Grants have been awarded to food redistribution organisations both large and small, including £1.9 million each for Community Shop, which has resulted in its Harnessing Harder to Reach Surplus programme, and FareShare and its Surplus with Purpose initiative.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, £5 million has been specifically made available to help redistribute surplus food to those in need including £1.8 million from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport fund in support of charities. Nearly 300 grants have been made available to over 230 charities. Grant recipients are now delivering their project activities and putting in place the new infrastructure that the funds have supported across their food redistribution networks.

Building on the significant support given to the most vulnerable during the pandemic, earlier this month a winter support package was announced, including a further £16 million to fund local charities to purchase food through well-established networks and provide immediate support to people of all ages.

■ Marine Protected Areas: Fisheries**John McNally:****[112075]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy immediately to ban industrial fishing in offshore Marine Protected Areas.

Rebecca Pow:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Belfast South on 6 November 2020, PQ UIN 107768.

[questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-22/107768]

■ Pet Travel Scheme: Dogs**Luke Pollard:****[111615]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many dogs were imported into the UK under the Pet Travel Scheme in each month of 2019.

Victoria Prentis:

Data for the number of dogs entering Great Britain under the Pet Travel Scheme in each month of 2019 can be found below.

January – 23,504

February – 14,046

March – 21,969

April – 21,124

May – 20,221

June – 25,676

July – 31,398

August – 51,208

September – 36,712

October – 27,826

November – 13,707

December – 21,013

The data regarding the Pet Travel Scheme covers pets entering Great Britain and is based on information supplied by checkers employed by approved carriers of pet animals.

This response has been compiled by the Animal and Plant Health Agency from data provided by third parties, and as such is reliant on the providers for the accuracy of the information.

■ River Thames: Sewage**Sarah Olney:**[\[111586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Environment Agency is taking in relation to Thames Water following reportedly unmonitored sewage spills into the Thames from the Mogden sewage treatment works.

Rebecca Pow:

The Environment Agency (EA) has confirmed that there have not been any unmonitored discharges into the River Thames from Mogden Sewage Treatment Works (STW).

The EA monitors all discharges to the River Thames from Mogden STW.

Storm sewage discharges occur when sewers or sewage works are overwhelmed by the extra water from rainfall. These outfalls are permitted by the EA and act as relief valves to prevent sewage backing up and flooding property and roads. The EA has powers to investigate non-compliance with permit conditions at Mogden STW and take appropriate action should non-compliance be established

As a regulatory requirement, Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) has been installed on Water Company storm overflows over the last five years. This has been part of the Asset Management Planning process agreed between the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), the EA and the Water Companies. Further monitoring is planned for the period 2020 to 2025 with more than a 1,000 monitoring installations across the country.

The program of installation was completed in March 2020 and since then the EA has accurate and complete EDM data sets. The data has been published and it has been acknowledged that data sets prior to March 2020 were sometimes incomplete as monitoring equipment was commissioned and data handling and reporting protocols were implemented.

However, protocols in place before and during the installation of the EDM ensured that the EA and the public received notification of all storm discharges from Mogden STW through storm sewage discharge notifications. The notifications include details of times and volumes, and the EA were able to use the data to monitor the site's discharges within the requirements of their permit.

Although it is not a regulatory requirement, this storm discharge data is made publicly available by Thames Water. The EA continues to receive and assess the data from Mogden STW when it discharges to the river.

A new Storm Overflows Taskforce has been established comprising of Defra, the EA, Ofwat, the Consumer Council for Water, Water UK and Blueprint for Water. The Taskforce is meeting regularly to set out clear proposals to reduce the frequency and volume of storm sewage discharges into waterways in extreme weather. The Taskforce is also exploring further short term actions water companies can take to accelerate progress in reducing storm sewage discharges.

Water: Sewage**Stuart Anderson:**[\[111620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that untreated sewage is not released into (a) rivers and (b) other inland waters.

Rebecca Pow:

During periods of significant rainfall untreated sewage diluted by rainwater will discharge through storm overflows to avoid streets, premises and sewage treatment plants from being flooded. Water companies are committed in the 5-year business planning period (2020-2025) to a significant programme of improvements to the monitoring and management of storm overflows at a cost of around £1.2 billion. This includes over 700 schemes to provide environmental improvements by reducing spills from frequently spilling overflows. As part of this investment, 'Event Duration Monitoring' is currently being installed on most storm overflows to improve our understanding, and to trigger investigations and improvements by water companies when overflows operate too frequently.

I recognise that there is more to do with regards to the management of sewage pollution. I met water company CEOs in September and made clear that the volumes of sewage discharged into rivers and other waterways in extreme weather must be reduced. To achieve this, I have set up a new Taskforce bringing together Government, the water industry, regulators and environmental NGOs. This Taskforce will set out clear proposals to address the volumes of sewage discharged into our rivers. The Taskforce is also exploring further short-term actions water companies can take to accelerate progress on storm overflows.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**British Nationals Abroad: EU Countries****Julian Sturdy:**[\[91877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November to Question 109332, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of making bilateral agreements with EU member states to allow UK nationals to travel visa-free in the EU beyond the 90/180 day period set out in the Schengen Borders Code for third-country nationals, if the EU continues to maintain that UK nationals will be treated as Third Country Nationals under the Schengen Borders Code from January 2021.

Wendy Morton:

The Government has discussed arrangements with the EU for UK nationals travelling to the Schengen Area. UK nationals will only be able to travel visa-free for short stays for up to 90 days in a rolling 180-day period. This is the standard length of stay that the EU offers to nationals of eligible third countries that offer visa-free travel for EU citizens, in line with existing EU legislation. The provisions on visa-free short-term

visits that will apply from 1 January 2021 reflect the UK and EU's respective border and immigration rules. They are existing provisions that are already applied to nationals of eligible third countries. From 1 January, free movement of people between the UK and EU will come to an end and we will have full control of our immigration system. The UK keeps its visa system under regular review to ensure that visit visas remain an effective tool in reducing immigration, tackling organised crime, and protecting national security.

■ Caribbean: Hurricanes and Tornadoes

Catherine West:

[\[113181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assistance the Government has offered to countries affected by Hurricane Eta.

Wendy Morton:

The British Government is supporting the humanitarian response in Central America in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Eta. The UK is a large donor to many of the multilateral agencies who are already responding across the region, including the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the World Food Programme. The Start Fund, to which the UK contributes, has activated in Nicaragua to provide food, water, and sanitation to those affected. The Fund is considering further activations in Honduras and Guatemala. The UK-funded NGO Map Action is providing crucial mapping services to support regional relief efforts. We are continuing to monitor the situation, and stand ready to provide further support as required.

■ Ethiopia: Violence

Harriett Baldwin:

[\[111499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of unrest on regions within Ethiopia.

Harriett Baldwin:

[\[111500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement.

James Duddridge:

The UK is concerned by the ongoing violence between federal and regional forces in the Tigray region. We are gravely concerned at Amnesty International's report of killings of civilians on 9 November and are investigating. The Foreign Secretary has written to Prime Minister Abiy and spoke with him on 10 November. He emphasised the need to protect civilians and allow humanitarian access. He also urged for a de-escalation of violence and called for swift moves to political dialogue. I have tweeted to urge the same.

Oromia and Amhara have also seen violent clashes in recent months. I condemn in the strongest terms the killing of Amharan civilians on 1 November in Oromia. I

visited Ethiopia from 27 - 29 July and discussed growing ethnic tensions with the President and senior ministers. I expressed the need for more peaceful dialogue between ethnic groups and for space to be given for political debate. We will continue to monitor the situation and raise the importance of human rights with the Government of Ethiopia and regional leaders.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon:

[\[111523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 17 September 2020 to Question 87548 on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Religious Freedom, what steps he is taking to assess whether the Freedom of Religion or Belief toolkit is being implemented by his Department's officials after having attended a toolkit workshop.

Nigel Adams:

The FCDO's Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) toolkit is a resource available to officials in the UK and at Post to inform their work on FoRB. Whilst we do not formally monitor use of the toolkit, we continue to make teams aware of how the toolkit can support their work and to seek opportunities to promote it. We also encourage officials to draw on the toolkit when drafting their entries for the Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, the next of which will be published in 2021.

■ Myanmar: Elections

Nadia Whittome:

[\[112147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Myanmar on the ability of Rohingya Muslims to take part in elections in that country.

Nigel Adams:

As we made clear in our statement on 9 November, the UK is very concerned that the Rohingya and other minority ethnic groups, were excluded from these elections. Universal suffrage for all people in Myanmar, including the Rohingya, and the right to stand as a candidate, is a key part of achieving effective democracy. We are clear that the 1982 Citizenship Law is deeply flawed and enables the exclusion of Rohingya and other minorities on spurious grounds. The Rohingya, who have lived in Myanmar for generations, should be granted full citizenship and the associated rights. They should not be excluded from Myanmar elections. We have made this clear to the Myanmar Government. The Foreign Secretary raised these issues with the Minister for International Cooperation in advance of the election and I [Minister Adams] raised my concerns when I spoke to the same Minister in June. We continue to call for elections to be credible and inclusive, allowing individuals of all communities to participate.

■ Nigeria: Police**Ms Lyn Brown:**[\[111473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2020 to Question 102917 on Nigeria: Police, whether the UK Government is providing material support or equipment to the Nigerian Government as part of its support for police reform in Nigeria.

James Duddridge:

The UK Government has worked with the Nigerian Government and the Nigerian Police Force in support of police reform and improving human rights compliance. Since 2018, as part of this work, we have provided specific and limited equipment, such as communications and office equipment, to the Nigerian Police. For example, through our CSSF funded North East Public Safety and Security Programme, radios were issued to Borno Police Command by our implementing partner, Creative Associates. This was to increase coordination between police units who are working to improve security and counter violent extremist organisations, including Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa, in North East Nigeria. All assistance is provided in line with the UK Government's Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidance.

■ Turkey: Freedom of Religion**Carla Lockhart:**[\[112161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Turkish counterpart on freedom of religion among (a) Christian and (b) other minorities in that country..

Wendy Morton:

The Turkish constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion, regardless of an individual's citizenship. We regularly discuss these issues and will continue to engage the Turkish Government at all levels to urge respect for Freedom of Religion or Belief, which are essential to the long-term health of Turkish democracy. Defending persecuted Christians, and persecuted individuals of all faiths or beliefs, remains a long-standing priority for the British Government. We will continue to monitor this important issue.

■ Uzbekistan: LGBT People**Catherine West:**[\[113182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations the Government has made to the Government of Uzbekistan on LGBT+ rights.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is strongly opposed to all forms of discrimination and is committed to promoting and protecting the rights and freedoms of LGBT+ people in all circumstances. FCDO senior officials, including the UK Ambassador in Tashkent,

continue to raise LGBT+ rights with the Uzbek authorities, including in the context of the current consultation on amending Article 120 of the Uzbek Criminal Code, which criminalises 'voluntary sexual intercourse between two male individuals'. We have made clear the importance of these consultations being transparent as well as the need to protect the rights of the LGBT+ community in Uzbekistan.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Contact Tracing: Computer Software

Chi Onwurah: [\[93584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of smartphone users that will not be able to access the NHS Test and Trace app as a result of the operating systems of their smartphones not being compatible with that app.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 25 September 2020]: Estimates using the latest data from Apple and Google show that 87% of iOS smartphone users and 93% of Android smartphone users in the United Kingdom can install a version of the operating system with the contact tracing technology the National Health Service app uses.

This means over 33.5 million people in England and Wales can download and use the NHS app.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[95161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of the incompatibility of older phones with the NHS covid-19 app on the effectiveness of that app.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 29 September 2020]: Estimates using the latest data from Apple and Google show that 87% of iOS smartphone users and 93% of Android smartphone users in the United Kingdom can install a version of the operating system with the contact tracing technology the National Health Service app uses.

This means over 33.5 million people in England and Wales can download and use the NHS app.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[95162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that the NHS covid-19 app is compatible with all mobile phone software.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 29 September 2020]: Estimates using the latest data from Apple and Google show that 87% of iOS smartphone users and 93% of Android smartphone users in the United Kingdom can install a version of the operating system with the contact tracing technology the National Health Service app uses.

This means over 33.5 million people in England and Wales can download and use the NHS app.

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[95163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many individuals in (a) Wales and (b) England his Department will not have access to the NHS COVID-19 app due to (i) device incompatibility and (ii) lack of access to a device; and if he will publish the methodology used.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 29 September 2020]: Estimates using the latest data from Apple and Google show that 87% of iOS smartphone users and 93% of Android smartphone users in the United Kingdom can install a version of the operating system with the contact tracing technology the National Health Service app uses.

This means over 33.5 million people in England and Wales can download and use the NHS app.

Emma Hardy: [\[98750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of the incompatibility of older phone software on the effectiveness of the NHS covid-19 app.

Helen Whately:

Estimates using the latest data from Apple and Google show that 87% of iOS smartphone users and 93% of Android smartphone users in the United Kingdom can install a version of the operating system with the contact tracing technology the National Health Service app uses.

This means over 33.5 million people in England and Wales can download and use the NHS app.

■ **Coronavirus: Batley and Spen**

Tracy Brabin: [\[99702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many covid-19 testing swabs were provided to testing centres in Batley and Spen constituency on each of the last 14 days.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 12 October 2020]: The Department does not publish this data in this format.

■ **Coronavirus: Bolton**

Yasmin Qureshi: [\[89666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many covid-19 tests were conducted at the new Bolton mobile testing sites at (a) New Bury and (b) Last Drop Village on (i) 11, (ii) 12, (iii) 13 and (iv) 14 September 2020.

Helen Whately:

The Department does not publish this data in this format.

■ **Coronavirus: Contact Tracing**

Barbara Keeley:

[\[90988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of people who tested positive for covid-19 cases were asked to provide details of close contacts via (a) telephone and (b) email in each week from 3 August to 13 September 2020.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 21 September 2020]: Currently the information is not available in the format requested.

■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

Sir George Howarth:

[\[90947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many covid-19 tests were carried out in each hospital trust area in each month since 2020; which laboratories analysed those tests; and what the average cost per test was.

Helen Whately:

The Government does not publish data in the format requested.

■ **Health and Social Service: Coronavirus**

Helen Hayes:

[\[68734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to ensure that staff working in the NHS and the social care sector are able to access (a) antibody testing and (b) regular antigen testing.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 8 July 2020]: National Health Service staff in all regions in England have been offered the opportunity to take an antibody test should they wish to have one. Social care workers in England have been eligible for a free antibody test at an NHS test site. We have also recently launched a new at-home testing service. This service provides a new route for adult social care staff to access antibody tests, giving greater flexibility and choice. This includes staff working in residential care, domiciliary care, extra care, supported living, local authority adult social care departments and staff working as personal assistants for individuals who receive adult social care services.

The adult social care sector has been, and continues to be, one of our highest priorities for the rollout of testing, and care homes have been one of the first groups to be given access to repeat asymptomatic testing. This includes weekly testing for care home staff weekly and residents every 28 days.

The NHS has set out its guidance when staff without symptoms should be tested, including where there is an incident, outbreak or high prevalence. The NHS have made testing available to all symptomatic NHS staff as a priority.

We are also testing those who are asymptomatic in specific circumstances where appropriate. For NHS workers specifically, NHS England has recently published guidance on when testing of this nature might be appropriate, including where an incident has taken place, an outbreak or where high prevalence has been established. In addition, NHS staff can also enrol in Public Health England's SIREN study. This enables us to monitor prevalence in NHS staff to help us identify areas of higher prevalence where asymptomatic NHS staff testing is needed. Currently 102 trusts are participating in SIREN with 34,954 participants enrolled.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Ian Lavery: [\[101016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many covid-19 tests have been given to each school in Wansbeck constituency; how many have been used; and how many have been replaced.

Helen Whately:

The Government does not publish data in the format requested.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum and Immigration

Kate Osamor: [\[110877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to recruit additional staff to help tackle the backlog of (a) asylum, (b) EU Settlement Scheme and (c) indefinite leave to remain applications.

Kate Osamor: [\[110878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the backlog of (a) asylum, (b) EU Settlement Scheme and (c) indefinite leave to remain applications.

Chris Philp:

ASYLUM OPERATIONS HAVE, OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS INCREASED THE NUMBER OF DECISION MAKERS AND SUPPORT STAFF. THERE ARE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES IN PLACE TO MAINTAIN STAFFING AT THE REQUIRED LEVELS TO ALLOW US TO MANAGE ASYLUM INTAKE AND REDUCE THE OVERALL TIME TO MAKE INITIAL ASYLUM DECISIONS. THESE INCLUDE ROLLING RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGNS, A STAFF RETENTION STRATEGY TO ENSURE IT RETAINS ITS HIGHLY SKILLED ASYLUM DECISION MAKERS, AND THE FURTHER EXPANSION OF DIGITAL PROCESSES TO INCREASE CASE WORKING FLEXIBILITY. ASYLUM OPERATIONS HAS ALSO BEEN EXPLORING FURTHER OPTIONS TO GET THE SYSTEM MOVING AGAIN FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 EARLIER IN THE YEAR WITH STEPS BEING TAKEN TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY, FOCUSING ON PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS, BETTER QUALITY DECISIONS AND TRANSFORMATION. ASYLUM OPERATIONS HAS ALSO DEVELOPED A RECOVERY PLAN FOCUSED ON RETURNING INTERVIEWS AND DECISIONS BACK TO PRE-COVID-19 LEVELS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. WE ARE ALSO SEEKING TO SECURE TEMPORARY RESOURCES TO ASSIST FROM WITHIN THE HOME OFFICE AND OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, ALONG WITH OTHER POTENTIAL OPTIONS. WE ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO ENSURING THAT OUR OPERATIONAL TEAMS HAVE THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO RUN AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE MIGRATION SYSTEM. IN ADDITION TO THE NEW TECHNOLOGY AND PROCESSES, WE HAVE OVER 1,500 UK VISAS AND IMMIGRATION (UKVI) EUROPEAN CASEWORK STAFF IN POST TO PROCESS APPLICATIONS, ALONG WITH 250 STAFF HANDLING CALLS AND EMAILS IN THE SETTLEMENT RESOLUTION CENTRE, HELPING PEOPLE APPLY. VISAS & CITIZENSHIP ARE FLEXING RESOURCES TO MANAGE CASELOADS AND THEREFORE CURRENTLY DO NOT REQUIRE ADDITIONAL RECRUITMENT TO ASSIST WITH INDEFINITE LEAVE TO REMAIN APPLICATIONS.

■ Offences against Children: Victim Support Schemes

Nadia Whittome:

[\[112143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of funding for (a) therapeutic and (b) advocacy support for victims of child sexual abuse.

Victoria Atkins:

Supporting victims of child sexual abuse, whether they are children or adult survivors, is a priority for the Government and we are taking steps to ensure that adequate funding is in place for specialist support services across the country providing both therapeutic and advocacy support. For example:

The Home Office and Ministry of Justice have doubled the funding available for voluntary sector organisations providing direct support to victims and survivors at a national level through the Support for Victims and Survivors of CSA fund. The SVSCSA will provide £2.4m up to 2022 to support vital national services including support lines, online resources and remote counselling. We have also introduced a new £2.8m transformation fund to promote and embed best practice in CSA victim support.

The Ministry of Justice has awarded £12m to 91 rape support centres across England and Wales to provide independent, specialist support to female and male victims of

sexual violence. This is an increase of £4m from 2019/20 and includes £1.8m of ringfenced funding for victims of recent and non-recent child sexual abuse. The new funding is in addition to the £4.79m provided to Police and Crime Commissioners by the Ministry of Justice to support victims of child sexual abuse (part of the £69m provided this year for them to commission victim support service based on local need).

The Government also recently announced an additional £4m per year until 2022 for recruiting more Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) to help victims feel informed and supported at every stage of their recovery journey. ISVAs provide an important link between police, support services and criminal justice agencies.

We have also increased spending from £31m in 2018 to £39m this year to improve services and pathways for survivors and victims of sexual violence, including child sexual abuse, who seek support from Sexual Assault Referral Centres, regardless of age or gender.

We are committed to ensuring that victims can continue to access such support during the COVID-19 pandemic and recently announced a £76m package of funding for victims, with £10 million ringfenced to provide support for victims of sexual violence specifically. This has helped fund technology to enable charities to offer services remotely.

■ **Registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships: Coronavirus**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[91852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure that civil registration of marriages can continue wherever possible during the covid-19 lockdown.

Kevin Foster:

Current regulations provide for marriages and civil partnerships to take place in England only in exceptional circumstances i.e. where one of the parties is seriously ill and not expected to recover. It is for local authorities to ensure ceremonies can be safely delivered in line with Public Health and local authority guidance.

Marriages and civil partnerships can take place in Wales where appropriate risk assessments have been undertaken and safety measures are in place

■ **Sexual Offences**

Nadia Whittome:

[\[112145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to improve the handling of sexual assault cases by police forces.

Victoria Atkins:

Rape and sexual assault are devastating crimes and we want victims to have the confidence to report them, knowing that every investigation will be conducted thoroughly, and everything will be done to bring offenders to justice.

The Government is currently conducting an end-to-end review of the criminal justice response to rape, which includes identifying issues and areas for improvement in the police handling of cases. We expect the review to report with actions for cross-system improvement later this year. These actions will improve outcomes for victims of sexual assault as well as those of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Building Safety Fund

Royston Smith: [\[111575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many applications his Department has received for the Building Safety Fund.

Royston Smith: [\[111576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many applications for buildings in Southampton Itchen constituency his Department has received for the Building Safety Fund.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department is continuing to work with building owners to progress applications for the Building Safety Fund and published registration statistics on 30 September, which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remediation-of-non-acm-buildings#building-safety-fund-registration-statistics>

■ Coronavirus: West Sussex

Henry Smith: [\[111481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what financial support the Government is providing to help (a) Crawley Borough Council and (b) West Sussex County Council during the November 2020 covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Luke Hall:

Government has provided substantial resources to councils to support their communities, businesses and vulnerable people.

Government has provided West Sussex County Council with:

- £45.9 million across four tranches of unringfenced grant.

Government has provided Crawley Borough Council with:

- £1.9 million across four tranches of unringfenced grant.
- £2.2 million in the Additional Restrictions Grant Bullet and £1.5 million of the Local Restrictions Support Grant.

Any council with concerns about their ability to manage financial pressures should contact MHCLG in the first instance to discuss their situation.

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation**Royston Smith:**[\[111574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made on merits of the requirement of EWS1 External Wall Fire Surveys on private residential property values in high-rise residential buildings with unsafe cladding.

Christopher Pincher:

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) designed the EWS1 process in conjunction with mortgage lenders. Its aim is to assist with valuations of high-rise residential buildings where remediation to ensure building safety might be required. The EWS1 process is not Government policy or a regulatory requirement. The Government is aware that the EWS1 process is being used on lower rise buildings, does not support such blanket use, and is encouraging industry to adopt a more proportionate approach.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Artificial Intelligence**Chris Stephens:**[\[112084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what (a) artificial intelligence and (b) machine learning projects are being (i) undertaken and (ii) considered for his Department.

Kelly Tolhurst:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to PQ83796 on 10 September 2020.

■ Sleeping Rough: Crawley**Henry Smith:**[\[111479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what progress his Department has made on delivering new accommodation for rough sleepers in Crawley constituency.

Kelly Tolhurst:

On 18 July, we launched the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). This makes available the financial resources needed to support local authorities and their partners to help prevent those accommodated during the pandemic from returning to the streets.

On 17 September we announced NSAP allocations to local authorities to pay for immediate support. Crawley has been allocated £296,500 for this aspect of NSAP.

On 29 October, we announced allocations to local partners to deliver longer-term move-on accommodation. More than 3,300 new long-term homes for rough sleepers across the country have been approved, subject to due diligence, backed by Government investment of more than £150 million. For this long term aspect of NSAP, Crawley has been allocated £200,000.

■ Towns Fund

Sir John Hayes:

[\[111414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what progress the Government has made on the Towns Fund.

Luke Hall:

In September 2019, Government announced the initial 101 places invited to develop Town Deal proposals as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund. In June 2020, as part of the Prime Minister's commitment to bringing forward £5 billion of capital investment projects to support jobs and economic recovery, the Government brought forward over £80 million from the Towns Fund for investment in capital projects that would have an immediate impact across these 101 towns.

On 27 October, we announced the first seven Town Deal offers, worth almost £180 million, for Barrow-in-Furness, Blackpool, Darlington, Norwich, Peterborough, Torquay and Warrington. Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-town-deals-worth-almost-180-million-announced>

Announcements will be made in due course on further Town Deals.

Government is also committed to a future competitive round of the Towns Fund and we will publish further details of this in due course.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Ben Lake:

[\[111594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what process will be used to allocate funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund across the UK.

Luke Hall:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will operate across the Union to make sure each of the four nations prosper. The Conservative Manifesto committed to at a minimum matching the size of European structural funds in each nation. Decisions regarding the design of the fund will need to be taken after a fiscal event. In the meantime, we will continue to work closely with interested parties whilst developing the fund.

■ Urban Areas: Regeneration

Henry Smith:

[\[111480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to support regeneration in (a) Crawley and (b) other towns adversely affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

This Government is committed to driving the regeneration of towns across the country as the nation responds to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our immediate response to Covid-19 builds on an ongoing programme of interventions. This includes the £3.6 billion Towns Fund which aims to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth to towns and high streets. In September 2019, we announced the initial 101 towns, including Crawley, invited to develop Town Deal proposals. We received Crawley's proposals earlier in the year, and expect to make further announcements of Town Deals in due course. In July, the Prime Minister announced £81.5 million of accelerated funding to the 101 towns to support immediate improvements; Crawley received its £1 million share in September.

Other elements of the Towns Fund include the Future High Streets Fund competition, where announcements of successful bidders will be made in due course, and a further Towns Fund competition. In addition, the High Streets Task Force has also launched a range of online resources to provide support to places across the country: <https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/products-and-services/support-for-all-high-streets/>

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Newcastle United Football Club: Saudi Arabia

Chi Onwurah: [\[113091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, whether (a) correspondence and (b) discussions have taken place between her Department and the (a) Saudi Arabian authorities and (b) Premier League with regards to the proposed Saudi takeover of Newcastle United.

Chi Onwurah: [\[113092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if she will publish any correspondence between her Department and the (a) Saudi Arabian authorities and (b) Premier League with regards to the proposed Saudi takeover bid for Newcastle United.

Graham Stuart:

[Holding answer 12 November 2020]: As part of our normal information gathering processes about prospective inward investment into the UK, there has been correspondence and/or discussions on the matter referred to, but I am unable to disclose details owing to their containing personal information, commercially sensitive information, and information provided in confidence.

JUSTICE

■ Five Wells Prison: Staff

Rachel Hopkins: [\[112152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many full time equivalent staff of each (a) grade and (b) rank will be employed at HMP Five Wells from 2022.

Rachel Hopkins: [\[112153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether contracts for staff of HMP Five Wells from 2022 will contain minimum (a) staffing levels and (b) staff-to-prisoner ratios; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Hopkins: [\[112154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to publish expected staffing levels for HMP Five Wells; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Hopkins: [\[112155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to include levels of (a) prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, (b) prisoner-on-staff assaults and (c) prisoner self-harm in the contractual key performance indicators for the operator of HMP Five Wells from 2022; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

In response to questions 112152 and 112154, we do not plan to publish staffing levels for HMP Five Wells. The operator contracts between the Department and all private prison providers require the Contractor to be responsible for all staffing matters, including ensuring staff have the training and experience necessary for safe and decent prisons. This is monitored to ensure the standards are maintained across the lifetime of the contract.

In response to 112153, mandating minimum staffing levels for private prison operators would restrict their ability to introduce and foster innovation, and their flexibility to adjust their staffing levels across the lifetime of the contract according to the needs and demands created by any changes to the prison population or in risk. It could also deter them from engaging with expertise and professional support in the local and wider community and hinder their ability to respond quickly to new challenges and opportunities. As such, the contract for the operation of HMP Five Wells does not include minimum staffing levels or staff-to-prisoner ratios.

However, we rigorously and robustly evaluated staffing levels as part of the evaluation process for the operator competition for HMP Five Wells. We are confident that the new prison operator, G4S has an approach and staffing model that will provide and ensure a decent, safe, secure and rehabilitative environment.

In response to question 112155, prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults will feature as contract delivery indicators within the performance framework for HMP Five Wells. Similarly, levels of prisoner self-harm will be covered in the framework through contract delivery indicators compared against HMIP Safety scores and the HMPPS Risk Management Audit. Performance in this area will also be published as part of the standard and regularly published statistics once the prison is operating and at full capacity.

■ Prisons: Drugs**Ms Lyn Brown:**[\[111467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2020, published on 29th October 2020, what lessons have been learned on (a) the value of substance abuse testing in prisons, (b) the connection between substance abuse testing and adjudications, (c) the connection between substance abuse testing and drug treatment and (d) other issues within prisons from the period of suspension of the Mandatory Drug Testing programme.

Lucy Frazer:

In response to COVID-19, the Ministry of Justice and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) took decisive action to protect staff and prisoners. The measures included restricting regimes, minimising inter-prison transfers and compartmentalising our prisons into different units to isolate the sick, shield the vulnerable and quarantine new arrivals. As part of our initial operational restrictions Mandatory Drug Testing Programme (MDT) was suspended between April to June 2020.

Since then, under our National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services, prisons at Stage Three (Restrict) may reintroduce MDT. Where this is done, the prison must take into account social distancing and cohorting measures, medical considerations and PPE requirements as well as security and safety considerations. It is too early to evaluate what the impact has been of the changes to MDT arrangements since the outbreak of COVID-19.

MDT in prisons and young offender institutions seeks to inform HMPPS on the prevalence of drug use. The key objective of MDT is to provide a means of identifying prisoners with ongoing drug problems and ensure they are offered the appropriate treatment, as well as providing evidence that can be used in adjudications. MDT is continually reviewed to determine its effectiveness.

TRANSPORT**■ Department for Transport: Artificial Intelligence****Chris Stephens:**[\[112079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what (a) artificial intelligence and (b) machine learning projects are being (i) undertaken and (ii) considered for his Department.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning have many potential applications including in the transport sector. Innovation teams across the DfT family support research and development initiatives conducted both within and outside of DfT.

One specific initiative is investigating a proof-of-concept study into a non-intrusive AI-model capable of detecting the number of face-coverings, and the number of

uncovered faces, in an image. The model would then display message responses focussed on positive engagement. This work will not be able to identify or track individuals, and no images will be stored by the system.

We don't hold information centrally regarding further AI or machine learning projects being undertaken or planned by the department at this time.

■ Global Travel Taskforce

Dr Luke Evans:

[111641]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Global Travel Taskforce is taking to ensure that a robust testing regime is in place as soon as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Robert Courts:

The Global Travel Taskforce has been considering a range of testing options and non-testing measures to ensure passenger safety and give travellers confidence once current restrictions ease. The Taskforce has also undertaken extensive consultation with the transport industry, international partners, tourism sector, business leaders and the private testing sector and will submit its recommendations to the Prime Minister in November.

■ Great Western Railway Line: Social Distancing

Ms Lyn Brown:

[111474]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the covid-19 social distancing measures implemented by Great Western Rail.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department issues guidance to transport organisations in England to help them understand how to provide safer workplaces and services for themselves, their workers and passengers. It outlines measures to assess and address the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19). The Department published updated guidance on 5 November:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators>

The guidance makes clear that it does not supersede any legal obligations relating to health and safety, employment or equalities and that it is important that businesses and employers continue to comply with their existing obligations.

■ Rail Review

Charlotte Nichols:

[111645]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to publish the Williams Rail Review.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government is committed to bringing forward vital sector-wide reforms and commissioned Keith Williams to carry out the first root and branch review of the rail industry in a generation. The Review was in its final stages at the outbreak of COVID-19. The Government views the purpose of the reforms as important as ever, but further work needs to be done now to reflect the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and we continue to examine a range of options to reform the railways. The Government will publish a White Paper with details on the Government's plans for rail reform once the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

■ Railways: Social Distancing**Ms Lyn Brown:**[\[111475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what penalties are applicable to train companies in the event that they fail to facilitate adequate covid-19 social distancing measures.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We have issued comprehensive guidance on the steps transport operators should take to assess and address the risks of coronavirus in the transport sector across England. While we strongly advise passengers to practice social distancing to help limit the spread of COVID-19, we acknowledge that this might not always be possible. We have been working closely with operators to ensure appropriate procedures are in place and that they are clearly communicated to passengers. Some stations have natural 'pinch-points', which makes maintaining social distancing difficult. Passengers are urged to use the whole length of the train to board, avoid travelling at busy times and follow government guidance.

Ms Lyn Brown:[\[111476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of existing legal obligations for train operators to ensure that customers are able to socially distance on their services during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We have issued comprehensive guidance on the steps transport operators should take to assess and address the risks of coronavirus in the transport sector across England. While we strongly advise passengers to practice social distancing to help limit the spread of COVID-19, we acknowledge that this might not always be possible. We have been working closely with operators to ensure appropriate procedures are in place and that they are clearly communicated to passengers. Some stations have natural 'pinch-points', which makes maintaining social distancing difficult. Passengers are urged to use the whole length of the train to board, avoid travelling at busy times and follow government guidance.

TREASURY**■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme**

Caroline Lucas: [\[112021\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make 23:59 on 31 October 2020 the RTI deadline for new applicants to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme .

Jesse Norman:

The cut-off date of 30 October allows as many people as possible to be included by going right up to the day before the announcement of the extension to the scheme.

Extending the deadline beyond 30 October would significantly increase the risk of abuse because the claim could not be confidently verified using the data after this point.

Caroline Lucas: [\[112022\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect on the hospitality industry and other sectors that do more business over the weekend of the RTI deadline for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme being 23:59 on 30 October 2020 and not 23:59 on Saturday 31 October 2020.

Jesse Norman:

The 30 October 2020 deadline was chosen because this date is the day before the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme extension was announced. Extending the cut-off date beyond 30 October 2020 would significantly increase the risk of abuse because claims could not be confidently verified using the data after this point.

■ Exports: VAT

Dr Liam Fox: [\[111406\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of the planned abolition of the VAT Retail Export Scheme on the number of tourists visiting (a) the UK and (b) EU countries from 1 January 2021.

Dr Liam Fox: [\[111407\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of the planned abolition of the VAT Retail Export Scheme on the level of spending by tourists in (a) the UK and (b) EU countries from 1 January 2021.

Dr Liam Fox: [\[111408\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of the planned abolition of the VAT Retail Export Scheme on employment levels in the (a) retail, (b) leisure and hospitality, (c) travel and tourism and (d) manufacturing sector in the UK.

Jesse Norman:

Ahead of the end of the transition period, the Government has announced the VAT and excise duty treatment of goods purchased by individuals for personal use and

carried in their luggage arriving from or going overseas (passengers). The following rules will apply from 1 January 2021:

- Passengers travelling from Great Britain to any destination outside the United Kingdom (UK) will be able to purchase duty-free excise goods once they have passed security controls at ports, airports, and international rail stations.
- Personal allowances will apply to passengers entering Great Britain from a destination outside of the UK, with alcohol allowances significantly increased.
- The VAT Retail Export Scheme (RES) in Great Britain will not be extended to EU residents and will be withdrawn for all passengers.
- The concessionary treatment on tax-free sales for non-excise goods will be removed across the UK.

The Government published a consultation which ran from 11 March to 20 May. During this time the Government held a number of virtual meetings with stakeholders to hear their views and received 73 responses to the consultation. The Government is also continuing to meet and discuss with stakeholders following the announcement of these policies.

The detailed rationale for these changes is included in the written ministerial statement and summary of responses to the recent consultation. A technical note has also been issued to stakeholders to expand on this document and to respond to issues raised by stakeholders.

HMRC estimate that VAT RES refunds cost about £0.5 billion in VAT in 2019 for about 1.2 million non-EU visitors. In 2019 the ONS estimate there were substantially more EU visitors (24.8 million) than non-EU passengers (16.0 million) to the UK. This implies an extension to EU residents would significantly increase the cost by up to an estimated £0.9 billion. This would result in a large amount of deadweight loss by subsidising spending from EU visitors which already happens without a refund mechanism in place, potentially taking the total cost up to about £1.4 billion per annum.

The final costings will be subject to scrutiny by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility and will be set out at the next forecast.

■ Income Tax: Coronavirus

Carla Lockhart:

[\[112127\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the potential loss of revenue to the Exchequer from income tax as a result of job losses in the 2020-21 financial year.

Jesse Norman:

An estimation of income tax receipts in 2020-21 would be a forecast as the financial year has not yet concluded. The Treasury does not publish forecasts for the economy or the public finances. Forecasts of future receipts, including income tax receipts, are produced by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) on a regular basis as part of

their Economic and fiscal outlook series (EFO). The Chancellor will deliver an updated OBR forecast on 25 November alongside the 2020 Spending Review.

In March, the Government announced the unprecedented Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), designed to help firms to keep millions of people in employment. The CJRS has helped 1.2 million employers across the UK to furlough 9.6 million jobs (as at midnight 18 October 2020), protecting people's livelihoods. The Chancellor has recently extended the CJRS until the end of March 2021, beyond the national lockdown restrictions.

■ Mortgages: Coronavirus

Carla Lockhart:

[\[112128\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions the Government has had with credit rating agencies on the effect on people's credit ratings of mortgage holidays or missed payments as a result of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on household incomes.

John Glen:

On 20 March, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) published guidance on what it expects mortgage lenders to do for consumers facing financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19.

As part of this guidance, the FCA set out that the consumer's credit score should remain unaffected by taking out a payment holiday. This has been achieved through the masking of the arrears status on the borrower's credit file.

Where a borrower who has not taken a payment holiday misses a payment, this will be recorded on their credit file in the usual manner. Information held by credit reference agencies (CRAs) is purely factual, and it is for individual lenders to decide how they use that data as part of their lending decisions.

It is important to note that the scores that individual CRAs provide are proprietary and may have a limited bearing on how lenders assess the data on a customer's overall credit file. Whilst some lenders use a CRA score, others will use the entirety of information contained on a credit file and compare this with their own individual lending criteria. Lenders may also use information beyond the borrower's credit file when deciding whether to accept a credit application. This could include asking the borrower questions directly about their finances, as well as assessing income, expenditure and future ability to make repayments, any of which may have been affected by COVID-19.

HM Treasury and the FCA have been working closely with lenders and the CRAs on this matter throughout the crisis and will continue to do so to ensure the best outcome for consumers.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme: Directors

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[112124\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will (a) expand the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to include company directors or (b) introduce a similar financial support scheme to include company directors during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

People who pay themselves a salary through their own company are eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). The CJRS is available to employers, including owner-managers, and individuals paying themselves a salary through a PAYE scheme are eligible. Where furloughed directors need to carry out particular duties to fulfil their statutory obligations, they may do so provided it is no more than would reasonably be judged necessary for that purpose.

The practical issues that prevented the inclusion of company owner-managers in the original Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), namely not being able to verify the source of their dividend income without introducing unacceptable fraud risk, still remain.

As with the previous SEISS grants, it is not practically possible for HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) 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.

This means, unlike with the SEISS grants that use information HMRC already hold, targeting additional support would require owner-managers to make a claim and submit information that HMRC could not manageably verify to ensure payments were made to eligible companies for eligible activity.

Those not eligible for the SEISS Grant Extension may still be eligible for other elements of the financial support available. This includes Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments and other business support grants.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Funeral Payments

Carolyn Harris:

[\[109501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what proportion of funeral expenses payments claims made in the first six months of 2020-21 were cleared in (a) 15 working days, (b) 15 working days plus 2 days and (c) 15 working days plus 5 days.

Guy Opperman:

The proportion of Funeral Expenses Payments made in the first 6 months of 2020-21 (April 20 to September 20) which were cleared in (a) 15 working days was 46%.

In April to September 2020 there was a backlog of claims which had built up over a period of months due to the closure of the Funeral Expenses Payments main processing centre in Balham in December 2019, and activity prior to closure to support staff through redeployment options. In March 2020 processing was impacted by colleagues shielding with health conditions under COVID.

We have since improved our processing and productivity times with a combination of additional processing support on loan, deployment of IT kit to colleagues at home and the introduction of process easements. These have been instrumental in improving the service to customers and the department are working with HMT and Ministers to seek permanent process changes.

We now have an Actual Average Clearance Time of 11.8 days in September 2020 compared to 34.7 days in September 2019.

Extract taken from RPT data store on 3rd November 2020.

Source: Departmental MISIP from Social Fund Funeral Payment System

Please note that the data supplied is derived from unpublished management information which was collected for internal Departmental use only and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard. The data should therefore be treated with caution.