Daily Report

Monday, 11 January 2021

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 11 January 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:36 P.M., 11 January 2021). 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

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Immigration: Prosecutions

Stuart C McDonald: [131294]

To ask the Attorney General, pursuant to the Answer of 15 December 2020 to Question 128184 on Immigration: Prosecutions, if she will publish the Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the Crown Prosecution Service and Home Office Immigration Enforcement in 2016.

Michael Ellis:

The Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Home Office Immigration Enforcement in 2016 will be published on the CPS website in January 2021. In the meantime, I will ensure that a copy is placed in the House library.

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Bounce Back Loan Scheme

Rachael Maskell: [133033]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, as of 22 December 2020 how many businesses have (a) applied and (b) secured a Bounce Back Loan Top Up; and how many Bounce Back Loan Top Up loans are being processed by accredited Business Bank Loan banks.

Paul Scully:

As of 13 December 2020, 62,311 Bounce Back Loan Scheme top-ups had been approved, worth £0.56 billion.

Bounce Back Loan figures are also available on the Government website: www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-treasury-coronavirus-covid-19-business-loan-scheme-statistics

Decisions on whether to capture information relating to the processing of loan applications are at the discretion of the lender.

Rachael Maskell: [133034]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of businesses who had secured a Bounce Back Loan had borrowed the maximum amount of 25 per cent of their estimated turnover, up to 10 November 2020.

Paul Scully:

As of 10 November 2020, 27% of businesses offered a Bounce Back Loan were offered one of a value equivalent to exactly 25% of their stated turnover.

Rachael Maskell: [133035]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many businesses that have applied to Top Up their initial Bounce Back Loan since November 2020 have had their applications rejected.

Paul Scully:

As of 13 December 2020, 62,311 Bounce Back Loan Scheme top-ups had been approved, worth £0.56 billion.

Decisions on whether to capture information relating to rejected loans are at the discretion of the lender.

Rachael Maskell: [133036]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, prior to announcing the Bounce Back Loan Top Up facility in November 2020, what estimate he had made of how many businesses had already taken out a Bounce Back Loan and (a) would and (b) would not be eligible for a Bounce Back Loan Top Up; and what estimate he had made of how much would be borrowed through Bounce Back Loan Top Ups.

Paul Scully:

The Government has amended the scheme rules to allow those businesses who have borrowed less than their maximum loan (the lower of 25% of their turnover or £50,000) to top-up their existing loan. We understand that some businesses didn't anticipate the disruption to their business from the pandemic would go on for this long; this will ensure that they are able to benefit from the loan scheme as intended.

Prior to the Top Up facility becoming operational, 1,336,320 loans had been approved, with a total value of £40.20 billion (figures as at 18 October 2020).

The Department estimated that around 360,000 businesses could be eligible for a Top Up based on the parameters of the scheme.

Business: Disclosure of Information

Dr Kieran Mullan: [133303]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to (a) enforce and (b) ensure businesses' compliance with the requirements of Regulation 28 of The Company, Limited Liability Partnership and Business (Names and Trading Disclosures) Regulations 2015.

Paul Scully:

If Companies House are made aware of a company whose trading disclosures do not comply with Companies Act requirements, they will contact the company concerned to clarify the position. If necessary, they will advise the company that it is committing an offence and request that it updates any non-compliant information.

The primary aim is to seek compliance. If the company refuses to comply, Companies House will consider taking prosecution action as a last resort.

Business: Grants

Conor McGinn: [<u>133934</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the announcement of a one-off grant for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure businesses on 5 January 2021, if he will advise local authorities to include wholesale distribution businesses in the eligibility criteria.

Paul Scully:

Officials are working closely with local authorities to deliver the one-off grant for businesses, announced by the Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer on the 5th January.

Through the Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment Grant, all rate-paying businesses mandated to close may eligible for a grants of up to £9,000. This is alongside the Local Covid Restrictions Grant (Closed) Addendum for 5 January onwards scheme, which provides grants of up to £4,500 per six-week period of closure.

For those businesses not mandated to close but who have had their trade adversely affected by the national and localised Covid-19 Restrictions, the Chancellor announced a further top up of £500 million to the exiting £1.1bn in Additional Restrictions Grant Fund. Local authorities have discretion to use this funding to support businesses in the way they see fit in their local area.

Business: West Yorkshire

Tracy Brabin: [134042]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of the £4.6 billion in new lockdown grants he announced on 5 January 2021 will be made available to (a) Kirklees and (b) the local authorities of West Yorkshire.

Paul Scully:

The Department is currently calculating the individual local authority and these will be shared with local authorities week commencing 11 January 2021.

Coronavirus: Vaccination

Esther McVey: [130712]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the cost to the public purse of the Pfizer covid-19 vaccine to date; and when he plan to publish details of the estimated cost to all stakeholders for the manufacturing and rollout of that vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

We are not able to disclose details of commercially sensitive contracts between the Government and vaccine manufacturers while negotiations are ongoing.

Esther McVey: [130713]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps were taken during the trial of the Pfizer covid-19 vaccine to test its effect on people with allergies.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has met the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's robust standards of safety, quality, and effectiveness, and the safety data from the trials has set out how the COVID-19 vaccine works in different types of people. A robust and proactive safety monitoring strategy for COVID-19 vaccines is in place, which allows for rapid, real-time safety monitoring at population level.

Ben Lake: [133109]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many of the covid-19 Pfizer vaccines procured by the Government have arrived in the UK; and how many doses of those vaccines have been distributed to (a) England, (b) Wales, (c) Scotland and (d) Northern Ireland.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The UK was the first country in the world to start a vaccination programme using the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Our swift and decisive action has ensured a regular and steady supply of vaccine doses arriving into the UK since early December 2020.

We have sufficient doses to maintain our vaccination programme as it continues to accelerate, and as of 25 December, we have received 22 deliveries of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to the UK. We have plans in place with the company to ensure sufficient supply throughout 2021.

Vaccination will be managed by the health services in each nation: NHS England and NHS Improvement, NHS Wales, NHS Scotland, and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland. We have procured vaccines on behalf of all parts of the country. The Government is working with the devolved administrations and overseas territories to ensure it is deployed fairly across the entire UK.

■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Databases

Chi Onwurah: [130727]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many information gateways there are in operation in his Department; and how those gateways are managed and monitored.

Amanda Solloway:

This information is not held centrally and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Staff

Emily Thornberry: [130001]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many staff and at what grades are operating his Department's business support (a) email enquiry service and (b) telephone enquiry service via the 0207 215 5000 helpline; and what hours those services will be fully staffed and operational from 28 December 2020 to 4 January 2021 inclusive.

Amanda Solloway:

The Departmental Enquiry Service (The Enquiry Unit - 0207 215 5000) is staffed by 1 x Senior Executive Officer, 1 x Executive Officer and 4 x Administrative Officers. The Unit was fully operational on 29th, 30th and 31st December and provided an email service on 1st, 2nd and 3rd January. The Unit has been fully operational from 4th January onwards. The Enquiry Unit is resourced appropriately to handle incoming enquiries to the Department

In addition to the Department's Enquiry Unit, BEIS also delivers a Business Support Helpline (0800 098 1098) for individuals and businesses to access signposting and guidance. This resource was increased to handle an anticipated higher number of contacts over the period, including queries relating to the end of the Transition Period.

The Business Support Helpline was open every day from Monday 28 th December to Saturday 2 nd January 2021, closed Sunday 3 rd January.

Disability: EU Law

Marion Fellows: [133029]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if his Department will bring forward legislative proposals to enshrine the European Accessibility Act into UK law.

Paul Scully:

The UK has left the EU, and as the Transition Period ended on 31 December 2020 the UK will not be required to transpose the EAA into UK law.

The UK already has robust legislation on accessibility through the protections covered by the Equality Act 2006, Equality Act 2010, and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland. The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination on grounds of disability and imposes a duty on providers of goods and services to make reasonable adjustments to prevent this.

The Government will consider how further to improve or enhance accessibility through domestic legislation, and provide real benefit to citizens with disabilities.

EU Grants and Loans

Dan Jarvis: [R] [<u>132920</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much (a) European Structural and Investment Funding and (b) UK matched funding was or will be allocated to (i) Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, (ii) the Sheffield City Region, (iii) England and (iv) the UK, in each of the four fiscal years from 2018-19 to 2021-22.

Paul Scully:

Allocations of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for each UK programme and region by year are published in the latest revision (31 January 2020) of the EU Structural and Investment Funds UK Partnership Agreement at Table 1.6*.

Information on ESIF match funding at national level is difficult to collate. We will place any available information in the Libraries of the House. Information on match funding for ESIF programmes in the Sheffield City Region is available and will be placed in the Libraries of the Houses shortly. Equivalent information for Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council cannot be provided as information is not available at this level.

*see attached

Attachments:

1. Table 1.6 [Written Question 132920 - Table 1.6.docx]

Fireworks

Ronnie Cowan: [130779]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward regulations to restrict the (a) sale of fireworks and (b) times when they can be set off by the public; and if he will make a statement.

Paul Scully:

There is a comprehensive regulatory framework already in place for fireworks that aims to reduce the risks and disturbances to people and animals. Existing legislation controls the sale, availability and use of fireworks, as well as setting a curfew and noise limit.

In its 2019 inquiry into fireworks, the House of Commons Petitions Committee concluded it could not support banning public sales and use of fireworks. The potential for unintended consequences would be counterproductive for public safety, including individuals sourcing illegal and unsafe products online.

The Government remains committed to promoting the safe and considerate use of fireworks through an effective legislative framework and through non-legislative measures.

Hospitality Industry: Coronavirus

Alex Sobel: [133149]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing granularity into the covid-19 hospitality curfew system to distinguish the differing risk profiles of (a) pubs and (b) adult gaming centres.

Paul Scully:

My Rt. Hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a new National Lockdown on 4 January. From 5 January hospitality venues must close; with the exception of providing food and non-alcoholic drinks for takeaway (until 11pm), click-and-collect and drive-through.

Iron and Steel: Northern Ireland

Stephen Kinnock: [132932]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the amount of steel moved from Great Britain to Northern Ireland in each of the previous five calendar years.

Nadhim Zahawi:

This information is not regularly collected by Government or other official sources. We have had access to some data on this from the industry, but this data is commercially sensitive and not suitable for public release.

Licensed Premises: Coronavirus

Andrew Gwynne: [133745]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) extending eligibility for the Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs to social clubs and (b) providing back payments to those clubs.

Paul Scully:

The Christmas Support Payment was put in place specifically to help pubs without a significant food offering, whose businesses were severely impacted by the local restrictions over the festive period. The scheme eligibility period ended on 28 December 2020 and the closing date for applications is 12 January 2021.

■ Life Sciences and Medicine: Research

Alexander Stafford: [130882]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans he has to direct funds within the £11.1 billion in R&D funding announced in the Spending Review 2020 to programmes that support (a) health research and (b) life sciences R&D and deliver high-value jobs and investment to towns and cities in the North of England.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Department's Research and Development (R&D) Spending Review 2020 settlement supports our Departmental commitments as set out in the R&D Roadmap and helps to consolidate the UK's position as a science superpower.

Indeed, the UK has one of the strongest and most productive life sciences sectors in the world, generating turnover of around £80.7 billion per annum in 2019.

Funding is subject to the departmental allocations process which is now underway. Further details of how funding will be allocated will be announced in due course.

■ Minimum Wage: Non-payment

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[133936]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to his Department's 31 December 2020 press release entitled Rogue employers named and shamed for failing to pay minimum wage, what proportion of those 95,000 workers received backpay as a result of unpaid work trials.

Paul Scully:

The Government is committed to ensuring that all employers pay their workers correctly. HM Revenue and Customs considers all worker complaints and will take enforcement action in any cases of abuse.

The naming scheme is an important tool in raising awareness of minimum wage enforcement and deterring any employers who might otherwise be tempted to break minimum wage law.

There were a variety of reasons for underpayment in the most recent Naming round. Some of most common reasons include deductions or payments that took pay below the minimum wage, unpaid working time or a failure to pay the correct rate to apprentices.

■ Motor Neurone Disease: Research

Jessica Morden: [130668]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which Motor Neurone Disease-related projects were funded by the (a) Medical Research Council and (b) National Institute for Health Research in (i) 2018-19 and (ii) 2019-20.

Amanda Solloway:

The Medical Research Council (MRC) and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) have funded the following number of Motor Neurone Disease-related projects, started in 2018-19 and 2019-2020.

	2018-2019	2019-2020
MRC	10	7
NIHR	3	0

Nurseries: Coronavirus

Ian Murray: [131234]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions he has had with the Competition and Markets Authority on guidance for nurseries charging full fees from parents while closed during the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

Ministers have regular meetings with the CMA leadership, and the CMA issued guidance for nurseries on charging and refunds for parents following closure due to the covid-19 outbreak on 28th July 2020.

Patents

Sarah Olney: [<u>130178</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his policy on the EU Withdrawal Agreement is that it obliges the establishment of a central patent court seat in London under the Unified Patent Court Agreement.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government will not be participating in the Unified Patent Court (UPC), nor establishing a seat in London, due to the UPC's links with the EU Court of Justice. Consequently, on 20 July 2020, the UK withdrew its ratification of the UPC Agreement. Withdrawing ratification clarifies the UK's status in the Agreement and will help facilitate its orderly entry into force for other States, if they so choose. The locations of the central division of the UPC is a matter for the remaining participating states to decide.

Post Offices: Subsidies

Marion Fellows: [133927]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if his Department will consult with relevant organisations before a decision is reached on how the Post Office subsidy will be allocated.

Marion Fellows: [133928]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department plans to undertake an assessment of the effect of the Post Office subsidy on subpostmasters across the post office network.

Paul Scully:

Through the November 2020 Spending Review a total of £227m of funding has been allocated to the Post Office to extend the network subsidy by £50 million and to provide £177 million to invest in the future of the network. This will ensure that post offices in every corner of the country, including our vital rural branches, can keep providing essential services for the people that rely on them – now and in the future.

The subsidy will be used to support the costs of loss-making post offices, in the same way that previous subsidies provided to the Post Office have been used. In order to support Spending Review decisions, the Department considered the impact of subsidy on subpostmasters across the Post Office network.

BEIS has a long track record of engaging with relevant organisations in relation to Post Office, including funding provided for the network, and it continues to meet with them on a regular basis.

Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah: [130729]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 14 December 2020 to Question 124750 on Research: Finance, what the evidential basis is for the statement that £1 of public investment in R&D eventually leverages around £2 of additional private sector investment; and what the time period is of that evidence.

Amanda Solloway:

BEIS published "The relationship between public and private R&D funding" (BEIS Research Paper Number 2020/010) on 1 July 2020 at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-and-development-relationship-

between-public-and-private-funding carried out by Oxford Economics Ltd

They estimated the monetary impact of the long-run leverage rate, suggesting that each £1 of public R&D eventually stimulates between £1.96 and £2.34 of private R&D

The study drew on OECD data for 41 countries from 1961 to 2017 with varying degrees of completeness

Grahame Morris: [133789]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of Government science, research and innovation funding is allocated to New Approach Methodologies.

Grahame Morris: [133790]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much funding is allocated to the development and uptake of New Approach Methodologies; and which sources that funding comes from.

Amanda Solloway:

BEIS' R&D settlement has increased to £11.1bn for 2021/22. This settlement supports our commitments set out in the R&D Roadmap and helps consolidate our position as a science superpower. We are revitalising the science, research and innovation ecosystem and releasing its potential. We recognise the importance of the independence of researchers and our investment in multiple disciplines and methodologies will be guided by experts.

Specific funding is subject to our Departmental allocations process, which is now underway and progressing at pace.

Research: International Cooperation

Layla Moran: [130828]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduction in the Official Development Assistance budget on the UK's reputation as a partner of choice in international research and development projects.

Layla Moran: [130832]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on the potential effect of the reduction in the Official Development Assistance budget on the UK's commitment to global research and innovation.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government remains committed to international development and will continue to provide £10 billion of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2021-22.

The UK's scientific excellence makes it a partner of choice for many international collaborations. The Government continues to support this excellence through its work towards a 2.4% of GDP investment in R&D by 2027. This has most recently been demonstrated in the £400m uplift to R&D funding announced by my Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Spending Review for financial year 2021/2022. International collaboration is a central feature of a healthy and productive R&D sector.

Science: Research

Colleen Fletcher: [130097]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to support investment in science research at universities in (a) Coventry, (b) the West Midlands and (c) England.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government announced we will publish a new ambitious Places Strategy for R&D in the R&D Roadmap. The Places Strategy will ensure that our research and development system delivers real economic and societal benefits in cities, towns, regions, and devolved nations right across the UK.

We are making a long-term investment in core research. By 2023-24, the government will be investing £1.4 billion more per annum in core funding for its world-leading research base compared to 2020/21.

As an example, we recently announced a £65 million boost to the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), part of which will be used to complete a first-of-its-kind UK Battery Industrialisation Centre in Coventry, creating 100 high-skilled jobs. Organisations across the automotive, rail and aerospace sectors will have access to

a unique battery production facility combining manufacturing, experimentation and innovation.

Sharing Economy: Industrial Health and Safety

Kirsten Oswald: [132959]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 applies to limb b workers.

Paul Scully:

Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (protection from detriment in health and safety cases) currently applies to employees.

Following the High Court Judgment of 13 th November 2021, work is underway to amend section 44(1)(d) and (e) of the Employment Rights Act 1996 to extend the rights in these provisions to apply to all limb (b) workers as well as employees.

Small Businesses: Digital Technology

Chi Onwurah: [<u>130066</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the effect on small businesses of large technology firms directly passing on the Digital Services Tax to online retailers using their platforms; and what assessment he has made of the effect of such action on the competitiveness of the marketplace.

Paul Scully:

The Digital Services Tax is a proportionate tax addressing widely held concerns about the tax paid by digital businesses. Pricing strategies reflect a range of factors and are a matter for businesses. The Government has announced the establishment of a new Digital Markets Unit in the CMA to promote competition in digital markets. We will consult on the powers of this unit in due course.

Wind Power: Seas and Oceans

Chris Elmore: [130798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to his Department's publication entitled Steel public procurement 2020: Compliance with the steel procurement guidance (PPN 11/16), published 09 October 2020, if he will make it his policy to include figures on the share of steel produced in the UK that is used in offshore wind developments that are supported by the public purse in future editions of that publication.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is committed to ensuring that UK steel producers have the best possible chance of competing for and winning the contracts associated with our domestic infrastructure investment.

The publication of the annual steel pipeline on national infrastructure projects and steel data on public sector procurement is part of this commitment. This information serves both as testament to our ambitious plans for the use of UK-sourced steel within our pipeline of major public infrastructure projects, but also as an accountability mechanism, as we work in collaboration with the sector to achieve this shared aim.

In October 2020 we published data of the steel pipeline of offshore wind national infrastructure projects to enable UK steel manufacturers to better plan for these projects.

Going forward, the Government will consider whether to publish annual figures of UK steel used in past offshore wind projects, if it is in the public interest.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Cabinet Office: Internet and Telephone Services

Emily Thornberry: [130004]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, which of her Department's dedicated (a) telephone helpline and (b) email service individuals and companies should use in the event that they have problems and questions arising from the end of the transition period which cannot be answered from the resources available on www.gov.uk/transition; and what hours those services will be fully staffed and operational from 28 December 2020 to 4 January 2021 inclusive.

Penny Mordaunt:

The transition period has now ended. As your question acknowledges, the latest guidance for businesses and citizens is available on gov.uk/transition.

This information is supplemented by departmental helplines and forums where businesses can access more detailed and specific guidance.

For questions relating to the Northern Ireland Protocol, specific information is available from the Trader Support Service and the Movement Assistance Scheme.

Census: Coronavirus

Cat Smith: [133011]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps the Government is taking to ensure the 2021 Census is covid-secure.

Cat Smith: [133012]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans the Government has to postpone the Census scheduled for March 2021 in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Cat Smith: [133013]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure face-to-face surveys for the March 2021 Census can take place during the covid-19 outbreak.

Cat Smith: [133014]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, regarding the March 2021 census, how the Government plans to survey (a) homeless people and (b) other people without access to the internet or a computer.

Chloe Smith:

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

Attachments:

1. Response to PQ133011, 133012, 133013, 133014 [PQ133011, 133012, 133013, 133014 - Response.pdf]

Duty Free Allowances: Northern Ireland

Gavin Robinson: [133886]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish further information on duty free arrangements for Northern Ireland to and from (a) Great Britain, (b) the EU and (c) the Rest of the World.

Penny Mordaunt:

All guidance on duty free arrangements for Northern Ireland traders has been published, and can be found at https://www.gov.uk/duty-free-goods.

Elections: Proof of Identity

Cat Smith: [131327]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the voter ID plan on proxy voting.

Cat Smith: [131328]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to improve the accessibility of polling stations to people with dementia at the next General Election.

Cat Smith: [131329]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that people suffering from dementia who lack ID will be able to vote under voter ID plans.

Cat Smith: [131330]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking under voter ID plans to support people with disabilities in accessing local elector ID.

Chloe Smith:

Further to my answers to PQs <u>104752</u> and <u>100442</u>, the Government is committed to ensuring that everyone who is eligible can participate in our democracy.

The impact of voter ID on voters, including by proxy, was the subject of the independent Electoral Commission's evaluations of the 2018 and 2019 voter ID pilots. These evaluations continue to inform planning for the implementation of voter ID.

Local authorities are responsible for designating polling places and the law requires them to make sure that, as far as is practicable, these are accessible to the local community, including those voters with a disability. Voters with disabilities are also able to get assistance in casting their vote from polling station staff or from a companion. The Government is intending to bring forward legislation to support voters with disabilities by increasing the range of support provided in polling stations and by removing restrictions on who can act as a companion.

We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders including charities and civil society organisations to make sure that reforms are delivered in a way that is inclusive for all voters.

Cat Smith: [133008]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 18 December 2020 to Question 128204 on Elections: Proof of Identity, whether expired photo ID will be deemed to be a valid form of voter ID in the list of approved photographic ID.

Cat Smith: [133009]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether an Irish passport will be accepted as a valid form of voter ID at the next general election.

Chloe Smith:

Electors will be required to show an approved form of photographic ID before casting their vote in a polling station across Great Britain at national UK-wide elections, and at local elections in England.

As set out in my answer of 18 December 2020 (PQ 128204), everyone who is eligible to vote will have the opportunity to do so. The list of approved photographic ID will not be limited to UK passports, a broad range of documents already in use will be accepted, including, for example, concessionary travel passes, PASS scheme cards, Ministry of Defence identity cards and photocard parking permits issued as part of the Blue Badge scheme.

We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders including charities and civil society organisations to make sure that reforms are delivered in a way that is inclusive for all voters.

■ Females: Coronavirus

Ruth Jones: [133183]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate his Department has made of the number of women who have left the workforce as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Chloe Smith:

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

Attachments:

1. Response to PQ133183 [PQ133183 - Response.pdf]

■ Government Departments: Databases

Chi Onwurah: [<u>130725</u>]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 15 December 2020 to Question 128167 on Government Departments: Databases, which Minister has responsibility for managing and monitoring the Government's information gateways.

Julia Lopez:

I refer the hon. Member to the list of Ministerial Responsibilities published here.

Imports: Ethics

Shabana Mahmood: [130678]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he has taken to ensure the Government does not procure (a) cotton from Xinjiang and (b) other unethically sourced products.

Julia Lopez:

The UK has taken a leading international role in holding China to account for its entirely unacceptable human rights violations and in Xinjiang in particular, including in respect of credible evidence of forced labour. The UK led the first international joint statements on this issue at the UN Human Rights Council in June.

The Government is committed to working to improve action to tackle modern slavery in supply chains, and has published commercial policy and guidance which advocates a systematic approach to identifying and tackling modern slavery and labour abuses in government supply chains, focussing on areas of the highest risk. We are keeping this matter under close review.

Local Government: Elections

Andrew Gwynne: [133742]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 1 October 2020 to Question 94353, and with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what plans the Government has to delay the 2021 local elections in England.

Dr Matthew Offord: [133793]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the implications of delaying municipal and local elections in May 2021.

Steve Reed: [133879]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether it is his Department's policy that elections scheduled for May 2021 go ahead as planned.

Cat Smith: [<u>133919</u>]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the May 2021 elections, whether he plans to change emergency proxy voting rules in light of the covid-19 outbreak.

Cat Smith: [133920]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans the Government has to plan for potential shortages in poll staffing caused by the covid-19 outbreak in advance of the May 2021 local elections.

Cat Smith: [133921]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans the Government has to tackle the potential challenge of recruiting polling staff due to the fact that a high number of polling staff are retired or elderly and in the at risk category under covid-19 guidance.

Cat Smith: [133922]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that supplier capacity for the running of the May 2021 local election elections is not affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Cat Smith: [133923]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people who have been advised to shield during the covid-19 outbreak are able to vote in the May 2021 local elections.

Cat Smith: [133924]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people who are symptomatic of covid-19

and instructed to self-isolate (a) on the day of the May 2021 local elections and (b) the day before those elections are still able to cast their vote.

Cat Smith: [133925]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans he has to ensure that the appropriate provision of personal protective equipment used during the covid-19 outbreak is provided to poll staff ahead of the May 2021 local elections.

Daisy Cooper: [134185]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether (a) the local elections planned for May 2021 will go ahead as planned and (b) polling stations will be (i) accessible and (ii) covid-19 secure.

Chloe Smith:

Primary legislation states that the elections will go ahead in May 2021.

We continue to work closely with the electoral community, including electoral suppliers, and public health bodies to resolve challenges and ensure everyone will be able to cast their vote safely and securely - and in a way of their choosing.

Measures are planned to support absent voting at short notice. Guidance will be published in good time ahead of the polls and this matter will be kept under review. The House will be kept updated.

The Government has also engaged with the Parliamentary Parties Panel to ensure that views from political parties are taken on board.

Military Operations: Parliamentary Scrutiny

Jonathan Edwards: [132854]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to allow Members of Parliament an explicit vote in advance of any major UK military action.

Chloe Smith:

The government has no such plans.

Prime Minister: Redundancy Pay

Justin Madders: [130125]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much has been paid in termination payments to employees who left employment in the Prime Minister's Office in each month of 2020.

Julia Lopez:

The Prime Minister's Office is an integral part of the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office Annual Report and Accounts includes information on staff costs and exit packages for permanently employed staff, Special Advisers and Ministers within the Department, including the Prime Minister's Office.

UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland

Stephen Kinnock: [132931]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate he has made of the number of categories of goods that may face restrictions moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland from 1 January 2021; and what those categories are.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Government has published comprehensive sector-specific guidance for businesses moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. There is a collated list of the applicable arrangements for goods movements available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/moving-goods-into-out-of-or-through-northern-ireland-from-1-january-2021.

Carla Lockhart: [133299]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what advice the Government has published on non-freight trade travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland after the transition period.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Government has published a broad range of guidance for businesses moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland from 1 January 2021. This includes arrangements for non-freight trade. This is available at:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/trading-and-moving-goods-in-and-out-of-northern-ireland-from-1-january-2021

■ UK Trade with EU: Procurement

Emily Thornberry: [132818]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the new procurement provisions in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement on the (a) level of market access for UK companies providing contracted services in the EU and (b) profitability of UK companies providing contracted services in the EU.

Penny Mordaunt:

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement provides UK companies supplying contracted services to public authorities in the EU with export opportunities. The Agreement will allow UK companies to compete fairly for these contracted services in the EU. Details of the Agreement are available on gov.uk.

■ Voting Rights: British Nationals Abroad

Sarah Olney: [<u>131376</u>]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending the length of time in which overseas electors can vote beyond 15 years.

Chloe Smith:

In line with the commitment in the 2019 Conservative manifesto, the Government will scrap the rule that prevents British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from participating in UK parliamentary elections. Many British citizens overseas retain deep ties to the United Kingdom and it is right that we respect this.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [133213]

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department plans to bring forward legislative proposals to grant British citizens living abroad lifelong entitlement to vote.

Chloe Smith:

The Government is committed to scrapping the arbitrary rule that prevents British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from participating in UK parliamentary elections.

The Government is considering the appropriate legislative vehicle to deliver votes for life, which is a manifesto commitment, and we will make an announcement on our intentions in due course.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Charitable Donations: Computer Software

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

128865

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment the Church of England has made of the potential merits of establishing an app to enable contactless donations to be given via a QR code in the context of the covid-19 outbreak.

Andrew Selous:

The Church of England's central purchasing facility 'Parish Buying' has been rolling out electronic and contactless giving across the parishes and cathedral since 2018. Parish Buying has negotiated a discounted rate for churches to take online donations given through GiveALittle. Nearly 2,000 churches have set up GiveALittle accounts so far.

The national Church is funding premium membership of this service for all parishes, enabling people to make gift aid declarations and to make regular monthly donations online. The GiveALittle system allows a church to publish a giving page or make a QR code available to enable people to give quickly and simply. Guidance for parishes is available here.

Training is available <u>online</u> for parishes on many giving issues, including online giving, and there is extensive guidance on both <u>Parish Buying</u> and <u>Parish Resources</u> websites. GiveALittle also has an app available for <u>contactless devices</u>, and this enables the public who may wish to donate to churches to continue to make donations. This year the Church will begin the rolling out of free contactless devices

to half Church of England parishes, and many have already installed them following the successful trials in 2018.

Church Commissioners: Land

Kerry McCarthy: [128638]

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2020 to Question 125956, whether the Commissioners in collaboration with the Land Registry has conducted a land survey of land assets held by the Church of England.

Kerry McCarthy: [128639]

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2020 to Question 125956, whether the Commissioners have made an assessment of the level of compliance with the Land Registration Act 2002 of their policy on digitally mapped Church land assets.

Andrew Selous:

As a responsible landowner, the Church Commissioners comply with the requirements of the Land Registration Act 2002, and the Church Commissioners are only responsible for the land which they hold, not all Church of England land.

The Church Commissioner's land has, to a large extent, been registered with the Land Registry, all such information is publicly available via the Land Registry. The 2002 Act does not provide for the Land Registry and the Church Commissioners to collaborate to undertake land surveys, nor does it require the Commissioners to have a policy on digital maps of their landholding.

Religious Buildings: Planning Permission

Valerie Vaz: [<u>128940</u>]

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps he is taking to support building development for historic places of worship.

Andrew Selous:

Advice and support for parishes and cathedrals is available via the Church of England's platform 'Church Care', this website acts as a portal for advice on management, maintenance, development and grants available to parishes and cathedrals.

During the pandemic period, £30m of grants that have been awarded to Church of England churches and cathedrals from a combination of the Government's Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) and the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Emergency Fund. The Church of England is grateful for this support and recognition by the Government of the key role these buildings play in their local communities.

The grants awarded by the Culture Recovery Fund were allocated to 227 churches and cathedrals with 43% of this money is going to the 30% most deprived parishes –

over £12.9m; 20% of the money going to the 10% most deprived parishes, totalling over £5.9m.

The Lichfield Diocese received of six grants totalling £342,825 from the Culture Recovery Fund and the National Lottery Heritage Emergency Fund, this included five awards to parish churches totalling £199,925 and a grant to Lichfield Cathedral of £142,900

A second Culture Recovery Fund has now launched, and churches with listed buildings are being encouraged to apply for support.

■ Religious Buildings: Poverty

Valerie Vaz: [128941]

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support available to places of worship in areas of high deprivation; and if he will make a statement.

Andrew Selous:

While the primary responsibility for decisions on resourcing mission and ministry rests with the dioceses, the Church Commissioners have provided an extra resource to dioceses (distributed by The Archbishops' Council) to support mission and ministry in deprived communities in the form of Lowest Income Communities Funding. Across England, £82.1m has been allocated by the Commissioners for this purpose in 2020-22. Recipient dioceses are required to report on their use of this funding to The Archbishops' Council each year. The Diocese of Lichfield, which covers Walsall South, will receive over £1.7m of this funding in 2021. In 2019, the diocese allocated some £200,000 of this to support ministry and mission in parishes in Walsall.

The dioceses can also apply for Strategic Development Funding (SDF) for significant projects which support their mission and financial strength, in line with their own strategies. The criteria for this funding seeks to focus on areas of deprivation, and on work with children and young people and within large urban areas. In 2019, £1.7million was awarded to Lichfield Diocese to fund a project to enhance mission and ministry in Telford, which includes some of the diocese's most deprived areas.

A further £35m Sustainability Funding has also been made available to help diocese whose income has been reduced by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This funding is focused on those dioceses with fewer historic assets and whose populations have lower average incomes. Grants worth £15m were made to 24 dioceses in 2020.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces: Mesothelioma

Stephen Morgan: [133144]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the University of Sheffield and Mesothelioma UK's report The Military Experiences of Mesothelioma Study; and if he will make a statement.

Johnny Mercer:

The health and safety of Ministry of Defence (MOD) personnel is of upmost importance and we are committed to providing a safe working environment including the continued replacement and elimination of asbestos items wherever practicable.

Following the findings of the Military Experience of Mesothelioma Study, we will continue our engagement with Mesothelioma UK and the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) to raise awareness of asbestos amongst the veteran community. When mesothelioma is diagnosed, we will support access to compensation through either the War Pensions Scheme or the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

Our Health Safety and Environmental Protection directorate, alongside the Defence People function will work with the OVA to explore the issues raised around perceived inequalities between veterans and civilians on compensation claims, and to continue to co-ordinate MOD's asbestos management approach.

Coronavirus: Vaccination

John Healey: [133664]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many combat medics are deployed across the UK as part of the rollout of the covid-19 vaccine.

James Heappey:

There are currently 14 Combat Medical Technicians deployed across Wales in support of the Vaccine Programme. A further 63 Combat Medical Technicians are being held at readiness, as part of the Vaccine Quick Reaction Force for NHS England.

John Healey: [133665]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, in what locations combat medics have been deployed in the UK as part of the rollout of the vaccine against covid-19.

James Heappey:

There are currently Combat Medical Technicians deployed across Wales in support of the Vaccine Programme, with further Combat Medical Technicians being held at readiness as part of the Vaccine Quick Reaction Force for NHS England. We stand ready to support the vaccine roll out in Scotland and Northern Ireland should help be requested.

■ Iraq: Detainees

Andy Slaughter: [132797]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether (a) the five techniques and (b) harshing were employed during interrogations in Iraq between 2003 and 2009.

Andy Slaughter: [132798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the December 2020 International Criminal Court report entitled Situation in Iraq/UK, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the reported flawed guidance in interrogation procedures used in Iraq between 2003 and 2009.

Andy Slaughter: [132799]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the December 2020 International Criminal Court report entitled Situation in Iraq/UK, whether he plans to compensate in accordance with international law victims of torture perpetrated by British forces during detention and interrogation in Iraq between 2003 and 2009.

James Heappey:

The International Criminal Court (ICC)'s report entitled "Situation in Iraq/UK", published on 9 December 2020, brings to an end its long running examination into allegations of war crimes by UK personnel in Iraq, with the finding that there is no basis on which to proceed to a full investigation.

The UK Government maintains a clear policy framework governing detention, interrogation and the passing and receipt of intelligence relating to detainees. It does not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone, and in no circumstance will UK personnel ever be authorised to take action amounting to, unlawful killing, the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment ("CIDT"), or extraordinary rendition.

Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 1-10, Captured Persons, is the capstone doctrine publication for all Captured Persons activities. It provides detailed direction and guidance to UK Armed Forces involved in planning, training for or conducting captured persons activities. Importantly, it also reflects the UK Government's policy and guidance resulting from recent operations.

Complimenting JDP 1-10 are The Principles Relating to the Detention and Interviewing of Detainees Overseas and the Passing and Receipt of Intelligence Relating to Detainees. These follow a thorough review of existing guidance to be as clear as possible about the standards under which the intelligence agencies and our Armed Forces operate.

The use of approved verbal and non-physical techniques remains vital if we are to retain the ability to secure swiftly in appropriate circumstances intelligence that can save lives. These techniques are non-threatening and do not cause physical harm.

However, the prohibition on the 'five techniques', introduced in 1972, remains in force, as set out in JDP 1-10. The prohibited techniques were redefined following the 2010 Baha Mousa public inquiry as: Stress positions; Hooding; Subjection to noise;

Deprivation of sleep and rest; and, Deprivation of food and water. These techniques must never be used for any purpose.

The UK takes all alleged incidents of this kind very seriously, and allegations against UK personnel are investigated. Regrettably, as previously acknowledged, for example in the Baha Mousa Inquiry published in 2011, unauthorised use of the 'five techniques' were used by elements of UK forces in Iraq.

With regard to compensation, as a matter of policy, when claims are received, they are investigated and considered on the basis of whether the MOD has a legal liability; and where there is such a liability, compensation is paid.

■ Iraq: Rendition

Andy Slaughter: [132800]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of whether the Government was involved in acts of rendition in Iraq from 2003 to 2009.

James Heappey:

The UK Government does not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone unlawful killing, the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment ("CIDT"), or extraordinary rendition. In no circumstance will UK personnel be authorised to take action amounting to torture, unlawful killing, extraordinary rendition, or CIDT. UK military action is conducted in line with the UK's Human Rights obligations and International Humanitarian Law.

The UK Government supports the rule of law, and opposes any form of unlawful deprivation of liberty that places a detained person outside the protection of the law, including so-called extraordinary rendition. Any request for the transit of foreign flights through the UK or overseas territories is considered on a case-by-case basis and are granted only when the purpose of the transit complies with international law.

There were two previously declared incidents relating to the US in 2002, where British Territory had been used for this purpose. The transition of two detainees through Diego Garcia was reported to Parliament by the then Foreign Secretary in February 2008. Since those events in 2002 the UK are not aware of any other instances of other countries holding or moving any detainees through the territorial land, air or seas of the UK or our overseas territories.

Military aid

John Healey: [133668]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to deposit in the Library the next update on Military Aid to Civilian Authority (MACA) requests.

James Heappey:

The latest update will be sent to Deposited Papers today, Monday 11 January, and they are updated every Monday. Although not visible straight away online, the deposits are available to MPs on request straight away.

■ Military Aid: Coronavirus

John Healey: [<u>132762</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many armed forces personnel are currently deployed to assist in the roll-out of covid-19 vaccines.

James Heappey:

The Ministry of Defence currently has circa 144 Armed Forces personnel providing direct assistance to the COVID-19 vaccine roll out, with a further 133 personnel remaining at readiness to support if required.

John Healey: [<u>132763</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, which armed forces regiments are being deployed to conduct mass covid-19 testing in schools.

James Heappey:

Up to 1,500 Defence personnel from all three Services are being used to form local response teams ready to support and advise schools in England. This support will be drawn from the package of 14,000 personnel held at readiness to support COVID-19 related tasks.

John Healey: [132764]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many schools will receive assistance from the armed forces in conducting mass covid-19 testing.

James Heappey:

Defence local response teams are ready to support and advise all secondary schools and colleges in England, to provide advice both virtually and in person. It will cover the establishment of testing sites, understanding of the testing process and assisting in the set-up of their testing facilities.

John Healey: [<u>132765</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many armed forces personnel are currently assisting local hospitals in their response to the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heappey:

There are currently 50 Armed Forces personnel deployed to three hospitals to provide direct support to their COVID-19 response. In addition to this there are a further circa 1,622 personnel from the Joint Hospital Group who are routinely embedded within NHS Trusts who may be delivering against COVID-19 related activities.

John Healey: [<u>132766</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many hospitals are currently being assisted by the armed forces in their response to the covid-19 outbreak.

James Heappey:

50 Armed Forces Personnel are currently providing specific assistance related to the COVID-19 pandemic to three NHS Hospitals. A further circa 1,622 personnel from the

Joint Hospital Group who are routinely embedded within 56 NHS Trusts may be delivering against COVID-19 related activities.

John Healey: [133666]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his comment of 31 December 2020 on Times Radio that 250 teams of medically trained personnel are on standby to assist in the rollout of the covid-19 vaccine, how many personnel make up each of those teams; and what level of medical training do those teams possess.

James Heappey:

The initial quick response teams comprise one Doctor, two Registered Health Professionals and three Combat Medical Technicians. Subsequent teams are likely to be of similar skills and numbers but will be tailored to meet the needs of the setting within which vaccinations will be delivered.

■ Military Aircraft: China

Mr Kevan Jones: [130652]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of buying secondhand airframes from China.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) seeks to provide the best equipment and to deliver the required capability to our Armed Forces as efficiently and as effectively as possible, while also delivering value for money to the UK taxpayer. When appropriate, this may involve the use of second-hand airframes, particularly as a means of delivering an early entry into service of important capabilities. Decisions are based on a thorough evaluation of available options, together with rigorous scrutiny and approvals processes, which enable the MOD to take an appropriate risk-based approach.

The safety and security of our personnel are our highest priorities meaning that it must be demonstrated that second-hand airframes, regardless of origin, meet our requirements. This might involve the airframes being stripped down, refitted and subjected to stringent security checks as required.

Military Bases: Northern Ireland

Colum Eastwood: [134261]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the estimated value is of each his Department's sites in Northern Ireland.

Jeremy Quin:

The market value of a Ministry of Defence site is normally only assessed when a site is due for disposal. Valuations are not released as to do so could prejudice commercial interests.

■ Ministry of Defence: Consultants

Stephen Morgan: [131445]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the statistical report, MOD departmental resources 2020, published on 10 December 2020, how much was spent on consultancy which was allocated under the unknown category.

Jeremy Quin:

At the time of publication, the 'unknown' elements of consultancy spend were reported as an overarching consultancy category on the departmental returns.

Following publication it has been determined that the sub-categories to which the majority of the unknown spend refer are: IT/IS, Programme and Project Management and Organisational and Change management.

Stephen Morgan: [131446]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to section 13 on MOD expenditure on consultancy in his Department's statistical report, MOD departmental resources 2020, published on 10 December 2020, if he will publish the (a) names of consultants and (b) consultancies contacted under the heading organisation and change management; and what services were procured under that heading.

Jeremy Quin:

The majority of the organisational and change consultancy was with KPMG LLP, and they were providing consultancy on the Ministry of Defence transformation programme.

Stephen Morgan: [131447]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to section 13 on MOD expenditure on consultancy in his Department's statistical report, MOD departmental resources 2020, published on 10 December 2020, if he will publish the (a) names of consultants and (b) consultancies contacted under the technical category; and what services were procured under that heading.

Jeremy Quin:

The top five consultancies were: Babcock Aerospace, Frazer-Nash Consultancy, QinetiQ, Jacobs U.K and Ernst & Young LLP, this was for consulting on a variety of technical subjects predominantly in IT, engineering and safety related topics.

■ NATO: Antisatellite Weapons

Olivia Blake: [131518]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he is holding with his NATO counterparts on proposals for the collective development of space-based weaponry for deployment by NATO nations other than the US.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence does not comment on specific space capability developments of our Allies. In 2019, NATO Leaders declared space an operational

domain, recognising its importance in keeping Allies safe and tackling security challenges, while upholding international law. NATO is in the process of refining their policy to implement space as an operational domain and the UK is actively engaged in the development of NATO Space policy alongside Allies. NATO's role in space will be to act as a forum to share information, increase interoperability and coordinate action. It is not seeking to develop independent space capabilities and will continue to rely on Allies to provide national products and services to support the Alliance's space requirements. NATO has no intention to put weapons into space.

Navy: Fisheries

Stephanie Peacock:

[130799]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential effect on UK defence capacity of directing increased Royal Navy resources towards potentially illegal fishing activity.

James Heappey:

Defence has made contingency plans to increase support to DEFRA to cover any potential illegal fishing activity if requested. We balance any request for assistance against critical outputs and keep our support under constant review. In the short term, we have units at increased readiness to support DEFRA and they will continue with planned activity until called forward.

Navy: Reserve Forces

Mr Richard Bacon:

[132793]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effect on (a) morale and (b) retention of the suspension of training by the Maritime reserves for four months.

James Heappey:

The Royal Navy has given full consideration to the effect on morale of the recent decision to temporarily pause some Maritime Reserves activity until the beginning of the next financial year.

This temporary cessation of some activity may result in disappointment for individual Reservists during the short period that it remains in force, but work undertaken by those on Full Time Reserve Service or Additional Duties Commitments will continue as normal; as will some Transformation projects that are deemed critical to meeting future Royal Navy and Defence outputs. This short term measure does not reflect our longer-term plans which continue to place an emphasis upon the Maritime Reserve.

■ Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations

Mr Richard Bacon:

[132791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, on what date his Department received the 2019 report of the Reserve Forces Cadets Association's External Scrutiny Team.

Mr Richard Bacon: [132792]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when his Department plans to publish the 2019 report of the Reserve Forces Cadets Association's External Scrutiny Team.

James Heappey:

The 2019 External Scrutiny Team (EST) Report was received on 1 July 2019 and was placed in the Library of the House on 3 September 2019.

The Ministry of Defence intends to publish the EST's 2020 report within this quarter.

Sri Lanka: Military Aid

John Healey: **133669**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2020 to Written Question 11516 on Sri Lanka: Military Aid, what support his Department has provided to Sri Lanka to combat (a) terrorism and (b) drug trafficking since April 2019.

John Healey: [133670]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2020 to Written Question 11516 on Sri Lanka: Military Aid, whether the fact that Sri Lanka had recently lifted the moratorium on executions for drug offenders in March 2019, was specifically considered in any OSJA assessments completed in respect of the assistance.

John Healey: [<u>133671</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2020 to Written Question 11516 on Sri Lanka: Military Aid, what mitigating steps were (a) included in any OSJA assessments; and(b) taken to ensure this UK assistance did not enable death sentences to be handed down for drug offences in Sri Lanka.

James Heappey:

Since April 2019, we have delivered some counter-terrorism assistance to the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. This limited assistance has focused on Counter Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) training, improving Sri Lanka's capacity to tackle the current and potential future threat from violent extremism. We have not provided any further support to the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in combating drug trafficking.

We carefully consider all our engagement with the Sri Lankan Armed Forces which aims to support the development of a modern, professional and human rights compliant military. Our supporting Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) Assessment is regularly updated to ensure our assistance and engagement is in line with our values and is consistent with our domestic and international human rights obligations. Successive OSJAs have considered the moratorium on executions for drug offenders. Following an injunction by the Sri Lankan Supreme Court in July 2019 the moratorium has not been lifted and remains official Sri Lankan government policy.

Sweden: Joint Exercises

Jim Shannon: [<u>132914</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans his Department has to conduct military exercises with the Swedish Government.

James Heappey:

As a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner and fellow member of both the Northern Group and the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), Sweden is a valued defence partner with whom we share a mutual interest in upholding the security of the Euro-Atlantic Area. Our bilateral defence relationship is strong and growing, underpinned by a Statement of Intent on enhancing our defence co-operation signed in September 2014. As part of this cooperation, UK and Swedish forces regularly train together, including in NATO, JEF and national exercises.

■ Trident Submarines: Finance

Mr Kevan Jones: [130653]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what contingency funding his Department allocated to the Dreadnought programme to replace the Vanguard-based nuclear deterrent in 2016; and how much of that contingency funding has been expended up to the financial year 2020-21.

Jeremy Quin:

In the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the Dreadnought Class submarine build programme was estimated to be likely to cost a total of £31 billion with an additional £10 billion contingency held by Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT). The programme remains on track to deliver on time and within this budget.

Up to March 2020, the Ministry of Defence has drawn down £705 million from the HMT-held Dreadnought contingency. This has allowed us to take opportunities to drive out cost and risk later in the programme. Access in the current Financial Year (2020/21) has yet to be concluded.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ 5G

Chi Onwurah: [132903]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to his Department's guidance, 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy, updated on 7 December 2002, whether the National Telecoms Lab created as part of the 5G diversification strategy will support the growth and development of new businesses and technologies in the 5G supply chain as part of the testing of security, resilience and performance of networks and interoperable deployment solutions.

Matt Warman:

The UK Telecoms Lab (UKTL) will sit at the centre of telecoms R&D across the UK, reducing barriers to entry for emerging suppliers by facilitating security, performance and interoperability testing. UKTL will be available for SMEs and academics as well as major industry players. Access to a best-in-class facility and ecosystem will play a key role in supporting the growth and development of new businesses and technologies throughout the 5G supply chain.

Chi Onwurah: [132904]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether (a) his Department, (b) Ofcom and/or (c) private sector operators will provide the human resource to increasing UK presence and influence at standard setting bodies as set out in the 5G supply chain diversification strategy.

Chi Onwurah: [132908]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to paragraph 2.6 of the 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy, updated on 7 December 2020, which (a) countries and (b) organisations his Department seeks to work with to influence global standards development.

Matt Warman:

Technical standards are a crucial part of our work to diversify the supply chain. As the vast majority of the global standards-setting ecosystem is industry-led, the priority for the Government in this area is assessing and implementing how we can best support UK industry in this process.

As a part of this process, the Government will be closely coordinating with industry, Ofcom and a wide range of international partners as we build on the strategy and increase UK influence and presence at the major standards development organisations, such as ETSI and 3GPP. This will include continued close working with like minded partners to forge a consensus on these issues.

Chi Onwurah: [132905]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether the 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy, updated on 7 December 2020 seeks to increase the number of (a) existing and (b) new full-service suppliers to mobile operators; and which existing suppliers will be contacted.

Chi Onwurah: [132907]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether the 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy anticipates that OPenRAN will overcome the dominance of full service suppliers within the 5G supply chain.

Matt Warman:

The Government is committed to increasing choice, competition and resilience in the telecoms supply market. Central to this is the promotion of interoperable solutions - through open-interface deployment methods such as OpenRAN . The Government's

long-term vision is to make open interfaces the standard so that network operators have the flexibility to use multiple suppliers throughout their network, rather than being over-reliant on one or two. We want to see existing scale suppliers enter the market as well as the emergence of new suppliers. We are talking to a range of suppliers and are open to all new potential entrants that support our long-term vision of an open market.

Chi Onwurah: [132906]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how the 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy, updated on 7 December 2020 will help ensure that the UK is well placed to play a leading role in developing and establishing novel and new solutions, such as within systems integration and to build and lead an international coalition to tackle some of the key barriers to diversification.

Matt Warman:

We recognise that whilst diversification is a significant challenge it also represents an even greater opportunity that we are determined to seize - for growth, productivity and in order to secure our position as a global leader in science and technology.

We will explore opportunities to establish UK capability and skills. This will include supporting UK suppliers, investing in R&D initiatives across the supply chain, and championing the exciting research underway across UK universities and regional advanced technology hubs. This work will link closely with the Government's broader growth and productivity agenda and building on DCMS' £200m 5G Testbeds and Trials Programme.

Chi Onwurah: [132910]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy, updated on 7 December 2020 and its focus on the RAN macro cell market. what assessment he has made of the importance of small cells for 5G.

Matt Warman:

In the longer term small cells will be a key part of 5G roll out, supporting the 'densification' of networks and enabling the high capacity, high reliability and low latency properties of 5G, primarily in urban areas. However, small cells will not replace the need for macro cells in the network, and will instead complement the higher capacity, mobility and power requirements for macro cells.

Alcoholic Drinks: Children

Kenny MacAskill: [130227]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his Answer to the Oral Question asked by the hon Member for East Lothian on 10 December, Official Report, col 980, what assessment the Government made of the level of exposure of people under the age of 18 to alcohol marketing (a) on social media and (b) online more widely.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government is committed to working with industry to address concerns over any irresponsible promotions, advertising and marketing relating to alcohol, particularly to ensure that children and young people are suitably protected.

Material in the Committee of Advertising Practice and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice Codes relating to the advertising and marketing of alcohol products is exceptionally robust, recognising the social imperative of ensuring that alcohol advertising is responsible and in particular that children and young people are suitably protected.

The government is committed to making the UK a safe place to be online. The Online Advertising Programme was established in order to foster fair, transparent and ethical online advertising that works for citizens, businesses and society as a whole.

The Programme is currently reviewing evidence from the relevant literature, stakeholder engagement and responses to its recent Call for Evidence. This Call for Evidence is focussed on ensuring standards about the placement and content of advertising can be effectively applied and enforced online so that consumers have limited exposure to harmful or misleading advertising.

Bookmakers: Additional Restrictions Grant

Mark Eastwood: [133249]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether on-course bookmakers are eligible for Additional Restrictions Grant funding; and whether guidance on eligibility requirements has been provided to local authorities.

Mark Eastwood: [133250]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what financial support is available to (a) on-course bookmakers and (b) other businesses that are unable to work as a result of restrictions on sporting events but have not been ordered to close during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

The Chancellor announced on 5 January another £4.5 billion in new lockdown grants to support businesses and protect jobs. This includes one-off top up grants to be delivered by local authorities for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, worth up to £9,000 per property, to help them through to the spring. A £594 million discretionary fund has also been made available to support other impacted businesses. Local authorities will receive the funding for these one-off grants next week, and we encourage them to make payments to businesses as soon as possible.

All local authorities in England will receive a top-up worth a total of £500m to their allocation from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), which has already provided local authorities with £1.1 billion. This funding will ensure that local authorities can make discretionary grants to businesses which are not eligible for the LRSG (Closed)

but which are nonetheless experiencing a severe impact on their business due to the national lockdown.

Eligibility for the one-off grants, as well as the existing LRSG (Closed) grants, is automatic. Businesses should contact their local authorities for more information on how to receive these grants, and in some cases they will need to provide additional information to their LAs.

Local authorities will run application schemes for the ARG, including for the £500m top-up, and will have significant discretion when it comes to deciding which businesses receive payments. Businesses should contact their local authorities for more information.

ARG guidance for LAs was first published on 3rd November 2019 and is updated regularly: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-restrictions-support-grants-lrsg-and-additional-restrictions-grant-arg-guidance-for-local-authorities

Broadband

Chi Onwurah: [128956]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2020 to Question 126027 on Broadband, what criteria he plans to use to determine whether to bring forward additional spending on accelerating the UKs fibre rollout.

Matt Warman:

Homes and businesses that do not yet have access to superfast broadband will be prioritised for gigabit-capable delivery with connections capable of offering more than 1,000 megabits per second, or one gigabit per second.

There is a consultation underway looking at large regions of England that are most likely to attract commercial investment but requires subsidy to reach the hardest 40,000 to 80,000 premises in each area. In addition, there will be smaller contracts to connect around 1,000 to 8,000 premises, to stimulate competition across a wider range of small, medium-sized and rural specialist telecoms providers and help them to scale up. DCMS is also exploring how to make available a small number of contracts covering very large areas that are the least commercially attractive to build in. This would help make sure that no areas are left behind - even those where there is a limited prospect of competition.

As well as these supply-side market interventions, the government is also seeking industry views on how to extend its successful Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme from April 2021. The scheme allows people in rural areas to request a gigabit connection with the government subsidising the installation costs. This would help broadband suppliers respond to increasing consumer demand for gigabit broadband while the new procurements get up and running. The government will also continue its programme to connect public and community buildings - such as council houses, schools, libraries and GP surgeries - so they act as full-fibre 'hubs' from which industry can build their networks and connect surrounding homes and businesses.

These new procurements for gigabit infrastructure are set to begin in Spring 2021. The government will now seek industry and local authority views on the strategy to define small and large procurement boundaries, as well as ensuring that priority areas are served.

The recent Spending Review set out the timeline for how the first tranche of £1.2bn of funding will be made available to industry over 4 years. The commitment to spend £5 billion stands, and the government will accelerate this investment if industry can demonstrate it has the capacity to deliver further and faster.

In parallel to these interventions the Superfast programme has put in place a number of new contracts during 2020 for delivery between now and 2024. This obviously includes R100 in Scotland and Stratum in Northern Ireland. Less well publicised are a number of English and Welsh procurements such as Devon, Somerset, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, North Yorkshire, Cheshire and Lincolnshire. These new contracts are almost entirely for delivery of gigabit capable fibre. In total these represent c.500k premises with incremental delivery for the Superfast programme in lieu of the new Supply Side procurements under the UK Gigabit Programme.

Colleen Fletcher: [130750]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what estimate he has made of the average amount paid annually by households in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England for broadband connectivity for each year since 2010.

Matt Warman:

Ofcom's <u>2020 Communications Market Report</u> sets out UK average monthly spend on fixed voice and data services. These costs include VAT and are adjusted for inflation at 2019 prices.

YEAR	AVERAGE FIXED VOICE AND DATA COST (£)
2010	38.38
2011	37.19
2012	37.36
2013	37.38
2014	38.23
2015	39.84
2016	42.01

2017	42.59
2018	39.59
2019	37.25

Ofcom data does not provide regional breakdowns.

Broadband: Disadvantaged

Kate Osborne: [134200]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department plans to take to close to the digital poverty gap in (a) Jarrow constituency, (b) the North East and (c) the UK.

Caroline Dinenage:

In response to Covid-19, the Government and Ofcom agreed a set of commitments with the UK's major broadband and mobile operators to support vulnerable consumers during the pandemic. In order to ensure that those in financial difficulty have access to the connectivity they need, there are currently social tariffs in place that provide low cost landline and broadband services for those on means-tested benefits, including BT Basic and Virgin's new service, Essential. Vodafone has also launched a mobile service providing unlimited data at low-cost to those receiving certain means-tested benefits.

In the slightly longer term, Ofcom is reviewing affordability issues in the communications market more generally, and intends to publish recommendations in the first half of this year. This will improve the evidence base of where households face difficulty, and inform any future Government interventions.

Public libraries are also a vital component in tackling the digital poverty gap. During 2019/20, South Tyneside's eight static libraries had 96 electronic workstations available with internet access, providing 298,632 hours of available use of the People's Network and with 74,449 hours recorded use of People's Network. In addition, the libraries also recorded 129,983 hours of use of Public Access Wi-Fi. Of the eight libraries in South Tyneside, two are open during the current national lockdown, one of which is Jarrow Focus that is offering access to public computers for essential use on a strict appointment basis.

The current lockdown requires libraries to close, other than to provide specific services, such as order and collect or providing access to public PCs for essential services. In addition, home library services and school library services can still operate on a no-or low-contact basis. While the regulations enable library services to continue to provide certain services, it is up to local Councils to determine after appropriate risk assessments around safety of both users and people working in libraries whether these services can and will be provided.

Broadband: Greater London

Apsana Begum: [131504]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what estimate he has made of the number of properties in (a) Poplar and Limehouse constituency and (b) Tower Hamlets that have broadband speeds of less than 10Mbps.

Matt Warman:

According to Ofcom's Connected Nations 2020 report, with data collected in September 2020,

- 1. Poplar and Limehouse constituency contains 459 premises which are unable to receive 10Mbps via a fixed line connection.
- 2. Tower Hamlets contains 723 premises which are unable to receive 10Mbps via a fixed line connection.

The average fixed line download speed is:

- 1. 59.3Mbps in Poplar and Limehouse and;
- 2. 53.7Mbps in Tower Hamlets.

This only accounts for the speeds premises receive via a fixed line broadband connection and therefore does not take into account those premises which are able to access a faster connection via a 4G or 5G mobile data service.

Most of these premises are likely to be able to access Superfast speeds via 4G (and some via 5G) with a mobile broadband data service.

According to Ofcom's Connected Nations 2020 report with data collected in September 2020, accounting for mobile broadband data services,

- Poplar and Limehouse constituency contains 134 premises which are unable to receive a connection that meets the requirements of the broadband Universal Service Obligation.
- 2. Tower Hamlets contains 335 premises which are unable to receive a connection that meets the requirements of the broadband Universal Service Obligation.

Charities

Daniel Zeichner: [132940]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with the CEO of the Charity Commission on the use of charity reserves since in each year since 2017.

Daniel Zeichner: [132941]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the advice of the CEO of the Charity Commission given between 2017 and 2019 on the use of charity reserves on the ability of charities to deliver their charitable (a) objectives, (b) covid-19 services and (c) other services.

Daniel Zeichner: [132942]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect on jobs in the charity sector of the advice of the CEO of the Charity Commission given between 2017 and 2019 on the use of charity reserves.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Secretary of State and Minister for Civil Society meet the Charity Commission on a regular basis to discuss a range of matters that are relevant to the charity sector. These have included discussions on the charity sector's financial resilience in relation to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Charity reserves make an important contribution to charities' financial resilience and their ability to respond to financial shocks. All registered charities in England and Wales must explain their policy on reserves in their trustees' annual report, stating the level of reserves held and why they are held. We welcome the Charity Commission's guidance on charity reserves, which was originally published in 2016 and subsequently refreshed in 2018. The guidance sets out clearly what reserves are, how to develop a reserves policy, the legal requirements for publishing the reserves policy and reporting on it, and what trustees should do to keep proper oversight of their charity's reserves. It continued to make clear that all charities need a policy that establishes a level of reserves that is right for the charity and clearly explains to its stakeholders why holding these reserves is necessary.

Building on this guidance, the Charity Commission provided clear advice to charities on financial management in 2020, including on the appropriate use of reserves in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has made no assessment of the specific impact of this advice.

Coronavirus: Exercise

Olivia Blake: [130262]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what public health advice and information led to the decision to designate Body Control Pilates when run by qualified instructors as exercise classes; and what assessment he has made of the effect on public safety of Body Control Pilates classes in tier 3 areas.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government does not designate individual activities in this way.

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are a vital weapon against coronavirus.

The Prime Minister announced a national lockdown on Monday 4 January as a response to the rising levels of coronavirus across the country. you can continue to exercise alone, with one other person or with your household or support bubble. This should be limited to once per day, and you should not travel outside your local area. You should maintain social distancing. Indoor and outdoor sports facilities,

including gyms and exercise class studios, must close. These restrictions are expected to last until the end of March if the situation in hospitals improves.

Culture: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes: [130155]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect of recently imposed Tier 3 covid-19 restrictions in London on (a) theatres, (b) music venues and (c) galleries and museums in London; and what steps he is taking to support those venues.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government fully recognises the disruptive impact that Coronavirus and restrictions has on the arts, theatre, live music and museums and galleries sectors and the devastating impact that closing events and venues has. The Government continues to work with all its sectors to assess the impact of the tiers and in particular Tier 3 and to develop proposals for how venues can reopen when it is safe to do so.

That is why we have already extended the Job Retention Scheme until March, alongside the unprecedented £1.57bn Culture Recovery package which has already benefited thousands of organisations and the individuals supported by them.

We recognise the impact that closures across the country will have on our vital cultural sector and remain committed to supporting it as it suffers the impact of this virus. The remaining £400m of Culture Recovery Fund grants and loans announced on Friday 11th December will support significant cultural organisations who now face financial distress as a result of closure, as well as helping them transition back to fuller opening in the spring.

The £1bn already committed has supported over 3000 organisations to weather this storm, supporting more than 75,000 jobs, with many more freelancers and jobs in vital supply chain industries also benefitting. Across the arts and heritage recovery grants, repayable finance, and capital awards so far, support for London was approximately £300m.

Tulip Siddiq: [131354]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to help arts and culture venues ensure their premises are covid-19 secure; and whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing grant funding to those sectors.

Caroline Dinenage:

DCMS has produced and regularly updates the Performing Arts Guidance to help performing arts organisations, venue operators and participants understand how to make their workplace COVID-Secure so that they can work and take part in the performing arts safely when and where permitted. The guidance applies to both professional and non-professional activity. This includes general guidance for rehearsals, training and pre-production. It also includes advice for managing

audience and performances including staging and capacity, social distancing and the Rule of 6, ticketing and payments, cloakrooms, managing people flow, staging arrival times and seating arrangements, ventilation, wearing of face masks and carrying out risk assessments.

DCMS has also convened a Venues Steering Group which includes representatives from leading sector organisations as well as Public Health England and other experts to develop an action plan for maximizing activity under Stage 4 and for how we safely proceed to stage 5 with fuller audiences.

The Government's unprecedented £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund has now surpassed the £1 billion milestone. Over £500million in recovery grants have been made to almost 3000 arts and heritage organisations in England helping to support 75,000 jobs and over £100million in capital grants. Organisations receiving grants from the CRF include Shakespeare's Globe, Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, The Old Vic, Manchester Royal Exchange and Opera North.

Additionally, a second round of funding was announced on 11 December, which utilises the remaining Culture Recovery Fund funding. There will be over £300m available in grants delivered by DCMS' delivery partners, and £100m of repayable finance delivered by Arts Council England specifically.

Data Protection

Chi Onwurah: [130731]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 December 2020 to Question 126871, what sanctions are available to companies who share anonymised data which is then re-identified by a third party.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Section 171 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) criminalises the re-identification of personal data that has been de-identified. It is unlawful to knowingly or recklessly re-identify personal data without the consent of the controller responsible for de-identifying it, unless a relevant defence applies. It is also an offence to process personal data that has been re-identified in this manner.

The penalties for offences under section 171 of the DPA are set out in section 196 of the DPA. A person who is convicted of an offence under section 171 of the DPA is liable to an unlimited fine in the courts. Under section 199 of the DPA, the offence is recordable which means that the company or individual committing the offence will have a criminal record on conviction.

As with other offences under the DPA, where an offence under section 171 has been committed by a company, that company's directors, managers and others acting in such a capacity can be convicted where the relevant individual or individuals consented, connived or neglected in taking their responsibilities seriously and contributed as a result to the offence being committed.

Stephen Timms: [132753]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the prospects of securing a data adequacy agreement with the EU within the next six months.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The EU's adequacy assessments, underway since March 2020, ascertain whether UK data protection standards are 'essentially equivalent' to the EU's. Given we have an existing data protection framework that is equivalent to the EU's, we see no reason why the UK should not be awarded adequacy and we expect the process to be concluded promptly.

The EU left insufficient time to adopt data adequacy decisions before the end of the transition period. We have therefore agreed with the EU a time-limited 'bridging mechanism' which will allow personal data to continue to flow as it did previously whilst EU adequacy decisions for the UK are adopted. In practice, we do not expect the bridging mechanism to be in place for more than 4 months, which is when the bridge is envisioned to expire, but there is scope to extend it to 6 months if required. As stated above, given the UK has an existing data protection framework that is equivalent to the EU's, we see no reason why the UK should not be awarded adequacy in this timeframe.

■ Digital Technology: Disadvantaged

Colleen Fletcher: [130098]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to tackle digital exclusion in Coventry North East constituency.

Caroline Dinenage:

In order to address regional digital skills gaps, my department is supporting a Local Digital Skills Partnerships in the West Midlands Combined Authority areas, which brings together cross-sector regional and national partners to work collaboratively to upskill the current workforce, advance digital inclusion, and build thriving regional economies.

Public libraries are also a vital component in tackling digital exclusion. A priority of Coventry Libraries is to create improved access to digital services and increase the digital literacy skills of local residents. During 2019 to 2020 Coventry Libraries in the North East of the City have provided over 70,000 hours and over 100,000 sessions of access to public computers and Wi-Fi services. While reduced service has been provided during 2020, due to COVID 19, they are continuing with plans to increase access to public PCs, install new computers at both Bell Green and Foleshill Libraries and reintroduce computer help sessions, job clubs and benefits, debt and housing advice sessions.

The Government has also introduced new essential digital skills qualifications (EDSQs) based on <u>new national standards for essential digital skills</u>. Adults with no or low digital skills can study essential digital skills qualifications for free.

Sarah Owen: [<u>131487</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to tackle the disproportionate effect of digital poverty on BAME communities in Luton.

Caroline Dinenage:

In response to Covid-19, the Government and Ofcom agreed a set of commitments with the UK's major broadband and mobile operators to support vulnerable consumers during the pandemic, including supporting those in debt, and providing new and generous landline and mobile offers, such as free or low cost mobile data boosts.

Furthemore, there are currently social tariffs in place that provide low cost landline and broadband services for those on means-tested state benefits, including BT Basic and KCOM's flex packages. In addition, in November 2020, Virgin Media launched a new low-cost broadband service for its customers in receipt of Universal Credit.

Public libraries are also a vital component in tackling digital exclusion. During 2019/20, Luton's six static libraries had 96 electronic workstations available with internet access, providing 246,610 hours of available use of the People's Network and with 67,235 hours recorded use of People's Network.

As part of over £300 million invested to support access to remote education and online social care, over one million laptops and tablets have been secured for disadvantaged children and young people. This figure includes 500,000 that have already been delivered since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Government has also introduced new essential digital skills qualifications (EDSQs) based on <u>new national standards for essential digital skills</u>. Adults with no or low digital skills can study essential digital skills qualifications for free.

Events Industry: Coronavirus

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [133218]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sports, what steps his Department is taking to support businesses in the events industry who have had to cancel events at short notice in response to new covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Nigel Huddleston:

We are aware that the events industry has been severely impacted by Government measures to control the spread of Covid-19. Events businesses and individuals can seek support in the form of various government-backed loans, business grants and the extended furlough and self-employed support schemes.

In light of the national restrictions announced on 4 January, the Chancellor has announced one-off top up grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses worth up to £9,000 per property to help businesses through to the Spring. He also announced that a £594 million discretionary fund will be made available to support

other impacted businesses. This comes on top of the existing Additional Restrictions Grant discretionary funding and the Local Restrictions Support Grants.

The Culture Recovery Fund has already supported a wide range of cultural organisations, including venues, festivals and theatres. The £1 billion already committed has supported 3000 organisations and more than 75,000 jobs. £300 million in grants and £100 million in loans is available to support cultural organisations including businesses in the events industry.

We continue to engage with stakeholders, including through the Tourism Industry Council and the Events Industry Senior Leaders Advisory Panel, to monitor the situation facing the sector.

Nadia Whittome: [133319]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing support to the events sector to encourage event attendance when it is safe to do so.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government acknowledges the significance of the events sector to the UK economy and that it has been significantly affected by the impacts of Covid-19.

We recognise the importance of giving the events sector clarity for when events will be permitted to resume with fuller audiences. However we have always been clear that the activity permitted would be in line with the latest public health context.

No assessment is currently available regarding the potential merits of providing support to the sector to encourage event attendance at this time.

We are committed to continue working with the live events sector to understand the challenges they face and to work towards reopening events with fuller audiences. Furthermore, the business events pilots we carried out in September will help to ensure that the correct advice and guidance is put in place to help larger events reopen when it is safe to do so.

Exercise: Coronavirus

Justin Madders: [131316]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment has been made of the risks of covid-19 transmission during group exercise classes where covid-secure measures are in place.

Nigel Huddleston:

As the Prime Minister said on 23 November, the national restrictions ended on Wednesday 2 December, and gyms and sport facilities will reopen across all tiers. The decision to allocate tiers is based on a range of factors and will be reviewed every 14 days.

The Prime Minister further updated the public on the Government's COVID response on Saturday and announced tier 4 in which indoor gyms and sports facilities will need to close. In Tiers 3 and 4 we have taken further measures to limit social interactions and therefore opportunities for the virus to spread. Unfortunately in these areas group activity and exercise classes indoors are also advised against.

■ Facebook: Data Protection

Alex Davies-Jones: [130874]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the effect on individual's data privacy of Facebook moving UK users on to US privacy agreements in 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Mr John Whittingdale:

On 15th December, Facebook publicly announced that from next year Facebook Inc in the US rather than Facebook Ireland will be the service provider responsible for UK users' personal data.

At the end of the Transition Period, any online service provider dealing with UK users' personal data will still be subject to the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation. The legislation will, therefore, continue to apply to Facebook's treatment of personal data of UK users when those users are served from the US.

The UK is committed to high data protection standards and we are confident that the UK's data protection laws provide appropriate protection for UK users.

Festival UK 2022

Patrick Grady: [133007]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the progress of plans for Festival UK 2022.

Caroline Dinenage:

Plans for Festival UK 2022 are progressing well. The Festival will showcase the very best of UK creativity and innovation across science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), both at home and abroad.

30 selected consortia, comprising almost 500 organisations and individuals from across the UK, are currently participating in the £3m R&D phase, which is investing in the creation of ideas for projects to take place across the UK in 2022. The ten final commissions will be announced in 2021.

Of the 30 teams, two are from Scotland and other Scottish organisations and individuals are involved in the 22 UK wide teams.

Film: Internet

Rosie Cooper: [130005]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of streaming services' content labelling provisions; and

whether he has plans in place to ensure that platforms adopt ratings by the British Board of Film Classification.

Caroline Dinenage:

As the designated body for age classification of film content, the government has great trust in the British Board of Film Classification's best practice age ratings.

While adoption of the BBFC's age ratings by online platforms is currently voluntary, we welcome their usage by Video on Demand platforms. This includes Netflix, who on December 1st announced that they have become the first platform to achieve complete coverage of their content under the BBFC's ratings.

According to recent BBFC research, nearly nine in ten parents find BBFC age ratings on Netflix useful in helping them to choose content well for their family. To build on this success, we will continue to engage with industry to encourage other platforms to adopt the BBFC's ratings, and will keep the evidence for legislation in this area under review.

■ Football: Coronavirus

Justin Madders: [131310]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how his Department plans to assess the effectiveness of spectators returning to football stadiums in Tier 1 and Tier 2 areas; and when a review of spectator numbers will take place.

Nigel Huddleston:

The Government remains committed to working towards achieving football stadiums' maximum socially distanced capacity as soon as it is safe to do so.

From Wednesday 2 December, it has been possible for fans to be readmitted to sports grounds where local COVID alert levels allow. The Government continues to be in close contact with the Sports Technology Innovation Group, formed of sporting bodies and health experts, and the Sports Grounds Safety Authority to assess the latest thinking and high-tech solutions that could enable further spectators to return.

We will continue to work with both bodies, alongside the football authorities, to determine the next steps in viably increasing spectator capacities without compromising public safety.

Gambling

Lee Anderson: [133196]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will make an assessment of (a) recent trends in the level of participation in black market gambling in Sweden and (b) the potential implications for his policies of those recent trends.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government monitors trends and developments in gambling markets in other jurisdictions where they might be relevant for the regulation of gambling in Great Britain, and is aware of reports claiming an increase in gambling participation with

unlicensed operators in Sweden. Our Review of the Gambling Act 2005 was launched last month and issues around black market gambling are included in its wide scope. The Review will be evidence led, and we have called for evidence on the extent of the black market and its accessibility to consumers, as well as whether the Gambling Commission has the powers and resources it needs to continue to tackle the black market effectively. We welcome evidence from other jurisdictions.

The Call for Evidence will be open until 31 March 2021, and further details, including how to make a contribution, can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-gambling-act-2005-terms-of-reference-and-call-for-evidence/review-of-the-gambling-act-2005-terms-of-reference-and-call-for-evidence.

■ Gambling: Internet

Colleen Fletcher: [130748]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on trends in the level of participation in online gambling; and what recent steps his Department has taken to help reduce gambling related harm.

Nigel Huddleston:

Since March, the Gambling Commission has collected and published monthly data from operators alongside regular consumer survey data to understand the impact of covid restrictions on gambling behaviours. Data from online operators representing about 80% of the market showed a significant fall in overall online gambling participation during the early months of the pandemic, with 25% fewer active players across all types of online gambling combined in May 2020 than there had been in March 2020. Participation increased again as restrictions were eased. In October 2020 there were 3% fewer active players across all types of online gambling combined than March 2020 (note that players may be active in more than one type of gambling).

Consumer survey data has also shown that the majority of people spent less or the same on gambling during Covid-19 as they did previously, and people were more likely to report that they had stopped gambling than started for the first time. The latest figures from the Gambling Commission are available at: https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/news-action-and-statistics/News/data-shows-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-gambling-behaviour-in-october-2020

The government has worked closely with the Gambling Commision to take steps to reduce gambling related harm. In April, we banned gambling on credit cards and mandated integration with GAMSTOP (the national online self exclusion scheme). The Commission also directed £8.8 million to GambleAware to ensure its treatment services could continue uninterrupted. In May, tough new rules were introduced for online operators, in response to the potential for pandemic restrictions to increase the risk of gambling harm. New rules on VIP schemes came into force in October, and

the Commission will respond to a consultation on new rules for online slots game design early next year.

Gaming: Coronavirus

Alex Sobel: [133146]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the covid-19 transmission risk posed by gaming machines in (a) adult gaming centres, (b) pubs and (c) licensed betting offices.

Alex Sobel: [<u>133147</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether an impact assessment has been carried out on the inclusion of adult gaming centres in the covid-19 hospitality curfew.

Alex Sobel: [133148]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department has carried out a site-based covid-19 risk assessment of adult gaming centres.

Nigel Huddleston:

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has listened carefully to the views of the scientific community, the information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and its sub-groups when taking decisions on the best way to tackle the pandemic.

Data and scientific advice informing the fight against COVID-19 are published on gov.uk and specific relevant findings are shared in presentations accompanying significant policy announcements.

Unfortunately we know that the virus spreads readily in indoor environments where members of different households and/or support bubbles spend time together. These restrictions do not single out Adult Gaming Centres but apply to a wide range of settings where the risk of transmission is high.

Google: Digital Technology

Chi Onwurah: [130073]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether he has made an assessment of the effect of Google's decision to pass the Digital Services Tax onto its advertising customers on the level of competition in digital advertising; and whether he has had discussions with representatives of Google on that issue.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Digital Services Tax is a proportionate tax addressing widely held concerns with the tax paid by digital businesses. Pricing strategies reflect a range of factors and are a matter for businesses. It is for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), as the UK's independent competition authority, to investigate specific markets and the behaviour of specific companies. The CMA's recent market study found that Google and Facebook have market power in search, social media and online advertising markets. In response, on 27 November 2020, the Government announced it is establishing a new procompetition regime for digital markets, housed in the CMA. We will consult on the form and function of the Digital Markets Unit in early 2021, and legislate to put it on a statutory footing as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Huawei

Chi Onwurah: [132911]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether he plans to complete the removal of Huawei from the fixed network before the rollout of planned overbuild of Fibre to the Premises as part of the UK Fibre (Gigabit-capable) Programme.

Matt Warman:

The technical consultation with fixed network operators on the use of Huawei equipment is ongoing and nearing completion. The Secretary of State will announce the outcome in due course.

Independent Press Standards Organisation

Ruth Jones: [133191]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has to replace IPSO with an independent regulator not funded by member publications.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Government is committed to the self-regulation of the press, independent of government. This is vital to protecting a free press, crucial to a strong and fully functioning democracy where the powerful can be held to account without fear.

There now exists two press regulators, IPSO and IMPRESS. Both regulators are independent of government and we do not intervene in the work of either regulator.

Internet: Advertising

Stephen Timms: [133619]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, when he will launch the consultation on Online Advertising.

Caroline Dinenage:

We intend to launch a public consultation during 2021 on measures to enhance the regulation of online advertising in the UK. The proposals in that consultation will build on the call for evidence we held in 2020, and we will consider options to enhance the regulation of advertising content and placement online.

Stephen Timms: [133620]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has to tackle the proliferation of online financial scam adverts; and if he will make a statement.

Caroline Dinenage:

Fraudulent online financial advertising is illegal. Action Fraud, the national police centre for fraud and the Financial Conduct Authority as the financial regulator regularly investigate potential frauds.

Through DCMS's Online Advertising Programme (OAP) we are developing solutions that address harms in relation to general online advertising content and standards.

Internet: Children

Rosie Cooper: [130006]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to protect children from harmful online content prior to the coming into force of online harms legislation; and if he will take steps to bring into force the requirement for age-verification on pornographic websites prior to that legislation.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government announced in October 2019 that it will not commence the age verification provisions of Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 and instead deliver these protections through our wider online harms regulatory proposals.

Under our online harms proposals, we expect companies to use age assurance or age verification technologies to prevent children from accessing services which pose the highest risk of harm to children, such as online pornography. The online harms regime will capture both the most visited pornography sites and pornography on social media, therefore covering the vast majority of sites where children are most likely to be exposed to pornography. Taken together we expect this to bring into scope more online pornography currently accessible to children than would have been covered by the narrower scope of the Digital Economy Act.

We would encourage companies to take steps ahead of the legislation to protect children from harmful and age inappropriate content online, including online pornography. We are working closely with stakeholders across industry to establish the right conditions for the market to deliver age assurance and age verification technical solutions ahead of the legislative requirements coming into force.

In addition, Regulations transposing the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive came into force on 1 November 2020 which require UK-established video sharing platforms to take appropriate measures to protect minors from harmful content. The Regulations require that the most harmful content is subject to the strongest protections, such as age assurance or more technical measures. Ofcom, as the regulatory authority, may take robust enforcement action against video sharing platforms which do not adopt appropriate measures.

■ Internet: Safety

Chi Onwurah: [130724]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department will take on additional staff as part of the expansion of Ofcom's remit to monitor and enforce online safety.

Caroline Dinenage:

My department has a team working on online harms, whose responsibilities include policy development, management of the upcoming legislation and management of the relationship with Ofcom as the designated regulator. I will ensure that the team has the resources it needs to do its job within the department's funding allocation from the recent Spending Review.

Jim Shannon: [130737]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Government response to the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee Report on Immersive and Addictive Technologies, published on 8 June 2020, what plans he has to introduce legislative proposals to require companies to use a proportionate range of tools including age assurance, and age verification technologies to prevent children from accessing age-inappropriate content.

Caroline Dinenage:

Protecting children is at the heart of our online harms agenda, and wider government priorities. We have now published our Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper, which sets out how a proposed legal duty of care on online companies will work in practice and gives them new responsibilities towards their users. We are working at pace to have legislation ready next year.

Services which are likely to be accessed by children will be required to provide additional protections for children using them. Companies will be required to assess the risk their service poses for children, put in place proportionate measures to protect children, and monitor these for effectiveness. Under our proposals, we expect companies to use age assurance or age verification technologies to prevent children from accessing services which pose the highest risk of harm to children, such as online pornography. Companies will also need to provide age-appropriate protections from harmful content and activity for children using their service.

We would encourage companies to take steps ahead of the legislation to protect children from harmful and age inappropriate content online. We are working closely with stakeholders across industry to establish the right conditions for the market to deliver age assurance and age verification technical solutions ahead of the legislative requirements coming into force.

Ben Lake: [131396]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Government's response to the online harms white paper, what steps his Department has taken in respect of Welsh language internet users on the (a) design of the proposed

regulatory framework, (b) use and futureproofing of AI in tackling hate speech and other evolving online harms and (c) development of best practice guidance for digital product and platform designers.

Caroline Dinenage:

We have been working with the Devolved Administrations, including the Welsh Government, throughout the development of our proposals and will continue to do so throughout the legislative process.

As set out in the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper, we also expect the regulator to ensure that devolved considerations are effectively built into their work.

Andrew Percy: [132852]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions his Department has had with stakeholders on the potential merits of bringing voice recognition services within the scope of the proposed Online Safety Bill.

Andrew Percy: [132853]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with representatives of voice recognition services on the potential broadcast of illegal content into homes.

Caroline Dinenage:

Broadcasting content regulation applies to television, video-on-demand and radio services in the UK. While some content delivered through voice recognition devices may be regulated by Ofcom (such as live radio), voice recognition services themselves are not subject to broadcasting regulation.

Under current legislation, online platforms, including those that use voice recognition software, must remove illegal content expeditiously once they are aware of its presence, or face civil or criminal liability.

The new online harms regulatory framework will apply to services which host usergenerated content or enable user interaction, and to search engines, regardless of how the service is accessed. Therefore, some services that use voice recognition software may fall in scope. All in-scope companies will need to assess the risk of harm to users of their services, and take appropriate steps to mitigate that risk.

We have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders including industry, civil society, academics and parliamentarians and will continue to do so as we move towards legislation.

Leisure and Theme Parks: Disability

Tulip Siddiq: [130166]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the Government is taking to help improve disabled access at theme parks and leisure venues.

Nigel Huddleston:

My Department and VisitEngland, the national tourist board, have taken a number of steps to improve accessibility within the tourism sector.

VisitEngland has a dedicated web portal providing tailored business advice to tourism businesses, including guidance on how to welcome guests with different access needs.

VisitEngland has also made sure that its promotional and marketing activities are inclusive. For example, its Escape the Everyday campaign worked in partnership with Channel 4 to launch the Mission: Accessible series, which highlights the perspective of visitors with access needs enjoying the tourism landscape.

And at the Budget last year, the Chancellor announced a £30m Changing Places Fund to increase the provision of Changing Places toilets in public buildings, including leisure buildings and theme parks.

The Tourism Sector Deal, published in June 2019, set out an ambition to make the UK the most accessible destination in Europe by 2025.

Mobile Phones: Infrastructure

Ben Everitt: [133284]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the role of public sector landlords, including local authorities, in supporting greater mobile connectivity.

Matt Warman:

Public sector landlords play a critical role in facilitating the delivery of greater mobile connectivity. We are keen to ensure that the public sector leads by example and that public property is readily available for digital infrastructure deployment.

My Department's Barrier Busting Task Force regularly engages with local authorities across the country to advise on the deployment of mobile infrastructure. This includes the publication of guidance, for example on access to assets and valuation, and working directly with councils to encourage greater collaboration with the mobile sector and develop understanding of the Electronic Communications Code, which underpins rights to install digital communications apparatus. My officials spoke with Buckinghamshire County Council in December last year, and are planning to meet with Milton Keynes Council in the near future.

In addition to our work with local authorities, both we and the Office of Government Property are continuing to engage with government departments and arm's length bodies in order to provide them with training and guidance on access to public sector land.

Selaine Saxby: [133307]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to encourage (a) local authorities and (b) other public sector landlords to support the delivery of infrastructure to improve mobile connectivity in their areas.

Matt Warman:

Public sector landlords play a critical role in facilitating the delivery of greater mobile connectivity. We are keen to ensure that the public sector leads by example and that public property is readily available for digital infrastructure deployment.

My Department's Barrier Busting Task Force regularly engages with local authorities across the country to advise on the deployment of mobile infrastructure. This includes the publication of guidance, for example on access to assets and valuation, and working directly with councils to encourage greater collaboration with the mobile sector and develop understanding of the Electronic Communications Code, which underpins rights to install digital communications apparatus. My officials engaged with Devon County Council in November and December of last year to advise on this issue.

In addition to our work with local authorities, both we and the Office of Government Property are continuing to engage with government departments and arm's length bodies in order to provide them with training and guidance on access to public sector land.

Mohammed bin Salman

lan Mearns: [132864]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to his oral evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee of 22 April 2020, HC157, what assessment his Department has made of whether Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and the Private Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia are separate entities.

Nigel Huddleston:

As the Secretary of State said during his evidence at the select committee, it is for the Premier League alone to make assessments of potential acquisitions of football clubs under its Owners' and Directors' Test.

Ofcom: Security

Chi Onwurah: [130734]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether Ofcom staff working on functions required by the Telecoms Security Bill will require security clearance.

Matt Warman:

As the regulator for telecoms security, Ofcom already has staff with the relevant security clearances.

Ofcom's expanding role in the strengthened security framework will require it to increase levels of resources and skills to meet its new responsibilities. This will include seconding technical expertise to further develop Ofcom's capability.

The National Cyber Security Centre will also provide expert advice to Ofcom in support of Ofcom's role in the new regime.

Ofcom will keep these needs under review to ensure that there are sufficient security cleared staff at all times.

Pornography: Internet

Chris Elmore: [131371]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the Government will take to ensure children are prevented from accessing pornography on sites that (a) do not carry user-generated content and (b) are not subject to regulation by Ofcom under the Online Harms legislation.

Caroline Dinenage:

The strongest protections in our online harms proposals are for children. All companies in scope, regardless of their size, will be required to assess whether children are likely to access their services, and if so, provide additional protections for children using them.

Where pornography sites host user generated content or facilitate online user interaction (including video and image sharing, commenting and live streaming), they will be subject to the duty of care. The online harms regime will capture both the most visited pornography sites and pornography on social media, therefore covering the vast majority of sites where children are most likely to be exposed to pornography. Taken together we expect this to bring into scope more online pornography that children can currently access than the narrower scope of the Digital Economy Act. We will continue to review our proposals to ensure we deliver the most comprehensive protections for children online.

Under our proposals, we expect companies to use age assurance or age verification technologies to prevent children from accessing services which pose the highest risk of harm to children, such as online pornography. We are working closely with stakeholders across industry to establish the right conditions for the market to deliver age assurance and age verification technical solutions ahead of the legislative requirements coming into force. We would encourage companies to take steps ahead of the legislation to protect children from harmful and age inappropriate content online.

Sovereign Wealth Funds

Chi Onwurah: [130733]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his oral contribution of 22 April 2020 to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Q65, what the evidential basis was for his assessment that it is a company backed by the sovereign wealth fund, so it is not him personally buying it.

Nigel Huddleston:

As the Secretary of State said during his evidence at the select committee, it is for the Premier League alone to make assessments of potential acquisitions of football clubs under its Owners' and Directors' Test.

Sports: Coronavirus

Andrew Rosindell: [131187]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with sports-related event organisers on the importance of ensuring that fans receive full ticket refunds in the event of cancellations caused by changes in covid-19 tier restrictions.

Nigel Huddleston:

I expect all sports events to look after their fans in line with the relevant consumer rights legislation, good practice and their wider legal obligations. Where organisations offer fans additional ways to support their club - such as foregoing refunds in lieu of vouchers or donations - this is a decision for the organisations themselves.

Swimming: Coronavirus

Robert Halfon: [130025]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what the scientific basis is for the decision to prevent individuals who are over 18 years of age from participating in club swimming during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

As the Prime Minister said on 23 November, the national restrictions ended on Wednesday 2 December, and gyms and sport facilities can reopen across all tiers. This means that certain leisure and sporting facilities including swimming pools are able to open subject to relevant social contact rules in each tier.

As set out in the COVID Winter Plan the decision to allocate tiers is based on a range of factors and will be reviewed every 14 days. In Tier 3 areas we have taken further measures to limit social interactions and therefore opportunities for the virus to spread. For swimming pools specifically, the transmission concerns have always been around points of contact within facilities, such as changing rooms.

Telecommunications

Chi Onwurah: [132909]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what level of security clearance will be required within (a) Ofcom and (b) his Department to carry out the functions of the Telecoms Security Bill effectively; and how many staff have that level of clearance.

Matt Warman:

Officials involved in the implementation of the Telecommunications (Security) Bill will require different security clearances depending on their precise roles.

Ofcom and DCMS currently have staff with the relevant national security clearances to carry out the functions of the Telecommunications (Security) Bill.

Ofcom will continue to review their security arrangements as they develop their capabilities to deliver this new regime. They will be working closely with the government and will receive expert advice from the NCSC who are a world-leading national authority on cyber security.

■ Telecommunications: Codes of Practice

Ben Everitt: [133282]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Electronic Communications Code as set out in the Digital Economy Act 2017.

Matt Warman:

My Department has been working closely with stakeholders within the private and public sector since the 2017 reforms to the Electronic Communications Code ("the Code") came into effect to support their implementation and to understand their impact on this important sector.

We are keen to ensure that the Code is fully fit for purpose and intend to consult on whether further reforms are necessary to support investment in digital networks.

Selaine Saxby: [133306]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Electronic Communications Code contained within the Digital Economy Act 2017 in delivering the rollout of digital infrastructure.

Selaine Saxby: [133308]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, when he plans to consult on the Electronic Communications Code contained within the Digital Economy Act 2017.

Matt Warman:

My Department has been working closely with stakeholders within the private and public sector since the 2017 reforms to the Electronic Communications Code (the Code) came into effect to support their implementation and to understand their impact on this important sector. Over the summer and autumn, I have held a number of roundtable meetings with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss these matters.

We intend to consult on whether further reforms to the Code are necessary to support investment in digital networks, and will provide further details regarding the timing of this as soon as possible.

■ Telecommunications: Diversification

Chi Onwurah: [130730]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 December 2020 to Question 124752, when the first payment from that fund will be made; and who will be responsible for making it.

Matt Warman:

The Government is working at pace to take forward the actions set out in the 5G Supply Chain Diversification Strategy, with the support of the Diversification Taskforce, and will set out further details in due course.

Telecommunications: Huawei

Chi Onwurah: [130735]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2020 to Question 124751, when he plans to publish details on the removal of Huawei equipment from the fixed network.

Chi Onwurah: [130736]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what estimate he has made of the cost of removing Huawei from Openreach's fixed network (a) as part of a new fibre to home network and (b) to be replaced by another fibre to the cabinet.

Matt Warman:

The Government is reaching the end of a technical consultation with operators to understand their supply chain alternatives to Huawei in full fibre networks.

The consultation is not considering the removal and replacement of Huawei in full fibre networks.

Information gathered as part of the consultation is commercially sensitive.

The Secretary of State will announce the outcome in due course.

■ Theatres: Coronavirus

Mr Clive Betts: [130633]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of allowing theatres to open in socially distanced conditions in tier 3 areas.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government fully recognises the disruptive impact that Coronavirus and restrictions has on the performing arts and particularly for theatres which have had to close to public performance. The Government continues to work with all its sectors to assess the impact of the tiers and to develop proposals for how venues can reopen when it is safe to do so.

We recognise the impact that closures across the country will have on our vital cultural sector and remain committed to supporting it as it suffers the impact of this virus. The remaining £400m of Culture Recovery Fund grants and loans announced on Friday 11th December will support significant cultural organisations who now face financial distress as a result of closure, as well as helping them transition back to fuller opening in the spring.

More than 440 theatres across the country have received more than £183 million from the Culture Recovery Fund, which is nearly 30% of the funding awarded by Arts Council England so far.

■ Travel: Fashion

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130762]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether people employed in the fashion industry are included in the travel corridor exempt list.

Caroline Dinenage:

The gov.uk website lists the jobs that qualify for travel exemptions https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-travellers-exempt-from-uk-border-rules).

The travel quarantine exemptions do not currently include an exemption for fashion professionals, but this list is kept under review.

Video on Demand

Chris Elmore: [131370]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which video-on-demand platforms currently use British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) ratings; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of video-on-demand platforms that will adopt BBFC ratings in the next (a) year and (b) three years.

Caroline Dinenage:

As the designated body for age classification of film content, the Government has great trust in the British Board of Film Classification's (BBFC) best practice age ratings.

While adoption of the BBFC's age ratings by online platforms is currently voluntary, we welcome their usage by Video on Demand platforms. We were particularly pleased to see Netflix announce on 1 December 2020 that they have become the first platform to achieve complete coverage of their content under the BBFC's ratings

A number of other Video on Demand platforms use BBFC ratings for some of their content, including Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, Curzon Home Cinema and BFI Player.

We will continue to engage with industry to encourage other platforms to adopt the BBFC's ratings across all of their content, and will keep the evidence for legislation in this area under review in the coming years.

EDUCATION

Academies: Coronavirus

Sam Tarry: [130260]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has written to academy schools requesting them to remain open throughout the second national lockdown and the latest tier 3 period in boroughs where the local authority had asked schools to consider closing.

Nick Gibb:

There have been 3 cases involving writing directly to schools asking them to remain open throughout the second national lockdown and the latest tier 3 period, where some local authorities had asked, or were considering asking, schools to move to remote education provision for the remainder of the current school term.

The 3 cases are:

- Royal London Borough of Greenwich A letter was sent out to all schools in Greenwich on 14 December.
- Waltham Forest A letter was sent out to all schools in Waltham Forest on 15 December.
- Islington A letter was sent out to all schools in Islington on 15 December.

Adoption Support Fund

Tim Loughton: [130625]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to extend funding for the Adoption Support Fund beyond March 2021.

Vicky Ford:

Funding for the Adoption Support Fund will be continuing for the next financial year of 2021-22.

Assessments

Jonathan Gullis: [133261]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to recruit additional exam invigilators for the 2021 exam series.

Nick Gibb:

The Government has announced that, from 5 January 2021, schools and colleges have moved to remote provision, except for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

The Department will therefore not be asking students to sit GCSE, AS and A level exams this summer as planned. Ofqual, with the department, will launch a consultation shortly which seeks views on how to fairly award all pupils with a grade that ensures they can progress to the next stage of their lives. This will be based on

funding-during-coronavirus-covid-19.

teacher assessment, with training and support provided to ensure grades are awarded fairly and consistently.

Further details on the delivery of assessment in 2021 will be available in due course.

■ Childminding: Finance

John Healey: [130637]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which local authorities do not pay early education entitlement funding in full to childminders.

Vicky Ford:

Our guidance makes clear how we expect local authorities to fund early years entitlement places during the COVID-19 outbreak. Local authorities should only take a different approach from that set out in guidance if they have good reasons for doing so, their approach is fair and equitable, and they communicate this clearly to their providers. Further information on this guidance is available here: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-to-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-the-during-the-coronavirus-u

Through our regular contact with local authorities, it is apparent that the vast majority have been compliant with our funding guidance throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.

Childminder funding can be more complex than funding for group-based providers. This is because unlike nurseries, which typically offer a fairly consistent number of childcare places, the number and age of children cared for by a childminder can vary significantly throughout the year and from one year to another. This means that childminders may move in and out of offering the government's early years entitlements depending on the children they are caring for at any given time.

For this reason, we know that some local authorities fund their childminders on a case-by-case basis in the interests of value for money and propriety. This ensures that they are not paying providers who might not otherwise have been offering entitlement places.

We do not currently hold data on the number of local authorities taking tailored approaches to childminder funding. This is due to the highly variable nature of this provision, and that fact that arrangements may vary within a single local authority based on the individual circumstances of each childminder.

Children: Computers

Chi Onwurah: [<u>132912</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to promote the repurposing of digital devices no longer needed by (a) private sector businesses and (b) members of the public for use by pupils who cannot afford a digital device for their education.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is investing over £300 million to help schools and young people in England continue their education at home and access online social care. Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department has already delivered over 560,000 laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children who would not otherwise have access to a digital device.

The Department is adding to this support by making a further 440,000 devices available bringing the total to over a million laptops and tablets available to support disadvantaged children that might experience disruption to their education. The laptops and tablets are an injection of support to help schools, academy trusts and local authorities to provide access to remote education and online social care. Schools, academy trusts and local authorities are responsible for distributing the laptops and tablets and are best placed to know which children and young people need access to a device.

As face-to-face education is now disrupted, we know that it is critical to get schools the support that they need in the shortest time frame.

The Department considered options to refurbish second-hand laptops and tablets but these could not be rolled out to schools and local authorities at scale over the urgent timeframe to meet the needs of these children, young people and families.

Bill Esterson: [133818]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, by what date he estimates children who require laptops to assist them with home learning will receive them.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £300 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, including securing over one million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people.

This includes over 560,000 laptops and tablets that have already been delivered to schools, trusts, and local authorities in 2020.

Laptops and tablets are owned by schools, trusts, or local authorities who can lend these to children and young people who need them most, during the current COVID-19 national restrictions.

From Saturday 2 January, all secondary schools have been able to order their full allocation of devices. As a result of orders placed since then, we dispatched over 100,000 laptops to schools by the end of last week.

By the end of this week, we expect to have delivered three quarters of a million devices.

Stephen Morgan: [134085]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether recipients of laptops for remote education will incur a financial penalty if those laptops are stolen or damaged.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £300 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, including securing over one million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people. This includes over 560,000 laptops and tablets that have already been delivered to schools, trusts and local authorities in 2020.

The laptops and tablets are the property of the school, local authority or academy trust, and they should assume responsibility for their ongoing maintenance and support as part of this. The Department will not apply financial penalties for devices that are lost or stolen and schools – academy trusts and local authorities should manage devices reported as lost or stolen, in line with their organisational policies.

If a device develops a fault that is not caused by a user, the school, local authority or academy trust that owns it can request a free replacement.

Children: Disadvantaged

Tulip Siddiq: [134023]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to ensure that vulnerable children who are safer in school than at home are encouraged to attend educational settings during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown and are able to do so; and what steps he will take to identify children facing greater risks in lockdown periods and ensure they are reached by support services.

Vicky Ford:

Since the lockdown announced on 4 January 2021, primary, secondary, alternative provision, special schools and further education providers will remain open to Vulnerable Children and Young People (VCYP). We have made clear that educational providers and local authorities should offer places and support to any child they deem as vulnerable, and VCYP are strongly encouraged to attend their educational setting.

The full-time attendance of VCYP, and ensuring that VCYP remain supported during the COVID-19 outbreak, continues to be a priority and we expect schools to follow up attendance concerns where absences are not related to COVID-19, including working with social workers, virtual schools heads and other services as needed.

We are clear on the important role of social workers to promote attendance and we are using our Regional Education and Care Teams to work directly with local authorities where attendance is a concern. We have launched a social worker toolkit to support social workers to encourage vulnerable children to attend school.

Where VCYP cannot attend schools or other settings (including post-16), we have asked local authorities and educational settings to ensure they have systems in place to keep in touch with them.

We have continued to keep children's social care working and ensured there are exemptions in some restrictions to enable services to continue to be there for families of VCYP.

We are supporting local safeguarding partnerships to work together to protect children in their areas, bolstering helplines and providing support for families with children who have SEND. We have continued to make sure that children have access to social workers.

Local authorities are providing the department with regular insight on contact between children and their social workers, social worker availability and other key indicators.

The government has also provided funding to children's voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to ensure charities can continue to provide services that safeguard vulnerable children and protect them from harm. This includes:

- £7 million donated to fund Barnardo's 'See, Hear, Respond' services supporting VCYP. Additional funding has been awarded to a coalition of charities to continue the 'See, Hear, Respond' programme until March 2021.
- Additional funding of £310,000 for Childline to modify and enhance the service for children and young people being put at increased risk of harm by isolation.

■ Coronavirus Catch-up Premium

Catherine West: [131368]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he has taken to ensure transparency and accountability in the use that schools make of their allocation of the £650 million catch-up premium.

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 to make up for lost teaching time. Head teachers have discretion over how to use this funding to best support the needs of their pupils, but we expect them to prioritise those who need the most catch up support. The Catch up Premium guidance is clear that schools should ensure that they provide appropriate transparency for parents in terms of how the premium is spent. The guidance can be accessed here:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up-premium.

Schools are held accountable for the outcomes they achieve with all their funding, including through Ofsted inspections and by governors and trustees, and this will be no exception.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Nurseries

Ian Murray: [131233]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether nurseries that have closed due to covid-19 and continue to charge parents full fees are eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Vicky Ford:

The Competition and Markets Authority issued an open letter on 28 July 2020, followed by detailed advice to the sector, following complaints from parents about allegedly unfair charging practices during early days of the COVID-19 outbreak. These are available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904194/Open_letter_to_Nursery_and_Early_Years_settings.pdf and https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Fnursery-and-early-years-sector-covid-19-restrictions-and-consumer-law%2Fnursery-and-early-years-sector-covid-19-restrictions-and-consumer-law-

advice&data=04%7C01%7CCraig.McClue%40cma.gov.uk%7C13f076f944ec466e24 7908d89b80c830%7C1948f2d40bc24c5e8c34caac9d736834%7C1%7C0%7C63743 0324728268280%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=9en2gwX9WZOMNHfFhbXioDVoJg1XujuKtWgAahheiVM%3D&reserved=0.

The letter supported the government's position that providers must be balanced and fair in their dealings with parents, and that they must avoid unfair charging practices. While contracts are a private arrangement between consumers and providers, the provisions of the letter are still broadly applicable. If parents or their children test positive for COVID-19, or are contacted by NHS Test and Trace, the principle that parents should not be charged for a service that cannot be provided without breaching government legal requirements would apply. We ask that providers continue to be fair and balanced in dealings with parents and must continue to avoid unfair charging practices.

An early years provider can access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to cover up to the proportion of its salary bill which could be considered to have been paid for from that provider's private income. This would typically be income received from 'parent-paid' hours that have not yet returned because of COVID-19, and excludes all income from the government's free entitlements. Providers should use the month of February 2020 to represent their usual income, in calculating the proportion of its salary bill eligible to be covered by the scheme, taking into account parent-paid income that has returned. Providers should adjust these proportions in subsequent furloughing applications if their income from the governments free entitlements changes.

Education: Coronavirus

Ben Lake: [134063]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the agreement with mobile network operators to provide free data for key educational sites will include Wales; and what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on that agreement.

Nick Gibb:

The mobile networks are currently providing internet access for pupils in England to engage with remote learning, and the devolved nations have set up separate initiatives to support their schools. The Department has kept colleagues in the devolved administrations updated throughout the COVID-19 response on its progress with providing laptops and the internet for remote education.

■ Education: Disability

Marion Fellows: [133028]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement on access to education for disabled people.

Michelle Donelan:

The Withdrawal Agreement Act protects the existing rights to equal treatment and non-discrimination for all EU citizens residing in the UK, UK nationals residing in the EU, and their family members. They have broadly the same entitlements to study and access public services and benefits as they did before withdrawal from the EU, where these entitlements derived from UK membership of the EU.

The government carried out a full Equality Impact Assessment on the Withdrawal Agreement Act and concluded that it is not envisaged that any equality issues will arise due to provisions contained within it. The Equality Impact Assessment can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/841245/EU_Withdrawal_Agreement_Bill_Impact_Assessment.pdf.

Furthermore, the explanatory notes on the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement Act contain a declaration from my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, that under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998, the provisions of the Act are compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The full explanatory notes are published on gov.uk here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-future-relationship-bill.

Educational Exchanges: EU Countries

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[131162]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to help schools to continue making arrangements for pupil exchanges with EU Member States after 1 January 2021: and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

School exchanges provide pupils with the chance to experience different cultures, improve their language skills and to build their independence. It is for individual schools to choose where and how they might wish to run a school exchange, including whether they use the support of third-party companies and organisations such as the British Council.

The Department funds the British Council-delivered International School Exchange programme, which provides opportunities for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to take part in an international exchange and visit partner schools around the world, including in EU Member States. It is hoped to restart the programme in the latter part of 2021.

The newly announced Turing scheme, which replaces the UK's participation in Erasmus+, will allow thousands of students to study and take part in work placements in the EU and beyond. The Turing scheme will be backed by over £100 million, providing funding for around 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on placements and exchanges overseas, starting in September 2021.

Educational Institutions: Coronavirus

Bill Esterson: [133815]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish the latest rate of infection with covid-19 of (a) teachers, (b) teaching assistants, (c) non teaching school staff, (d) staff in registered childcare settings, (e) college staff and (f) university staff.

Nick Gibb:

The Department does not hold data on infection rates amongst (a) teachers, (b) teaching assistants, (c) non teaching school staff, (d) staff in registered childcare settings, (e) college staff and (f) university staff.

Advice from the Children's Task and Finish group is that children are at very low risk of serious illness from the virus, and there is also no current evidence that staff are at higher risk of infection than those working in other sectors. This advice can be accessed here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948617/s0998-tfc-update-to-4-november-2020-paper-on-childrenschools-transmission.pdf.

The safety and wellbeing of staff, pupils and students in education settings is always our priority. The Government is doing all it can to minimise the risks to those working and studying in our nurseries, schools, colleges, and universities in this unprecedented situation, while mitigating the impact on education.

On 7 January, the Department published guidance to universities and students returning to higher education in the spring term. This guidance sets out how we will support higher education providers to enable students to return as safely as possible following the winter break, by staggering this process following the period of national lockdown and to facilitate testing for all. The guidance is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950367/Students_returning_to_and_starting_higher_education_in_Spring_Term_2021.pdf.

The Department also published 'guidance: Actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak', which sets out what all schools will need to do during the COVID-19 outbreak from January 2021. The guidance is available here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.

On 7 January, the Department published guidance for all early years settings and local authorities in England, which provides information on how the national lockdown restrictions to control the spread of COVID-19 will impact early years and childcare settings. This guidance is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950653/Education_and_childcare_settings_national_lockdown_from_5_January_2021_.pdf.

On 8 January, the Department published guidance on actions for further education colleges and providers during the COVID-19 outbreak:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision.

The Department will continue to keep our plans under review and ensure our position is informed by the latest evidence.

Extended Services: Coronavirus

Andrew Gwynne: [131204]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what financial support his Department is providing to wraparound and holiday childcare providers who have seen a loss of earnings as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Vicky Ford:

The Government recognises the value that wraparound and holiday childcare providers offer, in particular with supporting vulnerable children and supporting our critical workers to continue to work. That is why we have ensured these providers can continue to remain open for the duration of the national lockdown for all vulnerable children and young people; and for all children of critical workers, where it is to enable their parents or carers to work, search for work, to undertake training or education, or to attend a medical appointment or address a medical need.

We recognise that the wrapround childcare sector, like many sectors, is facing unprecedented financial challenges as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. It is for this reason why the Government has made a range of financial packages available, throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, to support private businesses, who have been adversely affected by COVID-19; details of which can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder. Depending on their circumstances, businesses may be eligible for tax relief, loans or cash grants through

the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme or the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. In addition, as part of the £4.6 billion in new lockdown grants to support businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors recently announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Government is making a discretionary fund of £594 million available for local authorities and the devolved administrations to support businesses that might be affected by the new lockdown restrictions, but that are not part of the retail, hospitality or leisure sectors. Wraparound childcare providers should apply to their local authorities to determine if they are eligible for this funding.

Given the importance of ensuring that vulnerable children and critical workers can access the support and childcare that they need, I also wrote to Directors of Children's Services in all local authorities in England in December to strongly encourage them to consider whether wraparound childcare providers can be supported using grants that have been made available to local authorities. This includes the Holiday Activities and Food Programme, a £220 million fund to be delivered through grants to local authorities, and which will be expanded to reach all local authority areas over the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays this year. Local authorities will be able to use these grants to arrange childcare provision through a range of settings, providing valuable support to families on lower incomes and giving them the opportunity to access rewarding activities alongside healthy meals over the school holidays.

Family Hubs

Tulip Siddiq: [130789]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish details of the procurement process for the new National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Services; and what steps his Department is taking to ensure that those services are delivered (a) transparently and (b) effectively.

Vicky Ford:

The tendering opportunity in relation to the establishment of the National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Services went live on 11 December 2020 via the department's electronic procurement portal, Jaggaer. All related documentation is available to access via this system. Further information on this can be accessed here: https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/b1066d22-abef-4123-8ba1-847425a7b888 and https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/procurement#jaggaer-the-dfe-etendering-portal.

This procurement is being undertaken in line with the Open procedure of the Public Contracting Regulations 2015. Any resulting contract will be awarded in line with the DfE standard terms and conditions for services and will be managed in line with departmental best practices.

Foster Care: Mental Health Services

Catherine West: [130175]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether national standards have been set for local authorities to ensure that foster parents receive comprehensive training in supporting children with complex mental health needs.

Vicky Ford:

Fostering can be hugely rewarding, but also challenging, demanding skills and dedication. The statutory framework and National Minimum Standards (NMS) clearly set out that all foster carers must receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively. The NMS are available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf.

Under NMS 6, there is an expectation that fostering services will promote the physical, emotional, and psychological health of children in foster care and NMS 20 covers the requirements around training and development of foster carers. These are essential for placement stability, and foster carers should receive the right training to meet the needs of the children in their care. They should have access to different or new training to develop their skills as need arises before and during placement. The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (TSD) sets out the minimum expectations of training for foster carers, and is available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287957/TSD_standards_guidance_for_supervisors.pdf. It is up to local fostering services to determine what training they offer, to whom and when, but information about that offer should be available to all foster carers.

■ Free School Meals: Coronavirus

Tulip Siddiq: [134021]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to ensure that pupils entitled to (a) benefits-related free school meals and (b) universal infant free school meals continue to receive support during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown; and what plans he has to re-introduce the national free school meal voucher scheme.

Vicky Ford:

During the period of national lockdown, schools should continue to provide meal options for all pupils who are in school. Meals should be available free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals who are in school.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meal support to pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals and who are learning at home. Extra funding will be provided to support schools to provide food parcels or meals to eligible children. Where schools cannot offer food parcels or local alternatives, we will ensure a national voucher scheme is in place so that every eligible child can access free

school meals while their school remains closed. Further guidance will be provided shortly.

Food parcels or vouchers are only available for children who are eligible for and receiving benefits-related free school meals. This includes children of infant age, that meet the free school meal eligibility criteria.

National Curriculum Tests

Sarah Champion: [133870]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans for Key Stage 2 SATs to proceed as scheduled in 2021.

Nick Gibb:

The Department recognises that due to the further disruption caused by the move to restricted attendance in schools, primary assessments cannot continue as intended. The Department has cancelled the statutory key stage 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021, including the key stage 2 tests in reading and mathematics, and statutory key stage 1 tests and teacher assessments.

Schools are expected to continue to use assessment during the summer term to inform teaching, to enable them to give information to parents on their child's attainment in their statutory annual report and to support transition to secondary school. The Department strongly encourages schools to use past test papers in their assessment of pupils.

These arrangements will apply for summer 2021 only, and the Department is planning for a full programme of primary assessments to take place in the 2021/22 academic year. This will include the introduction of the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment and Multiplication Tables Check as previously announced. We will confirm full details for 2021/22 primary assessments in due course.

Nurses: Training

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [133219]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of reimbursing the 2018-19 cohort of nursing students for their tuition fees.

Michelle Donelan:

This is a difficult and uncertain time for students, but we are working with the sector to make sure all reasonable efforts are being made to enable students to continue their studies. The government expects universities and other higher education providers to continue delivering a high-quality academic experience and help students to achieve qualifications that they and employers value.

The government is extremely grateful to all students who opted into a paid clinical placement in the NHS during the COVID-19 response. We have ensured that all these students were rewarded fairly for their hard work. Nursing, midwifery, and allied

health students who opted into a paid clinical placement received a salary and automatic NHS pension entitlement at the appropriate band. Time spent on paid placements as part of the COVID-19 response also counted towards the requirement for students to complete a specified number of training hours in order to successfully complete their degrees. There are no plans for tuition fee refunds or a specific debt write-off scheme for student volunteers.

Whether or not an individual student is entitled to a refund of fees will depend on the specific contractual arrangements between the provider and student. Universities and other higher education providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees. In deciding to keep charging full fees, providers will want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and help students progress their qualifications.

If students have concerns, there is a process in place. They should first raise their concerns with their university. If their concerns remain unresolved, students at providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to consider their complaint.

Pre-school Education: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas: [133772]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on the prioritisation of providers of nursery and early years care for vaccination against covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Alex Sobel: [<u>134094</u>

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase vaccinations for frontline staff working in early years settings.

Apsana Begum: [134227]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether staff working in early years settings will be considered a priority for covid-19 vaccination.

Vicky Ford:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are the independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the UK should use and provide advice on who should be offered them.

JCVI advises that the first priorities for the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. As the risk of mortality from COVID-19 increases with age, prioritisation is primarily based on age.

Regarding the next phase of vaccine rollout, JCVI have asked that the Department of Health and Social Care consider occupational vaccination in collaboration with other Government departments. The Department for Education will input into this cross governmental exercise, and I hope that educational staff, including in early years settings, will be vaccinated as soon as possible.

Primary Education: Admissions

Daisy Cooper: [134183]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will extend the 15 January 2021 deadline for primary school place applications in response to the disruption resulting from the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

We have no plans to extend the deadline of 15 January for primary school applications.

Applications for school places are made online or by post. The restrictions on attendance at schools do not prevent parents from submitting applications for school places.

Primary Education: Coronavirus

Matthew Pennycook:

[134026]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish the criteria used to determine which areas with primary schools were made subject to the contingency framework on Wednesday 30 December 2020.

Nick Gibb:

In considering which areas may be suitable for primary restrictions under our contingency framework, the Department worked closely with Public Health England, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, NHS Test & Trace and the Department for Health and Social Care using the most recent data available. We used a balanced approach, rather than simple threshold cut offs, and took all factors into account, but with particular focus on: very high rates of infection, particularly high increases in sevenday case rates, and intelligence about pressure on the NHS.

These were not easy decisions to make, but they were made according to the best clinical advice and the key indicators set out within the COVID-19 Winter Plan. More information on the COVID-19 Winter Plan can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-winter-plan.

The national lockdown announced on 4 January 2021 replaced the restrictions that had been active in some primary schools under the contingency framework. We will be continually reviewing the restrictions on schools, colleges and universities to ensure that pupils and students can return to face to face education when the pressures are easing on the NHS.

These decisions do not suggest that schools and colleges are no longer safe places. Instead, limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households.

Remote Education: Computer Software

Olivia Blake: [134284]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what software he is providing to help children and families access remote learning.

Nick Gibb:

We are funding schools to get set up on Google or Microsoft digital education platforms. These platforms bring together the school community, pool resources and give pupils the opportunity to work with their peers remotely. As of 5 January 2021, 6900 schools have applied for a digital platform as part of the Get Help With Technology programme.

This is part of over £300 million being invested to support access to remote education and online social care services, which also includes securing over one million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people.

Over 560,000 laptops and tablets have already been delivered to schools, trusts and local authorities in 2020. The devices come with standard software packages included, and this allows schools to make their own choice on how best to provide remote education according to their own local needs. This may include acquiring software of their choice.

Remote Education: Disadvantaged

Mr Richard Holden: [134232]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many IT devices have been given to disadvantaged children to enable them to attend school remotely in (a) North West Durham constituency, (b) County Durham and (c) England.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £300 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, including securing over one million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people. This includes over 560,000 laptops and tablets that have already been delivered to schools, academy trusts and local authorities in 2020.

As of 18 December 2020, 1,808 devices have been delivered directly to Durham Local Authority. Devices have also been delivered to academy trusts that have schools located in Durham Local Authority, which are not included in this figure. This is because it is for academy trusts, which may have schools in several Local Authorities, to determine how best to distribute the devices they have received. It is not possible to provide figures on the number of devices received specifically by schools in the North West Durham constituency, because schools in a specific constituency will have received devices from their Local Authority or, if they are an academy, from the trust of which they are part.

More information on the number of devices delivered as of the 18 December can be viewed here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/946954/Devices_and_4G_wireless_routers_data_as_of_December.pdf.

Schools: Computers

Jonathan Gullis: [133265]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many laptops have been (a) requested and (b) sent to schools in (i) Stoke-on-Trent and (ii) Staffordshire during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is investing over £300 million to help schools and young people in England continue their education at home and access online social care. Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department has already delivered over 560,000 laptops and tablets for disadvantaged pupils who would not otherwise have access to a digital device.

The Department is adding to this support by making a further 440,000 devices available, bringing the total to over a million laptops and tablets available to support disadvantaged pupils that might experience disruption to their education. This scheme is continually reviewed to ensure that support is offered in the most effective way.

The laptops and tablets are an injection of support to help schools, academy trusts and local authorities to provide access to remote education and online social care. Schools, academy trusts and local authorities are responsible for distributing the laptops and tablets and are best placed to know which children and young people need access to a device.

As of December 2020, data on devices can be viewed here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/946954/Devices_and_4G_wireless_routers_data_as_of_December.pdf. This includes 235 devices delivered or dispatched to local authority-maintained schools in Stoke-on-Trent and 769 devices delivered or dispatched to local authority-maintained schools in Staffordshire. The Department has also delivered devices to academy trusts in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire in addition to those delivered to local authority-maintained schools.

Where schools need additional devices, they should contact the Department for Education's service team at covid.technology@education.gov.uk. They should include the number of children in Years 3 to 11 who require support and an explanation of how they have gathered this evidence.

Schools: Coronavirus

Catherine West: [130174]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of postponing the return of the school term in January 2021 in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

A new national lockdown has come into effect and schools should only allow vulnerable children and the children of critical workers to attend face to face education. All other pupils will be taught remotely.

We know that receiving face to face education is best for children's mental health and for their educational achievement, and we will review the restrictions on schools to ensure that children and young people return to face to face education as soon as the pressures on the NHS are easing. Limiting attendance at this time is about reducing the number of contacts that people have with other households, given the rapidly rising numbers of cases across the country and the intense pressure on the NHS.

For those pupils and staff still attending school, the system of protective measures that we have asked schools to implement continues to mean that any risks are well managed and controlled.

Bill Esterson: [131257]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what payments have been made to schools in Sefton Central constituency to cover out-of-scope covid-19-associated costs.

Nick Gibb:

The first window for schools to claim funding back for exceptional costs incurred due to the COVID-19 outbreak, between March and July 2020, closed on 21 July. Payments against claims made within the published scope of the fund were made to schools and academies in September. The funding is targeted towards the costs we have identified as the biggest barrier to schools operating as they needed to between March and July to support vulnerable children and children of critical workers. No payments have been made to any schools, including those in Sefton Central, for claims outside the published scope of the fund.

Schools in Sefton Central have received the following payments for claims made within the published scope.

SCHOOL NAME	PAYMENT FOR CLAIMS WITHIN PUBLISHED SCOPE
Aintree Davenhill Primary School	£7,795
Hudson Primary School	£12,442
Northway Primary School	£7,081
Woodlands Primary School	£4,106
Summerhill Primary School	£6,029
Freshfield Primary School	£1,323
Green Park Primary School	£3,658
Redgate Community Primary School	£2,512

SCHOOL NAME	PAYMENT FOR CLAIMS WITHIN PUBLISHED SCOPE
Melling Primary School	£3,369
Valewood Primary School	£2,970
Lydiate Primary School	£73
St Luke's Church of England Primary School	£3,535
St Luke's Halsall Church of England Primary School	£1,651
St Nicholas Church of England Primary School	ol £7,551
St George's Catholic Primary School	£5,392
St Mary's Catholic Primary School	£6,204
St William of York Catholic Primary School	£1,031
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School	£5,914
Ursuline Catholic Primary School	£949
St Jerome's Catholic Primary School	£623
Holy Rosary Catholic Primary School	£9,905
Maricourt Catholic High School	£7,029
Holy Family Catholic High School	£18,875
Crosby High School	£1,510
Newfield School	£18,661
Trinity St Peter's CofE Primary School	£1,797
Formby High School	£1,775
Maghull High School	£4,930
Deyes High School	£5,505
St Michael's Church of England High School	£7,246
St Thomas Church of England Primary School Lydiate	I, £4,767
St Andrews Church of England Primary School, Maghull	£1,809

Schools continue to be able to access existing support for financial issues, including a wide range of school resource management tools, and, in serious circumstances, additional funding or advances from local authorities for maintained schools, or Education and Skills Funding Agency for academies.

Schools were able to claim in a second claims window that ran in December, for any costs which they did not claim for during the first window relating to the March to July period. We will shortly process those claims and make payments to maintained schools in February and academies in March.

In addition to this, the Department has announced details of a new COVID-19 workforce fund for schools and colleges to help them remain open: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-workforce-fund-to-support-schools-with-costs-of-staff-absences-from-1-november-2020-to-31-december-2020.

It will fund the costs of teacher absences over a threshold in schools and colleges, and is intended for those with high staff absences that are also facing significant financial pressures. The Department expects schools to be able to claim for workforce costs relating to November and December 2020 in spring 2021. Schools will be able to incur additional costs, backdated to November, in the knowledge that they will be reimbursed if they meet the relevant criteria.

Wes Streeting: [131339]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the priority given to school staff for access to the covid-19 vaccine; and when he plans to give school staff access to the covid-19 vaccine.

Nick Gibb:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are the independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the UK should use and provide advice on who should be offered them.

JCVI advises that the first priorities for the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. As the risk of mortality from COVID-19 increases with age, prioritisation is primarily based on age.

Regarding the next phase of vaccine rollout, JCVI have asked that the Department of Health and Social Care consider occupational vaccination in collaboration with other Government departments. The Department for Education will input into this cross governmental exercise.

Helen Hayes: [131344]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with (a) teaching unions and (b) headteachers' associations on the effect of rising rates of covid-19 infection on the start of the school term in January.

Nick Gibb:

The Department's ministers and officials regularly engage with the teacher and headteacher unions around the Government's COVID-19 response and will continue to to do so.

Bill Esterson: [132889]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to ensure that staff in schools are given the highest priority for the covid-19 vaccine.

Seema Malhotra: [132923]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with (a) school leaders and (b) the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the timetable for covid-19 vaccinations for teachers and school staff.

Nick Gibb:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are the independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the UK should use and provide advice on who should be offered them.

JCVI advises that the first priorities for the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. As the risk of mortality from COVID-19 increases with age, prioritisation is primarily based on age.

Regarding the next phase of vaccine rollout, JCVI have asked that the Department of Health and Social Care consider occupational vaccination in collaboration with other Government departments. The Department for Education will input into this cross governmental exercise.

Olivia Blake: [133309]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the more transmissible strain of covid-19, if he will review the mandatory requirement for parents and guardians to send children to school in the case that someone in the household is extremely clinically vulnerable.

Nick Gibb:

From Wednesday 6 January a new national lockdown came into effect. Schools should only allow vulnerable children and the children of critical workers to attend face to face education. All other pupils will learn remotely.

Parents will not be penalised for not sending their children to school during this period.

Schools: Redbridge

Wes Streeting: [133988]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reasons schools in the London Borough of Redbridge were not included in the covid-19 contingency framework implementation guidance, published on 30 December 2020.

Nick Gibb:

Redbridge was inadvertently omitted from the list supplied to the Department for Education by the Department of Health and Social Care, but was added as soon as the mistake was identified.

Secondary Education: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis: [<u>130078</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to extend testing of secondary school aged children to all schools under tier 3 covid-19 restrictions.

Dan Jarvis: [<u>130079</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of introducing covid-19 testing of all secondary school aged children in Yorkshire and Humber on the transmission of covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

The asymptomatic testing programme has been successfully stood-up for secondary schools and colleges and will continue to support testing in schools and colleges. Secondary schools and colleges should continue to roll out the rapid mass testing, alongside serial testing, for staff, children of critical workers and vulnerable children on site, with the full rollout of the testing programme across secondary schools and colleges when they reopen. Secondary schools and colleges should also carry out initial testing of vulnerable children and children of critical workers who are on school or college sites (two tests, three to five days apart). The Department will roll out the testing programme in primary schools when home testing is available for pupils in these settings. Weekly testing for staff will roll out later this month, although currently there is no confirmed date.

This programme will help to break the virus's chains of transmission by identifying asymptomatic cases, therefore minimising disruption to schools and colleges.

Special Educational Needs

Tulip Siddiq: [131366]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will provide an estimated date for the publication of the SEND review.

Vicky Ford:

The government remains fully committed to a thorough and fundamental review of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system.

The issues that the SEND system face are complex, but we are determined to deliver real, lasting improvements, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The COVID-19 outbreak has had an unavoidable impact on our capacity to conclude the review, but it is my aim to bring forward proposals for public consultation next Spring.

Special Educational Needs: Finance

Tulip Siddiq: [131363]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate his Department has made of the proportion of the current year's increase in the Schools Block of dedicated schools grant funding that has directly benefitted SEND pupils.

Tulip Siddiq: [131364]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that increases in funding to support children with SEND are used for that purpose.

Tulip Siddiq: [131365]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish his Department's methodology for calculating the High Needs Block of dedicated school grant funding for individual local authorities; and whether that methodology takes into account (a) existing deficits and (b) increased demand for SEND high needs support.

Vicky Ford:

A great education is fundamental to the success of children, their families, and our communities, as well as the success of our country. That is why we are giving schools the largest cash boost in a decade, which will give every school more money for every child. We are increasing core schools funding by £2.6 billion in the 2020/21 financial year, including an additional £780 million for children with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), compared to the 2019/20 financial year. In the 2021/22 financial year, our funding for high needs will increase by a further £730 million, or 10%, bringing the total high needs budget to over £8 billion. High needs funding is allocated to local authorities through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

We do not prescribe in detail how schools should spend their funding allocations, nor how local authorities should allocate their high needs funding, but local authorities and schools have statutory duties under the Children and Families Act (2014) to support children and young people with SEND. Local authorities must also spend DSG funding in line with the conditions of grant. Further information on these conditions is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2020-to-2021/dsg-conditions-of-grant-2020-to-2021/.

We have published the 'Dedicated Schools Grant technical note 2020 to 2021' which explains how the DSG allocations for this year are calculated, and the 'schools and high needs national funding formula allocation tables for 2020/21' show the allocations for each local authority, and the values used to calculate the final allocation. These are available here:

 $\frac{https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2020-to-2021/dsg-technical-note-2020-to-2021}{and}$

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2020-to-2021. The funding formula includes a range of

proxies to reflect the underlying level of need in each local area, as well as factors to reflect the local SEND system.

Teachers: Coronavirus

Jamie Stone: [134055]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many primary and secondary school teachers have died as a result of covid-19.

Jamie Stone: [134056]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many primary and secondary school teachers have contracted covid-19 in the workplace.

Jamie Stone: [134057]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if the Government will publish statistics on the number of teachers who have died of covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

The Department does not hold data on how many deaths there have been due to COVID-19 in the teaching profession, nor information on how many teachers have contracted COVID-19 in the workplace.

Current scientific evidence is that children are at very low risk of serious illness from COVID-19, and there is also no current evidence that staff are at higher risk of infection than those working in other sectors.

The safety and wellbeing of staff and pupils is always our priority. The Government is doing all it can to minimise the risks to those working and studying in our registered nurseries, schools, colleges, and universities in this unprecedented situation, while mitigating the impact on education.

On 7 January the Department published guidance "Actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak", which sets out what all schools will need to do during the COVID-19 outbreak from January 2021:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.

The Department will continue to keep its plans under review and ensure our position is informed by the latest evidence.

■ Training: Coronavirus

Mick Whitley: [134164]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of cancelling examinations for students on vocational training courses and awarding centre-assessed grades in 2020.

Gillian Keegan:

Ofqual published analysis of the grades awarded for a number of vocational and technical qualifications (VTQ) in the 2020 spring and summer exam series. It

suggests that the profile of outcomes was not unduly influenced by the 2020 awarding process; however, there was a notable increase in the number of top grades being awarded for certain types of qualifications.

The practical assessments contained within many vocational qualifications allows a student to display the necessary skills, aptitude and competence required to enter the workplace. Skills based assessments such as these may not easily be replaced by alternative awarding arrangements and this could potentially delay a student's readiness for the workplace. We are confident that vocational assessments can go ahead safely with the extensive protective measures already implemented by schools and colleges and we believe it is only right that students are given this opportunity so that they can achieve their ambitions.

We will continue to work with Ofqual, awarding organisations and other stakeholders to discuss the next steps and provide more detail on the way forward for VTQ exams and assessments for February onwards, including ensuring students have a way to progress with as little disruption as possible.

Turing Scheme

Jonathan Edwards: [132856]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the Turing Scheme; whether that scheme will be UK-wide; whether universities will be required to make an application to be eligible for participation in the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Michelle Donelan:

The government fully recognises the benefits of international exchanges in education and training. We have worked closely with the Welsh Government as well as the other Devolved Administrations in designing the Turing Scheme and I plan to continue doing so as we move towards delivery.

With over £100 million allocated for the 2021/22 academic year, Turing will be a UK-wide scheme which students from the entire UK will be able to benefit from. More details of the scheme will be made available shortly, and in the coming weeks universities, colleges, and schools, as would have been the case with Erasmus+, will be invited to bid for funding to support student mobilities taking place from September 2021. In the meantime, education providers across the UK should begin preparations with international partners as soon as possible.

Universities: Coronavirus

Anne Marie Morris: [133865]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of the quality of education received by university students during the covid-19 outbreak.

Michelle Donelan:

The government's clear and stated expectation is that universities should maintain the quality and quantity of tuition and seek to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have the resources to study remotely. This is more important than ever at the moment, with the vast majority of students studying solely online. The Office for Students (OfS), as regulator for higher education (HE) providers in England, has made it clear that HE providers must continue to comply with registration conditions relating to quality and academic standards. These set out requirements to ensure that courses are high quality, that students are supported and achieve good outcomes, and that standards are protected, regardless of whether a provider is delivering its courses through face-to-face teaching, remote online learning, or a combination of both.

The OfS has published information on quality and standards for providers, providing practical guidance on how best to ensure students continue to receive a high-quality academic experience in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. This sets out that providers should make all reasonable efforts to provide alternative teaching and support for students that is at least broadly equivalent to the provider's usual arrangements. The OfS will keep this guidance under review to ensure it remains relevant to the developing circumstances of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The OfS is taking very seriously the potential impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on teaching and learning and is regularly engaging with all registered providers. It is actively monitoring providers to ensure: that they maintain the quality of their provision; that it is accessible for all; and that they have been clear in their communications with students about how arrangements for teaching and learning may change throughout the year. The OfS is also following up directly with providers where they receive notifications from students, parents or others raising concerns about the quality of teaching on offer, and requiring providers to report to them when they are not able to deliver a course or award a qualification. If the OfS has concerns, it will investigate further.

The OfS is also monitoring the position across the sector, for instance, through polling of students' views. Where appropriate and in response to issues raised through that monitoring, it will issue further advice to the sector.

Students have rights under consumer law that they may be able to rely on if they are dissatisfied with their provider's response to the COVID-19 outbreak. In the first instance, students should speak to their provider to see if they can resolve their issue. We expect student complaints and appeals processes to be operated flexibly, accessibly and sympathetically by providers to resolve any concerns. If a student at a provider in England or Wales is not satisfied with their provider's final response, they should go to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, which has published guidance on this issue.

Vocational Education: Assessments

Mick Whitley: [134163]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the public health risks of students sitting vocational examinations in-person in January.

Gillian Keegan:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, meets regularly with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the Chief Medical Officer and Public Health England to discuss all aspects of the safe running of education, including exams, during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The decision to restrict face to face attendance does not suggest that schools, colleges and other educational and childcare settings have become significantly less safe places for learners. Instead, limiting attendance is about supporting the reduction of the overall number of social contacts in our communities.

Schools and colleges have already implemented extensive protective measures, informed by Public Health England advice, to make vocational and technical exams as safe as possible. Public health guidance to support exams from January 2021 has also been published, and can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series/public-health-arrangements-for-autumn-exams. This guidance sets out arrangements all types of exam centre should implement when delivering exams to enable them to progress in a way which significantly reduces the risk of COVID-19.

Mick Whitley: [134166]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what (a) support and (b) advice his Department is providing to clinically extremely vulnerable students who are due to sit vocational examinations in January 2021.

Gillian Keegan:

The Department for Health and Social Care and Public Health England have published guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19, which is available here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19. Alongside this, the Department has also published guidance for schools and further education providers on the phased return to face-to-face education: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-fe-providers-return-in-january-2021/further-education-fe-providers-return-in-january-2021.

If a student is unable to attend their assessment because they are shielding, they will not be penalised. We are working with Ofqual to ensure that students unable to take their January assessments are treated fairly in comparison with their peers.

Mick Whitley: [134167]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason it is his Department's policy that vocational examinations will go ahead in January 2021.

Gillian Keegan:

We understand that these are difficult times but students have worked hard and prepared for theses exams and assessments so it is right that schools and colleges are given the option to run them, if they judge that is the right decision. Unlike GCSE and A levels exams that were due to take place this summer, these students' learning has not yet been disrupted by the new public health measures we have announced to help limit the transmission of COVID-19.

It is important to note that these qualifications are very different from GCSEs and A levels. For some students, they also need to complete a practical assessment to enter into the workplace and it is right that they should have the opportunity to do so, so they are not prevented from progressing onto the next stage of their lives.

No student will be disadvantaged if they are unable take their exam or assessment and there will be no penalty for non-attendance. The department will continue to work with Ofqual to ensure that students who are not able to take assessments in January are treated fairly in comparison with their peers taking similar assessments at other times.

Young People: Disability

Lilian Greenwood: [133800]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to improve supported internship schemes for disabled young people.

Vicky Ford:

Supported internships are a key part of our offer to support young people with SEND into employment. Since its introduction, the Supported Internships programme has grown year on year. The most recent report in January 2020 showed that 2,231 young people with Education Health Care plans were undertaking Supported Internships, an increase from 1,646 from the same time in 2019 and 1,186 in 2018.

We anticipate that the COVID-19 outbreak is likely to negatively impact this growth. Department officials are looking into how we can sustain and strengthen the Supported Internship Programme, which we know will be all the more important in light of the challenges to the labour market brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak.

In September 2019 we launched a review of SEND policy, which includes looking at how we can provide the highest quality support that enables children and young people with SEND to thrive, prepare for adulthood, and secure high quality outcomes. Officials from across the government are working to inform the development of the National Strategy for Disabled people, in particular consideration of what more can be done to support young people with SEND to prepare for and successfully transition to adulthood, including employment.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agricultural Products and Seafood: UK Trade with EU

Dave Doogan: [133192]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the additional cost to Scottish seafood and agricultural exporters per year of (a) customs documentation and (b) other non-tariff barriers to trade with the EU under the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement.

Victoria Prentis:

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement delivers on the Government's promise to take the UK out of the EU's customs territory and to regain control of our borders. We have always been clear that this means there will be new customs processes on goods being moved from GB into the EU and vice versa. The Agreement will help to manage the burden of non-tariff barriers for businesses by supporting efficient customs arrangements covering all trade in goods, while ensuring that we will be free to regulate our own market as we see fit. In addition, the agreement enables both sides to further reduce costs in the longer term. For example, we have agreed to explore the possibility of sharing import and export declaration data, including by setting up pilot programmes, where appropriate, with a view to reducing administrative burdens on business.

Importantly, this Agreement ensures there will be zero tariffs or quotas on trade between the UK and the EU, where goods meet the relevant rules of origin, and includes provisions to facilitate trade and address non-tariff barriers for UK exports to the EU and vice versa. It will therefore provide Scottish businesses with exceptional access to the EU's market and help them continue to trade smoothly: it is the first time the EU has ever agreed a zero tariff, zero quota deal.

We have already struck deals with more than 58 countries around the world, worth £198 billion a year - including with Canada, Japan and Singapore, with many more to come. This will benefit Scottish businesses, and create new markets for Scotland's exporters. It allows us to continue to have a close relationship with our European friends and neighbours, while we take our place in the world with an independent trade policy, acting as a global force for good.

Agricultural Products: UK Trade with EU

Daniel Zeichner: [129001]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the volume of (a) food and (b) agricultural goods normally (i) imported and (ii) exported between the UK and EU that may be deferred in January 2021; and what assessment he has made of the economic effect of that matter.

Victoria Prentis:

Any deferral of imports or exports between the UK and the EU would be a decision for individual businesses. The economic impact of any deferrals would be determined

not only by the volume but by their duration, and by the nature of the commodities whose movement was being deferred.

Given this complexity, it is not possible accurately to assess either the potential scale of any deferrals or their economic impact. My department engages regularly with stakeholders to support them in meeting any new requirements applicable to trade with the EU.

Agriculture: Seasonal Workers

Paul Blomfield: [132876]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers pilot scheme; and when he plans to make an announcement on its future.

Paul Blomfield: [<u>132885</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish (a) what plans he has to assess the effectiveness of Seasonal Agricultural Workers Pilot scheme due to end in February 2021, (b) the criteria for the final assessment of that scheme and (c) any assessments carried out of that scheme to date.

Paul Blomfield: [132886]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans she has to consult with stakeholder organisations representing migrant workers on the future of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Pilot scheme before any further rollout of that scheme.

Stuart C McDonald: [132943]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 8 October 2020 to Question 98994, whether he has made an assessment of the effectiveness of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers pilot scheme; and when he plans to make an announcement on that scheme's future.

Victoria Prentis:

On 22 December 2020, the Government extended the Seasonal Workers Pilot for one year and expanded the number of visas from 10,000 to 30,000.

The extension and expansion of the Pilot for 2021 will allow for further evaluation of the pilot, including how growers will reduce their reliance on migrant labour now we have left the EU, whilst also easing some of the pressure felt on farms when they are at their busiest. The first-year evaluation information will be published later this year.

Defra is working closely with industry and the Home Office to better understand the effectiveness of interventions and to ensure there is a long-term strategy for the food and farming workforce beyond 2021.

Stuart C McDonald: [132944]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions her Department has had with (a) migrant representative organisations and (b) trade unions to assist (i) the evaluation assessing the impact of the Seasonal Workers Pilot in the agricultural sector; and (ii) the design of any future scheme to bring seasonal workers into UK agriculture.

Victoria Prentis:

On 22 December 2020, the Government extended the Seasonal Workers Pilot for one year and expanded the number of visas from 10,000 to 30,000.

The extension and expansion of the Pilot for 2021 will allow for further evaluation of the pilot, including how growers will reduce their reliance on migrant labour now we have left the EU, whilst also easing some of the pressure felt on farms when they are at their busiest. The first-year evaluation information will be published later this year.

Defra is working closely with industry and the Home Office – who engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, when designing and implementing immigration policy – to better understand the effectiveness of interventions and to ensure there is a long-term strategy for the food and farming workforce beyond 2021.

Animal Products: Imports

Nickie Aiken: [131476]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the operational effect on port health authorities of the new rules and guidance on inspections of animal and animal product imports from the EU following the end of the transition period; and what consequential support his Department has provided to those authorities.

Victoria Prentis:

SPS controls on animals and animal products imported into GB from the EU are being introduced in stages. From April, Port Health Authorities (PHA) will be required to carry out remote documentary checks on POAO, with physical and identity checks on animal products being carried out at BCPs from 1 July 2021.

Defra has provided £14 million funding to 21 local authorities in England to support PHAs with the recruitment and training of over 500 new staff. Defra continues to work closely with PHAs to develop the necessary training and guidance needed to deliver SPS controls on the import of animal products, and has a dedicated team in place to provide tailored support.

Animal Products: UK Trade with EU

Theresa Villiers: [131199]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the EU has agreed to list the UK as a third country from which it will accept exports of food and other products of animal origin.

Victoria Prentis:

The UK has successfully applied for authorisation (known as 'listing status') to export animal products and live animals to the EU from 1 January 2021. The legal instruments giving effect to our listing were published in the EU's Official Journal on 28 December and will apply from 1 January 2021.

Animals: Exports

Jonathan Edwards: [132857]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his Department's planned consultation on ending live animal exports for slaughter and the proposals in that consultation on temperature limits, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) cost implications for farmers and (b) effect on the supply chain; and whether businesses would be expected to use weather forecasts to assess whether or not they would be able to transport live animals.

Victoria Prentis:

We have published a consultation stage impact assessment which estimates the potential impact on businesses of proposals to end live animal exports for slaughter and fattening and introduce further improvements to animal welfare during transport. We want to gather further evidence through the consultation process to further refine the impact assessment.

We are working closely with the Animal and Plant Health Agency on how any proposals would be implemented and enforced.

Assistance Animals: Dogs

Luke Pollard: [133164]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to requirements for travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 1 January 20201, whether his Department has made an assessment of other countries that have introduced an internal passport for assistance dog owners travelling within their own country.

Victoria Prentis:

We are not aware of any countries which have introduced an internal passport for assistance dogs. Under the legal framework of the EU Pet Travel Regulations, there are no derogations for assistance dogs. These regulations will apply in Northern Ireland by virtue of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Introducing an internal passport for pet travel from Great Britain to Northern Ireland is not possible within the terms of the

EU Pet Travel Regulations. Assistance dog owners should prepare their animal for travel to Northern Ireland as per the requirements laid out on GOV.UK.

Recognising that these changes will take time to adjust to, the UK Government is working with the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on an appropriate approach towards enforcement that takes this into account.

We are proactively engaging with the assistance dog community and relevant stakeholders on the impacts on dog movements from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. We will continue to work closely with assistance dog organisations to share the latest advice and guidance (in accessible formats) with their members on pet travel requirements.

There will be no changes to the entrance requirements for pets or assistance dogs entering Great Britain from Northern Ireland. Assistance dogs or pets travelling via this route do not need any documentation or health preparation to enter Great Britain.

Assistance Animals: Northern Ireland

Paul Girvan: [130199]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what restrictions and travel authorisation requirements will apply to assistance dogs travelling from (a) Northern Ireland to Great Britain and (b) Great Britain to Northern Ireland after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

Under the legal framework of the pet travel regulations, there are no derogations for assistance dogs. Assistance dog owners should prepare their animal for travel to Northern Ireland as per the requirements laid out on GOV.UK.

However, recognising that these changes will take time to adjust to, the UK Government is working with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on an enforcement approach that takes this challenge into account. This approach will be implemented in a way which supports pet owners and assistance dog users while the Government pursues a permanent solution

We are proactively and positively engaging with the assistance dog community and relevant stakeholders on the impacts on dog movements to the EU after the end of the transition period. We will continue to closely work with assistance dog organisations to share the latest advice and guidance (in accessible formats) with their members on pet travel requirements.

There will be no changes to the entrance requirements for pets or assistance dogs entering Great Britain from Northern Ireland. Assistance dogs or pets travelling via this route do not need any documentation or health preparation to enter Great Britain.

Luke Pollard: [133161]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what representations he has received on the compatibility of requirements for documents for

assistance dog owners to travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland with the rights of citizens to move freely within the Common Travel Area.

Victoria Prentis:

The health and documentary requirements for pet travel to the EU and Northern Ireland are set out under the EU Pet Travel Regulations. Under the legal framework of the EU Pet Travel Regulations, there are no derogations for assistance dogs. Assistance dog owners should prepare their animal for travel to Northern Ireland as per the requirements laid out on GOV.UK.

Recognising that these changes will take time to adjust to, the UK Government is working with the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on an appropriate approach towards enforcement that takes this into account.

We are proactively engaging with the assistance dog community and relevant stakeholders on the impacts on dog movements from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. We will continue to work closely with assistance dog organisations to share the latest advice and guidance (in accessible formats) with their members on pet travel requirements.

There will be no changes to the entrance requirements for pets or assistance dogs entering Great Britain from Northern Ireland. Assistance dogs or pets travelling via this route do not need any documentation or health preparation to enter Great Britain.

Assistance Animals: Pet Travel Scheme

Luke Pollard: [133162]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has carried out an equality impact assessment on the changes to pet travel rules for assistance dog owners after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

Under the legal framework of the EU Pet Travel Regulations, there are no derogations for assistance dogs. Assistance dog owners should prepare their animal for travel to Northern Ireland as per the requirements laid out on GOV.UK. My department has not carried out an equality impact assessment on the changes to the pet travel rules which apply to movements out of Great Britain. These changes stem from decisions made by the EU, and we continue to press the EU commission to secure Part 1 listed third country status. This status would mean similar health and documentary requirements for EU travel to those required before the end of the transition period.

Luke Pollard: [133163]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the total additional annual cost to pet and assistance dog owners of obtaining documents for travel from Great Britain to the EU or Northern Ireland from 1 January 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

My department has not made an estimate of the total additional annual cost of this documentation for pet travel from Great Britain to the EU or Northern Ireland. The relevant Animal Health Certificate template forms can be downloaded by vets at no cost. The cost of completing and certifying pet travel documentation, including Animal Health Certificates, is set by individual veterinary practices.

Biodiversity

Stephen Morgan: [130822]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help restore the UK's biodiversity; and if he will make a statement.

Rebecca Pow:

Domestic biodiversity policy is a devolved matter, and the information provided relates to England only.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan marked a step change in ambition for biodiversity and the natural environment in England. This Government is taking a wide range of steps to deliver on this ambition.

Our landmark Environment Bill introduces a powerful package of policies and tools to support nature's recovery. Biodiversity net gain, local nature recovery strategies, conservation covenants and a strengthened biodiversity duty on public authorities will work together to drive local action on the ground that creates or restores wildlife-rich habitats. This action will be supported by a new framework for setting long term legally binding targets, including on biodiversity, to make sure that our ambition is maintained.

We have introduced new funding for nature, such as the Nature for Climate and the Green Recovery Challenge Funds. The first £40 million round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund has been extremely successful. The fund has received a high-level of interest and we have been able to fund 68 high quality projects across England. For example, The Woodland Trust is being awarded £3,860,200 to restore ancient woodlands and trees across England. Following this success, the Government doubled the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to £80 million, kick-starting a further pipeline of nature-based projects to restore nature, tackle climate change and connect people with the natural environment.

We are developing a new Environmental Land Management scheme that will incentivise farmers and land managers to improve the environment, improve animal health and welfare, and reduce carbon emissions. The Prime Minister recently announced, as part of his 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, that over the next four years we will establish 10 Landscape Recovery projects to help us restore wilder landscapes.

In English waters there are 178 Marine Protected Areas protecting 40% of our seas. We have now essentially completed building our comprehensive network of Marine Protected Areas and are focusing on making sure they are protected properly.

Dredging: West Lancashire

Rosie Cooper: [132822]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness and adequacy of the Environment Agency's £175,000 spend on desilting works in West Lancashire over the last three years as part of its recurring maintenance programme.

Rebecca Pow:

Desilting is one of a range of activities carried out by the Environment Agency (EA) in West Lancashire to protect people and property from flooding, alongside the control of aquatic vegetation, removal of blockages and the operation of key flood defence assets, including tidal outfalls and pumping stations. The works carried out by the EA are targeted where they will provide the greatest benefit to people and property.

A recurring programme of silt surveys is in place to help the EA focus on areas where the need is greatest. The EA has secured over £70,000 for desilting in West Lancashire in 2021/22, including a desilt of the Three Pools watercourse which has multiple benefits across local residential and agricultural areas.

Fires: Air Pollution

Olivia Blake: [134281]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward additional legislation to regulate wood-burning stoves and bonfires as a result of the health and environmental risks that they pose.

Rebecca Pow:

As indicated in the Clean Air Strategy, new emission standards for solid fuel appliances will be introduced from 2022, ensuring only the cleanest new stoves are available for sale. On 7 October 2020, legislation was made that will restrict the sale of the most polluting fuels: bituminous coal, wet wood and high sulphur manufactured solid fuels, from 1 May 2021.

At this time, we have not announced any new measures restricting outdoor burning or to ban bonfires.

We continually work to improve our evidence base and incorporate new & emerging evidence as it becomes available and will consider this as we develop our policy approach moving forward to control emissions of harmful pollutants.

■ Fishing Vessels: Marine Protected Areas

Caroline Lucas: [131223]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy to (a) attach conditions limiting vessel size on fishing vessel licenses to 100m in length in the UK's Marine Protected Areas and (b) publish a timeline for implementing those conditions.

Victoria Prentis:

As an independent Coastal State, we can now review which vessels, including supertrawlers, can access and fish our waters. The new licensing framework within the Fisheries Act allows us to apply conditions to the activities of all fishing vessels in our waters - regardless of their nationality – and will need to abide by UK rules around sustainability and access to our 'Blue Belt' of protected waters.

The activity of 'supertrawlers' is managed in the same way as all fishing vessels. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) closely monitors vessels, including large trawlers, when fishing in English waters. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are set up to protect specific seabed habitats and species. Supertrawlers are pelagic trawlers whose nets do not touch the seabed, so generally don't cause damage to seabed features. MPAs, being protection of specific locations, usually aren't a suitable conservation mechanism for the highly mobile fish which supertrawlers are catching. Measures that will work to protect those fish need to apply across their full range, such as quotas.

■ Flood Control

Sir Greg Knight: [133719]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is planning to take in response to the National Audit Office report on Managing the risks of flooding and coastal erosion in England, published November 2020; if he will make it his policy to deliver greater certainty in future funding for flood management programmes to enable longer term planning; and if he will make a statement.

Rebecca Pow:

The NAO report on Managing Flood Risk was published on Friday 27 November and follows on from a 2014 study on the same subject. Following the Public Accounts Committee hearing on this report, the Government will respond later this year in the usual way by publishing a Treasury Minute.

The report confirms that the Government's current investment programme of £2.6 billion of capital investment which will conclude on 31 March 2021 is on track to deliver 300,000 homes better protected, to time and budget, which represents strong performance for a major infrastructure programme.

The Government has committed to invest a record £5.2 billion in a further six-year capital investment programme which will commence in April 2021. This investment will better protect 336,000 properties including 290,000 homes from flooding and

coastal erosion by 2027. This will enable long-term planning. The Government also provided an additional £170 million in economic recovery funding to accelerate 22 shovel ready schemes that better protect businesses and jobs.

Given the significant increase in Government investment in the flood defences and the changes already made to our partnership funding rules, the new six-year flood defence programme will require less in wider partnership contributions compared to the current programme. We are confident that the scale of the remaining contributions can be found and this will help deliver more schemes and therefore better protect more properties.

Floods: Insurance

Bridget Phillipson: [130699]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Financial Conduct Authority on the role of Flood Re in the flood insurance market since 14 February 2020.

Anneliese Dodds: [131457]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Financial Conduct Authority since 14 February 2020 on improving access to flood insurance for tenants.

Anneliese Dodds: [131458]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Financial Conduct Authority since 14 February 2020 in respect of improving access to flood insurance for people on low incomes.

Anneliese Dodds: [131466]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on what dates he has had meetings with the Financial Conduct Authority since 14 February 2020 at which the functioning of the UK's flood insurance market has been discussed.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra ministers have not met with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) since the 14 February 2020.

Food Supply

Angus Brendan MacNeil:

[130007]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to ensure the equitable distribution of food in the event that food volumes crossing the English Channel from the European continent are diminished from 1 January 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

The UK has a highly resilient food supply chain which is experienced in dealing with situations that can cause disruptions to supply.

The Government has carried out extensive planning working closely with the food industry and the Devolved Administrations to prepare for the end of the transition period and ensure continuity of food supply across the UK.

Food: Labelling

Andrew Percy: [130023]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on what date he plans to launch his consultation on food labelling; whether he plans to (a) include questions on associated regulatory provisions on enforcement and monitoring of agreed food labelling and (b) indicate a preference for mandatory or voluntary requirements for participation in that consultation; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government has committed to consult on what can be done through labelling to promote high standards and high welfare across the UK market following the transition period. The consultation is currently being prepared ahead of a planned launch in the first half of this year. This will feed into the Government's wide-ranging review on food labelling to ensure that consumers can have confidence in the food they buy and to facilitate the trade of quality British food at home and abroad.

The consultation will seek stakeholder and public views on how consumer information should be presented and on a range of policy options including mandatory/voluntary labelling reforms and enforcement.

Food: Prices

Andrea Leadsom: [132898]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he plans to take to protect against potential increases in prices on (a) baby food, (b) infant formula and (c) specialist medical nutrition products in the event that the UK has reached the end of the transition period without a deal on its future relationship with the EU.

Victoria Prentis:

We have now successfully negotiated a Free Trade Agreement with the EU and we will therefore not see tariff-based increases to food prices for consumers for agri-food imports from the EU which meet the Rules of Origin. Non-tariff measures could result in limited impacts. The factors which will continue to affect consumer food prices include agri-food import prices, domestic manufacturing costs and currency exchange rates.

Horses: Exports

Luke Pollard: [130214]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has in place to safeguard the welfare of horses in transit due for export in the event of delays at the border after 1 January 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra is working closely with operational partners, industry groups and transporters to minimise any potential animal welfare risks and to encourage thorough planning of journeys.

Comprehensive guidance on the new requirements for all authorised GB transporters of live animals has been provided. The EU no longer recognises GB authorised transporters as of 1 January and so all GB authorised animal transporters now need to apply for EU documentation. We have been working closely with the equine sector to ensure that they understand all the new requirements.

A Journey Log, approved by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is required for unregistered horses travelling on journeys exceeding 8 hours from, to and through Great Britain. If the proposed journey is not realistic, the APHA will not approve the Journey Log.

Animal transporters have a legal duty to protect the welfare of the animals in their care and have been reminded of their legal responsibilities. Transporters should have contingency plans in place to ensure that animal welfare is not compromised, even in the event of disruption to the journey. These plans must include identifying control posts and emergency lairage facilities which can be used to provide animals with appropriate rest periods, using alternative routes or delaying the journey until delays have subsided.

Horses: Trade

Luke Pollard: [130215]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of new EU trading relations on the ease with which horses can be imported and exported from 1 January 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

New requirements for the importation and exportation of horses and other equines have been set out on GOV.UK (see below links) and have been frequently communicated to maximise the preparedness of horse owners, keepers, and transporters.

The equine industry will need to adapt to the new rules, but the Government has worked closely with industry representatives to help it prepare for the coming changes to facilitate the continued movement of equines into and out of the UK.

Requirements for exporting horses: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/export-horses-andponies-special-rules

Requirements for importing horses: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/import-horses-andponies-from-1-january-2021

Luke Pollard: [130216]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to communicate to horse owners the new rules on importing and exporting horses after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government has used a range of channels to communicate the detail of the new arrangements for importing and exporting horses between the UK and the EU after the transition period. The specific requirements are set out on dedicated GOV.UK pages at the links below. The information on these pages has been communicated to horse owners through press announcements, social media, and engagement of industry representatives who have assisted in promoting the information among their members. We will continue to support horse owners and businesses in understanding and acting on the information now that the transition period has ended.

Requirements for exporting horses: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/export-horses-and-ponies-special-rules

Requirements for importing horses: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/import-horses-and-ponies-from-1-january-2021

■ Horses: Travel

Luke Pollard: [130217]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Transport on the welfare of horses in the event that their travel is delayed by queues at the border after 1 January 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

My Department liaises with the Department for Transport on the welfare of animals as part of traffic management discussions in the event that their travel is delayed by queues at the border now that the transition period has ended. Equines are not covered under the prioritisation of goods contingency, as set out in the relevant legislation [HCVs in Kent (No.3) Order 2019]. Advice has been given, and will continue to be given, to the industry for those transporting equines not to travel through Kent; and where they do travel, to use a vehicle less than 7.5 tons which will enable them to use the Brock contraflow in the event of significant traffic disruption. Where a vehicle over 7.5 tons ignores that advice and does join the Brock queue and where any delay occurs that results in animal welfare issues, then in these extreme and individual circumstances it would be an operational matter for Kent Police to allow them to be extracted and to join the contra-flow.

Members: Correspondence

Rosie Cooper: [130662]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 20 October 2020 on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency, reference GD/ZA54170.

Rosie Cooper: [130663]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the two letters from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 26 October 2020 on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency, references GD/ZA54244 and GD/ZA54254.

Rosie Cooper: [130664]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 27 October 2020 on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency, reference GD/ZA54258.

Rosie Cooper: [130665]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the two letters from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 9 November 2020 on watercourse maintenance in West Lancashire constituency, references GD/ZA54301 and GD/ZA54412.

Rosie Cooper: [130666]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the two letters from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 11 November 2020 on watercourse maintenance and Internal Drainage Boards in West Lancashire constituency, references GD/ZA54475 AND GD/ZA54476.

Rosie Cooper: [130667]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 9 November 2020 on flooding and litter in West Lancashire constituency, reference GD/ZA54309.

Rebecca Pow:

With regard to correspondence references GD/ZA54309 and GD/ZA54475, I replied to the hon. Member on 17 December 2020.

With regard to correspondence references GD/ZA54170, GD/ZA54244, GD/ZA54254,

GD/ZA54258, GD/ZA54301 and GD/ZA54412, I replied to the hon. Member on 18 December 2020.

Correspondence reference GD/ZA54476 was answered in the same reply as GD/ZA54475.

Pet Travel Scheme

Luke Pollard: [133165]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the (a) UK's applications to the European Commission for part-one listed status under the EU Pet Travel Scheme and (b) formal correspondence from the Commission regarding those applications.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra's initial application to be listed as a Part 1 listed third country for pet travel was submitted to the EU Commission in 2019. This application was updated, but not materially changed in February 2020. We will continue to seek Part 1 listed status, and in light of this we are not planning at this time to publish our applications or the European Commission's responses.

■ Pet Travel Scheme: Disease Control

Paul Girvan: [130198]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether cats, dogs or ferrets require tapeworm treatment if travelling for non-commercial purposes from (a) Northern Ireland to Great Britain and (b) Great Britain to Northern Ireland after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

There will be no changes to the current pet travel health requirements for entry into Great Britain from Northern Ireland or the EU. Dogs will not be required to undergo treatment for the tapeworm *Echinococcus Multilocularis* before entry into Great Britain if they are travelling from Northern Ireland.

As of 1 January 2021, the UK has Part 2 listed status under the EU Pet Travel Scheme, meaning that people travelling from GB with their pets and assistance dogs will need to follow new requirements in order to travel to the EU and Northern Ireland. These changes include the requirement for dogs moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, be treated against tapeworm 24-120 hours before landing.

However, recognising that these changes will take time to adjust to, the UK Government is working with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on an enforcement approach that takes this challenge into account. This approach will be implemented in a way which supports pet owners and assistance dog users while the Government pursues a permanent solution.

Pet owners are being encouraged to check the latest government advice about travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland or the European Union with their pets at the end of the transition period.

■ Pet Travel Scheme: Northern Ireland

Paul Girvan: [130195]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether Northern Ireland is included in (a) part 1 list ,(b) part 2 list or is (c) unlisted for the purpose of moving of non-commercial dogs, cats or ferrets after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

Our application to become a listed third country for non-commercial pet travel after the transition period included the United Kingdom and Crown Dependencies. The EU Commission has voted and formally adopted Great Britain and the Crown Dependencies as a 'Part II' listed third country.

This listed status will not apply in Northern Ireland as the EU's pet travel regulations which govern the movement of non-commercial dogs, cats and ferrets apply there, being included in Annex II of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Paul Girvan: [130196]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether Great Britain is included in the (a) Part 1 list, (b) Part 2 list or (c) Unlisted category for the purposes of moving non-commercial cats, dogs and ferrets to Northern Ireland after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

Our application to become a listed third country for non-commercial pet travel after the transition period included the United Kingdom and Crown Dependencies. The EU Commission has voted and formally adopted Great Britain and the Crown Dependencies as a 'Part II' listed third country.

Paul Girvan: [130200]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether owners of more than five (a) cats, (b) dogs and (c) ferrets will be required to obtain a health certificate for that group of animals before travelling from (i) Northern Ireland to Great Britain and (ii) Great Britain to Northern Ireland after the transition period.

Victoria Prentis:

Under the legal framework of the pet travel regulations, pet owners cannot take more than five cats, dogs or ferrets to the EU or Northern Ireland in any one movement unless the owner is attending or training for a competition, show or sporting event. The owner must also show proof of registration for the event when they travel. The animals themselves must also be; attending the event or training, be over 6 months old and comply with all other pet travel rules.

If a pet owner wishes to take more than five pets to the EU or Northern Ireland for another reason, they must comply with the rules governing the commercial movements of dogs, cats and ferrets.

There will be no changes or new requirements for pets entering Great Britain from Northern Ireland after the transition period, and this limit does not apply to these movements.

Sewers: Private Sector

Tracy Brabin: [131372]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to bring into force Section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and adopt all private sewage pumping stations.

Tracy Brabin: 131373

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many private sewage pumping stations in (a) England, (b) West Yorkshire and (c) Batley and Spen will be adopted by water companies when section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 is commenced.

Rebecca Pow:

I have recently reviewed the case for implementing section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. In 2021 my Department will start the work necessary to implement it. Part of that work will include a consultation on our implementation approach as well as determining the timing for implementation.

Section 42 implementation would cover new, not existing, sewerage assets, constructed from the date of implementation.

Regarding existing sewerage assets, such as operational private pumping stations, the consultation will seek views on making separate regulations concerning the adoption of those assets by sewerage companies.

We do not hold data on the number of private sewage pumping stations currently operating in (a) England, (b) West Yorkshire and (c) Batley and Spen, however we will investigate this further as part of the work to prepare to implement section 42 and the development of any separate regulations.

Supermarkets: Coronavirus

Mick Whitley: [131482]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with supermarket retailers on the steps retailers are taking to ensure that clinically extremely vulnerable people have continued access to priority online shopping deliveries over the Christmas period.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra is continuing to work closely with supermarkets to provide clinically extremely vulnerable individuals in England with priority access to supermarket delivery slots. Between 2 December and 5 January, any clinically extremely vulnerable person living in a Tier Three or Tier Four local area who did not already have priority access to delivery slots was still able to register for this support through the Government website: www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support.

During the third lockdown, all clinically extremely vulnerable people are able to register for priority access to delivery slots with seven supermarkets: Asda, Iceland, Morrisons, Ocado, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose. All clinically extremely vulnerable individuals who have registered through the Government website will retain their priority access to delivery slots until at least March 2021.

Mick Whitley: [131483]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with supermarket retailers on ensuring that clinically extremely vulnerable people are not being subject to excessive charges when booking priority online shopping deliveries.

Victoria Prentis:

DEFRA is continuing to hold regular conversations with each of the seven supermarkets participating in the priority access to online deliveries offer: Asda, Iceland, Morrisons, Ocado, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose. The department uses these meetings as an opportunity to convey any concerns raised by charities or Local Authorities around topics such as delivery charges. Although DEFRA cannot legally dictate the delivery costs charged by supermarkets, our regular conversations ensure that supermarkets understand the impact that delivery charges can have.

Alongside encouraging supermarkets to seriously consider the impact delivery charges can have on clinically extremely vulnerable people, the department also monitors delivery charges and circulates this information to Local Authorities to allow them to advise their residents accordingly.

Supermarkets: Packaging

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[133114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with supermarkets on reducing their usage of non-recyclable packaging for foodstuffs.

Rebecca Pow:

We are currently developing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging. EPR for packaging will see producers paying for the waste management costs associated with the packaging that they place on the market. In addition to this, EPR for packaging will see those costs modulated (varied) to account for various criteria, including recyclability. This will provide an incentive to producers who use recyclable packaging, as they could be paying less than those who don't. We will be consulting in early 2021 on our proposals for introducing EPR for packaging.

In developing these proposals and in preparation for the upcoming consultation, engagement with stakeholders, including supermarkets, has been a priority. As part of this focus on engagement, a joint project was recently launched to develop a key element of the new EPR for packaging system. This project is developing an approach to the modulation of producer fees and will run until July 2021. It is being led jointly between the Government and the Devolved Administrations, the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment (INCPEN), the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), and the British Retail Consortium (BRC). At all stages of the project, stakeholder engagement will be central to our approach.

Water Treatment

Alex Norris: [131422]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to Answer of 21 July 2020 to Question 75425, what steps she has taken to progress work with the industry to ensure that the supply of chemicals and materials that are essential

for water and wastewater treatment processes is not adversely affected following the end of the transition period.

Rebecca Pow:

Prior to the end of the transition period, the department worked with water companies, the regulators and the wider sector to prepare for a range of potential outcomes. Water companies undertook extensive preparations to ensure continuity of supply and these have ensured that thus far, there has not been an impact on water supply. Water companies are continuing to monitor their supply chains and have increased their on-site stocks of chemicals. The sector has well-rehearsed contingency plans to respond to incidents that might arise.

Zoo Animals Fund

Alex Sobel: [134096]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policy on the £100 million Zoo Animals Fund of (a) the fund expiry date of 29 January 2021, (b) the absence of a replacement and (c) 95 per cent of the fund having been unspent.

Alex Sobel: [134097]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has for the allocation of remaining funds from the £100 million Zoo Animals Fund after that fund's expiry on 29 January 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

The Zoo Animal Fund remains open for applications until 29 January 2021 and provides support up until the end of March 2021. We are considering whether an extension to this application deadline may be possible. The Zoo Animals Fund is an envelope of available funds to provide for zoos who, due to a coronavirus-related drop in income are experiencing severe financial difficulties and need support in caring for their animals between now and the start of the next peak visitor season, which is normally around Easter time. If zoos are downsizing or rehoming their collection the fund can also provide support for this to ensure the animals' welfare.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Abduljalil Abdulla al-Singace

Andrew Gwynne: [129998]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to reports that Dr Abduljalil AlSingace continues to suffer ongoing medical negligence at Jau Prison in Bahrain, if he will make urgent representations to his counterpart in Bahrain on securing (a) the immediate provision of adequate specialised healthcare for Dr AlSingace and (b) his immediate release from prison.

Andrew Gwynne: [129999]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to reports that political leader and Swedish-Bahraini dual national Sheikh Mohammed Habib AlMuqdad has had three surgeries postponed by Jau Prison authorities in Bahrain, if he will make urgent representations to his counterpart in Bahrain on (a) ensuring that Sheikh AlMuqdad is provided with the three surgeries he urgently requires and (b) securing Sheikh AlMuqdad's immediate release from prison.

James Cleverly:

Responsibility for the provision of medical care lies with the Government of Bahrain, who have made clear that access to medical care for those in detention is guaranteed by the Constitution of Bahrain. We welcome these assurances from the Government of Bahrain. Bahrain takes allegations of mistreatment very seriously and has multiple mechanisms in place to investigate any allegations of wrongdoing. We urge those with any concerns regarding the treatment to submit a formal complaint into the Independent Ombudsman and the National Institute of Human Rights, for further investigation.

Africa: Overseas Aid

[131280] **Stephen Doughty:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will list the total Official Development Assistance out-turn to (a) Democratic Republic of Congo, (b) Ethiopia, (c) Burkina Faso, (d) South Sudan, (e) Mozambique, (f) Nigeria, (g) Somalia, (h) Sudan, (i) Malawi, (j) Sierra Leone and (k) Mali in each of the last 24 months.

James Duddridge:

The Statistics on International Development (SID) National Statistics report, published on the GOV.UK website, provides an overview of all official UK spend on Official Development Assistance (ODA). UK bilateral aid to the countries listed is detailed in a specific SID table - "Table A4a: Total UK Bilateral ODA by country -Africa". UK multilateral aid to the countries listed is detailed in "Table A10: Imputed UK Share of Multilateral Net ODA by Country". Details of multilateral aid by country are currently only available up to the year 2018.

UK ODA figures for 2020 will be published in Autumn 2021, via Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2020.

Preet Kaur Gill: [131395]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 October 2020 to Question 95724, how much Official Development Assistance went to the DRC, Nigeria, Niger, Mozambique, Uganda, Madagascar and Sudan in 2019 and 2020; and how much is planned to be allocated to those countries in 2021.

James Duddridge:

The Statistics on International Development (SID) National Statistics report, published on the GOV.UK website, provides an overview of all official UK spend on Official Development Assistance (ODA). UK bilateral aid to the countries listed is detailed in a specific SID table - "Table A4a: Total UK Bilateral ODA by country - Africa". UK multilateral aid to the countries listed is detailed in "Table A10: Imputed UK Share of Multilateral Net ODA by Country". Details of multilateral aid by country are currently only available up to the year 2018.

UK ODA figures for 2020 will be published in Autumn 2021, via Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2020.

Budget allocations are made for financial years and allocations for 2021-22 have not yet been made and will be decided through a rigorous business planning and budget allocation process in early 2021.

Algeria: International Assistance

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130626]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will seek assurances from the Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria that UK international aid, contributed via the European Union International Development fund, has not been used to acquire armaments used by the Algeria-backed Polisario, based in the Tindouf camps.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130627]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the UK component within the report by the European Anti-Fraud Office alleging large-scale embezzlement of the EU International Development aid intended to assist refugees in the Tindouf camps.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130632]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the evidence given by the Director-General of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, that the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria places a five per cent tax on aid sent from the EU International Aid fund to the Tindouf camps within its borders; and what estimate he has made of the UK contribution to that aid in the last five years.

James Cleverly:

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) report on food aid in Tindouf refugee camps was undertaken from 2003, drafted in 2007 and released in 2015 following an intervention by the EU Ombudsman. The European Commission has taken measures to address the findings documented in the OLAF report. The European Commission has found no evidence of aid diversion since these measures were put in place and it has taken measures to ensure that aid continues to reach the intended beneficiaries and to avoid diversion risks. We understand that the European Commission has also

taken steps with the Algerian Government to allow for donations intended for Sahrawi refugees to be exempt from VAT.

We are concerned about the people of Western Sahara, particularly those in the Tindouf refugee camps. The UK has provided support to displaced people in camps in the Tindouf region of Algeria via contributions to the EU's ECHO humanitarian fund, which provided €9 million in humanitarian funding in 2020. Our core contributions to the UN also help to support UN bodies in Tindouf. The UK strongly supports UN-led efforts to reach a lasting and mutually acceptable political solution on the Western Sahara dispute that provides for the self determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Algeria: Polisario Front

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130628]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his counterpart in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to seek assurances that it has not supplied armaments to the Polisario forces based in the Tindouf camps within its borders.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130631]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with the ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria on the application of human rights in the Tindouf camps in Algeria.

James Cleverly:

We have regular discussions with various interlocutors on Western Sahara, including Algeria and we are closely monitoring the situation. We continue to urge the parties to avoid further escalation, return to the ceasefire agreement, and re-engage with the UN-led political process. The UK is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide, including in Western Sahara and the Tindouf refugee camps, which we raise with the parties.

Anoosheh Ashoori

Hilary Benn: [133714]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the Iranian authorities calling for the release of Anoosheh Ashoori.

James Cleverly:

Securing the release of the dual British nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran, including Anoosheh Ashoori, is one of this Government's top priorities. Their welfare is our key concern. The Foreign Secretary regularly raises the detained dual British nationals with Foreign Minister Zarif. Our Ambassador to Tehran discusses them at every opportunity with his Iranian counterparts, most recently with Deputy Foreign Minister Araghchi on 30 December.

British Nationals Abroad

Layla Moran: [<u>134086</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many UK citizens have informed British consulates that they are stranded abroad since 21 December 2020.

Nigel Adams:

The FCDO has handled over 25,000 enquiries between 21 December 2020 and 6 January 2021 from British people requiring Consular support, of which 4,000 are from British people impacted by COVID-19. This figure includes under 200 calls from those seeking advice on returning home either to the UK or overseas.

British Nationals Abroad: EU Countries

Neil Coyle: [132937]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he will take to ensure UK nationals can qualify for an Article 50 Permit, where their move to the EU has been delayed until after the end of the transition period as a result of the suspension of travel between the UK and European destinations.

Wendy Morton:

Despite the travel disruption caused by Covid-19, the conditions of the Withdrawal Agreement, as set in domestic and international law, remain the same. To be in scope of the Withdrawal Agreement and therefore be eligible to obtain a residence document issued in accordance with it, UK nationals must have been lawfully resident in an EU Member State before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. Those who move to the EU after the transition period will not be in scope of the Withdrawal Agreement unless they are a close family member of someone who is in scope, provided the relationship was established prior to the end of the transition period. Children born before or after the end of the transition period, to parents protected by the Withdrawal Agreement, are also entitled to join them. The Government has made this information available to UK nationals in our communications throughout negotiations and during the transition period, including in our Living in Guides on gov.uk.

UK nationals who planned to move to the EU and secure rights under the Withdrawal Agreement ahead of the end of the transition period, have been able to travel to the EU despite Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Although the transition period is over, citizens' rights will remain a key priority for the Government.

British Overseas Territories: Climate Change

Stephen Doughty: [132925]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the UK Overseas Territories to UK climate change commitments.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Overseas Territories are custodians of internationally important habitats and species. As small island and coastal communities, climate change and biodiversity loss will have a profound impact upon them. The UK and Overseas Territories have a proud history of taking ambitious action on the environment, as demonstrated by the world-leading Blue Belt programme. Working with the Overseas Territories, we have successfully protected 60% of UK waters, which includes 4.3 million square kilometres of protection around the Overseas Territories. Building on this success in 2019, the UK launched the Global Ocean Alliance, calling for at least 30% of the global ocean to be protected by 2030.

At the recent Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council, territory leaders pledged to work with the UK to secure an ambitious agreement to tackle climate change at COP26. By the time of the Summit, each territory government will have endeavoured to communicate their plan for climate change adaptation and mitigation, which will contribute towards global carbon emission reductions. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy plans to consult with the territories on the extension of the Paris Agreement and the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution to cover their emissions.

British Overseas Territories: Overseas Aid

Stephen Doughty: [131277]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what additional funding arrangements he has established for the UK Overseas Territories following the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government is fully committed to supporting the Overseas Territories. The end of the transition period affects each territory in different ways. We will continue to work with the territories to understand funding needs and the right balance of OT and UK spending in support of these needs.

CDC: Fossil Fuels

Stephen Doughty: [131283]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much CDC has allocated to fossil-fuel projects in each of the last five years; and what the value is of planned allocations for the next five years.

James Duddridge:

CDC has published its complete portfolio of energy investments as held at 31 December 2019, with details including the start date of each investment and the total amount committed - https://assets.cdcgroup.com/wp-

content/uploads/2020/09/11174306/Fossil-Fuels-and-Renewables-portfolio-as-at-31-December-2019-pdf.pdf.

For future investments, CDC has published its fossil fuel policy to align with the Government's new approach.

Charities

Preet Kaur Gill: [131390]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to support small UK based development charities.

James Cleverly:

The FCDO is committed to working in partnership with a diverse range of civil society organisations (CSOs) and recognises the unique role played by small charities.

The FCDO's UK Aid Direct programme, with an overall budget of £179 million, supports very small, small, and medium-sized civil society organisations (CSOs) working to achieve sustained poverty reduction and deliver the Global Goals. It offers a number of different grants for CSOs with an annual income of £1 million or less per year. Specifically, the Small Charities Challenge Fund (SCCF) has been set up to invite applications from very small CSOs with an income of £250,000 or less and offers grants of up to £50,000. To date, over 100 SCCF grants totalling £5.1 million have been approved for funding to small British charities across 22 developing countries. The FCDO's funding through SCCF is also coupled with initiatives aimed at building capacity of small charities

China: Foreign Trade

Shabana Mahmood: [130676]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs,, what steps he is taking to raise concerns on cotton from Xinjiang and other unethically sourced products with the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Nigel Adams:

The UK has taken a leading international role in holding China to account for its human rights violations in Xinjiang, including in respect of credible evidence of forced labour. The UK led the first international joint statements on this issue at the UN, including at the UN Human Rights Council in June. Most recently, on 6 October, alongside Germany, we brought together a total of 39 countries to express grave concern at the situation in Xinjiang in a joint statement at the UN Third Committee. The statement expressed deep concern at the growing number of reports of forced labour in Xinjiang. In addition, at the UN Human Rights Council in September, we

raised the issue of forced labour in our national statement which we devoted entirely to China - the first time we had focused on a single country since Salisbury in 2018.

China: Human Rights

Mr Steve Baker: [130707]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the (a) the Chinese Government, (b) the international community and (c) UK businesses on the treatment of Uighurs and other minorities in Xinjiang.

Nigel Adams:

The UK has played a leading international role in holding China to account for its human rights violations in Xinjiang. Most recently, in October, alongside Germany we brought together a total of 39 countries to express grave concern at the situation in Xinjiang in a joint statement at the UN Third Committee. We have engaged more than 50 countries on this issue in recent months. The Foreign Secretary has raised our serious concerns directly with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi on a number of occasions this year. FCDO officials regularly engage business and other stakeholders including trade bodies to raise awareness of China's human rights violations, and underline our view that businesses must take steps to ensure their supply chains are free of forced labour. We continue to urge all UK businesses to conduct due diligence on their supply chains and are taking steps to strengthen supply chain transparency under the Modern Slavery Act.

Apsana Begum: [131510]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that UK businesses conduct thorough due diligence on supply chains that may be linked to entities engaging in human rights violations in Xinjiang.

Nigel Adams:

Through our overseas business risk guidance, regular engagement with business and clear statements to Parliament we have urged all businesses involved in investing in Xinjiang, or with parts of their supply chains in the region, to conduct appropriate due diligence to satisfy themselves that their activities do not support, or risk being seen to be supporting, any human rights violations or abuses. In addition, FCDO-funded research into forced labour in Xinjiang has been crucial to raising business awareness of this issue.

Christianity: Oppression

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130764]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to reports of attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria and increasing Islamic terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, Congo, Kenya, Uganda and other countries in West and Central Africa, what support his Department has provided to multi-national responses to (a) resist extremism and (b) protect vulnerable minority Christian communities.

James Duddridge:

We condemn all criminal and terrorist attacks on civilians, whatever their religion or belief. Attacks have caused immense suffering to local communities. The UK supports multi-national responses to tackle the threats from different terrorist groups in North East Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin and East Africa. For example, we support Nigeria and its neighbours in the fight against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa in North East Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad Basin by helping fund the Lake Chad Basin Regional Stabilisation Facility to strengthen community security, provide basic services and support livelihoods. We have provided funding and operational support for the Multinational Joint Task Force, a regional force coordinating military efforts for regional security. In the Sahel, we are providing logistical support to the French-led counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane. We are increasing focus on the protection of civilians through our deployment to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and as one of the largest humanitarian donors. Additionally, the UK supports regional security and efforts to counter the threat posed by Al-Shabaab in East Africa, including through UK military training to forces from troop contributing countries to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army. We are delivering a three year programme to strengthen regional, national and community level efforts to prevent radicalisation and recruitment across East Africa, including Kenya and Uganda. Across the continent, the UK continues to be a committed contributor to and supporter of UN peacekeeping operations.

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all (FoRB) globally, and promoting respect between communities. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with governments, including at Ministerial level. Defending FoRB was a core pledge in our successful campaign to be re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council, and we will continue to use our position to stand up for individuals who are persecuted for their faith, belief, or because they have no religious belief. We work within the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe and other multilateral fora to promote and protect FoRB for all where it is threatened. In November 2020, the Minister responsible for human rights, Lord Ahmad (Tariq) of Wimbledon, underlined the UK's commitment to FoRB, speaking at the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Ministers' Forum of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

Coronavirus: International Cooperation

Preet Kaur Gill: [131389]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the likelihood that the COVAX facility will meet its objectives.

Wendy Morton:

The Prime Minister has been clear in his commitment to equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, that is why the UK has played a leading role in shaping the COVAX Facility. We are proud to be its largest bilateral donor, committing up to £548 million to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. Our commitment to the COVAX AMC will support access to COVID-19 vaccines for up to 92 developing countries by contributing to the supply of 1 billion doses by the end of 2021, and vaccinations for up to 500 million people (subject to vaccines successfully securing stringent regulatory approvals).

COVAX is on track to deliver its targets and is making good progress in negotiating deals with manufacturers.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Internally Displaced People

Dame Diana Johnson: [130658]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps his Department has taken to help tackle the violence against the Banyamulenge community of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Dame Diana Johnson: [130659]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what programmes of international aid and humanitarian assistance the UK Government has contributed to in response to the ongoing persecution of the Banyamulenge community in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Dame Diana Johnson: [130660]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations the Government has made to the United Nations on action to protect the Banyamulenge community of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

James Duddridge:

The UK is concerned about violence against all communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including the Banyamulenge. Our six-year £70 million peace and stability programme is helping communities, including the Banyamulenge, secure land access, construct critical infrastructure and access income-generation opportunities. This is in addition to our support to the UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO, through funding (approximately £50 million in 2019/20) and the provision of three military staff officers. The UK also supports the UN Joint Human Rights Office to monitor and report human rights violations in DRC.

Since 2017, the UK's humanitarian programme has helped over three million people with cash, emergency nutrition, water and healthcare in DRC, including communities in South Kivu such as the Banyamulenge. All UK-funded humanitarian aid is distributed on the basis of need to ensure civilians are not discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity. Diplomatically, we continue to urge the UN and the DRC

Government to work together to protect civilians from ongoing violence and address the root causes of conflict. During Minister Duddridge's November visit to DRC he discussed the importance of addressing these issues, including during a meeting with President Tshisekedi. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, we are committed to ensuring MONUSCO's mandate is focussed on the protection of civilians and that vulnerable communities remain central to the UN's work in DRC.

■ Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Reorganisation

Preet Kaur Gill: [134048]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many employee hours have been spent on the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office does not hold this information.

Given the all-encompassing nature of the merger process, officials from across the full breadth of the FCDO engage in the merger process as required. As officials are not required to keep a detailed record of time spent it is not possible to accurately assess the number of hours designated to merger activity across the whole department.

Preet Kaur Gill: [134049]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many full-time equivalent staff have been working on the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in each month since January 2020.

Nigel Adams:

The number of FTE equivalent staff working in the FCDO's Transformation Team on the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the subsequent consolidation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in each month since January 2020 is as follows.

Prior to the Prime Minister's 16 June 2020 announcement of the merger -

JANUARY 2020 2020 MARCH 2020 APRIL 2020 MAY 2020 J					
	Marc	CH 2020 APF	RIL 2020 MAY	2020 JUNE 202	20
	0	0			

Subsequent to the Prime Minister's 16 June 2020 announcement of the merger -

	AUGUST	SEPTEME	BER OCTOBER	November	R D ECEMBEI	R J ANUARY
JUNE 2020 JULY 202	0 2020	2020	2020	2020	2020	2021
11 40	44	47	49	53	58	64

Given the all-encompassing nature of the merger process, officials from across the full breadth of the FCDO also engage in the merger process as required. However, as officials are not asked to keep a detailed record of time spent on merger activity it is not possible to assess to how many FTE equivalent staff this time would equate.

Developing Countries: Coronavirus

Preet Kaur Gill: [134046]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the average cost of a Oxford AstraZeneca covid-19 vaccination procured by COVAX under the advance market commitment agreement.

Wendy Morton:

The UK welcomes AstraZeneca's commitment to non-profit equitable access and encourages other manufacturers to do the same during the pandemic. COVAX has an advance purchase agreement with AstraZeneca for 170 million doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford candidate at non-profit pricing. Gavi and Unicef will publish procurement prices in due course. This is in addition to an existing agreement with the Serum Institute of India (SII) for 200 million doses - with options for up to 900 million doses more - of either the AstraZeneca/Oxford or Novavax vaccines (the latter is yet to complete phase 3 trials). The agreement with SII will see any combination of these vaccines be available at a price no greater than US\$3 a dose.

The UK is committed to rapid equitable access to safe and effective vaccines at affordable prices. The UK has committed up to £548 million to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), an international initiative that will support global equitable access to vaccines in up to 92 low and middle-income countries. The AMC will supply 1 billion doses in 2021, vaccinating up to 500 million people.

Developing Countries: Genito-urinary Medicine

Yasmin Qureshi: [130017]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he has taken as a result of the UK's endorsement of the Guttmacher-Lancet integrated definition of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in 2019.

Wendy Morton:

The UK government fully endorses the Guttmacher-Lancet definition of sexual and reproductive health and rights and promote this in our international engagement. The UK works hard to support this comprehensive package of services through our long-

term investments in family planning, safe abortion care, maternal and newborn health, HIV treatment and prevention, and our efforts to end female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. Sexual and reproductive health and rights services - as defined by Guttmacher-Lancet - are a core pillar of our action to end preventable deaths of mothers, newborns and children by 2030, including through our bilateral health and SRHR programmes.

■ Diego Garcia: USA

Olivia Blake: [<u>131516</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the US-UK agreement on the leasing of the Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands in the British Indian Ocean Territories includes permission for the US to (a) build and (b) operate the Ground-Based Electro-Optical Deep Space Surveillance system as part of outer space communications.

Nigel Adams:

There is no lease with respect to Diego Garcia. US presence and operations in the British Indian Ocean Territory are governed by a series of international agreements, beginning with a 1966 Exchange of Notes between the US and UK, which set out that the whole Territory should be made available for UK and US defence purposes.

■ Diplomatic Service

Wayne David: [129987]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answers of 14 December 2020 to Question 127489 and 3 December 2018 to Question 196145, when his Department stopped recording the countries where the UK does not have embassies or consulate offices.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) maps the extent of the UK's diplomatic and consular representation overseas. This information is publicly available on Gov.uk, and was last updated in September 2020:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-foreign-office-posts. UK nationals overseas who need assistance can call any of our embassies, high commissions or consulates, or the FCO switchboard, 24/7 for advice or help.

Countries not included in the FCDO list of Posts do not have a UK diplomatic presence. The FCDO does not publish a list of countries without UK diplomatic representation as this information is publicly available by comparing the FCDO list of Posts against the official map of countries as recognised by the UN: https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/world-today.

Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad

Stuart C McDonald: [132948]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what rights UK nationals (a) arrested, (b) tortured and (c) detained abroad have to consular (a) assistance and (b) protection; and if he will make a statement.

Nigel Adams:

Our consular staff endeavour to give tailored support to British nationals overseas and their families in the UK, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. We help around 30,000 British nationals abroad every year - 20,000 new cases and around 10,000 long running cases, such as those in detention. The UK Government has the power to grant consular assistance to British nationals abroad on such requests. Each request for consular assistance will be considered individually. The UK is a party to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which is a multilateral agreement setting out how States will cooperate in the support of their nationals in distress overseas including for example granting access to detained nationals. The Government's ability to provide consular assistance remains at all times dependent on other states respecting the VCCR and must be done in accordance with the laws of that country. The assistance the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) can provide to British nationals abroad is set out in the publication: Support for British nationals abroad: A Guide.

(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-british-nationals-abroad-aguide). It includes further information on what we can seek to do for victims of torture and mistreatment, and for those detained overseas. The level and type of assistance we offer is tailored to the individual circumstances of each case but we take all allegations of torture or mistreatment seriously, treat those who have made allegations of torture and mistreatment as vulnerable cases and follow up with action appropriate to the circumstances of each case. Consular assistance is often referred to as consular protection. It is distinct from diplomatic protection.

Diplomatic Service: Staff

Lisa Nandy: [130047]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 December 2020 to Question 126853 on Diplomatic Service: Staff, how many UK overseas diplomatic posts there are in each FCDO headcount band.

Nigel Adams:

For security reasons, the FCDO provides headcount detail in bands. The FCDO was formed on 2nd September 20, with Legacy Departments continuing to use legacy systems for recording staff in the interim. People in former DFID roles are recorded at Country level with no ability to report at Post level currently available. Therefore the data provided contains former FCO headcount only.

As at 31 October 2020, the number of Diplomatic Posts in each headcount band is set out as follows:

	No. of Posts with a UKB HEADCOUNT IN THE			
HEADCOUNT BAND	BAND			
Fewer than 10	166			
10-19	34			
20-29	11			
30-39	7			
40-49	1			
120-139	1			

Data does not include Posts where there is no UK-Based presence.

Education: Females

Sarah Champion: [131284]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to tackle the barriers girls face in accessing education throughout the world.

Wendy Morton:

The FCDO plays a leading role in championing every girl's right to 12 years of quality education. Through the UK's hosting of the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment summit and our G7 Presidency, for example, we will put girls' education front and centre of the global agenda in 2021.

We understand girls face a wide range of barriers to accessing education and learning from low quality and gender-insensitive teaching practices to gender-based violence and child marriage. The FCDO is working to remove barriers to girls' education and improve their learning outcomes through a wide range of programmes and policies in the education sector and beyond. We will continue to be a progressive force for women and girls, including for their sexual and reproductive health and rights and right to education, as we help lead the global response to coronavirus. We are challenging attempts to roll back rights globally, and we are present and influential in important forums such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Preet Kaur Gill: [131392]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Secretary of State for International Trade's speech at the Centre for Policy Studies on 17 December 2020 stating that the Government's approach to equality will not be about targets, whether his Department will continue to have targets for increasing the number of girls supported by the UK to have 12 years of quality education.

Wendy Morton:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office plays a leading role in championing every girl's right to 12 years of quality education. We will continue to prioritise girls' education because it is the right thing to do, and because the fortunes of so many of the poorest countries depend on tapping the full potential of all of their people, which must include women and girls in education.

Our global target, working with our partners, is to get 40 million more girls into education by 2025.

Preet Kaur Gill: [134047]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, for how long the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas) will temporarily be responsible for girls' education.

Wendy Morton:

The Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas is responsible for the girls' education portfolio. Any potential changes to Ministerial portfolios will be communicated in the usual way.

Ethiopia: Armed Conflict

Hilary Benn: [129980]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of (a) the implications for his policies of recent violence and (b) the human rights situation in the Oromia region of Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement.

James Duddridge:

The UK is concerned by the violence in the Tigray region and the risk it poses to civilians, and by reports of ethnically-motivated attacks both within Tigray and elsewhere in Ethiopia. We are also concerned about the risk these events pose to Ethiopia's overall political stability and its democratic transition, of which the UK has been supportive. The Foreign Secretary spoke with Prime Minister Abiy on 10 November and called for the immediate de-escalation of violence, for the protection of civilians and for unfettered humanitarian access. He reiterated these messages when he met Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister Demeke on 25 November.

Oromia and Amhara have also seen violent clashes in recent months. I condemned 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, as well as the President of Oromia. The UK is committed to supporting a peaceful political transition in Ethiopia where all the rights of minorities are protected. We will continue to monitor closely the human rights situation in Ethiopia.

Damian Collins: [132863]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to support humanitarian relief for people affected by the

conflict in Tigray in Ethiopia; and what recent discussions he has had with his Ethiopian counterpart on restoring peace to that region.

James Duddridge:

The UK is supporting life-saving assistance for people affected by the conflict in Tigray, including health and malnutrition treatment and water and sanitation delivered through UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and NGO partners. We continue to work closely with the UN and partners, in calling for sustained, free and unfettered humanitarian access across Tigray, in line with the guiding principles laid down by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Since the Foreign Secretary met the Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister in London on 25th November we have continued to press the Government of Ethiopia for a political solution to restore peace, including in my call with the Ethiopian Finance Minister on 16 December.

■ Females: Violence

Sarah Champion: [131286]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans his Department has to tackle the change in the level of violence against women and girls as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is deeply concerned about the surge in violence against women and girls (VAWG) during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided £20 million to UNICEF and £10 million to UNFPA, which includes funding to scale up reporting, protection and support services for women and children affected by violence. In September 2020, we announced new funding of £1 million to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women's COVID-19 Crisis Response Window, on top of our existing £21 million contribution.

The UK is further stepping up our international leadership on this agenda with our coleadership of the new Generation Equality global Action Coalition on Gender-based Violence (GBV). We are using this platform to drive more concerted, coordinated and scaled-up global action to prevent GBV. This has included initiating a joint statement on GBV and COVID-19 by the Action Coalition which was launched at the UN General Assembly in 2020 . This can be found here:

https://forum.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Joint_ACLeaders_statement_GBV_En.pdf.

We are also scaling up our investments, including through plans to launch in 2021 a new seven-year programme to scale up effective interventions to prevent VAWG - What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale. This will be the first global effort to systematically scale-up of VAWG prevention efforts globally.

Fossil Fuels: Overseas Aid

Preet Kaur Gill: [131387]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much Official Development Assistance was allocated to fossil fuel projects in 2020.

James Duddridge:

The Prime Minister announced at the Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December that the Government will no longer provide any new direct financial or promotional support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas, with very limited exemptions. This new policy will be implemented as soon as possible following the conclusion of a consultation process and will apply to all future Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending decisions.

This announcement forms part of the commitment made at the G20 in June 2019 that the UK Government will align all future ODA with the Paris Agreement temperature goals. ODA spend figures for 2020 are not yet available.

Preet Kaur Gill: [131388]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much Official Development Assistance he plans to allocate to fossil fuel projects in 2021.

James Duddridge:

The Prime Minister announced at the Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December that the Government will no longer provide any new direct financial or promotional support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas, with very limited exemptions. This new policy will be implemented as soon as possible following the conclusion of a consultation process and will apply to all future Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending decisions.

This announcement forms part of the commitment made at the G20 in June 2019 that the UK Government will align all future ODA with the Paris Agreement temperature goals. ODA spend figures for 2020 are not yet available.

Gaza Strip: Coronavirus

Dame Diana Johnson: [132801]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what (a) diplomatic and (b) humanitarian support the Government (a) has provided and (b) plans to provide to help tackle the effects of the covid-19 pandemic in Gaza.

James Cleverly:

The UK remains concerned about the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza, further compounded by COVID-19. The UK works closely with key partners, including the Palestinian Authority to ensure a coherent strategy to mitigate the immediate impacts of COVID-19 and to support recovery. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem are in regular contact with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities respectively.

Recognising the severity of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we have provided £1.25 million funding (the World Health Organisation with £630,000 and the United Nations Children's Fund with £620,000) to purchase and co-ordinate delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline health workers and scale up laboratory testing capacity - mainly in Gaza. In addition to our emergency support to the COVID-19 crisis, we are also providing £2.5 million to the World Food Programme to provide food and cash assistance for the most vulnerable Palestinians.

■ Gender: Equality

Yasmin Qureshi: [130018]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect on levels of gender equality globally of the proposed reduction in official development assistance in 2021.

Wendy Morton:

The seismic impact of the pandemic on the UK economy has forced us to take the tough but necessary decision, to temporarily reduce the overall amount we spend on ODA. Despite the reduction in our spend, the UK remains committed to advancing gender equality, and women's and girls' rights, and we are preparing to take full advantage of the opportunities that 2021 will offer. This includes the UK's Presidency of the G7, co-hosting the Global Partnership for Education replenishment, COP26 and co-leadership of the new global Action Coalition on gender-based violence.

The Foreign Secretary has been clear, we will remain a world leading aid donor. By combining aid with diplomacy and ensuing a coherent approach across Government departments, we will be focusing our efforts where the UK can make a world-leading difference to deliver maximum impact for every pound we spend.

Yasmin Qureshi: [130019]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that the covid-19 pandemic does not hinder global progress on gender equality.

Wendy Morton:

We know that COVID-19 is disproportionately effecting women and girls globally, therefore gender equality plays a central role in FCDO's response. Through the UN's Financing for Development "Recovering Better for Sustainability" work strand, the UK has helped to create a set of international principles for a green, inclusive and resilient COVID-19 recovery, with gender equality at its core. FCDO continues to work with international partners to deliver on these proposals.

We have provided an additional £10 million to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to address reproductive health supply shortages and scale up reporting, protection, and support services for women and girls affected. We provided an additional £1 million to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, on top of our existing £21 million contribution, to support long-term interventions for survivors.

We are tackling violence against women and girls through our co-leadership of the UN's Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence and our plans to launch a new seven-year programme to scale-up effective interventions to prevent violence against women and girls.

The UK will put girls' education and gender equality high on the agenda in our G7 Presidency, and as co-hosts of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Replenishment we will place gender at the heart of GPE's work to transform education systems worldwide.

Sarah Champion: [131285]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what proportion of his Department's aid was targeted to projects (a) with gender equality as a (i) principal and (ii) significant objective and (b) that were not-gender related in the last 12 months.

Wendy Morton:

Advancing gender equality and women's and girls' rights are a core part of this Government's mission and we remain steadfast in our commitment to this agenda.

The UK's Gender Equality Act 2014 (an amendment to the 2002 International Development Act, IDA), legally requires all overseas development funding to meaningfully consider the impact of how it will contribute to reducing gender inequality.

All ODA spend reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is screened against the gender equality policy marker and marked as 'principal' or 'significant' or 'not targeting'. This is a measurement of the proportion of aid that supports gender equality and women's empowerment.

The latest figures available (2019) show that of the former Department for International Development (DFID) and the former Foreign & Commonwealth Office's (FCO) total bilateral spend, 67%was marked as having gender equality as a principal or significant objective. This equates to £5.2 billion. These figures also show that 33% of the former DFID and former FCO's total bilateral spend was marked as not targeting gender equality.

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Stephen Doughty: [131274]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he will maintain the UK funding commitments to the UN Global Fund at an equivalent percentage and real-terms value.

Wendy Morton:

In his statement to the House on 26 November 2020, the Foreign Secretary noted that the UK will maintain our position as a world leader, including by investing in the Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB & Malaria. The UK is the second largest donor to the current replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Global health is a high priority for the Government. To maximise the Government's strategic focus in the use of ODA this year, the Foreign Secretary will run a short cross-Government process to review, appraise and finalise all of the UK's ODA allocations across all departments. It is the Government's intention to conclude this process as soon as possible, with the outcome communicated to the departments concerned. We will maintain our position as a world leader, investing in the GAVI Vaccine Alliance, COVAX, the Global Fund for Aids, TB and Malaria, and the International Finance Facility for Immunisation.

■ Gulf States: Overseas Aid

Andrew Gwynne: [130656]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to Answers of 10 November 2020 to Questions 112063 and 112064, for what reasons the disclosure of the number of (a)projects applied to by individual departments under the Integrated Activity Fund (IAF) in the 2018-19 financial year and (b) IAF projects delivered solely within the named states in financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20 would compromise the confidence or confidentiality of Gulf partners in light of the decision to disclose similar information for the 2017-18 financial year; and what assessment he has made of whether withholding that information is in line with the Government's commitment to transparency and good governance.

James Cleverly:

I refer the Honourable member to my response on 27 October to question 106366 and on 7 December to question 124318. Disclosures are in line with the Government's commitment to transparency and good governance and to the maintenance of international relations with our Gulf state partners.

HIV Infection: Health Services

Stephen Doughty: [131275]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to make the UK is a global leader in the development of new HIV vaccines, diagnostics and treatments.

Wendy Morton:

The UK remains a world leader in efforts to end the AIDS epidemic, including through our investment in the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria.

In 2018 alone the Global Fund provided 18.9 million people with antiretroviral therapy. This investment is complemented by a wider portfolio of programmes and research, including our 20-year agreement with Unitaid. Unitaid's work has enabled great advancements in HIV diagnostics and treatment at affordable costs, such as reducing the price of portable advanced HIV tests to less than \$4, and developing long-acting injectable antiretroviral treatments for HIV.

We are also the second largest government supporter of product development research to improve the health of the most vulnerable in the poorest countries. This

support includes funding to the International Partnership for Microbicides, which is developing women-initiated HIV prevention methods. One of the most advanced products is a one-month Dapivirine vaginal ring, which has recently received World Health Organisation prequalification.

Stephen Doughty: [131276]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much funding the Government disbursed (a) bilaterally and (b) multilaterally on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and research in each of the last five years.

Wendy Morton:

 a) FCDO bilateral funding on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and research over the last five years was as follows:

£23 million in 2015

£17 million in 2016

£13 million in 2017

£11 million in 2018

£9 million in 2019

• b) FCDO multilateral funding on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, research over the last five years was as follows:

£65 million in 2015

£15 million in 2016

£199 million in 2017

£190 million in 2018

£232 million in 2019

Hong Kong: Coronavirus

Lisa Nandy: [133832]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Hong Kong Government on the welfare of Hong Kong residents stranded in the UK as a result of the decision to ban arrivals from the UK.

Nigel Adams:

We are in contact with the Hong Kong SAR Government to minimise the disruption to UK and Hong Kong families and businesses.

The Hong Kong authorities have informed us that the decisions will be reviewed every two weeks.

India: Agriculture

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130201]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in India on the ongoing farmers protests in that country.

Nigel Adams:

The British Government are following the protests in India through the High Commission in New Delhi. We are conscious of concerns within India and in the UK about the agricultural reforms. Agricultural reform is a domestic policy issue for the Indian authorities to address.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[<u>130</u>203]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he discussed the farmers protest in India during his recent visit to that country.

Nigel Adams:

The British Government are following the protests in India through the High Commission in New Delhi. We are conscious of concerns within India and in the UK about the agricultural reforms. Agricultural reform is a domestic policy issue for the Indian authorities to address.

Hilary Benn: [132768]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he has made representations to his Indian counterpart on the farmers' protests in that country.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary discussed protests about agricultural reforms with his Indian counterpart during his visit to India in December, whilst making it clear that the handling of protests is an internal matter for the Indian authorities. The right to gather lawfully and demonstrate a point of view is common to all democracies. Governments also have the power to enforce law and order if a protest crosses the line into illegality.

Dr Rupa Huq: [133081]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his Indian counterpart on reports of water cannons and tear gas being used against peacefully protesting farmers in India.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary discussed protests about agricultural reforms with his Indian counterpart during his visit to India in December, whilst making it clear that the handling of protests is an internal matter for the Indian authorities. The right to gather lawfully and demonstrate a point of view is common to all democracies. Governments also have the power to enforce law and order if a protest crosses the line into illegality.

India: Human Rights

Apsana Begum: [131506]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has with his Indian counterpart on the human rights situation in India and (a) the conditions experienced by political prisoners, (b) the amount of time prisoners are waiting for trials, (c) the ability of human rights monitoring organisations to operate, (d) press freedom, (e) discriminatory laws, (f) labour rights and protections, (g)trade union rights, (h) violence against women and girls, and (i) democratic rights such as freedom of speech and the right to protest.

Nigel Adams:

We engage with India on the full range of human rights matters. On his visit to India 14-17 December, The Foreign Secretary discussed human rights with the Minister of External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. Our High Commission in Delhi works with Union and State Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations to promote human rights by building capacity and sharing expertise. Our projects tackle the drivers of human rights violations in regards to gender equality, media freedom and other FCDO priorities, and encourage the empowerment of minority groups.

Apsana Begum: [131507]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Government's plans for a closer UK-India relationship announced on 15 December 2020, what steps he plans to take to work with India on human rights, including freedom of speech and political freedoms.

Nigel Adams:

We engage with India on the full range of human rights matters. On his visit to India 14-17 December, The Foreign Secretary discussed human rights with the Minister of External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. Our High Commission in Delhi works with Union and State Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations to promote human rights by building capacity and sharing expertise. Our projects tackle the drivers of human rights violations in regards to gender equality, media freedom and other FCDO priorities, and encourage the empowerment of minority groups.

India: Islam

Apsana Begum: [131508]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the findings of the Annual South Asia State of Minorities Report published in November 2020 that India has become a dangerous and violent space for Muslim minorities; and if he will make a statement.

Nigel Adams:

We engage with India on the full range of human rights matters. We oppose discrimination against minorities because of religion, caste, or belief. On his visit to India 14-17 December, The Foreign Secretary discussed human rights with the Minister of External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

India: Visits Abroad

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130202]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he had with the Government of India on his recent visit to that country.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary met with Prime Minister Modi, the Minister of External Affairs Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the Minister for the Environment Prakash Javadekar and the Minister for Education Ramesh Pokhriyal. He outlined that a closer relationship with India, and engagement in the wider Indo-Pacific region, were amongst the highest policy priorities of Her Majesty's Government. The Foreign Secretary and his counterpart, Dr Jaishanker, agreed on the key elements of a ten year roadmap in which the UK and India enhance mutual prosperity through cooperation on trade, defence and security, climate, and health.

Iran: Baha'i Faith

Rachel Hopkins: [130885]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Iranian counterpart on reports of members of the Baha'i community being imprisoned or banned from public sector employment where they have academic qualifications issued by the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly:

We remain deeply concerned by the continuing systematic discrimination, harassment and targeting of the Baha'i community in Iran and follow this situation closely. The Government continues to raise our concerns on this and other persistent human rights violations with Iran.

On 26 October, we made a statement on this matter, during the Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran. We called on Iran to ensure members of all religious and ethnic groups are treated equally before the law and allowed to participate fully in society.

■ Iran: Nuclear Power

Scott Benton: [130867]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of Iranian compliance with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal; and if he will make a statement ahead of the biannual UN Security Council meeting on 22 December 2020 on Iranian compliance.

James Cleverly:

We remain deeply concerned by Iran's continued and systematic non-compliance with its nuclear commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA). We note with great concern both Iran's recent announcement to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it intends to install an additional three cascades of advanced centrifuges at the Fuel Enrichment Plant in Natanz, and the recent law passed by the Iranian Parliament, which - if implemented - would substantially expand Iran's nuclear programme and limit IAEA monitoring access. We have been clear, both at the 16 December Joint Commission and at the 21 December ministerial meeting of JCPoA participants, that Iran must not implement these measures and must return to full compliance with its commitments under the deal. We also made this point clearly at the UN Security Council meeting on 22 December on the Secretary General's ninth report on the implementation of UNSCR 2231.

The UK remains firmly committed to the JCPoA. Along with France and Germany, we have consistently worked to preserve the JCPoA framework over the last two years. We have made clear at every stage that we favour a diplomatic solution to resolve our concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme. And we have worked tirelessly to keep the diplomatic door open for renewed talks between Iran and the US. President-elect Biden has said that if Iran returns to compliance with the deal, the US would reenter the agreement and seek to both strengthen it and extend it. We welcome this commitment. This is an important opportunity to restart engagement between Iran and the US, and to realise the objectives of the JCPoA.

Iraq: Kurds

Robert Halfon: [130024]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of his visit to the Kurdistan region in Iraq.

James Cleverly:

The UK supports a strong a successful Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) within a thriving Iraq. During my December visit to Erbil, I discussed the mutual desire to deepen the UK-KRI partnership with the leadership of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The UK looks forward to continued close engagement with the KRG as a critical and valued partner in the region; progressing security cooperation, increasing our business links, and supporting sustainable economic reform that delivers for all Iraqis.

Tommy Sheppard: [130774]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations to his Iraqi counterpart on reports of recent violence towards peaceful protestors in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

James Cleverly:

We are deeply concerned by reports of violence in Sulaimaniyah, which our Consul General in Erbil has raised with the Kurdistan Regional Government. We call on security forces to respect the right to peaceful protest and to exercise restraint, and on those protesting to do so peacefully.

Israfil Erbil

Catherine West: [133097]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his Turkish counterpart on the detention of Israfil Erbil.

Wendy Morton:

We have not made representations to the Turkish authorities on behalf of Mr Erbil about his recent detention in Turkey. We understand that he was released the same day after questioning. We support the rights of minority communities in Turkey, including Alevis, and will continue to monitor their situation.

Kashmir: Self-determination of States

Andrew Gwynne: [133743]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) counterparts in the Indian Government (b) counterparts in the Pakistani Government and (c) United Nations officials on the implementation of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan resolution of 5 January 1949 on the self-determination of the people of Kashmir.

Nigel Adams:

The UK's long-standing position is that it is for India and Pakistan to identify a lasting political resolution to the situation in Kashmir, taking into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. It is not for the UK to prescribe a solution or to act as mediator.

Nagorno Karabakh: Human Rights

Catherine West: [130793]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to support investigations into human rights abuses during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government is aware of reports of human rights abuses taking place during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I have raised allegations of war crimes and human rights abuses with the Governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan and urged that they be thoroughly investigated.

Nagorno Karabakh: Humanitarian Aid

Wera Hobhouse: [131378]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent humanitarian assistance his Department has provided to people affected by the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict.

Wendy Morton:

In line with the Foreign Secretary's announcement of 30 October, the UK Government has provided the International Committee of the Red Cross with £1 million in support of its humanitarian efforts in the region. This financial support is being used to provide urgent medical supplies, food and shelter to thousands of people affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We have supported the wider international response by providing funding for additional monitoring and analysis of the humanitarian situation through organisations such as the Humanitarian 2 Humanitarian network. We are keeping the situation under close review, coordinating with local and international partners and will continue to explore opportunities to support partners to deliver an effective international response.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

Ruth Jones: [133181]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, on what date he last made representations to the Iranian Government on the detention of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

James Cleverly:

We continue to raise all of our dual British national cases at the most senior levels in the Iranian Government, including regular calls between the Foreign Secretary and the Iranian Foreign Minister, most recently on 13 December. We call for their release and discuss their situation and our concerns about their welfare at every opportunity with our Iranian counterparts. Our Ambassador in Tehran consistently raises all of our dual British national detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Jim Shannon: [133326]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to secure Nazanin Zaghari- Ratcliffe's return from Iran to the UK.

James Cleverly:

We are using every tool in our diplomatic arsenal to secure the immediate and permanent release of arbitrarily detained dual British nationals in Iran. We raise Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case at the most senior levels in the Iranian Government: The Foreign Secretary does so repeatedly with Foreign Minister Zarif, and our Ambassador in Tehran consistently discusses all of our dual British national detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The FCDO remains in regular contact with both Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family, and we continue to provide

them our support. We are doing everything we can to enable Nazanin to return home and to secure the release of all British dual nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran, so that they can be reunited with their loved ones.

■ Nigeria: Abduction

Carla Lockhart: [133293]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support the Government is providing to the Nigerian Government to protect children attending school from abduction after the abduction of pupils from a secondary school in Katsina state in December 2020.

James Duddridge:

The UK Government was deeply concerned about the abduction of Nigerian schoolboys from their school in Kankara, Katsina State on 11 December. Abductions of Nigerian schoolchildren are abhorrent and must stop. We welcome the news that they were released on 17 December. Following the attack, I publicly stressed that schoolchildren need to be protected and that all children should be able to access education without fear.

The UK provides a comprehensive package of stabilisation, development and humanitarian assistance to support communities in Northern Nigeria. Through the Education in Emergencies programme, we help fund the education of children affected by conflict. This includes supporting schools and communities to create conflict risk reduction plans to help protect children in schools. Since 2018, we have supported over 200,000 children in the North East to receive an education. We continue to advocate for the protection of children and schools across Nigeria. For example, we encourage the Nigerian Government to follow the Safe Schools Declaration, which sets out international guidelines to protect students, teachers and their schools during armed conflict.

Nigeria: Police

Kirsten Oswald: [131300]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 29 October 2020 to Question 107130 on Nigeria: Police, what assessment he has made of the effect on (a) the protection of human rights and (b) respect for the rule of law of the disbandment of the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad and redeployment of its members.

James Duddridge:

The UK Government welcomes President Buhari's decision to disband the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) following the #ENDSARS protests, and notes the intention to redeploy FSARS officers. We continue to support police reform in Nigeria, and to advocate for improvements in the human rights compliance and accountability of the Nigerian police. To this end, we welcome the establishment of

judicial panels of inquiry to investigate alleged incidents of brutality by the security services.

We will continue to push for the Nigerian police, armed forces and wider security services to uphold human rights and the rule of law in all operations, investigate any incidents of brutality, illegal detentions and use of excessive force, and hold those responsible to account.

North Korea: Religious Freedom

Carla Lockhart: [133294]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what additional steps his Department is taking to protect freedom of religious belief in North Korea.

Nigel Adams:

The UK continues to have strong concerns about the lack of freedom of religion or belief in North Korea. We continue to urge North Korea to uphold its human rights obligations and engage substantively with the international community on this issue. We regularly raise our concerns directly with the North Korean authorities and at the UN, including through the Human Rights Council and, most recently, in the Security Council in December 2020.

Defending the right to freedom of religion or belief for all is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. For example, the UK Government remains committed to implementing the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's independent Review on persecuted Christians in full. One of those recommendations related to the establishment of the UK's Global Human Rights sanctions regime. This regime came into effect on 6 July 2020 and allows us to designate those who commit serious human rights abuses or violations, including those who target individuals on the grounds of their religion or belief. We take decisions about whether particular individuals or entities could be subject to measures under the regime on a case-bycase basis. We have already designated two entities involved in administering the North Korean penal system.

Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee: Diplomatic Service

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[130648]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will review his decision to decline permission for the UK's Ambassador to the Irish Republic to speak privately with the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

It is long standing practice in Her Majesty's Government that Select Committees should receive briefings from the relevant Minister and from the relevant Ambassador when travelling. As has been made clear to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Ireland and the Embassy team will be at the

Committee's disposal for their visits to Ireland or other engagement with the Irish authorities.

Nuclear Disarmament

Caroline Lucas: [130683]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what multilateral disarmament measures the UK has negotiated through the UN Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

James Cleverly:

The Government remains committed to disarmament, and regularly engages in constructive discussions with international counterparts, the most recent being a Wilton Park workshop on 16-18 December. The UK participates in the US's Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) Initiative, and supports Sweden's Stepping Stones initiative. The UK plays a leading international role in nuclear disarmament verification, and continues our verification research through a well-established Atomic Weapons Establishment programme. The Government hosted a P5 Conference in London on 12-13 February 2020, which allowed the five Nuclear Weapon States to deepen our engagement on nuclear issues, including disarmament. The UK continues to advocate for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in the Conference on Disarmament, which we view as key steps to achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

Occupied Territories: Development Aid

Preet Kaur Gill: [131385]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2020 to Question 122716, whether the £20 million to the EU programme Support the Palestinian Authority will be reallocated to programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly:

The UK has been supporting the Palestinian Authority's health and education sectors through the EU PEGASE mechanism. Salary payments have been transferred to a dedicated bank account and are then paid to carefully vetted individuals. Each payment is independently audited to ensure it has been received by the intended recipient. At the end of the transition period, the UK will be able to continue to access the PEGASE mechanism as this is available for use by both EU and non-EU member states.

As announced by the Foreign Secretary on 26 November, to maximise the Government's strategic focus in the use of ODA this year, he is leading a short cross-government process to review, appraise and finalise all of the UK's ODA allocations for 2021, the outcomes of which have not been concluded.

Occupied Territories: Public Health

Ms Lyn Brown: [132831]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2020 to Question 127042, what assessment has he made of the Israeli authorities adherence to its legal duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

James Cleverly:

Under International Humanitarian Law, Israel, as the Occupying Power, has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) to the fullest extent of the means available and with the cooperation of the local authorities. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem are in regular contact with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities respectively. We again welcome the restoration of cooperation between the Government of Israel and Palestinian Authority, which shows both sides are willing to put the needs and security of Israelis and Palestinians first.

Overseas Aid

Andrew Gwynne: [129996]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many applications over £1 million were made to the Integrated Activity Fund (IAF) in financial year 2018-19; which Department's submitted those applications; how many of those applications were approved; and which (a) Minister or (b) Director approved those applications.

James Cleverly:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 27 October to questions 106364 and 106365. In 2018-19 the Integrated Activity Fund approved 5 applications over £1 million.

Andrew Gwynne: [129997]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many applications for funding from the Integrated Activity Fund (IAF) over £50,000 were approved in 2018-19 and 2019-20; what the value was of each of those applications; and which Departments or Ministers requested that funding.

James Cleverly:

I [Cleverly] refer the Honourable Member to the answers I gave on 21 October to question 103610, on 27 October to questions 106364 and 106365 and 9 November to question 111557. In 2018-19 the Integrated Activity Fund approved 27 applications over £50,000.

Stephen Doughty: [131282]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many ODA-funded projects were assessed according to the OSJA guidance in each of the last 24 months; and how many of those were approved by Ministers.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs does not hold centrally a record of the number of times Offical Development Assistance funded projects have been assessed according to the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidance and how many of these have been approved by Ministers.

Patrick Grady: [133004]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what estimate he has made of the amount of funding that will become available to his Department to spend as Official Development Assistance once the UK has met all outstanding commitments to the European Development Fund.

James Cleverly:

The UK's contribution to the European Development Fund (EDF) for 2021 onwards will gradually reduce on an annual basis as programmes are finalised. In 2019, the contribution to the EDF was £852,683,097 and for 2020 it was £371,142,678. In late 2020, the Commission estimated that the UK's share of the EDF will be EURO 1,527,732,926 (approx. £1,374,107,687) for the four year period 2021-2024. The UK ODA that the FCDO will have available to spend once the UK has met all outstanding commitments to the EDF will be calculated, audited and officially reported on once all EDF programmes are implemented and finalised and the total UK commitments fulfilled.

Patrick Grady: [133005]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department plans to co-ordinate the allocation of Official Development Assistance funding with the EU's forthcoming Neighbourhood, Development and International Development Instrument.

James Cleverly:

The FCDO has no plans to co-ordinate allocations of Official Development Assistance (ODA) with the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). We will take our own decisions about where we allocate our ODA in line with our own prioritisation decisions and the outcomes of the Integrated Review. However, following the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement we will continue to maintain an effective dialogue with the EU on global issues of common interest and coordinate when appropriate to maximise impact.

Overseas Aid: Fossil Fuels

Anna McMorrin: [134064]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much and what proportion of the UK's total overseas development assistance contribution provided to the 13th Replenishment Fund of African Development Bank (2014-2020) was allocated to (a) fossil fuel projects and connected business programmes and (b) to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project.

James Duddridge:

Since 2014, the UK has supported replenishments of the African Development Fund (AfDF) as follows:

13th replenishment (2014-16) £604 million of the £4.8 billion total;

14th replenishment (2017-19) £447 million of the £4.3 billion total;

15th replenishment (2020-22) £620 million of the £6.0 billion total.

The 16th replenishment is expected to be agreed in 2022.

Between 2014 and 2020 two AfDF projects with fossil fuel components have been approved by the Bank's Board, with a total value of £71 million. One relates to the installation of a generator for a diesel-powered power plant and the other to improving transmission from an existing gas power plant. No AfDF support has been provided for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project. Future AfDF projects have yet to be agreed with country governments and the Bank's Board. The Bank is preparing a new climate change and green growth policy, due to be published in late 2021. We are engaging with this process with the aim of further limiting the Bank's support for fossil fuel projects, in line with the UK's recently announced policy.

Anna McMorrin: [134065]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much and what proportion of the UK's total overseas development assistance contribution made available for the 14th Replenishment Fund of African Development Bank (2020-2026) is planned to be allocated to (a) fossil fuel projects and connected business programmes and (b) the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project.

James Duddridge:

Since 2014, the UK has supported replenishments of the African Development Fund (AfDF) as follows:

13th replenishment (2014-16) £604 million of the £4.8 billion total;

14th replenishment (2017-19) £447 million of the £4.3 billion total;

15th replenishment (2020-22) £620 million of the £6.0 billion total.

The 16th replenishment is expected to be agreed in 2022.

Between 2014 and 2020 two AfDF projects with fossil fuel components have been approved by the Bank's Board, with a total value of £71 million. One relates to the installation of a generator for a diesel-powered power plant and the other to improving transmission from an existing gas power plant. No AfDF support has been provided for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline project. Future AfDF projects have yet to be agreed with country governments and the Bank's Board. The Bank is preparing a new climate change and green growth policy, due to be published in late 2021. We are engaging with this process with the aim of further limiting the Bank's support for fossil fuel projects, in line with the UK's recently announced policy.

Pakistan: Curriculum

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130760]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan on the new single curriculum, regarding discrimination of religious minorities; and what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the monitoring of UK aid promotes freedom of religion or belief in school syllabus and text books.

Nigel Adams:

The new Single National Curriculum has the potential to be a significant step forward on inclusion and tolerance by introducing an inclusive, standards-based curriculum across all schools in the country. Work is still ongoing to reform textbooks to reflect this curriculum, and we are engaging with the Provincial and Federal Governments to ensure that the new textbooks promote diversity and inclusion.

The Minister for South Asia raised our concerns about Freedom of Religion or Belief and the protection of minority religious communities with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 16 November and with Pakistan's Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for the Interior, Shahzad Akbar, on 7 December. In addition, he met with Pakistan's Minister for Education, Mr Shafqat Mahmood on 1 October, and on 8 September with the Governor of Punjab, Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar, to discuss inclusive and tolerant education.

■ Pakistan: Females

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130763]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the findings of the report Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Pakistan published by the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development on 25 November 2020; and whether his Department has made representations to the Government of Pakistan on that matter.

Nigel Adams:

We welcome the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development's report titled 'Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Pakistan' published on 25 November. We regularly raise our concerns on human rights issues, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, women and girls' rights and gender equality, with the Government of Pakistan. The Minister for South Asia raised our concerns about child, early and forced marriage and forced conversion of women and girls from minority religious communities, with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 19 October. He raised our concerns about human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights on 16 November and with Pakistan's Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for the Interior, Shahzad Akbar, on 7 December.

Pakistan: Forced Marriage

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130761]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Pakistani counterpart on the abduction, rape, forced conversion and marriage of girls who belong to minority religions.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government strongly condemns the abduction, rape, forced conversion and forced marriage of women and girls from religious minorities in Pakistan. We regularly raise our concerns on these issues with the Government of Pakistan. The Minister for South Asia raised our concerns about child, early and forced marriage and forced conversion of women and girls from minority religious communities, with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 19 October. He raised our concerns about human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights on 16 November and with Pakistan's Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for the Interior, Shahzad Akbar, on 7 December.

■ Private Infrastructure Development Group: Fossil Fuels

Preet Kaur Gill: [131391]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much Official Development Assistance the Private Infrastructure Development Group has given in funding to fossil fuel projects in each of the last five years.

James Duddridge:

During the last 5 years (2015-2019) the Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG), which is a multi-donor funded institution that receives funding from at least 5 countries and the World Bank, has made a number of infrastructure investments in developing countries to increase access to power, some of which use fossil fuels to generate electricity. Of these investments, US \$292.86 million have been to projects using fossil fuels as a fuel source, the majority of which relate to gasfired power. Over the same period, PIDG has invested US \$571.05 million in renewable power projects. PIDG investments are made using ODA funds received from all PIDG owners, funds raised from the private sector and returns from its investments.

Data on all PIDG investment commitments are available online via its Results Monitoring Database and its annual reports. FCDO also publishes data relating to its funding to PIDG via DevTracker.

Research: Overseas aid

Layla Moran: [130827]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduction in the Official Development Assistance budget on the UK's reputation as a global research and innovation leader.

James Cleverly:

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact has forced the Government to take the difficult decision to temporarily reduce ODA to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI). The Foreign Secretary has set out a strategic approach to ensure maximum impact for our aid spend. This includes the use of ODA to support research to identify what development interventions are most effective and to develop and test new technologies and innovations that can provide new solutions to critical challenges in development, such as climate change and infectious diseases.

Difficult decisions will be necessary, and we are currently running a prioritisation exercise on allocations, to ensure that every pound we spend on ODA goes as far as possible and has greatest impact. For this reason, I am not yet able to comment on the direct implications for specific programmes or activities.

Layla Moran: [<u>130829</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department plans to guarantee funding for successful international scientific research programmes and partnerships in light of the reduction in the Official Development Assistance budget.

James Cleverly:

The Foreign Secretary has set out a strategic approach to ensure maximum impact for our aid spend. This includes the use of ODA to support research to identify what development interventions are most effective, and develop and test new technologies and innovations, that can provide new solutions to critical challenges in development, such as climate change and infectious diseases.

Difficult decisions will be necessary, and we are currently running a prioritisation exercise on allocations, to ensure that every pound we spend on ODA goes as far as possible and has greatest impact. For this reason, I am not yet able to comment on the direct implications for specific programmes or activities.

Layla Moran: [<u>130833</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduction in the Official Development Assistance budget on the UK's reputation as a partner of choice in international research and development projects.

James Cleverly:

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact has forced the government to take the difficult decision to temporarily reduce ODA to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI). The Foreign Secretary has set out a strategic approach to ensure maximum impact for our aid spend. This includes the use of ODA to support research to identify what development interventions are most effective, and develop and test new technologies and innovations, that can provide new solutions to critical challenges in development, such as climate change and infectious diseases.

Despite the extremely tough fiscal position, Spending Review 2020 (SR20) sets out the government's plan to cement the UK's status as a global leader in science and innovation by investing £14.6 billion in R&D in 2021/22, an increase in government R&D investment that will allow us to support the [UK's] R&D system through this difficult period.

Rockall: Fisheries

Colum Eastwood: [134264]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for relations with the Irish Government of the boarding of the Irish fishing vessel the Northern Celt by Marine Scotland.

Wendy Morton:

The Scottish Government have confirmed that a Marine Scotland patrol vessel carried out a routine inspection on 4 January 2021 of an Irish fishing vessel within 12 nautical miles of Rockall. Fisheries management is a devolved matter for the Scottish Government.

Colum Eastwood: [134265]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for UK-Ireland relations of the boarding of the Irish fishing vessel the Northern Celt by a UK vessel.

Wendy Morton:

The Scottish Government have confirmed that a Marine Scotland patrol vessel carried out a routine inspection on 4 January 2021 of an Irish fishing vessel within 12 nautical miles of Rockall. Fisheries management is a devolved matter for the Scottish Government.

Rwanda: Human Rights

Naz Shah: [132957]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he made an assessment of the human rights record of the government of Rwanda before agreeing to attend the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting with Rwanda.

Nigel Adams:

The Commonwealth places a high priority on being a community of peaceful, democratic countries which promote and protect shared values, including the rule of law and human rights. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) - of which the UK is a current member, is the custodian of these fundamental values.

Rwanda has made huge strides over the past two decades. It has a strong track record of equality of women in Rwanda's cabinet and parliament, and there have been significant improvements in healthcare, reconciliation, development and prosperity. However, the UK remains concerned by Rwanda's overall human rights

record and regularly raises specific cases of concern with the Rwandan Government. We continue to encourage Rwanda to model Commonwealth values of respect for human rights and rule of law as enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, and to match its impressive development progress with gains in civil and political rights.

Rwanda was selected at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 (CHOGM18) as the host of the 26th CHOGM. The summit, re-scheduled to take place in Kigali, Rwanda in June 2021 presents a valuable opportunity for Heads to meet and for the Commonwealth family to demonstrate how, by upholding and promoting the principles of the Commonwealth, a bright common future can be built for all. The UK plans to attend in our capacity as Chair-in-Office.

Saudi Arabia: Newcastle United Football Club

Chi Onwurah: [130732]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to emails released under Freedom of Information legislation detailing the Premier League's wish to ensure that it was on the same page as his Department regarding the proposed takeover of Newcastle Utd by Saudi investors, what was his Department's objective in meeting the Premier League; and whether that objective was achieved.

James Cleverly:

FCDO officials held meetings with the Premier League following a request by the latter. FCDO officials were clear with the Premier League that any prospective takeover of Newcastle United Football Club was a matter for the two parties concerned.

lan Mearns: [131237]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2020 to Question 124724 on Saudi Arabia: Newcastle United Football Club, on what grounds the English Premier League requested (a) advice, (b) intervention and (c) a meeting with officials from his Department.

James Cleverly:

This is a matter for the English Premier League. FCDO officials held virtual meetings with the Premier League following a request by the latter. FCDO officials were clear, in their communication with the English Premier League, that any prospective takeover of Newcastle United was a matter for the two parties concerned. FCDO officials routinely meet UK businesses at their request.

Ian Mearns: [131238]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2020 to Question 124724 Saudi Arabia: Newcastle United Football Club, which representative from his Department met with the English Premier League; and if he will publish the (a) job title and (b) area of responsibility in his Department of that representative.

James Cleverly:

Officials from the Middle East and North Africa Directorate and the British Embassy Riyadh met the Premier League virtually.

lan Mearns: [131239]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2020 to Question 124724 on Saudi Arabia: Newcastle United Football Club, how many meetings representatives of his Department held with the English Premier League where the issue of the proposed takeover of Newcastle United Football Club was discussed.

James Cleverly:

FCDO officials hosted two virtual meetings with the English Premier League.

lan Mearns: [<u>131240</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2020 to Question 124724 on Saudi Arabia: Newcastle United Football Club, if he will publish the correspondence between his Department and the English Premier League referred to in that answer.

James Cleverly:

We are not able to disclose detailed correspondence between the UK Government and the English Premier League. This would contravene the General Data Protection Regulation relating to third party data. FCDO officials were clear with the Premier League that any prospective takeover of Newcastle United Football Club was a matter for the two parties concerned.

Self-determination of States

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[134060]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2020 to Question 128714 on Self-determination of States, whether his policy to territories subject to the process of decolonisation also applies to territories not administered by the UK.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government supports the principle of self-determination, which is reflected in international law and applicable to all States. The application and exercise of that principle in non-self-governing territories that are not administered by the UK is, however, subject to the specific circumstances of each territory including its constitutional relationship to its administering power. As set out in my Answer of 16 December, the UK Government's responsibility is to ensure the security and good governance of the British Overseas Territories and their peoples. The UK and inhabited Overseas Territory governments remain in agreement that the Territories are internally self-governing and that the UK Government should retain responsibility for the powers necessary to uphold its constitutional obligations in the Territories.

Soya Beans: Forests

Liz Saville Roberts: [133095]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts across the globe on the impact of soy production on deforestation.

James Duddridge:

A due diligence obligation set out in the Environment Bill will make it illegal for UK businesses to use agricultural commodities if they have not been produced in line with local laws protecting forests. This will help to ensure that UK imports of soya come from sustainable sources, and the Government is working to encourage other major markets to take a similar position.

As President of the COP26 climate change conference, the UK is also working to establish a new partnership between consumer and producer countries of agricultural commodities. The partnership will promote collaboration between governments and accelerate action to stop deforestation caused by agricultural commodities, including soya, and encourage trade in commodities that have been grown sustainably.

This political engagement complements UK International Climate Finance for forest protection and sustainable agriculture in key regions, including soya-producing regions of Brazil.

Spaceflight: Armed Forces

Olivia Blake: [131517]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what proposals the Government has put forward in the UN conference on Disarmament to control the (a) weaponisation and (b) militarisation of outer space.

James Cleverly:

HMG is committed to maintaining outer space as a peaceful, safe, and stable environment vital for our social, economic and scientific development. Technological developments in areas such as anti-satellite missiles and jamming of navigational systems increase the threats to space systems both from the ground and in space. The UK therefore proposed a new resolution on 'Reducing Space Threats Through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours' which was adopted in the UN Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee) and then by the General Assembly on 7 December 2020, with the support of 164 countries. This resolution calls on all UN member states to study existing and potential threats and security risks to space systems and share their ideas on norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours to reduce the risks of misunderstanding and miscalculation. The UN Secretary General will produce a report for further discussion by Member States.

Special Envoy for Gender Equality

Yasmin Qureshi: [130016]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to fill the post of Special Envoy for Gender Equality.

Wendy Morton:

Gender equality is a core part of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's work as a force for good in the world. As part of the creation of the FCDO, we are building on existing strategies and reviewing structures and roles, including the Special Envoy for Gender Equality. The UK is committed to promoting every girl's right to 12 years of quality education, by working to accelerate progress towards getting marginalised girls into schools, staying there, and staying safe. The Strategic Vision for Gender Equality reflects and responds to the UK Government's ambitions, and works alongside our National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security.

Sri Lanka: Cremation

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[<u>133115</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to make representations to his Sri Lankan counterpart on the cremation in that country of covid-19 victims regardless of religious belief.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government is concerned about the Government of Sri Lanka's continued decision to mandate cremations for all those affected by Covid-19, and recognises the particular impact this is having on Sri Lankan Muslims and other faith communities. The Minister of State for South Asia and Minister responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has raised concerns about this directly with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner, most recently in December. Lord Ahmad also raised the importance of minority rights in a call with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena in November. The UK's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka has also raised concerns about mandatory cremations several times with the Sri Lankan Government, most recently in January.

The UK has shared guidance with the Government of Sri Lanka on how burials can continue to operate in a safe format, within the WHO guidelines, to ensure all religious groups can practise their rites. We will continue to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka on this important issue.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [133215]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will urge his Sri Lankan counterpart to stop their policy of forcibly cremating its citizens who have died from covid-19, in accordance with their religious beliefs.

Nigel Adams:

The UK Government is concerned about the Government of Sri Lanka's continued decision to mandate cremations for all those affected by Covid-19, and recognises

the particular impact this is having on Sri Lankan Muslims and other faith communities. The Minister of State for South Asia and Minister responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has raised concerns about this directly with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner, most recently in December. Lord Ahmad also raised the importance of minority rights in a call with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena in November. The UK's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka has also raised concerns about mandatory cremations several times with the Sri Lankan Government, most recently in January.

The UK has shared guidance with the Government of Sri Lanka on how burials can continue to operate in a safe format, within the WHO guidelines, to ensure all religious groups can practise their rites. We will continue to engage with the Government of Sri Lanka on this important issue.

Stabilisation Unit: Staff

Stephen Doughty:

[131281]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many officials in his Department were assigned to the Stabilisation Unit on a (a) full-time and (b) part-time basis in each of the last five years.

Nigel Adams:

The Stabilisation Unit (SU) is a cross-government unit that provides expertise to build stability, prevent conflict and meet security challenges internationally. The SU was hosted on a DFID platform until September 2020, when it became part of FCDO. Stabilisation Unit staff numbers employed on a full and part time basis from 2015 to 2020 are as follows:

STABILISATION

UNIT - TOTAL	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Full time staff	104	112	131	161	157	156
Part time staff						

FCDO (AS

OF SEPT 2020)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Full time staff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	95	
Part time staff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		

DFID STAFF	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Full time staff	58	59	74	87	100	N/A
Part time staff	less than 5					N/A

*Note:

- Staff from other Government departments, serving military, police and secondees make up the totality of SU staff numbers.
- The figures presented are not in the public domain, but are not considered sensitive.

Syria: Detainees

[131229] **Caroline Lucas:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the Syrian regime on (a) freeing detainees and (b) holding to account those responsible for detention and disappearance; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly:

The UK has repeatedly condemned the use of illegal detention by the Assad regime, affiliated militias and proscribed terrorist organisations. We support the UN's call to the Assad regime and Syrian armed groups to release a sufficient number of detainees to prevent COVID-19 spreading in detention facilities, as well as their urgent request to allow humanitarian actors and medical teams unhindered access to prisons. We have raised the plight of detainees at the UN Security Council and through our leadership at the Human Rights Council where we have included language on enforced disappearance in recent Syria Resolutions. However, we do not engage directly with the regime in Damascus, which has lost its legitimacy through its atrocities against the Syrian people.

We recognise that justice and accountability for detainees is a central issue for the UN-led political process and we fully support the UN Syria Envoy's efforts to work for the release of detainees, as a vital step towards a political settlement to end the conflict. Additionally we continue to pursue sanctions as a policy tool to hold the Syrian regime to account and to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Syria: Development Aid

Preet Kaur Gill: [131386]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer 4 December to Question 122716, whether the £9 million to the Economic Resilience Initiative in the Syria Region will be reallocated to programmes in Syria.

James Cleverly:

The £9 million payment made to the Economic Resilience Initiative (ERI) in the Syria Region is earmarked (specifically designated) to ERI projects in Jordan and Lebanon, most notably for water and sanitation services, a waste water plant, and bus fleet service. The payment will not be reallocated to programmes in Syria.

Syria: Education

[130228] Kenny MacAskill:

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether it is the Government's policy to maintain its aid spending on education in northwest Syria as part of his Department's prioritisation exercise.

James Cleverly:

Tackling the humanitarian impact of the Syria Crisis remains a priority for the FCDO. The UK is one of the largest donors to the Syrian humanitarian response having committed over £3.3 billion since 2012 and the UK is also one of the leading donors on education in North West Syria. The FCDO is in the process of assessing the impact of the ODA budget reduction on the UK's aid expenditure in Syria

To date, the UK's Syria Education Programme is the UK's largest bilateral education programme and has supported over 401,235 (49.6% female) children in the North West. This programme has improved access to the teaching profession, supported schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, financially supported stipends for thousands of teachers and most importantly, supported children's access to high quality education and psycho social care.

The regime's brutal targeting of schools is appalling. Many children have had their most formative years shaped by a backdrop of conflict. The Foreign Secretary has called for a nationwide ceasefire as part of a political process, as the only way to end the Syrian conflict and we continue to call on all parties to maintain the agreed ceasefires.

Tibet: Human Rights

Apsana Begum: [131512]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of reports that Chinese authorities in Tibetan areas continue to severely restrict religious and cultural expression, freedom of speech, movement, and assembly.

Nigel Adams:

We remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others on the grounds of their religion or belief in China. The freedom to practise, change or share ones faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy. The UK regularly raises freedom of religion or belief directly with the Chinese authorities and via multilateral action at the UN. On 6 October, the UK and 38 other countries joined a statement at the UN Third Committee in New York calling on China to respect human rights, particularly the rights of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, including in Xinjiang and Tibet.

■ Travel: Coronavirus

Taiwo Owatemi: [133229]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what documentation British citizens will require to qualify for a travel exemption to countries that have banned travel from the UK as a result of the emergence of the VUI-202012/01 covid-19 variant.

Nigel Adams:

International travel is increasingly restricted in the UK. Different rules apply in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, in England you must not leave home including to travel abroad, unless you have a legally permitted reason to do so, such as for essential work purposes. British nationals, who are intending to travel on the basis of a legally permitted reason, should check and monitor FCDO travel advice for the country they are planning travel to, including local restrictions. Travel Advice will be updated as soon as possible when there are changes to entry restrictions overseas, however, these are sometimes implemented with little prior warning.

■ UNICEF: Finance

Harriett Baldwin: [131261]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much funding his Department provides to Unicef for (a) core funding and (b) contracts awarded.

James Cleverly:

Information on how much ODA the UK channels through UN agencies, including UNICEF, is published in the National Statistics publication - Statistics on International Development (SID).

In calendar year 2019, the Department for International Development provided a total of £48 million core multilateral funding and a further £416 million bilateral through multilateral funding. In addition, other UK Government Departments provided a further £16.3 million bilateral through multilateral funding.

United Nations: Public Appointments

Stephen Doughty: [131279]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many UK representatives have been elected to UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies and Institutions in each of the last 10 years.

Nigel Adams:

The UK places great importance on the work of UN Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Bodies and institutions. While members of Treaty Monitoring Bodies are nominated by a State Party, they serve on their respective committees as independent experts. In 2010, Patrick Thornberry was elected to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In 2012, Diane Mulligan was elected to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Sir Nigel Rodley was elected to the Human Rights Committee; and Sir Malcolm Evans was elected to the Sub-committee on the Prevention of Torture. In 2016, Sir Malcolm Evans was again elected to the Sub-committee on the Prevention of Torture. The UK was elected to the UN Human Rights Council in 2013, 2016 and 2020.

United Nations: Sustainable Development

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[133708]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when the UK next plans to submit a Voluntary National Review to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Nigel Adams:

The Government remains committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at home and abroad. The UK's first Voluntary National Review was published in 2019 and is a comprehensive account of our progress towards the Goals to date. We have made no decision about the timing of a further Voluntary National Review. Our current focus is on accelerating action to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a valuable framework to ensure a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19.

Urban Areas: Sustainable Development

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[130644]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support his Department is offering cities and towns that have committed to a voluntary local review of the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

Nigel Adams:

The Government is committed to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) internationally and in the UK. The FCDO has oversight of the SDGs, but all government departments have responsibility for aspects of the SDGs that relate to their policy remits. Everyone in the UK has a role to play, including communities, local government, the private sector, and civil society. We welcome decisions by local authorities to undertake voluntary local reviews.

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[130645]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to encourage the uptake of voluntrary local reviews in the UK.

Nigel Adams:

The Government is committed to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) internationally and in the UK. The FCDO has oversight of the SDGs, but all government departments have responsibility for aspects of the SDGs that relate to their policy remits. Everyone in the UK has a role to play, including communities, local government, the private sector, and civil society. We welcome decisions by local authorities to undertake voluntary local reviews.

West Bank: Demolition

Daisy Cooper: [130842]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what duties the Government has as a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Fourth Geneva Convention in respect of attempts to demolish school buildings in Khan al-Ahmar in the occupied West Bank.

Daisy Cooper: [130843]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the potential demolition of Khan Al-Ahmer school in the West Bank.

James Cleverly:

The UK is seriously concerned by the possible demolition of a Palestinian school in Khan al-Ahmar by Israeli authorities. The UK remains strongly opposed to Israel's proposed demolition of the village, and continues to call on Israel to reconsider its plans to do so. I raised UK concern about the planned demolition of humanitarian structures, as well as the wider demolition of Palestinian infrastructure, with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv also raised our concern about the demolition of schools with the Government of Israel on 13 October, alongside European partners. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including the treatment of Palestinian children. We are continuing to monitor developments in Khan al-Ahmar and officials from our Consulate-General in Jerusalem visit the community regularly.

■ Western Sahara: Peace Negotiations

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130629]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the viability of a re-launch of the political process talks on the political and security situation in the Sahara.

James Cleverly:

We note reports of ceasefire agreement breaches on both sides. The UK supports UN-led efforts to achieve a lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. We have regular

discussions with the UN and continue to urge the parties to avoid further escalation, return to the ceasefire agreement, and re-engage with the UN-led political process. We strongly support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to appoint a Personal Envoy as soon as possible. We will continue to monitor the situation in Western Sahara.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:

[130630]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on the integrity of the United Nations brokered ceasefire in the Moroccan Sahara of a reported breach of the 1991 agreement by armed Polisario forces at the Guergerate border crossing between Mauritania and Morocco; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly:

We note reports of ceasefire agreement breaches on both sides. The UK supports UN-led efforts to achieve a lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. We have regular discussions with the UN and continue to urge the parties to avoid further escalation, return to the ceasefire agreement, and re-engage with the UN-led political process. We strongly support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to appoint a Personal Envoy as soon as possible. We will continue to monitor the situation in Western Sahara.

World Food Programme

Stephen Doughty:

[131278]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the value was of UK disbursements to the UN World Food Programme to each country destination in each of the last 24 months.

Wendy Morton:

The World Food Programme (WFP) remains one of the UK's most important humanitarian partners. We are part of the agency's governance system, the Executive Board, and in 2019 we were the agency's 3rd largest government donor.

Our partnership is particularly important in the context of the FCDO Famine Initiative, given the agency's mandate in food security and food assistance, and increasing global need. The essential work of WFP is more crucial now than ever.

WFP publishes a breakdown of each donor's funding on their website, accessible at https://www.wfp.org/funding.

Xinjiang: Human Rights

Apsana Begum:

131511

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking with his international counterparts to condemn and work against human rights abuses being committed by the Chinese government on Muslim communities in Xinjiang province.

Nigel Adams:

The UK has taken a leading international role in holding China to account for its gross human rights abuses in Xinjiang. On 6 October, alongside Germany, we brought together a total of 39 countries to express grave concern at the situation in Xinjiang in a joint statement at the UN General Assembly Third Committee. This growing international pressure on China reflects UK diplomatic leadership, including intensive diplomacy by the FCDO's diplomatic network and the personal involvement of the Foreign Secretary in raising the issue with a wide range of partners.

Zambia: Police

Wendy Chamberlain:

[134177]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Zambian High Commissioner on the shooting dead of two civilians by Zambian police in Lusaka on 23 December 2020.

James Duddridge:

The UK Government is deeply concerned about the fatal shooting of two civilians during an opposition demonstration in Lusaka on 23 December. Our condolences go to the families of the two individuals involved. The Foreign Secretary has not discussed this incident with the Zambian High Commissioner at this time. The UK's High Commissioner to Lusaka publicly expressed his shock at this incident and has called for a full police investigation to establish why these civilians lost their lives.

The UK continues to call on all parties to respect the rights of all Zambians to express their views in a peaceful manner. We continue to raise the importance of free and fair elections and respect for human rights directly with senior government ministers.

Zimbabwe: Famine

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [133216]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will provide additional support to relief efforts in Zimbabwe to support people suffering from the famine in that country.

James Duddridge:

On the 30th December 2020 the UK announced a £47 million support package to nine countries affected by food insecurity including Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, £4 million will be used to provide 110,000 people in urban areas with monthly transfers worth USD 12 per person. People targeted include the elderly, people with disabilities and child-headed households. Through our ongoing humanitarian programme, the UK is also supporting 156,000 food insecure people in 3 rural districts with food assistance.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Abortion: Drugs

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[130649]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the number of women who have had incomplete abortions within the first nine weeks of having taken mifepristone and misoprostol and have received surgery as a result of those incomplete abortions since April 2020.

Helen Whately:

This information is not collected centrally.

Anaesthetics: Greater London

Gareth Thomas: [96757]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimates he has made of the number vacancies for anaesthetists in London hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

NHS Digital publish the total full time equivalent (FTE) adverts placed on NHS Jobs. The data can be found at the following link:

https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-vacancies-survey/april-2015---june-2020-experimental-statistics

NHS Jobs data shows that for anaesthetists in the London there were 80.9 FTE adverts placed in the three-month period April 2020-June 2020.

Anaesthetics: Recruitment

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130759]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the finding of the most recent Royal College of Anaesthetists census that 39 per cent of consultant anaesthetists are aged over 50, what plans his Department has to (a) train and (b) recruit NHS anaesthetists.

Helen Whately:

In England, training programmes for anaesthetics had over two applicants per place this year, at both core and specialty training level. There are over 63% more anaesthetic trainees in core programmes since 2010. The anaesthetic workforce overall has increased by almost 23% since 2010, with a 30% increase in the number of consultants.

Health Education England are also supporting the Royal College of Anaesthetists to develop their new anaesthetics curriculum, due to launch in 2021 pending General Medical Council approval. This would see the length of the programme reduced from eight years to seven years, which would more quickly generate a supply of consultant-level anaesthetists.

Asthma: Medical Treatments

Jonathan Ashworth: [130087]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to develop a national comprehensive severe asthma guideline to ensure that people with severe asthma are identified and put on the right treatments.

Edward Argar:

Through NHS England and NHS Improvement specialised commissioning, a comprehensive specification for managing difficult and severe asthma is available. This has been refreshed recently and is available at the following link:

https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/specialised-respiratoryservices-adult-severe-asthma.pdf.

Those with severe asthma require systematic assessment and specialist care in tertiary respiratory centres, as there is no standard diagnostic test for severe asthma.

Asylum: Coronavirus

Stuart C McDonald: [128186]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his policy is on clinically extremely vulnerable asylum seekers under his jurisdiction accessing covid-19 vaccines; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 15 December 2020]: The Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) has advised that for Phase 1 of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, the vaccine first be given to care home residents and staff and those over 80 years old, followed by health and social workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors.

Asylum seekers have the same access to the COVID-19 vaccine as the rest of the population. If they have not done so already, they should register with a general practice, and if they have health conditions that would make them clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable then that should be recorded.

Autism and Learning Disability

Alex Cunningham: [131266]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to end the use of restraint, segregation and seclusion for people with (a) learning disabilities and (b) autism.

Helen Whately:

We are clear that restrictive interventions should only ever be used as a last resort. In 2018, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care commissioned the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to undertake a review into the use of restraint, segregation and seclusion for people with a learning disability and autistic people.

The CQC's final report was published on 22 October 2020, and we will take further action drawing on its recommendations.

We remain committed to implementing The Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act. This makes clear that staff should be appropriately trained and that the Secretary of State must ensure that at the end of each year statistics are published regarding the use of force by staff in mental health units. We are developing statutory guidance to support the implementation of the Act.

■ Borderline Substances Advisory Committee: Finance

Alex Norris: [130206]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will allocate funding to the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency in reviewing applications.

Jo Churchill:

The Department allocates funding in line with the Government's overall priorities to ensure that the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances can carry out its business effectively and efficiently.

■ Breast Cancer: Research

Jim Shannon: [122702]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has had discussions with Breast Cancer Now on their findings, published 6 November 2020, that an increase in the protein HIF-1 can cause breast cancer spread; and what assessment he has had made of the implications for his policies of those findings.

Jo Churchill:

The Government and NHS England and NHS Improvement are aware of the Breast Cancer Now HIF-1a research.

As acknowledged by Breast Cancer Now, further research in this area is required to understand how HIF-1a impacts the spread of breast cancer cells before it can be assessed whether HIF-1a could be a potential drug target.

■ Cancer: Cost of Living

Sir Mark Hendrick: [128082]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2020 to Question 104054 on Cancer: Cost of Living, if his Department will make an estimate of the average additional financial costs of living with cancer.

Jo Churchill:

There are no plans to make such an estimate.

Cancer: Medical Treatments

Lee Anderson: [128279]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what additional support his Department is providing to people being treated with chemotherapy during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidance NG161 was published in April 2020 to support clinicians in the management of patients requiring systemic treatment through the pandemic. The guidance, developed by clinicians, provides advice on alternative chemotherapy treatment approaches to reduce the risk of infection to patients and avoid unnecessary admissions and visits to hospital where possible.

On 3 August 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement announced that 'COVID-19 friendly' cancer treatments that are safe for patients during the pandemic will be expanded and extended through a £160 million initiative. The funding will pay for drugs that treat patients without having such a big impact on their immune system or offer other benefits such as fewer hospital visits.

Thousands of patients have already benefitted from 50 treatments approved for use as 'swaps' for existing drugs and more have become available thanks to a series of deals struck between the National Health Service and pharmaceutical companies.

Jim Shannon: [128975]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce delays in cancer treatment.

Jo Churchill:

To ensure essential and urgent treatment for all cancers have continued throughout the response to the pandemic, COVID-protected surgical hubs have been established for cancer surgery across the country to keep often vulnerable cancer patients safe. This particularly protects cancer patients from immunocompromised infection. All 21 Cancer Alliances across England now have arrangements in place for cancer hubs.

Cancer: Radiotherapy

Grahame Morris: [127528]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the NHS press notice, entitled Convenient modern cancer treatment for patients during covid-19 pandemic, 11 June 2020, if new funding is being made available to accelerate the roll-out of stereotactic ablative radiotherapy in order for it to be delivered by April 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Grahame Morris: [127529]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much his Department has allocated for rollout of stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR); and what the planned timescale is for the rollout of SABR.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 14 December 2020]: The Government and NHS England and NHS Improvement are committed to expanding the provision and use of stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) and has put in place a comprehensive support package to enable trusts to achieve this, including centrally funded access to both the national quality assurance programme and experienced mentors.

The expansion of SABR across the National Health Service is expected to require an investment of around £13 million and NHS England and NHS Improvement have made this available. Our aim is to ensure that by April every part of the country will be offering SABR treatment for non-small cell lung cancer and those with lung, lymph nodes and non-spine bone oligometastatic disease, in radiotherapy units nationwide. Further rollout for other disease types is planned for 2021/22.

Care Homes: Autism and Learning Disability

Alex Cunningham: [131264]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce the number of autistic people and people with learning disabilities in care and health settings.

Helen Whately:

People with a learning disability and autistic people should have access to the same, high quality health and care that we all expect. The Government is implementing Building the Right Support national plan, which aims to reduce the number of people with a learning disability and autistic people in specialist inpatient settings by ensuring more people get the support they need in the community.

As part of this, we will provide £74 million (£62 million in England) over the three years from 2020/21 to support discharge for people with a learning disability and autistic people from hospital into the community. In England, the first year of funding (£20m) of has already been paid through the Community Discharge Grant to all nominated lead Local Authorities.

■ Care Homes: Coronavirus

Paul Girvan: [127621]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether all staff employed in care homes, including cooks and cleaners will receive the covid-19 vaccination at the same time as nurses and care assistants.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) consists of independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the United Kingdom should use, including prioritisation at a population level. The JCVI has advised that the first priorities for any COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of COVID-19 mortality and the protection of health and social care staff and systems.

Therefore, in line with the recommendations of the JCVI, the vaccine will be initially rolled out to the priority groups including care home residents and staff, people over 80 years old and health and care workers, followed by the rest of the population. As set out in the green book, this includes staff involved in direct care, as well as non-clinical ancillary staff in secondary or primary care/community healthcare settings.

Mohammad Yasin: [98743]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to Public Health England's guidance entitled, Personal protective equipment (PPE) – resource for care workers working in care homes during sustained COVID-19 transmission in England, for what reasons the advice was changed from wearing vinyl gloves to wearing nitrile, neoprene or latex when providing personal care and when exposure to body fluids or blood is likely; and what evidence base was used to inform that updated guidance.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 7 October 2020]: The Public Health England (PHE) guidance on personal protective equipment (PPE) was amended to state that vinyl gloves should not be worn if it is anticipated that there will be contact with bodily fluids or blood. This was informed by Health Protection Scotland's Standard Infection Control Precautions Literature Review on PPE. We recognise that as this review was undertaken in clinical settings, the findings are not wholly applicable to adult social care settings. We are working closely with PHE and adult social care providers to amend and clarify the guidance.

Children and Young People: Mental Health Services

Catherine West: [131369]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of the £500 million package to support mental health services in England announced in the Spending Review 2020 will be ring-fenced to fund mental health support services for children and young people in (a) schools and (b) healthcare and community settings.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

This additional funding will be used to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need and invest in the National Health Service workforce. Further detail will be set out in due course.

■ Community Hospitals: Dorset

Sir Christopher Chope:

[133628]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will set out the timetable for delivery of the new community hospital hubs in Bournemouth and Christchurch being constructed as part of the Government's programme of new hospital building by 2030.

Edward Argar:

The health infrastructure plan sets out our strategy for long-term rolling investment in health infrastructure. The announcement on 2 October last year naming 40 of the 48 new hospitals to be built by 2030 represents the next step of this strategy. This will be the biggest hospital building programme in a generation and part of our agenda to build back better.

All hospital projects included in this will work with the central new hospital programme team. This collaborative approach is intended to help each trust get the most from its available funding whilst avoiding repetition of work, competition for resources as well as finding the best outcome for the staff, patients of local communities and the taxpayer. The programme delivery timetable will take all these factors into consideration to ensure that all hospitals are completed by 2030 and drive maximum value for taxpayers' money.

Coronavirus

Claudia Webbe: [126177]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people tested for covid-19 were found to be asymptomatic in (a) Leicester East constituency and (b) the UK.

Helen Whately:

We do not publish data in the format requested.

Coronavirus and Pneumococcal Diseases: Vaccination

Dr James Davies: [130142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the (a) effectiveness of protection conferred by pneumococcal vaccination in reducing deaths of people who have tested positive for covid-19 and (b) current level of take-up of pneumococcal vaccination among groups eligible for that vaccination; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending eligibility for that vaccination during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

There were large reductions in pneumococcal disease since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, most likely because of the lockdown measures that were implemented nationally. Co-infections of SARS-CoV-2 and pneumococcal disease occur very rarely. The number of pneumococcal infections and more so deaths due to pneumococcal disease in people with COVID-19 has been low. As such, it is not

possible to assess the effectiveness of protection conferred by pneumococcal vaccination in reducing deaths of people who have tested positive for COVID-19.

The most recently published pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) coverage data are for the year 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. PPV coverage was 69.0% in all patients aged 65 years and over, immunised at any time up to 31 March 2020 in England, rising to 82.4% for those aged 75 years and over. The proportion immunised in the last 12 months for these two age groups was 3.8% and 1.4% respectively.

These data are available to view here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pneumococcal-polysaccharide-vaccine-ppv-vaccine-coverage-estimates

As the supply of the PPV23 vaccine is limited due to high demand, the Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunisation is not currently planning to undertake an assessment of the potential merits of extending eligibility for the vaccine. Public Health England has issued comprehensive clinical guidance on how to prioritise those who should receive this vaccine.

Coronavirus and Respiratory System: Health Services

Jonathan Ashworth: [130083]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 24 November 2020 to Question 114825 on Coronavirus and Respiratory System: Health Services, what estimate he has made of the resources that are required to deliver respiratory commitments set out in the Long Term Plan.

Jo Churchill:

No estimates have been made past the funding that has already been announced.

The National Respiratory Programme is a sub-programme of the wider Cardiovascular Disease and Respiratory programme. The Cardiovascular Disease and Respiratory Programme was allocated NHS Long Term Plan funding as follows:

- 2019/20 £8.4 million
- 2020/21 £15 million

Coronavirus: Bedfordshire

Mohammad Yasin: [130182]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will prioritise Bedford and Kempston residents for local access to the second tranche of covid-19 vaccination; and what his timetable is for the roll-out of the vaccination for for the highest priority patients.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The National Health Service is working to ensure a COVID-19 vaccine is available to clinically prioritised groups as soon as possible. Over 200 Primary Care Network-led sites started vaccinating patients this week in England. Over the coming weeks and

months, the rate of vaccinations will increase as more doses become available and the programme continues to expand.

For the first phase, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, as well as frontline health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors. Included in this are those with underlying health conditions, which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality. It will likely take until at least spring until all high-risk groups, estimated at over 25 million people in England, have been offered a COVID-19 vaccine.

■ Coronavirus: Buckinghamshire

Joy Morrissey: [130840]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has made for the roll out of the covid-19 vaccine in Buckinghamshire; and what the timetable is for that roll out.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The National Health Service (NHS) has a tried and tested track record for delivering vaccination programmes and is working with existing partners across the healthcare system to ensure the safe and effective deployment of a COVID-19 vaccine across every region of the United Kingdom.

Alongside local partners, the NHS has been working to ensure fair access and maximum uptake of the vaccine which is why it has developed three different models of delivery. Included in this are hospital hubs, local vaccination services and vaccination centres. More than 730 vaccination sites have already been established across the UK and hundreds more are opening shortly to take the total to over 1,000.

■ Coronavirus: Congleton

Fiona Bruce: [130685]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, where residents in Congleton constituency will be able to access a long covid clinic.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

NHS England has provided £10 million for a network of clinics to support patients suffering with the long-term symptoms of COVID-19 and there are now 69 operating across England. Nine of these clinics are situated in the North West of England.

NHS England published details of the of current clinics locations on 18 December at the following link:

https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/12/long-covid-patients-to-get-help-at-more-than-60-clinics/

Coronavirus: Contact Tracing

Grahame Morris: [96045]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he made an assessment of the potential merits of awarding covid-19 test, track and trace contracts to local authorities before he awarded them to private sector companies.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 1 October 2020]: We encourage all suppliers of goods and services to express an interest in Test and Trace work whether local authorities, the private sector or an individual. Test and Trace are continuing to increase market engagement as part of specifying and sourcing all goods and services, including engagement with local authorities.

Coronavirus: Death

Chris Grayling: [114788]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of deaths taking place within 28 days of a positive covid test in each of the last six months had an unrelated primary cause of death.

Chris Grayling: [114789]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of deaths within 28 days of a positive covid-19 test in each of the last six months resulted from an infection acquired in a (a) hospital or (b) social care setting.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 17 November 2020]: Public Health England (PHE) COVID-19 death data series counts deaths in people with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 and is not designed to provide definitive information on the causal role of COVID-19 in relation to individual deaths. A PHE analysis from 3 August found that 95% of deaths that occurred within 28 days of the first positive test had a mention of COVID-19 on the death certificate, further information is included in the PHE Technical Summary of 12 August 2020 which is available at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-data-series-on-deaths-in-people-with-covid-19-technical-summary

PHE does not hold data for what proportion of deaths within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test in each of the last six months resulted from an infection acquired in a hospital or social care setting.

Chris Grayling: [132781]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the proportion of covid-19 deaths in hospital settings which occurred following tests administered as part of hospital admissions protocols where the patient was being admitted for a reason other than covid-19 or covid-like symptoms.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

This data is not held centrally.

Coronavirus: Disease Control

Olivia Blake: [128329]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the evidential basis for his decision not to advise people who are classified as clinically vulnerable during the covid-19 outbreak not to attend work or school.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 15 December 2020]: People who are identified as clinically vulnerable are considered to be at moderate risk from COVID-19 and should follow the same advice as the rest of the population within their tier. This means following the rules on washing hands regularly, wearing a face covering and keeping at least two metres apart and working from home if possible. If unable to work from home, they can go into work, as their employer is required to make the workplace COVID-19 secure.

The guidance from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health is clear that the risk from COVID-19 to children, including those who are clinically vulnerable, is very low.

Additional guidance has been issued for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable and at a high risk from COVID-19.

Stephen Morgan: [130823]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the prevalence of the newly identified strain of covid-19 (a) nationally, (b) in Hampshire and (c) in Portsmouth South constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

The increase in cases linked to the new variant first came to light in late November when Public Health England (PHE) was investigating why infection rates in Kent were not falling despite national restrictions, discovering a cluster linked to this variant spreading rapidly into London and Essex. 144 lower tier local authorities have identified at least one case genomically, although the vast majority of cases identified are in London, the South East and the East of England.

PHE is working with partners, such as Imperial College, Wellcome Sanger Institute, University of Edinburgh and the University of Birmingham, to investigate this variant. There is currently no evidence that the variant is more likely to cause severe disease or mortality, but investigations are continuing to understand this better.

Stephen Morgan: [130825]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of the newly identified strain of covid-19 on the capacity of healthcare settings (a) nationally, (b) in Hampshire and (c) in Portsmouth South constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Edward Argar:

As a result of the rapid spread of the new variant and rapidly rising incidence rates in the South East, the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) now consider that the new strain of SARS-CoV-2 to be more transmissible. This is a dynamic situation and additional investigation is being undertaken by United Kingdom (UK) experts to understand the potential impact of the new variant.

On 19 December 2020, the Prime Minister introduced tougher restrictions for large parts of South East England with a Tier 4: 'Stay at Home' alert level. Throughout the pandemic, the evidence has shown that rising rates of infection will lead to increased hospital admissions risking intolerable pressure on the National Health Service (NHS) in the toughest winter months. The introduction of Tier 4 will protect the NHS and save lives.

Justin Madders: [131317]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the scientific evidence that supports the closure of group exercise classes in areas under tier 3 covid-19 restrictions.

Tulip Siddiq: [131362]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the evidential basis was for the Government decision to require museums to close in areas with tier 3 restrictions.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Government is committed to publishing data that has informed its decision making, including the tiers framework and allocations.

We have also published supporting information to accompany the most recent regulations which is available at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-health-economic-and-social-effects-of-covid-19-and-the-tiered-approach

Epidemiological data and projection models on local restriction tiers, including commentary on individual tier allocation decisions is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938964/Coronavirus_England_briefing_26_November.pdf

This provides further information and context beyond the headline metrics as to why areas are in particular tiers currently.

Tulip Siddiq: [131353]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to provide secure indoor spaces for new mothers outside of private dwellings in areas of Tier 3 covid-19 restrictions.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Government recognises the importance of parent and baby groups for new mothers. We have provided updated guidance for businesses and community centres to continue to provide access in a COVID-19 secure manner. The guidance ensures these groups can continue to meet and provide new mothers the support they need.

■ Coronavirus: Dorset

Sir Christopher Chope:

[133630]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people were hospitalised with covid-19 in Dorset hospitals in (a) November and (b) December 2020; and how many of each cohort acquired their infection before being admitted to hospital.

Edward Argar:

The following table shows the total number of patients with COVID-19 admitted to Dorset hospitals in the period 1-30 November 2020 and 1-27 December 2020:

	1-30 NOVEMBER 2020	1-27 DECEMBER2020
University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust	280	219
Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust	55	52
Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	22	26

NHS England do not collect data to indicate when patients acquired their infection.

Coronavirus: Hospitals

Taiwo Owatemi: [133227]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to open nightingale hospitals in response to increased demand on hospital beds in England.

Edward Argar:

Patients are currently being treated in Nightingale hospitals in Manchester and Exeter with the Bristol and Harrogate sites supporting elective services. The London Nightingale site is also being readied for operation so it is available to support the National Health Service hospital bed capacity.

Coronavirus: Ice Skating

Alex Cunningham: [130059]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will lift the tier three covid-19 restriction on competitive ice skaters aged 18 and over training at ice rinks.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

National restrictions ended on Wednesday 2 December and gyms and sport facilities are reopening across all tiers. Outdoor skating rinks can stay open across all tiers and indoor skating rinks can open in Tiers 1 and 2.

Under Tier 3, ice rinks are able to open for disability sport, sports as part of the curriculum in education and supervised sport and physical activity for under-18 year olds, including those who were under 18 years old on 31 August 2020. Elite and professional athletes may continue to use facilities including ice rinks to train and to compete behind closed doors.

Coronavirus: Kidney Diseases

Alex Norris: [131414]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect on the risk of covid-19 transmission for patients with in-centre haemodialysis of those patients being in priority group four for the covid-19 vaccine.

Alex Norris: [**131415**]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of moving patients with in-centre haemodialysis higher up the priority list for the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Of the factors associated with COVID-19 mortality, age is the most strongly associated factor and applies across all other risk factors, including underlying health conditions. There is currently no conclusive evidence to indicate whether COVID-19 vaccines will have an impact on transmission.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has reviewed data on the risk of mortality from COVID-19 in-patients receiving in-centre haemodialysis (ICHD). In the ICHD cohort, 30% of all COVID-19 deaths up to 30 June 2020 occurred in persons aged over 80 years old. Those aged over 80 had a mortality risk of about 4.2 times more than those aged 18 to 59 years. Further information is available here:

https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0241263

The JCVI has recognised that persons on ICHD attend healthcare facilities regularly, and that this is an opportunity for vaccination. The JCVI therefore agreed that implementation teams should take advantage of this setting to vaccinate eligible individuals.

Coronavirus: North West

Ms Angela Eagle: [91572]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many covid-19 tests have been available and what proportion of those tests have been used in (a) the North West, (b) Merseyside, (c) Wirral and (d) Wallasey constituency in each of the last five weeks for which data is available.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 22 September 2020]: We do not publish data in the format requested. We publish data on the number of pillar 2 tests processed in each local authority weekly alongside the Test and Trace statistics publication on GOV.UK.

Coronavirus: Photography

Tom Tugendhat: [131334]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 23 November 2020 to Question 119289, whether photographers are able to work (a) indoors and (b) outdoors in areas under (i) tier 1, (ii) tier 2 and (iii) tier 3 covid-19 restrictions.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Photographers who are practising in a work capacity are exempt from the gathering restrictions, though anybody who is not working and is taking part in the photography, including those being photographed, must adhere to the social contact restrictions that apply in that tier both indoors and outdoors.

Photographers cannot operate in premises that are closed, for example in a hospitality setting in tier 3, unless they are 'making a film, television programme, audio programme or audio-visual advertisement'.

The Government is keeping the restrictions under continual review.

Coronavirus: Portsmouth

Stephen Morgan: [90221]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the timetable is for the closure of the covid-19 testing site at Tipner in Portsmouth.

Helen Whately:

The drive through site at Tipner Lorry Park in Portsmouth closed on 23 September 2020.

Coronavirus: Protective Clothing

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[130624]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what clinical studies he used as the evidential basis for introducing regulations requiring face coverings to be worn (a) on public transport, (b) in shops and (c) other specified indoor venues during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

From the onset of the pandemic, the Government's policy has been guided by the advice of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), and by evidence reviewed by Public Health England (PHE). There is some evidence to suggest the virus spreads most easily in enclosed spaces and that using face coverings as a

precautionary measure could be at least partially effective at reducing the rate of transmission in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible. These conclusions were reached by clinicians and experts of SAGE and PHE after reviewing the available scientific literature on face coverings.

Based on this evidence, we have mandated the wearing of face coverings on public transport, in shops and other indoor venues. The Government continues to keep the evidence under review in order to inform future policy decisions as the pandemic developments.

Coronavirus: Research

Sir Christopher Chope:

[131167]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the SIREN research study by Public Health England into covid-19 immunity covers immunity through antibodies and T cells; and if he will publish the latest interim findings.

Jo Churchill:

The SARS-CoV-2 Immunity and REinfection EvaluatioN (SIREN) study collects information on polymerase chain reaction and antibody results from healthcare workers who have given their consent for participation among participating sites across the United Kingdom.

Information related to T-cell response will be assessed through a sub-study of approximately 2,500 participants from the UK Immunology Consortium funded by UK Research and Innovation. The interim analysis of the data is underway and will be published in January 2021.

■ Coronavirus: Schools

Tulip Siddig: [131360]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the data his Department holds on the effect of school bubble isolation following positive covid-19 cases on local covid-19 transmission rates.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Public Health England (PHE) in partnership with the Office for National Statistics and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, is working on a large prospective study in schools across England which aims to collect data on infection and transmission in primary and secondary schools. This will include detailed investigations of bubbles and outbreaks in educational settings which will begin next term.

The data are anticipated to be published as part of the COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey in the summer of 2021. More information on the survey is available at the following link:

https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforhouseholdsandindividuals/householdandindividualsurveys/covid19schoolsinfectionsurveysis

Further information on the PHE studies relating to childhood COVID-19 is available at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-paediatric-surveillance

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[132751]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will prioritise school staff for covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI is an independent expert advisory committee to the Government.

The JCVI has advised that the priority for the first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality. The JCVI has advised that teachers will be considered for prioritisation in the second phase of the programme. Teachers aged 50 years and older, or in an at-risk group are eligible for vaccination in the first phase of the programme.

Coronavirus: Screening

Rachel Reeves: [110791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what criminal background checks are undertaken against (a) covid-19 testing site workers who interact with children under 12 years old and (b) other testing site workers.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 9 November 2020]: We expect our providers to have rigorous recruitment practices to ensure that the staff they recruit to work on test sites are appropriate for the role. Children must be accompanied by their parent or guardian at a test site. Test site staff are not permitted to test children aged under 12 years old. In all test settings other than a National Health Service setting such as in hospital or a general practitioner surgery, children aged under 12 years old must only be tested by their parent or guardian.

Bill Esterson: [112037]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the OptiGene Direct RT-LAMP test, if he will publish the (a) clinical validity data and (b) results of the Southampton University trial of May 2020.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 10 November 2020]: The Test and Trace Scientific Team are currently preparing a report covering the clinical validation of Optigene's DIRECT RT-LAMP Test which will incorporate the findings of the pilot carried out in Southampton as well as those from other pilot sites. This report will be published on GOV.UK alongside the report on lateral flow test validation data published on 11 November.

Dr Dan Poulter: [113530]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of Polymerase Chain Reaction tests after 45 cycles.

Helen Whately:

In August 2020, a study performed and published by Eurosurveillance looked at a selection of cases to identify samples that were Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) positive for COVID-19 and which had infectious virus. It found the PCR cycle threshold (Ct) values correlate strongly with infectious virus, meaning when there is more infectious virus the Ct value is lower. The probability of culturing virus declines to 8% in samples with Ct more than 35 and to 6% 10 days after symptom onset. This would be lower for Ct with more than 45 cycles.

The Eurosurveillance study is available at the following link:

https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.32.2001483?crawler=true

Ben Lake: [121337]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the capacity is for (a) pillar I and (b) pillar II covid-19 tests.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 1 December 2020]: Testing capacity in the United Kingdom across all pillars between 26 November and 2 December was at 4,684,727 tests. Data on individual capacity across all pillars throughout England is published each week alongside other Test and Trace statistics at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-test-and-trace-statistics-england-weekly-reports

Coronavirus: Theatres

Mr Clive Betts: [130634]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the level of covid-19 transmission in theatres.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We know that the virus spreads readily in indoor environments where members of different households and/or support bubbles spend time together, so the transmission risk in indoor settings remains high. Our approach has always been guided by scientific and medical advice. The restrictions that apply at each tier will be reviewed every 28 days to ensure they remain necessary and proportionate.

Coronavirus: Vaccination

Justin Madders: [116542]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of primary care networks have applied to deliver the direct enhanced scheme for the covid-19 vaccine rollout.

Justin Madders: [116543]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many primary care networks have not applied to deliver the covid-19 vaccine; and what plans are in place to deliver the vaccine in areas covered by those networks.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 23 November 2020]: NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioned the general practice COVID-19 vaccination service in line with agreed national terms and conditions, as an enhanced service (ES). Individual general practices, rather than Primary Care Networks (PCNs), have applied to deliver COVID-19 vaccinations, coming together in groupings to administer the vaccine. Some of these groupings mirror existing PCN configurations but others do not.

The number of practices that have opted into the ES is not held centrally. Hundreds of PCN sites have already been mobilised; further PCN sites are due to mobilise over the coming weeks so coverage will continue to increase. These groupings can vaccinate both unregistered patients and patients registered with practices that have not signed up to deliver the vaccine.

Where there are gaps in provision, NHS England will commission additional providers, such as community pharmacy, to provide COVID-19 vaccinations, with 200 community pharmacies due to be online next week. and that process has commenced. As more vaccines become available, there will be increased flexibility in local delivery.

Ed Davey: [117933]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has in place to ensure people who are not registered with a GP surgery get vaccinated against covid-19 as soon as possible.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 24 November 2020]: In planning for the vaccine programme, NHS England and NHS Improvement have considered those who are not registered or who are unable to reach a general practitioner. The agreement under which general practices will deliver COVID-19 vaccinations - The General Practice COVID-19 vaccination programme 2020/21 Enhanced Service Specification - enables practices, working within their Primary Care Network (PCN) groupings, to vaccinate unregistered patients provided they are eligible for a vaccination.

General practices, working in PCNs, form just one part of the plan for delivering COVID-19 vaccinations. They will operate as part of a system of providers, ensuring

best possible coverage of the population. Each PCN grouping is required to work with their local regional team to understand the current healthcare provision for vulnerable groups.

More than 730 vaccination sites have already been set up across the UK and hundreds more are opening this week, taking the total to over 1,000.

Alex Sobel: [119364]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what definition of care home applies in the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's interim advice on priority groups for covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has based its advice on the data it has reviewed from a number of sources including the Office for National Statistics and Public Health England. For the purposes of COVID-19 vaccine prioritisation, the definition of care homes as all care home premises licensed and registered with the Care Quality Commission, applies.

Alex Sobel: [119365]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether hospices will be included within the definition of care home in the interim advice on priority groups for covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee and Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has based its advice on the data it has reviewed from a number of sources including the Office for National Statistics and Public Health England. For the purposes of COVID-19 vaccine prioritisation, the definition of care homes as all care home premises licensed and registered with the Care Quality Commission, applies. This definition does not include hospices.

Hospices are included in the JCVI's advice as part of their prioritisation of frontline health and social care workers.

Munira Wilson: [123719]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what qualifications will be required to administer a covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 7 December 2020]: Any person administering a COVID-19 vaccine will have undergone specific training, developed by Public Health England and will have been assessed by their employer as competent to administer the vaccine or undertake other related activity, such as assessing an individual's suitability for vaccination and gaining their informed consent.

Sir Greg Knight: [124137]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to introduce (a) pre and (b) post covid-19 vaccination procedure to help ensure vaccines are effective

at the point of being administered; what steps he is taking to mitigate the risk to vaccine effectiveness of mis-storage; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 7 December 2020]: General practitioner (GP) practices will ensure that all vaccines are received, stored, prepared and subsequently transported, where appropriate, in accordance with the relevant manufacturer, Public Health England and NHS England's instructions as well as with all associated Standard Operating Procedures.

Where vaccinations are administered away from a designated site, for example, at a care home, the GP practice will ensure that appropriate measures are taken to ensure the integrity of the cold chain, following any guidance issued by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation or Public Health England. Appropriate procedures will be in place to ensure stock rotation, monitoring of expiry dates and appropriate use of multi-dose vials to minimise wastage.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[124653]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it the policy of the Government that people who have recovered from covid-19 after testing positive should not be given priority for the covid-19 vaccination; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 8 December 2020]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation are the independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the United Kingdom should use and provide advice on prioritisation at a population level. Clinical decisions will be made for those who have suffered from a COVID-19 infection and it is likely that vaccination should be deferred until clinical recovery and at least four weeks after onset of symptoms.

Hilary Benn: [125945]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when NHS and care staff will receive the BioNTech/Pfizer covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The National Health Service (NHS) began vaccinating patients and NHS workers against COVID-19 at hospital hubs on 8 December 2020, in the biggest immunisation programme in the UK's history. The majority of the vaccines so far have been administered to over 80 year olds, care home workers and NHS staff, through more than 730 vaccination sites across the UK; hundreds more are opening this week to take the running total to over 1,000.. Vaccination sites are also working with care home providers to book their staff in to vaccination clinics.

Harriett Baldwin: [126024]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the dentistry profession on the potential involvement of that profession covid-19 vaccine delivery.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 16 December 2020]: An enormous amount of work has already taken place to ensure we have the required workforce to roll out a COVID-19 vaccine to the United Kingdom population at the pace and scale required.

To enable this, the Department made changes to the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 in Oct 2020 (The Human Medicines (Coronavirus and Influenza) (Amendment) Regulations 2020). This allows additional health care professionals and those who have passed a programme of extensive training developed by Public Health England and Health Education England to safely administer a licensed or temporarily authorised influenza or COVID-19 vaccine.

Staff working in dental services – particularly those who are registered with relevant professional groups – have been encouraged to consider applying for temporary roles to support the COVID-19 vaccination programme, including as vaccinators. Information has been provided to dental staff groups on how they might apply for these opportunities.

Anne Marie Morris: [128169]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of prioritising people with mental health issues for the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 15 December 2020]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has considered the available evidence and published the prioritisation list for COVID-19 vaccination, which is largely prioritised by age due to the strong association of older age and mortality from COVID-19. Those considered clinically extremely vulnerable have also been prioritised for vaccination and those in clinical risk groups aged 16 years old and over.

Persons with severe mental illness are included as a risk group prioritised for COVID-19 vaccination and are described as individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or any mental illness that causes severe functional impairment.

Sir Mark Hendrick: [128634]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to communicate the importance of the covid-19 inoculation to different (a) age, (b) ethnic, (c) race, (d) gender, (e) religious and (f) socio-economic groups.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Department, together with the National Health Service (NHS) and Public Health England, is providing advice and information at every opportunity to support those getting the vaccine and to anyone who might have questions about the vaccination process.

The Department, alongside the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and NHS England are holding regular meetings with local authorities, faith leaders and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) organisations to provide

advice and information about COVID-19 vaccines and how they will be made available.

The communications plan includes targeted information and advice via TV, radio, and social media, translated into 13 languages. Print and online material, including interviews and practical advice, will also appear in 600 national, regional, local, and specialist titles, including BAME media, to maximise reach.

Chi Onwurah: [128675]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how people who have had the covid-19 vaccine will be tracked; and how that information will be shared with GPs.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 16 December 2020]: The NHS National Immunisation Management System (NIMS) is being used as the national register of COVID-19 vaccinations. At the point that someone receives their COVID-19 vaccine, the vaccinating team will record it and this information will go onto the NIMS system and onto a patient's general practioner record.

Duncan Baker: [128740]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether people with settled status need to prove their status before they can receive the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 16 December 2020]: Entitlement to free National Health Service treatment is generally based on ordinary residence in the United Kingdom. A person who can show they have taken up ordinary residence in the UK can access all NHS services immediately, including COVID-19 vaccinations, based on clinical need. This will be on a free of charge basis. They can apply to register with a general practitioner practice near where they now live.

Theresa Villiers: [128892]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to prioritise clinically extremely vulnerable people under the age of 80 for the covid-19 vaccine.

Theresa Villiers: [128893]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when clinically extremely vulnerable people who are under 70 will be included in England's covid-19 vaccination programme.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 17 December 2020]: In line with the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the vaccine is being rolled out to priority groups, including care home residents and staff, people over 80 years old and health and care workers. The vaccine will then be rolled out to the rest of the population in order of age and risk, including those who are clinically extremely vulnerable and all individuals aged 16-64 years old with underlying health conditions.

Our top priority is to offer a COVID-19 vaccine to everyone in JCVI cohorts 1-4 by mid-February – groups that account for more than four out of every five Covid fatalities.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[129950]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to publicise the content of Clause 4.6 of the Reg 174 information for healthcare professionals on the Pfizer/BioNTech covid-19 vaccine that it is unknown whether covid-19 mRNA Vaccine BNT162b2 has an impact on fertility; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The information for healthcare professionals on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, including whether it has an impact on fertility, is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontechvaccine-for-covid-19/information-for-healthcare-professionals-on-pfizerbiontechcovid-19-vaccine.

Sarah Owen: [130232]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government plans to publish a running total of people vaccinated against covid-19.

Nadhim Zahawi:

As of 27 December 2020, the Department published data showing that 944,539 people in the United Kingdom had received a COVID-19 vaccination.

Formal statistics will be published on an ongoing basis at: https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/healthcare.

Esther McVey: [130714]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the standard procedure is for assessing the effect on people with allergies of a vaccine during the trial stages.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Entry of patients into a clinical trial is managed by the implementation of inclusion and exclusion criteria that are defined in the trial protocol and approved by the regulator. The inclusion and exclusion criteria will have been carefully selected by the trial sponsor to enable the objectives of the trial to be achieved and also to maximise safety for all patients enrolled into the trial. Allergic reactions can occur to any constituent of a medicinal product, including vaccines and clinical trials may exclude subjects who are known to have had a severe allergic reaction in the past to the same or similar constituents.

Afzal Khan: [131470]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to make covid-19 vaccine information available in other languages.

Afzal Khan: [131471]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to make covid-19 vaccine information available in Romanian; and where that information can be accessed.

Afzal Khan: [131472]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to make covid-19 vaccine information available in Polish; and where that information can be accessed.

Afzal Khan: [131473]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to make covid-19 vaccine information available in Bengali; and where that information can be accessed.

Afzal Khan: [131474]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to make covid-19 vaccine information available in Urdu; and where that information can be accessed.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Department, together with the National Health Service and Public Health England, are providing advice and information to support the national vaccination programme. The Department, alongside the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, is holding regular meetings with local authorities, faith leaders, and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) organisations to provide advice and information about COVID-19 vaccines and how they will be made available.

The communications plan includes targeted information and advice via TV, radio, and social media. This is being translated into 13 languages, including Bengali, Chinese, Filipino, Gujarati, Hindi, Mirpur, Polish, Punjabi and Urdu. Print and online material, including interviews and practical advice will also appear in 600 national, regional, local and specialist titles. Public Health England is also currently developing translated versions of patient advice leaflets in to 19 languages, which will include the following languages: Arabic, Albanian, Chinese, Bengali, French, Farsi, Kurdish, Gujarati, Hindi, Polish, Panjabi, Nepalese, Romanian, Turkish, Tagalog, Spanish, Somali, Ukrainian and Urdu.

Apsana Begum: [131496]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to Royal Society of Public Health survey funding that 55 per cent of people in Asian communities would take the covid-19 vaccine, whether he plans to implement public health initiatives for Asian communities to encourage covid-19 vaccine take up.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Department, together with the National Health Service (NHS) and Public Health England, is providing advice and information at every opportunity to support uptake in

individuals who are prioritised for the COVID-19 vaccine. This includes providing advice to groups who may have questions about the vaccination process, including members from the Asian communities.

The Department, alongside the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and NHS England are holding regular meetings with local authorities, faith leaders, and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) organisations to answer questions and provide advice and information about COVID-19 vaccines and how they will be made available.

Rosie Cooper: [132825]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of including dental professionals on the list of people eligible for early covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) consists of independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the United Kingdom should use, including prioritisation at a population level. For the first phase, the JVCI has advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, as well as frontline health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors. Included are those with underlying health conditions, which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality.

Frontline healthcare staff include those who have frequent face-to-face clinical contact with patients and who are directly involved in patient care in either secondary or primary care/community settings. This includes dentists, as well as non-clinical ancillary staff who may have social contact with patients but are not directly involved in patient care. Their advice states that this not only includes those working for the National Health Service, but also those in independent, voluntary, non-standard and community healthcare settings.

Catherine West: [133096]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure teachers and school staff have access to the covid-19 vaccine; and what assessment he has made of the potential merits of making teachers and school staff a priority group for vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is the independent medical and scientific expert body which advises the Government on prioritisation for all vaccines.

The JCVI has advised that the priority for the first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality. The JCVI has advised that teachers will be considered for prioritisation in the second phase of the programme. Teachers and school staff aged 50 years and older, or in an at-risk group are eligible for vaccination in the first phase of the programme.

Ben Lake: [133110]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government's covid-19 vaccine distribution strategy takes into account whether certain covid-19 vaccines should be prioritised for certain groups.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government has now accepted the recommendations from the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to authorise three COVID-19 vaccines for use from Pfizer/BioNTech, Oxford University/AstraZeneca, and Moderna. This follows months of rigorous clinical trials and a thorough analysis of the data by experts at the MHRA who have concluded that both vaccines met its strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

The National Health Service began to deploy the AstraZeneca vaccine from the week commencing 4 January. Through the Vaccines Taskforce, we have 100 million doses ordered for delivery over the coming months of this particular COVID-19 vaccine, enough to vaccinate millions of people.

Both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccines have proven in clinical trials to give very high protection against severe disease, which is the primary aim of the first phase of the programme and both vaccines have demonstrated good safety profiles. The logistical challenges posed by the storage and distribution requirements for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine mean that in some populations, the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine is the only vaccine which can be deployed rapidly and without substantial vaccine wastage. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation does not advise a preference for either vaccine in any specific population. For operational, logistical and programmatic reasons, such as to enable more extensive and timely vaccine coverage, one vaccine may be offered in certain settings in preference over another vaccine.

Coronavirus: Vaccinations

Andrew Rosindell: [121182]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of the Bingo Association's offer for its bingo halls to be used as vaccine distribution centres.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The National Health Service is grateful for the support that businesses have offered and is in the process of establishing vaccination centres across the country that can manage the logistical challenge of needing to store the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine at an appropriate temperature.

Our approach, with three delivery models – community teams, vaccination sites, and hospital hubs – has been devised to be flexible and reach all parts of the country. The phased vaccination programme - which began on 8 December 2020 with hospital hubs - will be expanded over the coming weeks and months to include local vaccination services and large-scale vaccination centres across the country. More

than 730 vaccination sites have already been established across the UK and hundreds more are opening this week to take the running total to over 1,000.

Coronavirus: York

Julian Sturdy: [127540]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the timetable is for a covid-19 vaccination hub to be opened in York.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The National Health Service (NHS) has a tried and tested track record for delivering vaccination programmes and is working with existing partners across the healthcare system to ensure a COVID-19 vaccine can be deployed safely and effectively across every region of the United Kingdom.

Alongside local partners, the NHS has been working to ensure fair access and maximum uptake of the vaccine which is why it has developed three different models of delivery. Included in this are hospital hubs, local vaccination services and vaccination centres. More than 730 vaccination sites have already been established across the UK and hundreds more are opening this week to take the running total to over 1,000.

Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions

Justin Madders: [131311]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to Question 97607, tabled by the hon Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston on 30 September 2020 on Congenital Abnormalities and Coronavirus.

Edward Argar:

We responded to the hon. Member's Question <u>97607</u> on 30 December 2020.

Eating Disorders: Health Services

Wera Hobhouse: [131380]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to Health Survey for England 2019's finding that 16 per cent of adults aged 16 and over screened positive for a possible eating disorder, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure that anyone affected by an eating disorder is able to access specialist treatment at the earliest opportunity.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Improving eating disorder services is a key priority for the Government and a vital part of our work to expand and transform mental health services.

The National Health Service will invest almost £1 billion extra in community mental health care for adults. Under the NHS Long Term Plan, 12 areas in England have received funding to test new integrated models of primary and community mental health care since 2019/20. Eight sites have also received specific additional funding to transform the eating disorders pathway, including early intervention for young adults with eating disorders.

Building on this, the NHS has announced the roll out of the first episode rapid early intervention for eating disorders model in 18 sites across the country for young people, aged 16-25 years old, with eating disorders. This model advocates treatment within two to four weeks and aims to contact patients within 48 hours of referral.

Embryos and Foetal Tissue: Overseas Trade

Jim Shannon: [130741]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the traceability of human embryos, gametes and aborted fetal tissue imported into or exported from the UK.

Jim Shannon: [130742]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department takes to monitor the import into or export from the UK of human fetal tissue.

Jim Shannon: [130743]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the transportation of human (a) gametes, (b) embryos and (c) tissue from aborted fetuses across UK borders in the last five years.

Helen Whately:

The Human Tissue Act 2004 makes no distinction between pregnancy remains and other tissue from a living person. Tissue for use in human application or for research is regulated by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA). HTA-licensed establishments maintain inventories of the material they hold and, by meeting expected standards on coding and records, are able to demonstrate full traceability for the human material for which they are responsible, from receipt to final disposal/disposition. Since 2018, the HTA has collected information from its licenced establishments on the import of fetal material intended for use in human application.

All imported human embryos and gametes and all those transported across UK borders are registered with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), as required by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, as amended, and recently updated under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020. Further requirements, including traceability requirements, can be found in the General Directions issued by the HFEA and in the HFEA Code of Practice.

Epidemiology

Margaret Greenwood:

[<u>131295</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of infectious disease and diagnostics specialists that the UK requires for the next 10 years to enable it to respond effectively to any future pandemics; and what steps he is taking to meet that need.

Helen Whately:

The Department does not hold the information requested.

Foetal Tissue

Jim Shannon: [130744]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Quality and Safety of Organs Intended for Transplantation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 applies to aborted fetal tissue.

Helen Whately:

The Quality and Safety of Organs Intended for Transplantation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 cover the quality and safety of activities relating to organs intended for donation and transplantation and do not cover pregnancy remains.

The Human Tissue (Quality and Safety for Human Application) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 amend the Human Tissue (Quality and Safety for Human Application) Regulations 2007 and regulate the quality and safety of activities concerning human tissues and cells, intended for use in human application. These regulations apply to pregnancy remains to the extent they are used for human application.

Food: Advertising

Nickie Aiken: [131478]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the proposed online ban on advertising food and drink high in salt, fat and sugar on the ability of hospitality and food and drink businesses to market their products and develop their businesses.

Nickie Aiken: [131479]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the proposed ban on advertising online food and drink high in salt, fat and sugar on the ability of the (a) advertising industry and (b) food and drink (i) manufacturing and (ii) hospitality sectors to recover from the economic effects of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

We published an evidence note alongside the consultation on the proposal to introduce a total restriction of online advertising for products high in fat, salt and sugar. This is available at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/total-restriction-of-online-advertisingfor-products-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt-hfss/evidence-note

This builds on the impact assessment that accompanied the 2019 consultation on further advertising restrictions on TV and online. This is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/786554/advertising-consultation-impact-assessment.pdf

■ General Practitioners: Coronavirus

Munira Wilson: [130230]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support GP services in (a) Twickenham and (b) England during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

Across England and Twickenham, general practice is playing a vital role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering high quality care for both COVID-19 patients and for individuals requiring urgent care or essential routine care for new and pre-existing conditions that are non COVID-19. To support general practitioner (GP) services during this time a number of actions have been taken, including:

- providing an additional £150 million in funding to support expanding general practice capacity up until the end of March 2021, which follows support for the additional costs borne by GP practices during the first wave through the COVID-19 Support Fund;
- helping general practice adapt at pace to offer more remote care so that patients could continue to access GP services safely, by deploying laptops and headsets for use in primary care and accelerating the roll out of online video consultation capability;
- ensuring all GPs in England are eligible to use the personal protective equipment (PPE) portal to order COVID-19 PPE free of charge, and reimbursing GPs for the costs of such PPE purchased up to 31 December 2020; and
- the Department and NHS England and NHS Improvement are working to maximise workforce capacity through continued deployment and recruitment of the retired GP workforce and increasing the participation of the existing workforce. Locums and returning GPs made a valuable contribution to general practice during the first wave, with many coming forwards to support NHS 111 and the Covid Clinical Assessment Services.

Health Authorities

Catherine West: [130792]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the commissioning criteria of the nations' health authorities will be required to change as a result of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill.

Edward Argar:

Healthcare and adult social care services are out of scope of the services framework rules in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. This means there will be no

disruption to the commissioning or procurement of health and care services, or supply chains.

Health Protection Agency and Public Health England

Margaret Greenwood:

[131297]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of plans to move initially the Health Protection Agency and subsequently Public Health England to Harlow, including the cost of premises that have been bought, refurbished and maintained.

Jo Churchill:

In the period up to and including the 2019/20 financial year the spend on the Science Hub Programme has been £203.9 million.

Health Services and Social Services: Coronavirus

Justin Madders: [95110]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether household members of health and social care workers will be prioritised for covid-19 testing.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 29 September 2020]: Essential workers within home care can order five test kits for themselves and other symptomatic members of their households. However, for households of more than five the 119 contact centre raise on order on their behalf.

Health Services: Coronavirus

Alexander Stafford: [130877]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to provide additional support to people in the northern regions to improve (a) physical and (b) mental health care in light of the health, economic and social effects of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England (PHE) works with NHS England and NHS Improvement to support and assure the delivery of the health inequalities ambitions set out in the NHS Long Term Plan. The support programme includes Communities of Improvement forums as well as bringing together expertise from around the country and local academia. Programmes to address health inequalities include those covering cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory health, health checks, mental health, drugs and alcohol, social prescribing and numerous others. Work in each locality is delivered through local constructs such as the sustainability and transformation partnership, the health and wellbeing board and individual local organisations.

We are committed to supporting everyone's mental health and wellbeing in all parts of the country throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the winter period and beyond. We

have published our Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Plan for COVID-19, which sets out the support available for individuals and we are working with the National Health Service, PHE and others to gather evidence and assess the potential longer-term mental health impacts of COVID-19. Additional funding for 2020/21 announced in the Spending Review will be used to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need, and invest in the NHS workforce.

Health: Mould

Chris Evans: [126006]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will undertake a review on the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of mould sickness in the UK.

Chris Evans: [126007]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the knowledge of mould sickness among doctors, and what steps he plans to take to improve the diagnosis of mould sickness.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England published a review in 2019 on bioaerosols, which include mould, related to composting and intensive farming, and their potential effects on the health of those living nearby. This followed two other reviews published in 2018.

NHS England is aware of how damp and mould can lead to respiratory problems, infections, allergies, asthma and affect the immune system. Aspergillus is a group of moulds common in the home. Most people are naturally immune and do not develop disease caused by Aspergillus. The European Respiratory Society have produced guidelines for the diagnosis and management of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis.

Hearing Impairment: Coronavirus

Sarah Olney: [127608]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the BMJ Case Report of 13 October 2020 on Sudden irreversible hearing loss post covid-19, if he will make it his policy to prioritise partially deaf people for receipt of the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 14 December 2020]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) consists of independent experts who provide advice to the Government on which groups to prioritise. The Committee has stated in their advice that Phase 1 roll out of a vaccine will have the prevention of mortality at the forefront of its objectives, as well as to support the National Health Service and social care system.

For the first phase, the JVCI has advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, as well as frontline health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors. Included are those with

underlying health conditions, which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality.

Hospices: Coronavirus

Alex Sobel: [119366]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether hospice staff will be prioritised for covid-19 vaccination.

Alex Sobel: [119367]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether staff working in (a) neurological care centres and (b) other specialist care homes will be prioritised for covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI is an independent expert advisory committee to the Government.

For the first phase, the JVCI have advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, followed by frontline health and social care workers, including hospice staff and staff working in neurological and other specialist care homes, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors, including underlying health conditions.

Hospitals: Coronavirus

Chris Grayling: [122590]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the proportion of covid-19 infections which can be attributed to contact in a hospitality setting.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 3 December 2020]: We publish weekly data on the number of incidents in each setting with at least one laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19.

This information is available at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillancereports

Joint Replacements: Waiting Lists

Robert Halfon: [130026]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce waiting times for (a) knee and (b) hip replacement surgery.

Edward Argar:

The recent Spending Review provided £3 billion for 2021/22 to support the National Health Service in tackling the impact of COVID-19. This included £1 billion to tackle

long waiting lists and address backlogs by facilitating up to one million extra checks, scans and additional operations such as knee and hip replacement surgery.

Knee Replacements: Waiting Lists

Julian Sturdy: [130709]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the national average waiting time is for knee surgery in most recent period for which figures are available.

Edward Argar:

Information on average waiting times for knee surgery is not published in the format requested. Knee surgery is included in the category 'trauma and orthopaedics', for which the median waiting time in weeks for October 2020 was 14.3 weeks.

■ Leicester General Hospital NHS Trust

Claudia Webbe: [133287]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if the Government will provide additional capital funding for development of a GP hub and observation beds at the site of the Leicester General Hospital.

Edward Argar:

Following the outcome of Spending Review 2020, capital spending plans for 2021/22 will be subject to a detailed financial planning exercise and finalised in due course. Any opportunities to bid for funding will be communicated when available.

Loneliness: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher: [111549]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the costs to the economy of loneliness and social isolation in (a) elderly and (b) vulnerable people during the covid-19 outbreak.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

There have been no specific bilateral discussions.

However, we recognise that guidance on self-isolation and social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak could increase feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

In April, we launched a major effort to tackle loneliness with over £18 million of the Government's £750 million charity funding package going specifically towards reducing loneliness. This funding is directly benefiting people at increased risk of loneliness, including older people, young carers, veterans, new parents, people living with disabilities and many more.

Lung Diseases: Health Services

Jonathan Ashworth: [130084]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to tackle the backlogs in (a) respiratory diagnosis and (b) referrals for urgent care for people with lung conditions.

Edward Argar:

Through its communication to general practitioner practices and commissioners on 31 July 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement asked general practice to restore activity to usual levels where clinically appropriate and reach out proactively to clinically vulnerable patients and those whose care may have been delayed.

Through national and regional campaigns, the National Health Service continues to make the public aware that the NHS is available to help them and to come forward as they would have done prior to the pandemic with their health concerns. A national campaign to encourage the public to seek help when necessary began in October 2020 in partnership with Public Health England.

Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Independent Review

Yasmin Qureshi: [130022]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will set out a timetable for implementing the recommendations of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

All recommendations of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review are being considered carefully. The Government will provide an update in 2021.

Members: Correspondence

Tim Loughton: [132752]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham of 17 August 2020 on resuscitation in hospital.

Edward Argar:

We are working to provide all Members and external correspondents with accurate answers to their correspondence, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's letter will be answered as soon as possible.

Mr John Baron: [132779]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay of 5 November and 25 November on his constituent with the reference JB29357.

Edward Argar:

I replied to the hon. Member's correspondence on 23 December 2020.

■ Memory Clinics: Coronavirus

Judith Cummins: [130751]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that memory assessment services operate face-to-face during the covid-19 outbreak.

Judith Cummins: [130752]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the effect on patient health and wellbeing of undertaking diagnostic tests for dementia face-to-face; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

No formal assessment has been made recently. However, we know that diagnosis is important in ensuring appropriate access to treatment and support.

NHS England and NHS Improvement are continuing to encourage memory assessment services to provide safe and person-centred assessment and diagnosis via remote methods or in face-to-face consultations as appropriate during the pandemic. Webinars and guidance have been provided to support evolving best practice and a person-centred approach to diagnosis that supports patient choice.

Mental Health

Neil Coyle: [132935]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when his Department plans to publish the White Paper on mental health.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We will publish the White Paper as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services: Finance

Colleen Fletcher: [130101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the percentage change has been in Government spending on mental health services in each year since 2010.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Department and the National Health Service do not hold financial data at information requested prior to 2015/16.

The following table shows total spend on mental health services, learning disabilities and dementia from 2015/16 to 2019/20.

YEAR	ENGLAND £ MILLION	YEAR ON YEAR INCREASE £ MILLION	YEAR ON YEAR INCREASE PERCENTAGE
2015/16	10,978.9	-	-
2016/17	11,601.9	623.0	5.7
2017/18	11,976.0	374.1	3.2
2018/19	12,513.2	537.2	4.5
2019/20	13,324.8	811.6	6.5

Source: NHS Mental Health Dashboard, NHS England and NHS Improvement

Mental Health Services: North of England

Alexander Stafford: [130878]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has for investing in research into mental health interventions to support people post-covid-19 in the North.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Department, through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has funded various studies into the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, through the urgent public health COVID-19 call and the Mental Health Policy Research Unit. Additionally, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the NIHR jointly launched the Rapid Response Rolling Call to fund research that aimed to understand, prevent, or manage COVID-19. The call issued a mental health highlight notice to fund research that sought to identify and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, including interventions. From the UKRI-NIHR call, six mental health studies were funded. Further information can be found at the following link:

https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/2-million-funding-boost-for-new-research-to-tackle-impact-of-covid-19-on-mental-health/25851

Alexander Stafford: [130881]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to use the £500 million for mental health set out in the Spending Review 2020 to increase investment in mental health services in the North.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

This additional funding will be used to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need and invest in the National Health Service workforce. Further detail will be set out in due course

Mental Health: Employment

Dr Lisa Cameron: [130758]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2020 to Question 84278, whether he plans to allocate ring-fenced funding to assist employers in devising bespoke strategies to help support the mental health and wellbeing of workforces to include the prioritisation of suicide awareness during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We have no such plans at present. The Department for Work and Pensions will continue to work with the 'Thriving at Work Leadership Council' and Mind to promote resources supporting mental health of employees, including resources to reduce the risk of suicide.

The Department of Health and Social Care also funds the Zero Suicide Alliance (ZSA), which aims to achieve zero suicides across the NHS and in local communities by improved suicide awareness and prevention training. Part of the ZSA's work includes an online training module to raise awareness of suicide prevention amongst individuals and the workforce of member organisations.

■ Mount Vernon Hospital Northwood: Cancer

Sir Oliver Heald: [123501]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of cancer patients receiving treatment at Mount Vernon Hospital live in Hertfordshire.

Jo Churchill:

As of November 2020, 44% of cancer patients receiving treatment at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre live in Hertfordshire. In 2019/20, 32% of activity on the Mount Vernon site was from West Hertfordshire or the Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group area and 12% from East and North Hertfordshire.

Sir Oliver Heald: [123504]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to make a decision on the future of Mount Vernon cancer centre.

Jo Churchill:

The Hertfordshire radiotherapy service is provided by East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust from a specialised cancer centre in Northwood in North Middlesex. The cancer service is not clinically sustainable on its present site and a review is underway to relocate the services, including radiotherapy. Final options are expected to be decided in April 2021 before the public consultation which is expected to start from June 2021 and a decision expected next autumn.

NHS: Continuing Care

Munira Wilson: [130844]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many initial assessments for NHS Continuing Care resulted in the patient being (a) granted and (b) refused a full assessment in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Munira Wilson: [130845]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many full assessments for NHS Continuing Care resulted in the patient being (a) granted and (b) found ineligible for NHS support in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Munira Wilson: [130846]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many NHS patients suffering with (a) Alzheimer's disease and (b) other forms of dementia were granted NHS Continuing Care in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Munira Wilson: [130847]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many NHS patients suffering from cancer (a) with which they were expected to live for more than six months and (b) from which they were diagnosed as terminally ill and likely to die within six months were granted NHS continuing care in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Helen Whately:

Determination of eligibility for NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC) is based on an assessment of care needs and is not based on a specific medical condition, disease or diagnosis. Eligibility is determined by whether a person has a primary health need as set out in the national framework for NHS Continuing Healthcare and NHS Funded Nursing Care. Consequently, figures which are condition-specific are not collected by NHS England.

NHS England have interpreted 'initial assessments' to mean how many people go from an initial screening process to a full assessment. This data is not collected. NHS England have interpreted 'full assessments' to refer to the number of people who have a full NHS CHC assessment and are found eligible. Data on NHS Continuing Healthcare eligibility rates is published quarterly and is available at the following link: https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/nhs-chc-fnc/

NHS: Contracts

Margaret Greenwood:

131298

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of NHS contracts were awarded to private companies in each year from 2012 to 2020; and what the value was of those contracts in each of those years.

Edward Argar:

Information on the proportion of NHS contracts that were awarded to private companies in each year from 2012 to 2020 is not held centrally. Data on the amount of NHS spend by NHS Commissioners on private health providers and the value as a percentage of overall NHS spend from 2012 to 2019 (the most recent year for which such information is available is shown in the following table.

NHS
COMMISSIONERS
SPEND ON NON
NHS BODIES BY

ORGANISATION TYPE	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 RESTATED	2015/16 RESTATED	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Independent sector providers	5,669 S	6,467	8,067	8,818	9,007	8,765	9,180
Total NHS revenue expenditure	102,570	106,495	110,551	114,730	117,031	120,650	125,278
Spend on independent sector as a % o total NHS revenue spend	5.5% f	6.1%	7.3%	7.7%	7.7%	7.3%	7.3%

1. The numbers above have been collected separately from audited accounts data and may include estimations

Nivolumab

Chris Bryant: [132785]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the NICE draft guidance ID681 which recommends that nivolumab is not recommended for the adjuvant treatment of melanoma.

Jo Churchill:

We have made no such assessment. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an independent body and it would not be appropriate for the Department to interfere in the development of NICE's recommendations

While NICE was unable to recommend Nivolumab for routine funding in its draft recommendation of November 2020 (ID1681), this is not final guidance and a consultation on the draft recommendations closed on 25 November. NICE will now

consider the responses to the draft recommendation and expects to publish its final guidance in March 2021.

Nurses: Coronavirus

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[126773]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to vaccinate nursing staff against covid-19 who are working in private hospitals under NHS contracts.

Rosie Duffield: [130802]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether community nurses working with patients who have tested positive for covid-19 will be given the same priority and access to the covid-19 vaccination as nurses working in a hospital setting.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 14 December 2020]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are the independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the United Kingdom should use, including prioritisation at a population level. For the first phase, the JVCI has advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, as well as frontline health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors.

The JCVI considers frontline health and social care workers who provide care to vulnerable people a high priority for vaccination. The definition of frontline healthcare staff includes those involved in direct patient care. This includes staff who have frequent face-to-face clinical contact with patients and who are directly involved in patient care in either secondary or primary care/community settings.

Nurses: Pay

Huw Merriman: [130131]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of changes to (a) pension contributions and (b) overall pay for nursing staff at the next pay settlement.

Helen Whately:

The current member contribution structure in the NHS Pension Scheme has been in place since 1 April 2015. The NHS Pension Scheme is a mutual scheme for the benefit of the National Health Service workforce, and the contribution structure is designed to cover the average 9.8% employee contribution towards the cost of the generous benefits provided to members.

The NHS Pension Scheme Advisory Board, a statutory body made up of employer and staff representatives, has been asked to make recommendations on the future structure of employee contributions to be implemented from 1 April 2022. The Department expects to consult on proposals for changes to the employee contribution rate structure during 2021, following consideration of those recommendations.

To protect jobs, pay rises in the rest of the public sector will be paused next year, with the exception of those on lower incomes and NHS workers. The NHS Pay Review Body will report next year and the Government will take their recommendations into account in setting Agenda for Change pay, which includes nurses.

Obesity: Children

Nickie Aiken: [131477]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what comparative assessment he has made of the effect on whole population levels of childhood obesity of (a) the Daily Mile and other activity-based options and (b) restricting the advertising of food and drink high in salt, fat and sugar.

Jo Churchill:

There has been no such comparative assessment. Obesity is a complex problem caused by many different factors to which there is no single solution.

Obesity: Coronavirus

Alex Norris: [131420]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that people with obesity are given timely access to the covid-19 vaccine; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) consists of independent experts who advise the Government on which vaccine/s the United Kingdom should use, including prioritisation at a population level. For the first phase, the JVCI has advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, as well as frontline health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors.

Included are those with underlying health conditions, which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality. Individuals who are morbidly obese are included in the clinical risk groups aged 16 years old and over, identified by the JCVI.

Palliative Care

Andrew Rosindell: [131194]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people received palliative care in the last 12 months; what proportion of people who died received that care; and how many patients were unable to access that care in the last year for which figures are available.

Helen Whately:

This data is not held centrally.

Pregnancy

Mary Glindon: [131268]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2020 to Question 103511, what plans his Department has to undertake an assessment of the (a) effect of multiple gestation on pregnancy and (b) effectiveness of the medical advice given to parents on multiple gestation.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published new guidelines on twin and triplet pregnancy, NG137, in September 2019. The guideline sets out care that should be offered to women with a twin or triplet pregnancy in addition to the routine care that is offered to all women during pregnancy. It aims to reduce the risk of complications and improve outcomes for women and their babies.

The Department has no plans to undertake an assessment of the effect of multiple gestation on pregnancy and the effectiveness of the medical advice given to parents on multiple gestation at this time.

Protective Clothing: Procurement

Charlotte Nichols: [124334]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of the contracts tendered by the Government for personal protective equipment during the covid-19 outbreak went to companies owned by (a) women and 9b) BAME individuals.

Jo Churchill:

Information on the gender and ethnicity of the owners of companies which offered to supply personal protective equipment to the Department was not required as part of the bidding process.

Public Health England: Staff

Margaret Greenwood:

[131296]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of Public Health England employees with expertise in infection control have left the service prior to retirement in the last ten years; and what proportion of the Public Health England workforce that represented at the time of their leaving.

Jo Churchill:

The data is not available in the format requested.

Radiotherapy: Finance

Munira Wilson: [121026]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to increase radiotherapy treatment funding in line with the recommendations of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Radiotherapy's report entitled, Transforming Radiotherapy, A

six-point Covid-19 recovery plan to save lives and save money within the NHS, published on 6 July 2020.

Jo Churchill:

There are no plans to make this recommendation into Government policy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic radiotherapy service provision continued. In light of the need to minimise trips to hospital, particularly for people likely to be worse affected by COVID-19, radiotherapy services have made use of fewer fraction protocols as supporting evidence emerges. The focus on recovery for radiotherapy has been on embedding the use of hypo-fractionated or fewer fraction treatments.

Radiotherapy: Hertfordshire

Sir Oliver Heald: [123500]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has for a satellite radiotherapy centre for Hertfordshire.

Jo Churchill:

The Hertfordshire radiotherapy service is provided by East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust from a specialised cancer centre in Northwood in North Middlesex. The cancer service is not clinically sustainable on its present site and a review is underway to relocate the services, including radiotherapy.

Final options are expected to be decided in April 2021 before the public consultation, which is expected to start from June 2021, dependent on receiving confirmation that capital funding will be available, and a decision expected next autumn.

No capital funding has been identified for either a satellite radiotherapy centre or the relocation of the main centre.

Serco: Contact Tracing

Sir Mark Hendrick: [81547]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to England's Covid contact-tracing system, what criteria his Department used to award Serco a contract in relation to that system.

Helen Whately:

Serco are an approved supplier on the Crown Commercial Services (CCS). The CCS undertook a pre-procurement exercise engaging with all suppliers under the Framework to understand which suppliers could establish the contact centre in the volumes required and the timescales needed. The Department has put in place arrangements to ensure robust contract management in line with relevant guidance.

Skin Cancer: Medical Treatments

Chris Bryant: [132784]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure an effective range of adjuvant treatment options for melanoma patients.

Jo Churchill:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the independent body responsible for producing evidence-based guidance for the National Health Service on whether medicines represent a clinical and cost-effective use of resources. The NHS in England is legally required to fund medicines recommended through a NICE appraisal.

Overall 82% of the recommendations in the technology appraisal guidance are positive - recommended, optimised, or recommended in the Cancer Drugs Fund - the percentage positive recommendations in melanoma treatments is higher at more than 92%.

Social Services: Children

Tulip Siddiq: [131358]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Education on incorporating children's social care services into Integrated Care Systems.

Helen Whately:

Promoting integrated care is a priority for the Government and helping to develop Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) is a crucial part of this work.

In developing ICSs, we have been keen to allow local areas to develop models that work most effectively for them. This will allow them to promote close working between health and care organisations and between National Health Service (NHS) bodies and local authorities to support effective local service integration. NHS England is currently engaging on ICSs, and we will respond to that engagement in due course, including by introducing legislative change as necessary.

Social Services: Coronavirus

Alex Cunningham: [131263]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will provide a bonus to care workers in recognition of their work throughout the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

The social care workforce more than ever demonstrates unwavering compassion and dedication. We are proud of them and immensely grateful to them. We want to celebrate their work and give them the acknowledgement and appreciation that they deserve.

The vast majority of care workers are employed by private sector providers who ultimately set their pay and remuneration, independent of central government. We are exploring ways to further develop recognition of the social care sector, to empower staff and reinforce appreciation across the sector. However, we are not currently planning to pay social care staff a bonus as a part of this.

Surgery

Dean Russell: [130871]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, by what date NHS England will recommence the publication of cancelled elective operations data.

Edward Argar:

The collection of cancelled elective operations is currently paused until at least March 2021. The cancellation is part of a package of measures designed to help reduce burden on the National Health Service during the response to COVID-19.

Layla Moran: [133145]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reinstate publication of cancelled elective operations data.

Edward Argar:

Due to COVID-19 outbreak and the need to release capacity across the National Health Service to support the response, NHS England paused the collection and publication of some of their official statistics. This includes data on cancelled elective operations, and this dataset will remain paused during Quarter 4 of 2020/21.

NHS England will keep the list and dates of paused publications under review ahead of Quarter 1 of 2021/22 to establish if collections should be reinstated or paused.

Test and Trace Support Payment

Maria Eagle: [116402]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will review the eligibility criteria for Test and Trace Support Payments to include people whose Test and Trace ID Reference isolation date predates the introduction of the scheme.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 23 November 2020]: The NHS Test and Trace Support Payment scheme was introduced on 28 September 2020, alongside the legal duty to self-isolate. People can apply for the Test and Trace Support Payment if they have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace on or after this date and they meet the eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria will not be changed to include people whose isolation period predates the scheme.

Daniel Zeichner: [119259]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of the funding allocated to councils for the Test and Trace Support Payment has been spent in (a) Cambridge, (b) Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and (c) England.

Helen Whately:

We continue to work closely with the 314 local authorities in England administering the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme. This includes collating information on the number of successful applications, which we will publish in due course.

Jon Trickett: [91939]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason people on low incomes and eligible for self-isolation payments are unable to access financial support unless they are asked to isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

Helen Whately:

The Test and Trace Support Payment is available to people who are required to selfisolate, are on a low income and will lose income because they are unable to work from home.

In addition to those told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, there are now arrangements in place to allow people told to self-isolate on the advice of local public health officials to make a claim for a Test and Trace Support Payment.

Tobacco

[<u>130148</u>] Martyn Day:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to strengthen the UK's tobacco control regime after the transition period.

Jo Churchill:

The Government has introduced the Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020, ensuring that after the end of the transition period we continue to maintain our strong tobacco control legislation to address the harms from tobacco. Post-transition period, Great Britain will no longer have to comply with the European Union's Tobacco Products Directive and there will be opportunity to consider future regulatory changes to address the harms from tobacco. Any changes will be based on robust evidence and in the interests of public health.

Tobacco: Smuggling

[130150] Martyn Day:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will commission an independent, academic-led study into the issue of illicit tobacco smuggling in the UK to assess the scale of the potential role of major tobacco producers in that matter.

Jo Churchill:

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs are the responsible Government department leading on illicit tobacco and there are no current plans to commission a study but they will keep the need for further analysis under review.

Transplant Surgery: Coronavirus

Lee Anderson: [128278]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what additional support his Department is providing to transplant recipients during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

Solid organ transplant recipients were identified at the start of the pandemic as one of the groups of patients at highest clinical risk of COVID-19 and therefore were included in the agreed list of clinically extremely vulnerable patients. Throughout the pandemic, healthcare providers were asked to ensure care for these patients is personalised and takes account of individual circumstances such as COVID-19 risk and the impact of shielding on health and wellbeing. Such patients were able to access government support, including delivery of food and medicines and clinical advice through various routes.

■ Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme: Coronavirus

Sir Christopher Chope:

[131166]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy make the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme open to anyone who suffers serious injury following vaccination against covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

As part of the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, the Government laid a statutory instrument adding Coronavirus to the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (VDPS). This sensible step ensures that, in the very rare circumstance where someone is severely disabled as a result of taking the vaccine, those individuals can access financial assistance. Numerous diseases have been added as successive governments have rolled out more immunisation programmes, for example Human papillomavirus (HPV), Meningitis B etc.

Whistleblowing at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust Independent Review Justin Madders: [132986]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the independent rapid review into West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust undertaken by Christine Outram has concluded; and when he plans to publish the findings of that review.

Edward Argar:

The independent rapid review of issues at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust was commissioned by NHS Improvement at the request of the Department.

The investigator, Christine Outram was originally aiming to complete the review by April 2020, but the work was delayed due to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are expected to be published in spring of this year once the review has been completed.

HOME OFFICE

Airguns: Regulation

Kenny MacAskill: [134186]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the responses to the Airgun Registration consultation conducted in 2017.

Kit Malthouse:

Following the Government's review of air weapon regulation in England and Wales, which commenced in December 2017, we published a formal public consultation on a number of firearms safety issues on 24 November last year. The consultation includes proposals for new controls on air weapons, following the earlier review. The firearms safety consultation will close on 16 February, following which the Government will publish its response to the consultation, including in relation to air weapons controls.

All Party Immigration Detention Group

Alison Thewliss: [109458]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to respond to the letters of 30 July and 24 August 2020 from the all-party Parliamentary group on immigration detention.

Chris Philp:

I apologise for the delay in responding to the letters of 30 July and 24 August 2020, the responses to which have now been sent.

Asylum

Nadia Whittome: [130266]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking prior to the end of the transition period to ensure that international agreements are in place that would guarantee that an asylum applicant will be received in a timely manner by a safe third country.

Chris Philp:

We have made a political commitment to pursue new bilateral negotiations on posttransition migration issues with key countries with which we share a mutual interest, including on new arrangements for the family reunion of unaccompanied asylumseeking children.

Chris Stephens: [130775]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's Immigration Rules, what the criteria is for assessing safe third countries for asylum seekers; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

The technical changes to the Immigration Rules laid on 10 December will send a strong message to those who could and should have claimed asylum in the first safe country they entered. They will not be able to make claims at sea and they may not have their claims decided in the UK.

Our Immigration Rules set out clear criteria which must be met in order for a third country to be considered safe for a particular applicant.

I made a statement on the Rules changes on 16 December.

Asylum: Cardiff

Alex Davies-Jones: [130875]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the cost to the public purse of opening the temporary Asylum Operations Regional Intake Unit in Cardiff.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office are unable to state what estimate has been made of the cost to the public purse of opening the temporary Asylum Operations Regional Intake Unit in Cardiff. Where possible we have reduced costs by retributing resources from within the Home Office and Other Governmental Departments. To obtain this information would require the interrogation of information held under multiple cost centres and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Home Office are able to provide the total asylum costing for 2019/2020 and can be found at asy_04:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-protection-data-november-2020

Asylum: Coronavirus

Alex Davies-Jones: [131514]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 15 December to Question 128332, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on her Department's capacity in asylum operations intake units.

Chris Philp:

Pursuant to the answer of 15th December 2020, the temporary regional intake unit in Cardiff has been in operation since April 2020, as part of the Home Office response to the COVID pandemic.

There are no processing capacity limits on the additional temporary locations introduced to register asylum claims.

The Home Office aims to ensure all locations are sufficiently resourced to provide timely appointments to register asylum claims. Capacity is based upon demand and

workforce availability at these temporary locations which enables them to cope with fluctuations in levels of asylum intake.

Asylum claims registered at these temporary regional locations are processed in accordance with policy, fulfilling the UKs statutory obligations in relation to registering asylum claims in a Covid safe environment.

These are temporary arrangements which will be kept under review to align with HMG guidance. These changes do not represent a new operating model - they are contingency measures put in place during the COVID-19 epidemic in order to ensure that asylum seekers are able to safely register their claims.

Asylum: Deportation

Chris Stephens: [130776]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development on Returns or Readmissions Agreements for those deemed to be (a) irregular migrants, (b) refused asylum and (c) inadmissible; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Stephens: [130778]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with his counterparts in (a) EU countries, (b) EEA states and (c) non-EU or EEA states on bilateral deals on or which include Returns or Readmission Agreements for those deemed to be (i) irregular migrants, (ii) refused asylum or (iii) deemed inadmissible; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

As an EU Member State, the UK participated in a number of EU Readmission Agreements (EURAs) with third countries. Now that the Transition period has ended, we are no longer party to these and, where appropriate, we are looking to transition these arrangements into bilateral agreements. The Home Office continues to work closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development on this. As negotiations with individual countries are ongoing, it would not be appropriate to make a statement at this time.

Negotiations have now concluded with the EU. The UK and EU have agreed a joint declaration noting the importance of effectively managing migratory flows. The UK will continue to engage bilaterally and multilaterally with Member States to discuss suitable practical arrangements on illegal migration, asylum, returns and family reunion for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Asylum: Greater London

Helen Hayes: [131351]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers have died who were resident at Barry House in East Dulwich in the last 12 months.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office do not publish statistics on deaths relating to service users resident in asylum accommodation.

Asylum: Military Bases

Tulip Siddig: [130787]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the implications for her policies of reports of poor and unsafe living conditions for migrants in (a) Napier Barracks in Folkestone and (b) Penally Training Camp in Pembrokeshire; and if she will make a statement.

[130788] **Tulip Siddiq:**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to improve conditions for migrants at (a) Napier Barracks in Folkestone and (b) Penally Training Camp in Pembrokeshire.

Chris Philp:

A rapid review of asylum accommodation came out of a series of Cabinet Office Covid-19 taskforce visits to asylum accommodation and a recommendation that the Home Office conduct a 'deep dive' on our approach to initial accommodation during Covid.

The Home Office is reviewing the recommendations of the rapid review and, as previously stated, will seek to publish a summary of the recommendations. We will also hold round tables with stakeholders to discuss the recommendations, actions taken and proposed next steps.

The Napier Barracks and Penally training camp sites have been in operation for almost three months. They are fit for purpose, safe and equipped in line with existing contractual requirements for asylum accommodation. We continue to work closely with our provider and partners to identify opportunities for improvement, as we do across our entire accommodation estate.

Wendy Chamberlain: [130841]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to relocate asylum seekers located at the Penally Camp to alternative accommodation.

Chris Philp:

A rapid review of asylum accommodation came out of a series of Cabinet Office COVID-19 taskforce visits to asylum accommodation and a recommendation that the Home Office conduct a 'deep dive' on our approach to initial accommodation during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Home Office is reviewing the recommendations of the rapid review and, as previously stated, will seek to publish a summary of the recommendations. We will also hold round tables with stakeholders to discuss the recommendations, actions taken and proposed next steps.

Asylum: Temporary Accommodation

Stuart C McDonald: [130120]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish any reviews she has undertaken of covid-19 safety in contingency hotels and military barracks being used as asylum accommodation.

Chris Philp:

A rapid review of asylum accommodation came out of a series of Cabinet Office COVID-19 taskforce visits to asylum accommodation and a recommendation that the Home Office conduct a 'deep dive' on our approach to initial accommodation during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Home Office is reviewing the recommendations of the rapid review and, as previously stated, will seek to publish a summary of the recommendations. We will also hold round tables with stakeholders to discuss the recommendations, actions taken and proposed next steps.

Stuart C McDonald: [130121]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking (a) nationally and (b) locally to monitor, prevent and mitigate the risk of Far Right activities at contingency hotels and military barracks being used for asylum accommodation.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office works closely with law enforcement and others at a national level to monitor far right activity and ensure that local law enforcement and providers are joined up and have effective plans to tackle incidents.

Our accommodation providers liaise closely with local police colleagues and asylum seekers are briefed on risks and encouraged to report hate crimes accordingly.

The Home Office keeps security arrangements under review at its accommodation sites.

When incidents occur at these sites, providers report to the Home Office immediately, and then the Home Office works with the providers, putting additional measures in place if required.

Aviation: Passengers

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

[133967]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many passengers have arrived in the UK by air (a) in total between 1 June 2020 to 31 December 2020 (b) in each of those months.

Chris Philp:

The most recent immigration statistics were published on the 27th November 2020.

The links to the relevant information can be found below:

In addition, an ad hoc 'Statistics relating to Covid-19 and the immigration system, was also published on the 27 th November 2020.

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2020#history

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-relating-to-passenger-arrivals-since-the-covid-19-outbreak-november-2020

The next Immigration statistics is due to be published in February 2021.

■ Biometrics: Glasgow

Brendan O'Hara: [130745]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of appointments for biometric testing at the Core Service Point in Glasgow are (a) free and (b) enhanced appointments which incur a charge.

Kevin Foster:

UK Visa and Citizenship Application Service (UKVCAS) centres are run by Sopra Steria Ltd (SSL) on behalf of UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI) The core service points, at which free appointments are offered are located in Cardiff, Croydon, Belfast, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester.

The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) regarding availability of free appointments for biometric enrolment at core service points related to SSL is published on a quarterly basis as part of the Key Performance Indicators for HMG's most important contracts held by the Home Office.

This can be found following the link below:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-performance-indicators-kpis-for-governments-most-important-contracts

Note: In order to find the information specific to the UKVCAS contract, this can be identified via column C and selecting Sopra Steria Ltd.

■ Biometrics: Greater Manchester and Kingston upon Hull

Dame Diana Johnson: [133750]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the number of free biometric appointments issued in (a) Hull and (b) Manchester in 2020; and what steps her Department has taken to increase the number of available biometric appointments.

Kevin Foster:

As a result of COVID-19, and national restrictions at the time, all UK Visa and Citizenship Application Service (UKVCAS) sites were closed from 27 March until 1 June 2020.

Following the reopening of UKVCAS services, capacity was initially reduced due to the need to adhere to social distancing regulations. To help reduce the number of customers who needed to attend a physical appointment, we introduced a biometric reuse process which allows UKVI to reuse previously submitted biometrics in order to assess visa and citizenship applications, meaning eligible customers didn't need to visit a UKVCAS service point to enrol new biometrics. In parallel, customers without reusable biometrics were invited to book a physical appointment in date order from the date in which they applied.

This approach meant we could resume normal service quicker following the COVID-19 impact, and we were able to return to regular processes from 24 September, with a biometric reuse process still in place for student applications, where eligible. Since late September capacity at UKVCAS service points has continued to increase through site expansion, whilst ensuring the physical locations remain COVID-19 secure. and is now greater than pre-covid levels.

However, application demand since this time has exceeded forecasts, meaning some customers have experienced delays in securing an appointment.

The contract we have with Sopra Steria Limited, who run the UKVCAS service on behalf of UKVI, stipulates the percentage of appointments which must be free at the core service points in Cardiff, Croydon, Belfast, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester. Details on the relevant performance indicators to measure appointment availability has been published and can be found in Schedule 7 of the UKVI Front End Services contract available here

https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/ec5031ea-021e-471a-86cf-af540e8d8efa.

UKVI monitors appointment levels closely to ensure there are sufficient free appointments made available overall and including in geographical regions where there appears to be most demand. As a result, the UKVCAS service point in Manchester, for example, now has proportionately more free appointments than it did in July. UKVI continues to look at options to enhance capacity further to meet demand.

Borders: Personal Records

Joanna Cherry: [133910]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether Passenger Name Record (PNR) data from the EU to the UK accessible under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement include (a) the criminal records of and (b) intelligence on passengers.

Kit Malthouse:

PNR data is generated by airlines in their normal course of business as a record of each passenger's details needed to process their booking. It may include information such as the passenger's name, passport and contact details, how the reservation was made and paid for, travel itinerary and any travel companions. PNR data does not include criminal record information or intelligence on passengers. Airlines operating flights to and from the UK are under a legal requirement to transfer PNR

data which is used to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute terrorist offences and serious crime. Processing of PNR data is undertaken in intelligence-led operations and post-incident investigations to detect known individuals; to identify otherwise unknown individuals whose PNR data or pattern of travel is linked to or associated with terrorism-related or serious criminal activity, and to identify and protect vulnerable individuals.

■ Common Travel Area: Coronavirus

Conor McGinn: [133933]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the Common Travel Area.

Kevin Foster:

The Government is committed to maintaining the Common Travel Area arrangements and has done so throughout the pandemic. There continue to be no routine immigration controls on journeys from within the CTA to the UK, with no immigration controls whatsoever on the land border.

Those arriving in England from within the CTA will only be required to provide locator details and self-isolate in certain circumstances. These requirements apply to all nationalities, including British and Irish nationals.

The Government has also announced passengers arriving from all international destinations will be required to present a negative COVID-19 test result before entering England. However, people travelling to England from within the Common Travel Area will be exempt.

Coronavirus: Disease Control

Rachael Maskell: [133049]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to prevent people travelling from higher to lower local covid alert level Tier areas; and whether she plans to provide the police with additional powers to enforce the guidance on travel restraint.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government is clear that those living in a higher tier or tier 4 area are advised not to travel out of the area unless it is necessary, such as for work or education. It is important that people follow government guidance on local tier restrictions.

Powers available to the police related to the Covid-19 regulations are kept under review and the police have the power to issue fixed penalty notices for those who do not have a reasonable excuse for travelling from their area.

Mr Clive Betts: [133659]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what powers the police have to enforce covid-19 restrictions on people living in Tier 4 areas travelling to Tier 3 areas to shop during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kit Malthouse:

People are required to continue to follow the rules under the current restrictions. They are in place to protect the public and save lives during this national pandemic This means that you must not leave or be outside of your home without reasonable excuse. We also recommend that people stay local where possible. Stay local means stay in the village, town, or part of the city where you live.

The police will be able to take action against those who break these rules, including issuing a fixed penalty notice of £200 for the first offence.

People aged 18 or over can be issued with a fixed penalty notice:

- £200 for the first offence, lowered to £100 if paid within 14 days
- £400 for the second offence, then doubling for each further offence up to a maximum of £6,400

The Home Office continues to work closely with the police and operational partners to ensure they have the powers, resources and guidance they need.

Coronavirus: Protective Clothing

Chris Grayling: [132782]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many fines have been issued to people for refusing to wear a facemask in an indoor setting in each of the last six months.

Kit Malthouse:

In its most recent published statistics, the National Police Chiefs' Council reported on 30 November that 641 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued between 15 June and 16 November for breaches of the Face Coverings Regulations across England and Wales. Of these FPNs:

- 169 were issued against the regulations concerning wearing a face covering on public transport, across twelve forces (including British Transport Police in England and Wales).
- 472 were issued against regulations concerning the wearing a face covering in a relevant place, such as a retail setting, across thirty-two forces (including British Transport Police in England and Wales).

The latest statistics published by NPCC can be found here:

https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/more-fixed-penalty-notices-issued-since-national-coronavirus-restrictions-were-reintroduced-with-crime-9-per-cent-lower-than-last-year

Mr Clive Betts: [133660]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what powers the police have to enforce the wearing of face coverings in shops during the covid-19 outbreak; and whether

the police may require people to produce documentation to prove a medical exemption from the requirements to wear face coverings.

Kit Malthouse:

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place) (England) Regulations 2020, as amended, requires members of the public to wear a face covering in relevant indoor public settings unless an exemption applies, or the individual has a reasonable excuse.

The police have the power to enforce the requirement to wear a face covering including directing the individual to wear a face covering, directing the individual to leave the relevant place, and issuing a fixed penalty notice of £200 (reducing to £100 if paid within 14 days) doubling upon each repeat offence up to a maximum of £6.400.

Police officers receive guidance on the law and that they should use their discretion at all times. As they have done throughout the pandemic, the police apply a four-step escalation method - engaging, explaining and encouraging compliance before moving to take enforcement action.

■ Counter-terrorism: Luton

Sarah Owen: [131489]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what public engagement exercises her Department has undertaken in Luton on the Prevent Strategy.

James Brokenshire:

The Prevent programme is fundamentally about safeguarding and supporting vulnerable individuals to stop them from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It works best when it is locally-led and delivered in partnership with communities. As part of the Prevent Duty, Local Authorities have an obligation to deliver a programme of engagement tailored to the needs of the local community. The Home Office supports areas with engagement to increase transparency and communicate proactively about Prevent delivery in the local area. The Home Office has previously engaged with Luton Council's Elected Members Prevent Engagement Group on the Prevent Strategy.

■ Criminal Records: EU Nationals

Joanna Cherry: [133912]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many requests the UK has made to EU member states for information on the criminal background of EU citizens in 2021; and how many responses it has received.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not hold the information requested. However, statistics on the Criminal Records Exchange are published by the national Criminal Records Office (ACRO) quarterly. These figures are published at: https://www.acro.police.uk/Publications

Cybercrime: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher: [130746]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on trends in the (a) number and (b) number of victims of online scams; and what steps her Department is taking to help protect (i) people and (ii) businesses from cyber crime.

James Brokenshire:

The Government is aware that fraudsters are exploiting the pandemic to commit opportunistic crimes such as fraud. Along with partners in law enforcement, the public sector and the private and third sectors, we have been implementing measures to ensure the public has the protection and advice needed to protect themselves from these crimes.

The Home Office collects data on individual fraud categories, some of which will be committed online, but we are unable to provide a breakdown of these offences.

The Home Office collects quarterly data on the number of reports of fraud made to Action Fraud that have been recorded as criminal offences by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB). The most recently available data for the year ending June 2020 have been published by the Office for National Statistics and can currently be found in Table A5 here:

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesappendixtables

Our efforts include working with the National Cyber Security Centre to establish a new Suspicious Email Reporting Service. This service allows the public to report potential scams safely and effectively. To date, this has led to the removal of over 22000 scams. Members of the public can currently forward suspicious emails to the dedicated email address: report@phishing.gov.uk

In addition, in 2019 the Government launched specialist Cyber Crime Units in every local police force, in order to improve the local response, provide an effective investigative response and an improved victim experience. The Government also provides funding for the Cyber PROTECT police officers and staff in all policing regions and local forces, and Cyber Resilience Centres, which are now live in each region, providing cyber security advice and support to micro and small SMEs.

However, law enforcement cannot do this alone. The best way to deal with these scams is for the public to be well-informed on how to protect themselves. That is why we have launched a gov.uk page that contains easy-to-follow steps for people to spot potential frauds and the steps they can take to avoid them. It also signposts advice and support to those who may unfortunately have fallen victim. This page can currently be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-fraud-and-cyber-crime

Deed Poll

Sarah Champion: [132926]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if her Department will bring forward proposals (a) to remove the right to a change of name for a person convicted of sex offences or who is on the sex offenders register and (b) establish a regulatory body to oversee the name change process.

Victoria Atkins:

The UK has some of the toughest powers in the world to deal with sex offenders and we are committed to ensuring that the system is as robust as it can be. Tough checks and a range of legislative measures are available to the police to manage known sex offenders living in the community.

Registered sex offenders are required to inform their offender manager of any change in circumstances, including a change of name. A failure to notify the police of a change of name can be considered as a breach of an order, which could lead the offender receiving a five year prison sentence.

We understand the concerns that have been raised about people with a history of sexual offending attempting to change their name in order to hide their identity. We are working with the Courts and the Disclosure and Barring Service to close any monitoring gaps to ensure the public is kept safe.

Drugs: Crime

Jonathan Gullis: [133260]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans the Government has to increase sentences on (a) possession and (b) intent to supply of synthetic drugs.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government has no plans to change the lengths of sentences which can be handed down for possession or intent to supply Class A, B or C controlled drugs. We consider the classification of drugs on a case by case basis taking into consideration advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). This includes changing the classification of drugs which are already controlled as well as classifying new substances or those which are newly understood to pose a risk of harm or misuse.

We will shortly be introducing controls over several novel benzodiazepines for the first time as Class C drugs, following ACMD advice, and this will mean a maximum sentence of up to two years in prison, an unlimited fine or both for possession, and up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both for supply and production of these substances. We are currently considering recent ACMD recommendations on increasing the classification of GBL/GHB and on maintaining the current classification of synthetic cannabinoids and we will respond in due course.

European Arrest Warrants

Stuart C McDonald: [133895]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are currently subject to outstanding UK requests under the European Arrest warrant.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not hold the information requested.

The National Crime Agency handles requests made through the European Arrest Warrant as well as those made under the new surrender arrangements.

Statistics on the European Arrest Warrant have been published by the National Crime Agency for each year of its operation. These figures are published at: https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications

Joanna Cherry: [<u>133914</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people were subject to outstanding UK requests under the European Arrest warrant as at 31 December 2020; and how many of those cases are live requests under the replacement surrender arrangements.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not hold the information requested.

The National Crime Agency handles requests made through the European Arrest Warrant as well as those made under the new surrender arrangements.

Statistics on the European Arrest Warrant have been published by the National Crime Agency for each year of its operation. These figures are published at: https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications

Extradition: EU Countries

[133913] Joanna Cherry:

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the average time between (a) a request and an arrest and (b) an arrest and return of a subject to the UK under the surrender arrangements of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Kit Malthouse:

The streamlined extradition arrangements agreed under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement are based on the exchange of warrants between judicial authorities which are similar to the arrangements in place between the EU and Norway and Iceland and contain identical time limits to those under the European Arrest Warrant Framework Decision. The arrangements are intended to be as fast and effective as those under the European Arrest Warrant while providing greater safeguards for those who are arrested.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Recruitment

Zarah Sultana: [130243]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allocating funding to fire and rescue services to enable the recruitment of 5,000 additional frontline firefighters.

James Brokenshire:

The Government is committed to ensuring that fire and rescue services have the resources and support they need to carry out their vital roles and to keep people safe.

Overall, fire and rescue authorities will receive around £2.3 billion in 2021/22. Standalone fire and rescue authorities will see an increase in core spending power of 2.6% in cash terms this year compared to 2020/21.

It is the responsibility of fire and rescue services to ensure that they have they have the appropriate number of firefighters to deliver their core functions across prevention, protection and response. There were 2,845 new firefighters in England in 2019/20, Equivalent to 8% of all firefighters.

■ Fire Stations: Yorkshire and the Humber

Jon Trickett: [133705]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many fire stations there were in the Yorkshire and the Humber region in (a) 2010 and (b) 2020.

Kit Malthouse:

The number of fire stations in North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Humberside, the four fire and rescue services that make up the Yorkshire and the Humber region, was a) 138 in 2010 b) 126 in 2019 (the latest year for which published statistics are available)

Further detail is available in table FIRE1403 here

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fire-statistics-datatables#other

Operational matters (including where to locate fire stations) and the response to them are for each individual fire and rescue service (FRS) to determine, along with their associated Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA). Every fire and rescue service is obliged to carry out its own risk assessments and identify appropriate control measures to protect its staff and communities. The Integrated Risk Management Plan for each FRS is published by the FRA. The National Fire Chiefs Council, through their Central Programme Office, provide operational guidance spanning a wide range of activity to assist fire and rescue services in their work.

■ Firearms: Antiques

Nickie Aiken: [131480]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance her Department has issued on which calibres (a) qualify firearms for antique status and (b) are to be

amended due to their usage by criminals so that antique dealers and military collectors can ensure they take the correct action to comply with changes in the law.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office Guide on Firearms Licensing Law includes guidance on which firearms can currently be regarded as antique. The Guide can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachm ent data/file/518193/Guidance on Firearms Licensing Law April 2016 v20.pdf.

Since 2007, the number of antique firearms recovered in criminal circumstances has increased significantly as criminals have taken advantage of the lack of a legal definition of 'antique firearm' to obtain old, but functioning, firearms for use in crime.

That is why on 9 November, the draft Antique Firearms Regulations 2020 were laid before Parliament. They will define 'antique firearm' in law, thereby providing legal clarity on which firearms can safely be regarded as antique, and therefore exempt from most firearms controls, and those which must be subject to licensing.

We will further strengthen the controls by removing from the definition of 'antique firearm' seven cartridges which have regularly been used in crime. This will mean that firearms chambered for use with those seven cartridges will become subject to licensing. However, owners will be able to keep such firearms on a firearm certificate. Further information can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/policing-and-crime-bill-proposals-toimplement-legislation-to-define-antique-firearms.

Subject to the regulations being approved by Parliament, we will publicise the changes in the law on gov.uk and through the media. We are also working closely with representatives of collectors, museums, dealers and shooting organisations on other ways of reaching people – for example, through their websites and newsletters.

Firearms: Licensing

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[130623]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has received representations on differences in practice between police forces on firearms licensing and registration; and if she will implement (a) a national standard for that practice and (b) a database of all licensed firearms.

Kit Malthouse:

We know that there are some variations in practice between police forces in processing firearms licensing applications. This is why the Government intends to issue statutory guidance to the police on their firearms licensing functions. We consulted on draft guidance between 23 July and 17 September 2019 and we are considering the responses received, as well as discussing the details with interested parties. While the granting of firearm certificates is an operational matter for the police, they will be required to have regard to the statutory guidance when issued, which will ensure greater consistency in firearms licensing practice across all forces.

The National Firearms Licensing Management System is a central database which provides records of all firearm and shotgun certificate holders and registered firearms dealers who have been licensed by the police to hold firearms in accordance with the Firearms Act 1968.

■ Graduates: Migrant Workers

Patrick Grady: [130769]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending graduate work visas in response to the economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak.

Kevin Foster:

The Graduate route will be launched in summer 2021 and will enable students to work or look for work for two years (three years for PhD students) after successful completion of their course of study.

To be eligible for the route students must successfully complete a degree at undergraduate level or above at a Higher Education Provider (HEP) with a track record of compliance and hold valid leave as a student after the route is launched.

Students whose leave expires prior to the introduction of the route will not be eligible, but still benefit from favourable switching provisions into skilled work routes, including the new Skilled Worker Route.

■ Hate Crime: Coronavirus

Sarah Owen: [131488]

To ask the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of hate crime during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kit Malthouse:

In March, April and May, the level of racially and religiously aggravated offences in 2020 was lower than the previous year. In April the number of offences was down almost a quarter (24%) on the same month in 2019. However, the number of racially or religiously aggravated offences in June 2020 was a third higher (34%) than in June 2019 and remained high in July. More information can be found online at <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-

These offences are completely unacceptable and the UK has a robust legislative framework to respond to them.

The Home Office is working closely with the National Police Chief's Council to ensure that all police forces are providing reassurance to affected communities and encouraging hate crime reporting during the pandemic.

Human Rights

Stuart C McDonald: [130122]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what (a) consultation and (b) assessment of compliance with the European Convention of Human Rights her Department is undertaking in advance of the introduction of the Sovereign Borders Bill.

Chris Philp:

The UK remains committed to meeting our obligations under both the European Convention of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The Home Secretary has set out the Government's ambition to overhaul our approach to asylum and illegal migration, delivering a firm but fair system, including bringing forward new legislation next year. All legislation is assessed against compliance with our international obligations including ECHR.

Any consultation that may take place will do so in line with established principles as well as taking into account any other relevant statutory duties.

■ Immigrants: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas: [131224]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to suspend (a) No Recourse to Public Funds conditions and (b) all other immigration-based exclusions from welfare and homelessness assistance for (i) 12 months, (ii) at least for the duration of the covid-19 outbreak; and if she will make a statement.

Caroline Lucas: [131226]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Housing, Community and Local Government and (b) the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the call from the Local Government Association to temporarily and universally remove the No Recourse to Public Funds condition to reduce public health risks and ease the pressure on homelessness services by enabling vulnerable people to access welfare benefits who are currently unable to do so because of their immigration status; and if she will make a statement.

Caroline Lucas: [131228]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the effect of the No Recourse to Public Funds condition on (a) rough sleeping levels and (b) transmission of covid-19 in the next six months; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

The Government remains committed to protecting vulnerable people and has acted decisively to ensure that we support everyone through this pandemic. During this time the Home Office has continued to work closely with Public Health Officials, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and local authorities.

The Government has introduced a range of measures to ensure people can stay safe and many of these such as the Coronavirus Job retention scheme, and self-

employment income support scheme are available for those with a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition. Contribution-based benefits are also not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Testing and treatment for Covid-19 is also free of charge to all regardless of immigration status.

We have also launched the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme in England, which provides a £500 payment to people on low incomes who cannot work from home and have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Support is also available for those who are not in receipt of one of the seven means-tested benefits that are part of the eligibility criteria for the main scheme, but who will still face hardship if they have to self-isolate, in the form of a £500 discretionary payment, paid by local authorities. This payment is available to those with NRPF, provided they meet the criteria set by the local authority for discretionary payments in their area. Further information on this scheme can be found at

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

The Government has provided an unprecedented £7.2 billion of package of support to councils to help their communities through this pandemic, which includes their work to support rough sleepers. This includes £4.6 billion in un-ringfenced funding, £1.1 billion from the Infection Control Fund, £300 million to support Test and Trace as well as funding allocated to councils from the new Local Alert Level system and a number of grants to support communities and vulnerable people.

Migrants with leave under the Family and Human Rights routes can apply to have their NRPF condition lifted by making a 'change of conditions' application if they are destitute or at risk of destitution, if the welfare of their child is at risk due to their low income Since the onset of the pandemic, we have continued to prioritise NRPF 'change of conditions' applications and deal with them compassionately.

In light of all the support that is currently available for people in the UK, including those with an NRPF condition, we have no plans to temporarily suspend NRPF.

■ Immigrants: Females

Richard Fuller: [132847]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to extend the Action Access pilot scheme in response to the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the numbers of women participating in that scheme.

Chris Philp:

Now in its second year, the Action Access pilot has provided women who would otherwise be detained with a programme of support in the community, including case management support. We are working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and they have appointed the National Centre for Social Research to independently evaluate this work, once the pilot concludes in March 2021. The evaluation is scheduled for publication Summer 2021. We will use the

evaluation to inform our future approach to case-management focused alternatives to detention.

Immigrants: Sleeping Rough

Neil Coyle: [131288]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect on recent changes to Immigration Rules that make rough sleeping grounds for deportation on people with no recourse to public funds.

Chris Philp:

The Immigration Rule making provision for the discretionary refusal or cancellation of permission to stay in the UK on the grounds of rough sleeping came into force on 1 December 2020. It will be used sparingly and only as a last resort where a person sleeping rough refuses offers of support and engages in persistent anti-social behaviour.

A person is expected to leave the UK if their leave is cancelled or refused. If they do not choose to leave voluntarily the Home Office may enforce their removal. They will not be subject to deportation action which is reserved for foreign national offenders with serious and persistent criminality as well as for reasons of national security.

The Home Office does not hold data on the number of people rough sleeping in the UK who are subject to no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

The Government remains committed to protecting vulnerable people and has acted decisively to ensure that we support everyone through this pandemic. Many of the wide-ranging COVID-19 measures the Government has put in place, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme have been made available to migrants with NRPF. We have published guidance and support for migrants affected by COVID-19

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrantliving-in-the-uk.

Apsana Begum: [131501]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of the recent changes to Immigration Rules that make rough sleeping grounds for deportation on people seeking a change of conditions from No Recourse to Public Funds; and if she will make a statement on this.

Chris Philp:

The Immigration Rule making provision for the discretionary refusal or cancellation of permission to stay in the UK on the grounds of rough sleeping came into force on 1 December 2020. It will be used sparingly and only as a last resort where a person sleeping rough refuses offers of support and engages in persistent anti-social behaviour.

A person is expected to leave the UK if their leave is cancelled or refused. If they do not choose to leave voluntarily the Home Office may enforce their removal. They will not be subject to deportation action which is reserved for foreign national offenders with serious and persistent criminality as well as for reasons of national security.

The Home Office does not hold data on the number of people rough sleeping in the UK who are subject to no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

The Government remains committed to protecting vulnerable people and has acted decisively to ensure that we support everyone through this pandemic. Many of the wide-ranging COVID-19 measures the Government has put in place, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme have been made available to migrants with NRPF. We have published guidance and support for migrants affected by COVID-19 at

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrant-living-in-the-uk.

Migrants with leave under the Family and Human Rights routes can apply, for free, to have their NRPF condition lifted by making a 'change of conditions' application if they are destitute or at risk of destitution, if the welfare of their child is at risk due to their low income, or where there are other exceptional financial circumstances.

Change of conditions decisions are being prioritised and are being dealt with compassionately. This approach is working. <u>Data</u> published in November 2020 shows that 85% of change of condition applications are granted and the average time taken to make a decision is now just 17 days, down from 45 days in the previous quarter.

Immigration

Nadia Whittome: [130267]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that point 11.4 of the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules (10 December 2020) is compliant with the UK's commitments to the UN Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 3).

Kevin Foster:

Point 11.4 of the Statement of Changes is part of the overall clarification of the places and circumstances in which a Home Office officer is capable of receiving an asylum claim. It makes clear that an asylum claim cannot be received in the territorial waters of the United Kingdom.

I am satisfied the Rules are compatible with our international obligations. No individual will be refouled to a place where they would be harmed.

Stuart C McDonald: [130753]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will review the effectiveness of the Minimum Income Requirement, as recommended by the Migration Advisory Committee in its annual report of 15 December 2020.

Kevin Foster:

In February 2017 the Supreme Court upheld the lawfulness of the minimum income requirement, which prevents burdens on the taxpayer and promotes integration, ruling it strikes a fair balance between the interests of those wishing to sponsor a partner to settle in the UK and of the community in general. The Court found the minimum income requirement is not a breach of the right to respect for private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and is not discriminatory.

We continue to keep the family Immigration Rules under review, including taking into account recommendations made in the Migration Advisory Committee's annual report of 15 December 2020, and will make adjustments should these prove necessary. However, our overall assessment is the Rules, including the minimum income requirement, are having the right impact and are helping to ensure public confidence in the immigration system by ensuring family migration is not based on access to the welfare system paid for by taxpayers.

Chris Stephens: [130777]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether external bodies were consulted in advance of publishing new Immigration rules changes; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

We have laid changes to the Immigration Rules that are vital to curb irregular migration, which is often facilitated by criminal gangs seeking to arrange dangerous journeys for profit. We have been absolutely clear that we will do all we can to make the use of small boats to cross the Channel an unviable option for reaching the UK.

It is a longstanding principle that asylum seekers should claim at the earliest opportunity in the first safe country they reach. Under existing Rules, any claimant who travelled through a safe country before claiming asylum in the UK could expect their claim to be considered inadmissible.

This is a technical change to the existing Rules which were already coming into effect from January. For these reasons, changes to the Rules on place of claim and third country inadmissibility have not been subject to formal public consideration.

I made a statement on the Rules changes on 16 December.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131408]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason past tax discrepancies result in good character requirement failures under paragraph 322(5) of the Immigration Rules' grounds for refusing indefinite leave to remain.

Kevin Foster:

Immigration Rule 322(5) related to refusal of leave to remain on the grounds it was undesirable to allow a person to remain in the UK in the light of their character, conduct or associations. It was replaced with rule 9.3.1 in Part 9 of the Immigration Rules laid on 22 October 2020. This provides for the mandatory refusal of permission to stay where a person's presence in the UK is not conducive to the public good because of their character, conduct or associations.

Published guidance makes clear the behaviours which mean an application would be refused under rule 9.3.1. While innocent tax discrepancies would not normally warrant refusal on non-conducive grounds, an application can be refused on the grounds of corruption or involvement in the proceeds of crime.

Immigration Controls: Offenders

Joanna Cherry: [133911]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what real-time systems are available to UK Border Force to enforce a ban on foreign criminals sentenced to more than one year in prison entering the UK.

Chris Philp:

While it is not possible to reveal the details of how security checks at the border operate, Border Force undertakes to perform 100 per cent checks on scheduled passengers arriving in the UK. The majority of passengers are also checked against our systems before they travel, through the collection of Advanced Passenger Information (API). Where we are aware of individuals that pose a threat to the UK we can and do refuse entry and, where legislation applies, refuse Authority to Carry prior to departure.

Immigration Enforcement Directorate

Stuart C McDonald: [132945]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the reasons why British citizens were stopped by immigration enforcement teams more than any other nationality over the last two years in Leeds, Nottingham, Cardiff, Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool and London; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

Immigration Enforcement operations including visits, crime reduction and street operations play a critical role in detecting and deterring immigration abuse and reducing the harm caused by illegal immigration, such as modern slavery, people trafficking and smuggling. Immigration Enforcement do not carry out random visits and nor do they stop individuals at random; all operational activity is intelligence-led.

Immigration Enforcement officers are empowered to carry out an in-country examination of a person to establish their immigration status where they reasonably suspect that the person is in breach of immigration law. Where a person shows an adverse reaction to an immigration presence, typically attempting to flee from premises when Immigration Officers arrive, an Immigration Officer may arrest a person if that adverse reaction gives them reasonable grounds to suspect they may be in breach of immigration law. The person, if British, would be de-arrested as soon as their nationality was established. An arrest of a British citizen could also occur

following a criminal offence such as the obstruction of an Immigration Officer in the execution of their duty and for assaulting an Immigration Officer.

Immigration: Applications

Sir Christopher Chope:

[131164]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when a response will be given to the settlement application reference UAN:3434-0630-8381-4967/00; and if she will make a statement.

Kevin Foster:

In this instance, our enquiries have now been completed and the applicant granted status.

Mr Virendra Sharma: [133768]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate she has made of the proportion of (a) entry clearances, (b) applications for biometric residency permits and (c) leave to remain applications are processed within the published service standards.

Kevin Foster:

Performance against service standards, where service standards apply, are included in the Migration Transparency data which is published here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visas-and-citizenship-data-november-2020.

Please see data table tab VC_01a, which includes data on the percentage of applications for each route processed within service standards. Where we are not able to process within the target processing time, we write to the applicant to explain this. For Biometric Residence Permits, we routinely publish this as part of the Transparency data.

Mr Virendra Sharma: [133769]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate she has made of the proportion of update requests on pending applications which are responded to within published service standards.

Kevin Foster:

For all application progress enquiries to our advice line, where we need to review in more detail, we aim to respond to these within 5 working days.

In the last month we achieved this in 100% of cases.

Immigration: Biometrics

Afzal Khan: [133153]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to UKVI applicants with reusable biometric information, which applicants were (a) permitted to use the data and (b) prevented from utilising reusable biometric data.

Afzal Khan: [133154]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the merits of allowing biometric information submitted as part of a person's previous immigration application to be reused in further applications.

Afzal Khan: [<u>133155</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to Answer on 28 October to Question 106945 on Immigration: Coronavirus, what further steps her Department has taken to widen the use of previously enrolled biometrics.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office published Covid-19 guidance on 3 September 2020 setting out biometric reuse measures that were introduced to support UKVI customers adversely affected by the pandemic. The guidance sets out the circumstances under which reusable biometrics can be reused and can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-biometricenrolment-reuse-and-evidencing-status

We are developing plans to enable us to widen the reuse of previously enrolled fingerprint biometrics, while maintaining public safety. The capability to reuse previously enrolled fingerprint biometrics will help us to reduce the need for foreign nationals to attend an office to provide their fingerprints every time they make an immigration application. However, foreign nationals will still be required to provide their latest facial image.

Immigration: EU Nationals

[<u>1308</u>26] Layla Moran:

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what data her Department collects on the reasons why EU citizens with settled status request proof of that status.

Kevin Foster:

Individuals granted status under the EU Settlement Scheme can use the online 'view and prove' service, to view their immigration status information and to share it with a third party.

The individual is asked to select whether they are proving their right to work, their right to rent or proving for something else, to ensure the appropriate information is provided, and is then able to preview the information that will be shared and generate a share code. The third party can use this share code to access the relevant information, using the following services – 'view a job applicant's right to work details', 'view a tenant's right to rent in England' and 'check someone's immigration status'. The service used will depend on the reason why the check is being conducted. Within the 'check someone's immigration status' service checkers are asked to choose why they are carrying out the check.

Information on usage of online status services is published as part of the Home Office's quarterly migration transparency data;

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-data-november-2020

The transparency data contains information on the number of views by checkers on the 'check someone's immigration status' service, as well as the reason for check given by the checker when using that service. Purpose of check is collected so we can understand how the service is being used and to help us identify areas for improvement. It is also stored as part of the audit record of the check. Where a checker specifies a reason other than the pre-set options this data is not published.

Layla Moran: [131449]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the number of EU settlement scheme applications that will be outstanding on 1 January 2021.

Kevin Foster:

Administration of the Scheme will not cease on 1 January 2021 and EEA Citizens eligible to apply to it will continue to be able to use their Passport or National Identity Card to prove their entitlements until 30 June 2021.

Although 31 December 2020 is the deadline for EEA citizens to be resident in the UK to be eligible for the scheme, they will then have until 30 June 2021 to submit an application. There will be some instances were applications made after 30 June 2021 will be accepted and (non-exhaustive) guidance on this will be published in early 2021.

EEA citizens and their family members who have already been granted pre-settled status will be able to make a subsequent application for settled status once they meet the criteria of being resident in the UK for a continuous year five-year period.

EEA citizens who hold status under the scheme may also bring close family members to join them in the UK after the 30 June 2021 deadline. Such family members will be able to make an application to the Scheme, provided they meet the relevant criteria.

Internet: Safety

Dame Cheryl Gillan:

[130621]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of including in legislative proposals on online harms protections for people with autism from international extradition resulting from cyber incursions.

James Brokenshire:

The Extradition Act 2003 is the legislative framework which contains the safeguards and protections available in UK courts to all persons requested for extradition to any overseas jurisdiction. A requested person will not be extradited if doing so would breach their human rights, if the request is politically motivated or if they would be at risk of facing the death penalty. The court can also bar a person's extradition if, according to a range of factors including their health, it would not be in the interests of justice for the extradition to take place and can decide that it would be more appropriate to try the case in the UK than in the requesting state.

Knives: Young People

Virginia Crosbie: [134279]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to educate young people on the illegality of carrying knives without reasonable cause.

Kit Malthouse:

It is vitally important that we prevent young people from being drawn into violent crime and carry knives in the first place. Raising awareness of the risks and consequences of carrying a knife is an important part of the Government's approach to knife crime prevention. And there are many sources of funding we have put in place to ensure this education exists for young people:

The Government has invested over £200 million specifically in early intervention and prevention initiatives to support children and young people at risk of exploitation and involvement in serious violence. The Youth Endowment Fund and their National Centre of Excellence are sharing knowledge and expertise with those working with vulnerable children and young people at risk of involvement in serious youth violence.

This funding is in addition to the £22 million Early Intervention Youth Fund which ran from 2018 - 2020 that directly funded awareness raising and education programmes, diversionary activities, tailored interventions, and programmes which aimed to cease offending or reoffending.

Locally we have set up Violence Reduction Units in 18 of the highest violence hotspots whose job it is to bring together police, local government, health and education professionals, community leaders and other key partners to identify the drivers of serious violence, to help them to implement a long term, multi-agency, preventative approach, to stop violence from happening in the first place. We know that a number of these Units are funding education/awareness programmes.

Members: Correspondence

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[130183]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 1 December 2020 to Question 114290 on Home Office: Correspondence and the Answer of 15 December 2020 to Question 126107 on Members: Correspondence, whether her Department has the capability to measure the average time it takes to respond to correspondence from hon. Members.

James Brokenshire:

Currently different areas of the Department work on different IT systems for correspondence, which makes calculating average response times more complex. A programme of work is underway to transfer all correspondence onto one system.

Previous answers have given the link to published data for UKVI against meeting the 20-day service standards, this is published quarterly.

Mr John Baron: [131184]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to respond to the correspondence of 22 September, 3 November and 25 November on constituent reference JB28916 from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay.

Chris Philp:

Answer:

I apologise for the delay in responding to the Hon. Member's correspondence. A reply was sent 18 December 2020.

Background:

The Hon. Member wrote on 22 September 2020 on behalf of his constituent Mrs Mercia Rose Kildaire, regarding a missing Biometric Residence Permit.

Mrs Kildaire made an application on 24 March 2020 and leave to enter the UK as a Tier 2 Migrant was granted on 29 July 2020. Unfortunately, when the application was made the Biometric data was not captured successfully and as a result the Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) was not produced. The BRP Error Team were notified there was an issue with production on 24 September 2020. As a result, on 6 October 2020 the necessary application was raised and on 13 October a Biometric Enrolment letter was issued. On 20 October the request for production of a BRP was submitted. Mrs Kildaire's BRP was issued on 23 October 2020 and sent to the dispatch address we held on file.

On 12 November a reply was dispatched in response to the Hon Member's correspondence, unfortunately the response was sent to an incorrect email address. The response has now been sent to the correct email address on 18 December.

Migrant Workers: Teachers

Daisy Cooper: [131485]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of offering free visa extensions for overseas teachers that are working in British schools during the covid-19 pandemic.

Kevin Foster:

The Government recognises the significant contribution which key workers, including teachers, have made during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many overseas workers, including teachers, have been able to benefit from a range of concessions. For example, free extensions where a person's visa expired after 24 January 2020, but before the end of August 2020, and they were unable to leave due to travel restrictions, or concessions on requirements of the immigration rules where salaries do not meet the normal salary requirements due to company-wide furlough.

Money Laundering

Scott Mann: [133987]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of anti-money laundering provisions in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002; and what recent assessment she has made of the effect of the 2002 Act on small businesses.

Kit Malthouse:

The UK is internationally recognised as having some of the strongest controls and legislation worldwide when it comes to tackling money laundering and bringing to justice those who seek to use or hide the proceeds of crime. There has been no recent assessment of the effectiveness of anti-money laundering provisions in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. In 2017, the Regulatory Policy Committee, which considers the impact of legislation on business, rated the Criminal Finances Bill as 'fit for purpose'. They agreed that the Bill would "involve no significant burden on small businesses". The Criminal Finances Act amended the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and gained Royal Assent in 2017.

Police

Alex Norris: [R] [<u>131428</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many no further action notices were issued by the police in each month in (a) 2019 and (b) 2020 in (i) the UK and (ii) each region of the UK.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Offices publishes the investigative outcomes of crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales on a quarterly basis and the latest figures can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables

However, from the information held centrally, it is not possible to separately identify cases in which a person investigated with regard to a specific offence has been issued with a "No Further Action" notice.

As policing is a devolved matter, information for Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Police Stations: Bahrain

Brendan O'Hara: [130095]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether an Overseas Security and Justice Assessment or similar human rights due diligence was carried out before the visit of the Home Secretary to Muharraq Governorate Police in Bahrain on 6 December 2020.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office undertakes Overseas Security and Justice Assessments for activities that involve providing security and justice assistance to a foreign partner.

This includes any activities that could either result in changes to the laws, policies or practices of foreign justice or security institutions or which may alter their capabilities. Assessments are also carried out where the activity could result in any individuals being identified or brought into the judicial process of the foreign authority.

The Home Secretary's visit to the Muharraq Governorate Police Station on 6 December did not involve providing any such security and justice related assistance.

Police Stations: Yorkshire and the Humber

Jon Trickett: [133704]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many police stations there were in the Yorkshire and the Humber region in (a) 2010 and (b) 2020.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not hold information centrally on police station numbers across England and Wales.

Police: Recruitment

Andrea Jenkyns: [133061]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of recent increases in police recruitment on the number of police officers engaged in on-the-ground work.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government is delivering on the people's priorities by recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers and putting violent criminals behind bars for longer.

I am delighted that almost 6,000 police officers have already been recruited as part of the uplift, working to support the national response to coronavirus as well as tackling crime and keeping communities safe.

We are committed to recruiting at pace, but also ensuring officers are fully trained and supported to meet modern crime demands. During their probation, new officers will be on the beat.

The deployment of these officers is an operational decision for Chief Constables.

Ports: Road Traffic Control

Stephanie Peacock: [130800]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans he has to increase the numbers of traffic patrol officers to ensure road safety around the ports.

Kit Malthouse:

Local Resilience Forums and Police Forces have comprehensively prepared to ensure disruption on roads is kept to a minimum and the safety of all road users is not compromised, this includes working with Highways England where appropriate.

Decisions regarding the number of officers and how they are deployed are a matter for Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables. They are best placed to understand how to deal with all the issues for which the force is responsible, taking into account any specific local problems and demands.

Radicalism

Andrew Rosindell: [131197]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to monitor the UK activities of extremist Christian faith groups.

James Brokenshire:

The Counter Extremism Strategy covers all forms of extremism. A key part of the strategy is building our understanding of the threat posed by different forms of extremism.

Andrew Rosindell: [131198]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support former members of extremist faith groups and protect them from harassment and intimidation.

James Brokenshire:

Our manifesto gave a clear commitment to protect those who work in counter extremism from threats and intimidation. Where individuals are subject to harassment and intimidation they should report this to the police.

Rifles: Compensation

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[130622]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much compensation owners surrendering MARS and lever release rifles are entitled to; and how long they will have to wait for payment.

Kit Malthouse:

The Offensive Weapons Act surrender and compensation scheme was launched on 10 December and allows the owners of relevant firearms and offensive weapons to surrender these to the police, and to claim financial compensation if they wish to do so, before the scheme ends on 9 March 2021. Guidance for the public on what items qualify under the scheme, and the levels of compensation that we expect to pay for each item have been placed in the libraries of both Houses and can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offensive-weapons-act-surrender-and-compensation-scheme.

Claims for financial compensation submitted to the police will be forwarded to the Home Office, where they will be processed as quickly as possible.

Roads: Police

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[131177]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the HMICFRS report entitled Roads Policing: Not optional - An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales, published in July 2020, whether she has concluded her review of strategic policing requirements; and what plans she has to include roads policing in the strategic policing requirements.

Kit Malthouse:

The department commenced a review of the Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) in October 2020. The review is approximately three months in duration and is due to conclude in the new year, ahead of PCC elections in May. The review is ongoing and we continue to work with policing partners, seeking views on and shaping the content of a revised SPR. There is a high threshold for inclusion of new national threats in the SPR and as part of the review process we are assessing whether and how roads policing might feature.

Security: EU Countries

Conor McGinn: [133932]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what mechanisms and structures have been agreed between the EU and the UK on future security co-operation.

Kit Malthouse:

The safety and security of our citizens is the Government's top priority.

The Trade Co-operation Agreement (TCA) was signed by the EU and the UK on 30 December. The agreement delivers a comprehensive package of capabilities that ensures we can work with counterparts across Europe to tackle serious crime and terrorism – protecting the public and bringing criminals to justice.

This includes: streamlined extradition arrangements which prevent disproportionate extradition requests and long periods of pre-trial detention; effective operational cooperation with Europol and Eurojust that reflects the scale of our contribution to these agencies; fast and effective exchange of national DNA, fingerprint and vehicle registration data via the Prüm system; fast and effective arrangements for exchanging criminal records data via shared technical infrastructure; the continued transfer of Passenger Name Record (PNR) data from the EU; and arrangements that will simplify and speed up cooperation with EU Member States on mutual legal assistance and asset freezing and confiscation. The agreement also provides an additional basis for bilateral law enforcement cooperation to continue between the UK and EU Member States. This includes information sharing in response to requests, as well as on a spontaneous basis, such as information on wanted and missing persons and objects.

Further detail on the Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice co-operation elements of the TCA are available on GOV.UK.

The UK is, and will continue to be, a global leader on security and one of the safest countries in the world.

Sexual Offences: Police Cautions

Alex Davies-Jones: [134272]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people received a police caution for a sexual offence in England and Wales in each year since 2015.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office publishes the investigative outcomes of crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, including the number resolved through a police caution. This data is published on a quarterly basis and can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables

■ Sussex Police: Recruitment

Andrew Griffith: [133325]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many additional police officers have been recruited to Sussex Police since December 2019.

Kit Malthouse:

We are delivering on the people's priorities by recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers by March 2023.

Police Uplift data is published quarterly and the latest release covers recruitment data from the start of the Programme in October 2019 to September 2020.

At 30 September 2020, Sussex Police had recruited 129 additional officers through the Police Uplift Programme and has therefore met its year one uplift allocation. The force also recruited 40 additional officers through other means during this period.

I am extremely grateful to those brave men and women who have signed up to join the police and keep our communities safe.

UK Border Force: Heathrow Airport

Chris Loder: [134161]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of Border Force resources to deliver its service level agreement with Heathrow airport in 2021.

Chris Philp:

Border Force is confident that resources to meet anticipated overall operational requirements are in place with Border Force recruiting sufficient additional frontline staff and continuing to build staffing levels during 2020/2021 across all critical ports.

Resource and staffing requirements at every port, including Heathrow, are continually reviewed by Border Force working with airport operators including Heathrow Airport Ltd, and resources are deployed flexibly as and when they are required.

Nationally, Border Force recruited over 1,000 additional officers in preparation for the end of transition and continues to ensure maximum flexibility in their recruitment and deployment approach.

Wait times in airports can be caused by a number of factors, not just related to resourcing. This includes the volume of immigration case working, additional support and checks in relation to Covid-19, and specific security activity. Our teams seek to balance this range of tasking each day. Whilst mindful of passenger wait times and experience, our primary objective is to ensure the security of the border and that all mandated security activity is carried out to keep the country safe.

UK Visas and Immigration: Fees and Charges

Alex Davies-Jones: [130876]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much revenue was generated in the last 12 months by the £2.74 charge for public enquiries to the UK Visas and Immigration Department via email.

Kevin Foster:

The £2.74 email charge is levied to fund the commercial contract, as the UK government believes it is right those who use and benefit directly from the UK immigration system make an appropriate contribution towards meeting the costs of the immigration system.

Those who use the services are predominantly from outside the UK. Our web site gov.uk is the main source of information and advice and is free of charge.

Further details of the financial arrangement in place between the Home Office and SITEL UK Ltd for the provision of Contact Centre Services (UK and International) is not available due to it being commercially sensitive.

Undocumented Migrants

Zarah Sultana: [130851]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of the (a) reintroduction of the 14 Year Residency Rule for undocumented migrants and (b) amnesty for undocumented migrants previously proposed by the Prime Minister.

Kevin Foster:

The Government welcomes those who migrate to the UK through safe and legal routes, yet is committed to deterring illegal immigration which undermines both the system of immigration control and public confidence in it.

There are already several ways in which migrants who have lived in the UK for a long period can regularise their stay under the Immigration Rules providing certain requirements are met.

Visas: Coronavirus

Mr Virendra Sharma: [133766]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support visa holders unable to return to their home countries as a result of covid-19 restrictions whose visas have expired.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office is currently operating a concession which allows visa holders unable to return to their home country as a result of COVID-19 restrictions to request 'Exceptional Assurance'.

Exceptional Assurance provides short-term protection against immigration action or future consequences after leave has expired. If their visa conditions allowed them to work, study or rent accommodation they may continue to do under this concession.

Exceptional Assurance is not a grant of leave. It is a means to protect those who are unable to leave the UK due to COVID-19 restrictions and not to facilitate travel, other than to return home.

Information on our current concession can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-andtemporary-uk-residents

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

[Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Peter Grant: [910671]

What recent discussions he has had with (a) devolved Administrations and (b) Cabinet colleagues on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

John Nicolson: [910677]

What recent discussions he has had with (a) devolved Administrations and (b) Cabinet colleagues on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Angela Crawley: [910679]

What recent discussions he has had with (a) devolved Administrations and (b) Cabinet colleagues on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Luke Hall:

The Government has been clear we intend to continue to work in partnership with the devolved administrations and local communities. We have demonstrated this

commitment by confirming that devolved administrations will have a place within the governance structures for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

Ministers regularly speak to Cabinet colleagues on the UKSPF and my officials routinely engage with their devolved administration counterparts on their priorities. To date, we have conducted 25 engagement events across the UK, many of which were attended by the devolved administrations. We will continue this engagement as we develop the UKSPF investment framework and in advance of its publication.

Margaret Greenwood:

[**910672**]

What progress he has made on ensuring that (a) new and (b) existing homes are net zero carbon.

Christopher Pincher:

We have proposed an ambitious uplift in the energy efficiency of new homes through the Future Homes Standard. These homes will be 'zero carbon ready', with the ability to become fully zero carbon homes as the electricity grid decarbonises, without the need for further costly retrofitting work.

The Government is providing funding (including the green homes grant) and making regulatory changes (including consulting on increased minimum standards for the Private Rented Sector) to improve existing homes. Our forthcoming Heat and Buildings Strategy will set out further actions.

Karin Smyth: [910674]

What estimate he has made of the total cost of remedial work required to replace dangerous material and rectify poor quality construction identified by EWS1 form inspections.

Christopher Pincher:

EWS1 is not a Government form or regulatory requirement, and it is not a safety certificate. It was designed by industry to aid valuation of high-rise residential properties with cladding, but we know it has been used far more broadly.

In relation to high rise buildings, the Government has already made £1.6 billion available to remediate dangerous ACM and non-ACM cladding on residential buildings 18m and over.

The Government is determined to further identify suitable financing solutions for high rise residential buildings and remove barriers to remediation where these exist.

Brendan Clarke-Smith:

[910675]

What progress his Department has made on delivering new accommodation for rough sleepers.

Kelly Tolhurst:

During the Pandemic, through Everyone In, by November we had supported around 33,000 people with nearly 10,000 in emergency accommodation and over 23,000 already moved on into longer-term accommodation.

To provide a longer-term solution, on 29 October, we announced funding of more than £150 million to deliver more than 3,300 units of long-term, supported, move-on accommodation for rough sleepers across the country. We are now working with our delivery partners at Homes England and the Greater London Authority to ensure these schemes are delivered at pace.

[910680] Kate Osamor:

What recent estimate his Department has made of the number of buildings in England that have combustible non-ACM cladding.

Christopher Pincher:

Local authorities and housing associations are conducting a data collection exercise as part of a programme to build a more complete picture of high-rise residential buildings and the variety of external wall systems in use. We will publish appropriate summary information from the data collection in our monthly Building Safety Programme data release when ready, which we expect to be in spring this year.

For buildings with unsafe ACM cladding, more buildings have come on site with remediation work within the last year than at any other time previously. Final figures for 2020 will be published on 21 January and we expect this to show that around 95 per cent of the buildings identified at the start of last year will have safety work completed or underway.

Liz Twist: [910684]

What steps he is taking to help ensure the provision of accessible homes for older and disabled people.

Kelly Tolhurst:

By April 2022, the Government will have invested over £4 billion through the Disabled Facilities Grant, which will have funded adaptations to almost 400,000 homes since 2010.

In addition, 10 per cent of units delivered under the new Affordable Homes Programme will be used to increase the supply of specialist or supported housing.

Our current planning rules mean councils must consider the needs of older people and those with disabilities when planning new homes, and the Government recently consulted on options that include introducing higher mandatory accessibility standards for all new homes.

Jon Trickett: [910687]

What assessment he has made of the contribution of his Department's policies to the delivery of the Government's levelling up agenda.

Luke Hall:

This Government is committed to levelling up. The SR announced a £4 billion Levelling Up Fund that will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities.

To help local areas prepare for the introduction of the UKSPF, we will provide an additional £220 million in 20/21 for communities to pilot programmes and new approaches, with total domestic UK-wide funding being ramped up to at least match EU receipts, reaching around £1.5 billion a year

In the Hon Member's region, the West Yorkshire devolution deal will bring close to £3 billion public and private sector investment into the region, creating 26,000 jobs and adding £2.1 billion a year to the economy by 2031.

Jonathan Edwards: [910689]

With reference to the Spending Review 2020, what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Luke Hall:

At Spending Review, the Government confirmed we will publish a UK-wide investment framework in 2021 for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and will confirm spending profiles at the next Spending Review.

Ahead of this, Government has made clear that it intends to continue to work in partnership with the devolved administrations and local communities. We have demonstrated this commitment by confirming that devolved administrations will have a place within the governance structures for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Clive Lewis: [910691]

What progress his Department has made on the English devolution and local recovery White Paper.

Luke Hall:

The Government intends to bring forward the English Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper in due course, detailing how the UK Government will partner with places across the UK to build a sustainable economic recovery.

The Government is continuing progress on devolution and recently announced the West Yorkshire devolution deal which, subject to parliamentary approval, will give the newly elected Mayor control over an annual £38 million investment fund, as well as new powers over transport, education and housing and planning.

Rachael Maskell: [910692]

What recent discussions he had with Cabinet colleagues on the role of local authorities in the NHS Test and Trace programme.

Luke Hall:

I have regular discussions with my Cabinet colleagues regarding local authorities' role in coronavirus response, and my department works closely with NHS Test and Trace to help strengthen local-national partnerships for testing and contact tracing.

This ensures we utilise our combined capacity and capability to stop the spread of the virus and, together with the vaccine rollout, minimise the time that people need to live with restrictions that we recognise are a challenge for everyone.

Taiwo Owatemi: [910695]

What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the funding allocated to local authorities to make discretionary payments to people needing to self-isolate as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

The policy and funding for the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is the responsibility of the Department for Health and Social Care. Of course, MHCLG ministers and officials regularly engage with their counterparts in a range of departments, including DHSC and the Treasury, as well as with local authorities on matters relating to local government finance.

Affordable Housing: Construction

Esther McVey: [130056]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to help ensure the continued operation of enabling hubs for community groups building their own houses following the closure of the Community Housing Fund.

Christopher Pincher:

Through the Community Housing Fund, my department provided £6 million in grant funding over 2018/19 and 2019/20 to a consortium of leading community-led housing stakeholder groups to support the development of a national network of enabling hubs. These enabling hubs provide impartial advice and guidance to community-based organisations wishing to take forward local housebuilding schemes to help meet local housing needs. Part of the justification for providing grant funding to the hubs was to enable them to develop to the point where they become financially self-sustaining through the fees that they are able to charge community-based housebuilding groups.

Esther McVey: [130057]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he has put arrangements in place for support for community groups building their own homes following the closure of the Community Housing Fund.

Christopher Pincher:

The Community Housing Fund closed at the end of March. Departmental budgets for 2021/22 have been confirmed at the recent Comprehensive Spending Review and my department is now undertaking a process of allocation of budgets to individual programmes. The needs of the community-led housing sector will be taken into consideration alongside the full range of the department's priorities. In the meantime, organisations that are registered as providers of social housing may seek capital funding from the over £12 billion Affordable Homes Programme operated outside London by Homes England.

Building Safety Fund

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130812]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to extend the Building Safety Fund application deadline.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department has been working at pace and with building owners to process the registrations to the Building Safety Fund and to ensure that as many buildings as possible can make use of the fund – a task that has been made challenging by the failure of many buildings to provide basic eligibility information. It became clear that many building owners would be unable to complete applications by our intended deadline of 31 December 2020, adding to the concerns of many leaseholders. To address this we announced on 17 December 2020 that building owners will now have until 30 June 2021 to complete their applications.

Commonhold

Dan Jarvis: [<u>133853</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans his Department has to implement the recommendations made by the Law Commission in its report entitled Reinvigorating commonhold: the alternative to leasehold ownership, published 21 July 2020.

Kelly Tolhurst:

In 2017 the Government asked the Law Commission to recommend reforms to reinvigorate commonhold as a workable alternative to leasehold, for both existing and new homes.

On 7 January we announced that we will establish a new Commonhold Council as a partnership of industry, leaseholders and Government that will prepare homeowners and the market for the widespread take-up of commonhold. We will start this work immediately and will set out a plan for the transition to commonhold in new build housing over the course of this Parliament. This will include considering legislation. We know this will take time and close working with consumers and industry, and the Commonhold Council will be the critical first step of this.

We will respond to the Law Commission's recommendations in due course.

Community Housing Fund

Esther McVey: [130058]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reasons the Community Housing Fund was not renewed.

Christopher Pincher:

The Community Housing Fund closed at the end of March. Departmental budgets for 2021/22 have been confirmed at the recent Comprehensive Spending Review and my department is now undertaking a process of allocation of revenue budgets to

individual programmes. The needs of the community-led housing sector will be taken into consideration alongside the full range of the department's priorities. In the meantime, organisations that are registered as providers of social housing can seek capital funding from the over £12 billion Affordable Homes Programme operated outside London by Homes England.

■ Flats: Mortgages and Sales

Andrew Gwynne: [130655]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions he has had with RICS on ensuring that its members abide by the agreement between the Government and RICS announced on 21 November 2020 that owners of flats in buildings without cladding will no longer need an EWS1 form to sell or remortgage their property.

Christopher Pincher:

RICS have agreed that buildings without cladding do not need an EWS1 form. RICS are consulting on guidance for valuers, and Government has regular discussions with RICS about the issues associated with EWS1.

Help to Buy Scheme

Paula Barker: [130259]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will extend the help-to-buy scheme to enable smaller developers to obtain materials and meet their obligations to buyers.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government recognises that there has been market disruption. That is why on 31 July a two-month extension was announced to the Help To Buy building completion deadline from 31 December 2020 to 28 February 2021. The legal completion deadline for the purchase remains 31 March 2021. However, the Government also announced some additional flexibility to protect existing reservations made before 30 June 2020. These sales, by agreement with Homes England, must reach practical completion by 30 April 2021 and legal completion no later than 31 May 2021. More information can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/news/help-to-buy-scheme-extended. There are no plans to extend the current Help to Buy scheme beyond 31 March 2021 and a new two-year Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme for first time buyers commences on 1 April 2021. More information on the new scheme can be found at: https://www.helptobuy.gov.uk/equity-loan/help-to-buy-equity-loan-2021-2023/.

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation

Mike Amesbury: [130212]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what proportion of the £200 million fund for private sector high-rise buildings covered in ACM cladding has been paid out.

Christopher Pincher:

Information on how much of the funding has been approved for the removal and replacement of unsafe ACM can be found on the Building Safety Programme Monthly Data Release, available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/aluminium-composite-material-cladding#acm-remediation-data.

Homelessness: Coronavirus

Neil Coyle: [130094]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many homeless people accommodated under the Everyone In scheme are not being funded by the Government as a result of No Recourse to Public Funds restrictions.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Throughout the pandemic, we have worked closely with local authorities and the sector to offer vulnerable people safe accommodation and support. That work is ongoing and by September, we had successfully supported over 29,000 people, with 10,000 still in emergency accommodation and over 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move on support. These efforts have been backed by significant Government support, including over £4.6 billion in unringfenced grants.

The rules as to eligibility relating to immigration status, including for those with No Recourse to Public Funds, have not changed. This has been the case throughout the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and continues to be so.

Local authorities must use their judgement in assessing what support they may lawfully give to each person on an individual basis, considering that person's specific circumstances and support needs.

The data and breakdown requested is currently not available.

Thangam Debbonaire:

130772

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many homeless people who have been provided emergency accommodation in response to covid-19 outbreak were (a) aged under 15 years, (b) aged 16 to 17 and (c) aged 18 to 24.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in all its forms is a key priority for this Government and we have taken huge steps this year, working with local authorities and their partners to protect vulnerable rough sleepers during the pandemic.

We do not have an age breakdown of the people accommodated during the ongoing emergency response but the 'Everyone In' campaign has supported over 29,000 vulnerable people, with over 10,000 in emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move on support.

We have also put in place bespoke support for local authorities through our Homelessness Advice and Support Team, which includes dedicated youth homelessness advisor roles that have a commitment to work with local authorities to proactively promote positive joint working across housing authorities and children's services, offering training, advice and support to all local authorities.

This year we have provided £90,000 to St Basil's to fund Youth Voice, a training scheme for 40 young homeless people across the country. Youth Voice includes the Youth Homelessness Parliament which provides insight and advice to Government on issues affecting young homelessness people.

Cat Smith: [131331]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people aged 16 to 25 have become homeless since the start of the covid-19 outbreak in March 2020.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in all its forms is a key priority for this Government and we have taken huge steps this year, working with local authorities and their partners to protect vulnerable rough sleepers during the pandemic. The 'Everyone In' campaign has supported over 29,000 vulnerable people, with over 10,000 in emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move on support.

We have also put in place bespoke support for local authorities through our Homelessness Advice and Support Team, which includes dedicated youth homelessness advisor roles that have a commitment to work with local authorities to proactively promote positive joint working across housing authorities and children's services, offering training, advice and support to all local authorities.

This year we have provided £90,000 to St Basil's to fund Youth Voice, a training scheme for 40 young homeless people across the country. Youth Voice includes the Youth Homelessness Parliament which provides insight and advice to government on issues affecting young homelessness people.

Layla Moran: [134090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans the Government has for the vaccination of (a) homeless people and (b) rough sleepers during the rollout of the covid-19 vaccine; and where they are on the vaccine priority list.

Kelly Tolhurst:

MHCLG is working closely with DHSC, Public Health England, and NHS England to ensure the health and care needs of vulnerable people experiencing rough sleeping can be met during the COVID-19 pandemic – including access to the vaccination.

We have asked all local authorities to ensure that rough sleepers are safely accommodated and that this opportunity is used to make sure that all rough sleepers are registered with a GP and factored into local area vaccination plans, in line with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) prioritisation for COVID-19 vaccinations. This will help ensure that the wider health needs of people who sleep rough are addressed, supporting them now and for the future.

The JCVI are the independent experts who provide advice to Government on which vaccine(s) the UK should use, and which groups to prioritise. The JCVI have advised that the first priorities for any COVID-19 vaccination programme should be for the prevention of COVID-19 mortality and the protection of health and social care staff and systems.

Many people sleeping rough will be a priority for the COVID-19 vaccine due to underlying health conditions. Secondary priorities could include vaccination of those at increased risk of hospitalisation and at increased risk of exposure, and to maintain resilience in essential public services.

We continue to work with the homelessness sector, local authorities and health and care partners, to ensure the needs of those experiencing homelessness can be met.

■ Homelessness: Death

Grahame Morris: [130686]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made for the implications his policies on homelessness of the Office for National Statistics publication, Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2019 registrations, published on 14 December 2020.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Every death of someone sleeping rough on our streets is a tragedy, and the Government is committed to ending rough sleeping. This is why we are spending over £700 million on homelessness and rough sleeping this year alone.

We know that many individuals experiencing homelessness have substance misuse and mental health support needs. MHCLG is working closely with DHSC and PHE to ensure rough sleepers have the health care they need, when they need it.

On 14 December, we announced £23 million of Government funding to provide substance misuse treatment and recovery services for people sleeping rough or at risk, backed by an additional investment of £52 million in 2021/22. This funding will provide evidence-based drug and alcohol treatment, such as detox and rehab services and will be vital to enabling people to access the specialist support required to rebuild their lives and move towards longer term accommodation. Additionally,

DHSC is delivering £30 million of funding for mental health services for people experiencing rough sleeping up until 2023/24, as committed to in the NHS Long Term Plan and MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Strategy.

This year has presented increased challenges and we have met these by taking quick and unprecedented action to protect rough sleepers throughout the pandemic. Our rapid response protected many vulnerable people from the risk of COVID-19 and ultimately will have saved lives. According to research by UCL and published in the Lancet, preventative measures taken by the Government may have avoided 21,092 infections, 266 deaths, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 intensive care (ICU) admissions of homeless people.

We continue to work closely with the homelessness sector, local authorities and health and care partners, to ensure the needs of those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping can be met.

■ Homelessness: LGBT People

Cat Smith: [131332]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support the Government is providing to young homeless LGBTQ+ people.

Kelly Tolhurst:

We recognise that many LGBT people who find themselves homeless may have a different experience of homelessness. In the Rough Sleeping Strategy, we announced a range of measures, including undertaking research that is underway with the Government Equalities Office into the nature of LGBT homelessness. The Department has provided local authorities with free training to help tackle issues facing vulnerable groups, including LGBT people. Delivered to frontline workers by Stonewall Housing, the training package sets out why LGBT people may be at greater risk of homelessness, and the barriers LGBT people can face when seeking homelessness support.

We have also put in place bespoke support for local authorities through our Homelessness Advice and Support Team, which includes dedicated youth homelessness advisor roles that have a commitment to work with local authorities to proactively promote positive joint working across housing authorities and children's services, offering training, advice and support to all local authorities.

■ Homelessness: Yorkshire and the Humber

Jon Trickett: [133703]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people classed as homeless have died in the Yorkshire and the Humber region since 2010.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) publishes official estimates of the number of deaths of homeless people in England and Wales annually, although the statistics are

still classed as experimental. Currently, data released by the ONS is available for deaths among people who were homeless in England and Wales registered from 2013 to 2019; this data is available broken down by region. A breakdown of this data can be found here:

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/d eaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/previousReleases

Every death of someone sleeping rough on our streets is a tragedy, and the Government is committed to ending rough sleeping. Therefore, we are spending over £700 million on homelessness and rough sleeping this year alone. We recognise the importance of ensuring vulnerable rough sleepers have their health needs met. This is why we are working closely with PHE and NHSE to ensure that rough sleepers accommodated in emergency housing are registered with a GP and receive substance misuse and mental health assessments where appropriate.

We continue to work closely with the homelessness sector, local authorities and health and care partners, to ensure the needs of those experiencing homelessness can be met.

Housing First

Grahame Morris: [130687]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of (a) accelerating and (b) expanding the rollout of the Housing First programme.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Housing First has an impressive international record in helping people with complex needs to recover and stay off the streets for good, which is why we awarded £28 million to pilot it in three areas (the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region).

We recognise that rough sleeping is a nationwide challenge, and that is why it is important that we consider the findings of our evaluation, together with our experiences from the three pilots, to ensure that we know how it could work best on a larger scale.

The Government committed to expanding Housing First in its latest manifesto and we will use the findings of our evaluation, together with our experiences from the three pilots, to inform next steps.

Housing: Construction

Rachel Hopkins: **130886**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate he has made of the value of live portfolios with committed guarantees under the ENABLE Build programme.

Rachel Hopkins: [130887]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many lenders are registered to provide finance as part of the ENABLE Build programme.

Christopher Pincher:

ENABLE Build is a £1 billion extension of a the pre-existing BEIS-led ENABLE Guarantee programme. It was launched in April 2019 with the primary objective of increasing the availability of debt finance for SME housebuilders, following the initial success of the ENABLE Guarantee programme - which is currently supporting three SME housebuilder transactions. A number of transactions were, and continue to be, under consideration for the programme but some of these were curtailed by the onset of Covid-19. Activity is resuming and, while there are currently no lenders accredited (and therefore no associated portfolio value) under the new ENABLE Build Programme, it is our expectation that SMEs will have access to ENABLE Build-backed lending shortly.

Housing: Insulation

Andrew Gwynne: [131202]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2020 to Question 128640, if he will update the guidance Building safety advice for building owners, including fire doors to help ensure that that guidance does not impede individuals' ability to buy and sell properties in low-rise buildings.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department has no plans to amend 'Advice for Building Owners of Multi-Storey, Multi-Occupied Residential Buildings' as published in January 2020.

Andrew Gwynne: [131203]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2020 to Question 128640, what discussions he has had with Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors on the timetable for the introduction of new guidance for surveyors which will make clear the circumstances when EWS1 valuation forms are, and are not, to be requested.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department has regular discussions with RICS, who plan to publish draft guidance for public consultation in 2021.

Andrew Gwynne: [132794]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' handling of the EWS1 process.

Christopher Pincher:

The RICS EWS1 process was designed to assist with valuation of high-rise residential buildings where cladding may be a concern. While there is still work to be

done to provide consumers and leaseholders with the clarity they need, we have come to an agreement with RICS that flats in blocks without cladding do not need an EWS1 form, and I await the refreshed RICS EWS1 guidance with interest.

Andrew Gwynne: [132795]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December 2020 to Question 128896 on Housing: Insulation, what plans his Department has to make an estimate of the number of buildings of three storeys or fewer that have been brought into the current EWS1 process.

Christopher Pincher:

There are no plans to make such an estimate at present. We have been clear that we do not believe that buildings three storeys and under should fall in to the RICS EWS1 process. RICS is working with wider industry, including lenders, on new guidance for surveyors which will make clearer the circumstances when EWS1 valuations are, and are not, to be requested.

Members: Correspondence

Mr John Baron: [132776]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay of 29 September, 29 October and 25 November 2020 on his constituent with reference JB29140.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The response was sent on 7 January.

Mr John Baron: [132777]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay of 5 October, 6 November and 25 November on his constituent with reference JB29185.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The response was sent on 18 December.

Rosie Cooper: [132823]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 6 November 2020 on the strategic flood risk assessment for West Lancashire, reference GD/ZA52459.

Kelly Tolhurst:

We have received the letter and are collating any relevant documents to send in reply. As noted in the original correspondence, this is related to press releases and letters from local authorities from 2008 so the discovery exercise is not straightforward. However, we will reply as soon as we can.

■ Mobile Homes Act 1983 (Amendment) Bill

Sir Christopher Chope:

[129948]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department has taken in respect of the Mobile Homes Act 1983 (Amendment) Bill since the discussion between the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the hon. Member for Christchurch on 11 November 2020.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[129949]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the oral contribution made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 23 October 2020, Official Report, column 1418, what progress his Department has made on exploring options on how to deliver better protection for park home residents; and if he will make a statement.

Kelly Tolhurst:

As the Hon. Member for Christchurch is aware, the Government is unable to support his Mobile Homes Act 1983 (Amendment) Bill as currently drafted. However, the Government remains committed to improving protections for park home residents and will continue to build on the substantial improvements already made to the sector by the Mobile Homes Act 2013.

On 23 September, we delivered on our commitment to make Regulations introducing a fit and proper test for park home site owners or their manager. We are making progress on introducing further primary legislation as parliamentary time allows to deliver on other commitments set out in our 2018 response to the review of park homes legislation.

Following the meeting with the Hon. Member, my Department has been carefully considering options and the detailed policy to ensure that any proposed at any proposed measures can be delivered effectively without any unintended consequences.

Planning Permission

Steve Reed: [133880]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason his Department does not maintain a list of expired holding directions issued under section 31 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015; and if he will make a statement.

Christopher Pincher:

Holding directions issued under section 31 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 are not substantive decisions. They are merely a procedural tool which restricts the grant of planning permission by a local authority, and are used to allow Ministerial consideration of

requests to call in planning applications. Once a decision on whether to call in an application or not has been made, the direction ceases to have effect.

Steve Reed: [133881]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many holding directions issued under section 31 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 are currently in effect; and if he will publish a list of those directions by local authority area.

Steve Reed: [133882]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what number and proportion of holding directions made under section 31 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 have been issued by officials of his Department without ministerial involvement.

Christopher Pincher:

There were a total of 31 Article 31 holding directions in effect as of 8 January 2021. These directions were all issued by officials under delegated powers. Directions related to applications in the following local authorities: Bristol, East Lindsey, Enfield, the Greater London Authority, Halton, Hammersmith, Havering, Luton, North Warwickshire and Stevenage.

Planning Permission: Hillingdon

Steve Reed: [133883]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2020 to Question 122720 on Planning Permission: Hillingdon, if he will publish the holding decision put in place by his Department on the planning application 4266/APP/2019/3088 in Hillingdon.

Christopher Pincher:

As they are a procedural tool rather than a substantive decision, the department does not routinely publish Article 31 Directions, although recipient local authorities often choose to do so.

Sleeping Rough: Coronavirus

Thangam Debbonaire:

[130770]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 November 2020 to Question 114247 on Sleeping Rough: Coronavirus, what progress he has made on allocating to local authorities the (a) £15 million of funding through the Protect Programme and (b) £10 million of funding through the Cold Weather Fund.

Kelly Tolhurst:

On 14 December, we confirmed that an initial £10 million funding had been allocated for 19 areas, plus the Greater London Authority, under the Government's £15 million 'Protect Programme'. This is to provide accommodation for rough sleepers during the

pandemic in areas that required extra support throughout winter. A full list of allocations can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-help-forrough-sleepers-with-drug-and-alcohol-dependency

The Cold Weather Fund has been made available to all local authorities and we asked that they submit their proposals by the 4 December. As of 17 December, we have confirmed allocations totalling £7.3 million to over 260 local authorities and are in the process of confirming the final allocations, where local authorities have applied.

Supported Housing

Shabana Mahmood: [13121<u>5</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many supported exempt accommodation units there were in each local authority area in each of the last three years.

Kelly Tolhurst:

This data is not held centrally. Supported housing is a matter devolved to local authorities.

Supported Housing: Inspections

Shabana Mahmood: [130681]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many investigations have been undertaken by the Regulator for Social Housing into providers of supported exempt accommodation in each of the last five years.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Whether or not accommodation is 'exempt' is a matter for local authority housing benefit departments. The Regulator of Social Housing regulates only those landlords that wish to register with it and who are able to meet its registration requirements (other than local authorities who own homes who are automatically registered). This includes being able to demonstrate that it is a provider of homes at rents below market levels. Not all providers of exempt accommodation provide sub-market rent.

Exempt accommodation is often delivered through providers entering into leasebased agreements with private landlords or property owners. The regulator issued a report in 2019 setting out its concerns about this type of "lease-based" supported housing and has subjected providers using this business model to increased scrutiny to obtain assurance about their compliance with regulatory standards.

There are 13 lease-based providers of supported housing that currently have either non-compliant regulatory judgements or notices.

The Government is committed to taking action to ensure vulnerable people have safe, good quality homes and that standards are improved in the minority of cases where they fall below our expectations. In October, we published our National Statement of Expectations for supported housing, which sets out recommended accommodation standards, and highlights examples of best practice in the sector. We have also provided £3.1 million of funding to five local authority areas, to test approaches to improving quality and oversight in supported housing in a targeted, proportionate way.

■ Urban Areas: Coronavirus

Jo Gideon: [130873]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether Local Authorities are permitted to contract a Business Improvement District for (a) the recruitment, and (b) the management of High Street Ambassadors.

Kelly Tolhurst:

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are independent of the Government and local authorities and, subject to their constitution; the BID proposal upon which the original BID ballot was held and any alterations that have been passed subsequently; and the Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004, BIDs are free to work with local authorities and others to deliver, challenge or enhance local services. This could include the recruitment and management of high street ambassadors if the BID and the local authority were to agree on terms for the delivery of such a scheme and in adherence to the rules applying to any particular funding streams being utilised.

Waking Watch Relief Fund

Florence Eshalomi: [131525]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the eligibility criteria and process will be for applying to the Waking Watch Relief Fund when it opens in January 2021.

Christopher Pincher:

High-rise buildings (private and social sector buildings over 18 metres) with unsafe cladding systems where there is a waking watch in place and costs are being passed on to leaseholders are eligible for the scheme. We will work with local authorities and Fire and Rescue Services on the delivery of the fund and expect to publish a prospectus with further information on eligibility criteria and evidence requirements in January.

Florence Eshalomi: [131526]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the timeframe will be from the point of application to the release of funds for the new Waking Watch Relief Fund.

Christopher Pincher:

The Waking Watch Relief Fund will open in January with the aim of providing funding for the installation of alarms as quickly as possible.

Florence Eshalomi: [131527]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether residents of buildings under 18 metres that are required to initiate waking watch provisions will be eligible to apply for support under the Waking Watch Relief Fund.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government is focussing public funding on buildings with the highest risk, which are those buildings over 18m in height. The Waking Watch Relief Fund will not be available for buildings below this height.

Florence Eshalomi: [131528]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether applicants to the Waking Watch Relief Fund will be able to retrospectively claim back the cost of alarm systems already purchased.

Christopher Pincher:

The Waking Watch Relief Fund does not cover retrospective costs where waking watch services are no longer in place because alarms have been installed prior to 17 December 2020. The purpose of the Fund is to incentivise the purchase of alarm systems in buildings where there is currently a waking watch in place and there is no common alarm system.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Department for International Trade: Email and Telephone Services

Emily Thornberry: [130000]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November 2020 to Question 119199 on Department for International Trade: Email and Telephone Services, how many staff, by grade, operate her Department's (a) business support email and phone enquiry services and (b) Transition Period Enquiry Service; and in what hours those services were fully staffed and operational from 28 December 2020 to 4 January 2021 inclusive.

Graham Stuart:

The Department for International Trade (DIT) business support enquiry service is current-ly operated under a Memorandum of Understanding with BEIS. This helpline is staffed by 1 SEO, 1 EO and 4 AO's.

Between 28th December 2020 and 4th January 2021, the enquiry line was closed on the 28th December, operated from 9am to 5pm on 29th - 31st December inclusive, and on the 4th January. From 1st - 3rd January the helpline was an email only service from 9am to 5pm.

The email-based Transition Period Enquiry Service is staffed by 1 Grade 7, 1 SEO, 2 HEOs and 1 EO. Further resource is available from staff based around the globe for op-erational contingency, trained to support the team when demand requires this.

The enquiry line was operated from 9am to 5pm on all days between 28th December and 4th January 2021 inclusive.

Expert Trade Advisory Groups

Emily Thornberry: [132806]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, whether the members of her Department's Trade Advisory Groups responsible for (a) agri-food, (b) automotive, aerospace and marine, (c) manufactured and consumer goods, (d) telecoms and technology, (e) chemicals, (f) life sciences, (g) creative industries, (h) investment, (i) transport services, (j) professional advisory services and (k) financial services were given an opportunity to comment on the draft provisions of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement relevant to their respective sectors.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

As the Rt Hon. Lady knows, the Cabinet Office – not the Department for International Trade – negotiated the United Kingdom-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

In accordance with the "Terms of Reference on the United Kingdom-EU Future Relationship Negotiation" published on 28th February 2020, negotiating documents were not to be shared beyond the respective negotiating teams.

Hydrogen: Exports

Mr Clive Betts: **[133663**]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made of the implications for the Government's policies of steps being taken by the German and Australian Governments to establish a supply chain of hydrogen; and what steps she is taking to build trade links between the UK and other countries to create new export opportunities for UK hydrogen technologies.

Graham Stuart:

The Department for International Trade (DIT) has a dedicated hydrogen team who, as part of their ongoing work, keep regular assessments of international hydrogen markets under review, including the Australian and German markets. DIT has energy teams in all key hydrogen markets, with the direct purpose of increasing business for UK energy companies, including companies in the hydrogen sector. DIT is in regular discussion with governments overseas to understand where there are opportunities for greater co-operation, and where there are opportunities for closer working, and we will look to capitalise on these.

Import Controls: Ethics

Shabana Mahmood: [130677]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps her Department plans to take to prevent (a) cotton from Xinjiang and (b) other unethically sourced products from entering the UK.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

The United Kingdom has taken a leading international role in holding China to account for its violations of rights in Xinjiang, including in respect of credible evidence of forced labour. We have repeatedly condemned such violations being perpetrated against Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang. Most recently, on 6th October, we worked with Germany to deliver a joint statement – with 38 other countries – at the United Nations.

We advise businesses with supply chain links in Xinjiang to conduct appropriate due diligence so they may satisfy themselves that their activities do not support, or risk being seen to support, any violations of rights. In addition, research into forced labour in Xinjiang, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), has been crucial to raising awareness of this issue with businesses.

Iron and Steel: UK Trade with EU

Stephen Kinnock: [132933]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on tariff free access for UK-produced steel to the European market.

Greg Hands:

The Government has worked successfully with the European Commission to secure country-specific allocations for some steel products within the Tariff Rate Quotas (by which the EU imposes its steel safeguard measures) to enable UK companies to trade tariff-free into the EU. These tariff-free allocations came into operation on 1 January 2021.

Migrant Workers

Sir Robert Syms: [131174]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, if (a) she and (b) her officials will meet with the Chair of the Association of Relocation Professionals on supporting high value jobs through relocation to the UK after the transition period.

Graham Stuart:

My officials regularly meet with businesses and associations across the country. I have asked them to make contact with the Association of Relocation Professionals to initiate a meeting to discuss supporting the relocation of high value jobs to the UK.

Our country has a proud and hard-won reputation as one of the most open economies and one of the foremost destinations for inward investment in the world. The Department supported 1,449 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects during the 2019/20 financial year, which created almost 45,000 new jobs and safeguarded a further 8,000.

Trade Agreements

Emily Thornberry: [130661]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, which of the Continuity Trade Agreements signed by her Department since 1 October 2020 were shown in draft form to (a) the members of the Trade and Agriculture Commission, (b) relevant members of her Trade Advisory Groups, and (c) the members of her Trade Union Advisory Group, for the purposes of expert analysis and consultation prior to the completion of negotiations.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

Continuity Trade Agreements seek to replicate the effects of the EU's trade agreements, and were scrutinised on that basis previously. Accordingly, no draft continuity trade agreements have been been shared with these groups.

Trade Agreements: Human Rights

Emily Thornberry: [131209]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what the Government's policy is on the principles underlying the 2009 EU agreement on the incorporation of essential elements clauses relating to human rights in new free trade agreements.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

The United Kingdom has long promoted her values globally. We are clear that more trade does not have to come at the expense of our values.

While our approach to agreements will vary between partners, it will always allow HM Government to have open discussions on issues, including rights and responsibilities.

Trade Agreements: India

Apsana Begum: [131505]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that India upholds international labour, democratic and human rights standards as part of the ongoing trade negotiations with the UK; and if she will make a statement.

Apsana Begum: [131509]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has had with her Indian counterpart on (a) trade negotiations with India and (b) the Annual South Asia State of Minorities Report published in November 2020; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

We have a high level of ambition to strengthen the United Kingdom's trade relationship with India. In July, as a first step towards a potential free trade agreement in the future, we agreed to establish an Enhanced Trade Partnership to deepen trade ties and address barriers to trade and investment.

The United Kingdom has long promoted her values globally. We are clear that more trade does not have to come at the expense of our values. While our approach will

vary between partners, it will always allow HM Government to have open discussions on issues, including rights and responsibilities.

■ Trade Agreements: Singapore

Emily Thornberry: [131207]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, with reference to Paragraph 8.2 of the Explanatory Referendum on the UK's Free Trade Agreement with Singapore, what paragraph of the joint political statement accompanying the agreement supports the UK's (a) wider political and (b) human rights objectives.

Emily Thornberry: [131208]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what provisions there are in the UK's Free Trade Agreement with Singapore allowing for that agreement to be suspended in whole or in part in response to serious violations by either party of the terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948.

Emily Thornberry: [131210]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what discussions she had with her Singaporean counterpart on the potential negotiation of an equivalent to the EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement; and for what reason her Department has not sought such agreement to accompany the UK's free trade agreement with Singapore.

Emily Thornberry: [131211]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, for what reason her Department did not include an essential elements clause relating to human rights in the UK's free trade agreement with Singapore, absent an accompanying bilateral negotiation of an equivalent to the EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

Greg Hands:

The United Kingdom has a strong history of promoting our values globally. The UK will continue to show global leadership in encouraging all states to uphold international human rights obligations. We are clear that trade does not have to come at the expense of our values. We have a longstanding, deep, relationship with Singapore and we are able to have open discussions on a range of issues. The UK and Singapore have agreed to sign a UK-Singapore Political Joint Statement to reflect our close partnership. Once the text has been signed it will be published on gov.uk.

■ Trade Agreements: Turkey

Layla Moran: [<u>134089</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what impact assessment was conducted by her Department of the human rights record of the Turkish Government prior to the agreement of the UK-Turkey trade deal on 29 December 2020.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

The Agreement signed on 29th December transitions existing EU-Turkey trade provisions, as far as possible, into a bilateral arrangement between the United Kingdom and Turkey. The continuity of these provisions gives certainty to businesses trading between the United Kingdom and Turkey, ensuring goods can continue to flow without tariffs.

HM Government is clear that trade does not come at the expense of rights and responsibilities. We have a strong history of promoting our values globally, and we will continue to engage the Turkish Government on these important issues.

Welsh Government: Disclosure of Information

Jonathan Edwards: [132855]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on adding the Welsh Government to the list of public authorities permitted to disclose information under Clause 2 of the Trade (Disclosure of Information) Act 2020.

Greg Hands:

The Department for International Trade (DIT) led engagement with the Welsh Government during the passage of the Trade (Disclosure of Information) Bill.

DIT and the Cabinet Office have committed to working closely with devolved administrations. This will ensure that relevant analysis and information obtained through Clause 2 can be shared to support the delivery of devolved functions. This has been communicated at Ministerial level to devolved administrations.

Our close working with Welsh Government colleagues led them to recommend legislative consent during the passage of the Trade (Disclosure of Information) Bill, and to the Welsh Parliament to grant a legislative consent motion.

JUSTICE

Administration of Justice: ICT

Alex Cunningham:

[130060]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what budget provisions he has made for the implementation of the recommendations in the report entitled Digital Justice: HMCTS data strategy and delivering access to justice.

Chris Philp:

HMCTS published a full response and progress update in October 2020 to Dr Byrom's report Digital Justice: HMCTS data strategy and delivering access to justice. The response is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hmcts- response-and-progress-update-on-dr-natalie-byrom-report and details HMCTS response and progress made to date on each of the 29 recommendations.

Delivery of HMCTS response is funded in part through existing budgets including the Reform programme, and in part through funding from Administrative Data Research UK.

CAFCASS

Liz Saville Roberts: [130169]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the decision by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) of 23 November 2020 to allocate only the highest priority work in South Yorkshire and the Humber, what steps he is taking to help avoid the necessity for Cafcass to trigger that prioritisation protocol elsewhere.

Liz Saville Roberts: [130170]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the decision by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) of 23 November 2020 to allocate only the highest priority work in South Yorkshire and the Humber, what estimate he has made of the additional financial resources necessary to (a) stabilise Cafcass in South Yorkshire and the Humber and (b) avoid the necessity for Cafcass to trigger that prioritisation protocol elsewhere.

Liz Saville Roberts: [130171]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the decision by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) of 23 November 2020 to allocate only the highest priority work in South Yorkshire and Humber, what impact assessment his Department has carried out on the effect of the prioritisation protocol on children and families in (a) South Yorkshire and Humber and (b) other regions.

Liz Saville Roberts: [130172]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the decision by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) of 23 November 2020 to allocate only the highest priority work in South Yorkshire and Humber, what steps his Department is taking to (a) improve the effectiveness of Cafcass and (b) increase Cafcass staff retention.

Alex Chalk:

The Ministry of Justice has been working closely with Cafcass on mitigating the additional pressures on its services from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Decisions on Cafcass funding are made at a national level. Following discussions with Cafcass, the Ministry of Justice agreed £3.4m in additional funding this year to enable it to increase staff capacity at pace to help meet the challenge of a rising open caseload. It is for Cafcass to make operational decisions about how best to deploy resources across its Service Areas, including allocating work between them to alleviate pressures and reduce the risk of triggering the prioritisation protocol.

Since the protocol was triggered in South Yorkshire and Humberside, significant joint agency work has been undertaken by Cafcass, the judiciary, Her Majesty's Courts

and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) and other partners such as local authorities. This work has reviewed the root causes for triggering prioritisation in South Yorkshire and Humberside and has included data analysis and reviews of individual case files. The triggering of the protocol in South Yorkshire and Humberside remains under review.

Cafcass has taken measures to manage the impact on children and families of prioritising cases in this Service Area. Cases with a delayed allocation for further Cafcass work will be those where another safeguarding agency is involved or where no safeguarding risks have been identified. The parties will be sent a letter to let them know if Cafcass has been unable to allocate their case and to explain that they will be notified when it has been allocated to a Family Court Adviser. Children will be sent a letter that is age appropriate and explains why their case has been delayed and signposts them to alternative services they can use. The telephone number of a Cafcass Service Manager is given, and they can speak to parents or children if they have concerns about their unallocated case. Delays will be kept to a minimum where possible. All unallocated work will remain under review by a Cafcass Service Manager and reviewed regularly by the Assistant Director in the area and on a weekly basis by a multi-agency group which includes members of the judiciary and HMCTS. A material change to the circumstance of the family could, if appropriate, prompt a change to the priority of the case.

Cafcass continues to work to attract, recruit and retain social workers into the posts created by the additional £3.4m resource. It is continually reviewing and developing options to help retain its highly trained workforce during this challenging time. In South Yorkshire and Humberside Cafcass has recruited a number of agency and permanent Family Court Advisers which has addressed some of the issues present at the point the protocol was triggered.

Ministry of Justice officials hold regular meetings with Cafcass for assurance that its resources are being used as effectively as possible. We are aware of the pressures that Cafcass staff are facing due to unprecedented levels of demand. The importance of being able to recruit and retain appropriately qualified staff is being considered during the approval of Cafcass' pay remit for this financial year.

Courts

Alex Cunningham: [130062]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2020 to Question 81888 on Courts: Video Conferencing, whether his Department holds data on the number of in-person hearings that are completed per hour in the (a) magistrates court, (b) county courts and (c) network of tribunals.

Alex Cunningham: [130063]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the answer of 9 September 2020 to Question 81888 on Courts: Video Conferencing, whether his Department holds data that would enable the comparison of the relative duration of hearings conducted by cloud

video platform under covid-19 with in-person hearings across (a) magistrates courts, (b) county courts and (c) the network of tribunals.

Chris Philp:

HMCTS does not hold data on the number of hearings completed per hour or the duration of hearings. We continue to carefully monitor and evaluate the use of video and technology in courts, so that we can improve services and support access to justice. The decision to deal with a hearing or part of a hearing remotely is a matter for the judiciary and the length of hearings vary significantly whether in person or remote.

We are listening to feedback from all court users including the judiciary, legal professionals, staff and other key stakeholders to understand the impact of the technology during Covid and findings of that evaluation will be available in Spring 2021.

Courts: Disability

Alex Cunningham: [130061]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 23 June 2020 to Question 61493 on Courts: Disability, what his timetable is for collecting data relating to disabled court users across the courts and tribunals system, in line with his Department's commitment in the publication Making the most of HMCTS data.

Chris Philp:

Commitments on the timeframes for collecting data on the protected characteristics of our users, including disabled users, are included within the 'Making the most of HMCTS data' report.

Crime

Tulip Siddiq: [130790]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure that the minimum age of criminal responsibility is assessed in line with the most up-to-date scientific research on children's development.

Lucy Frazer:

We believe that setting the age of criminal responsibility at 10 provides flexibility in dealing with children, allowing early intervention with the aim of preventing subsequent offending. The Government does not have any current plans to either review or change the age of criminal responsibility.

The approach of the youth justice system is rightly distinct from that of adults, focusing on the statutory aim of preventing offending by children and the welfare of the child. When considering the most appropriate response to offending by a young person the age, maturity and needs of a child are always considered.

■ Debt Collection: Coronavirus

Karl Turner: [R] [133808]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what guidance he has issued on the taking control of goods by enforcement agents for the duration of national covid-19 restrictions in England.

Alex Chalk:

In light of the extraordinary circumstances engendered by the coronavirus pandemic, the Government has taken steps to ensure that enforcement activity is conducted safely and in accordance with the public health measures in place to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

This includes the publication of Covid-secure guidance for those using the taking control of goods procedure, which has been in place since enforcement at homes was permitted to resume in August 2020. The guidance requires a consideration of the health risks and sets out the steps that enforcement agents and firms should take in order to ensure they operate safely, including: adhering to social distancing requirements; use of suitable PPE; and withdrawing and re-scheduling their visit for a later time if a household is symptomatic or self-isolating.

The guidance is titled *Working safely during COVID-19: enforcement agents (bailiffs)* and is available on Gov.uk. It is kept under review to ensure it continues to reflect the latest public health advice.

HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Weapons

Alex Cunningham: [131262]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the answer of 7 December 2020 to question 122689 on HMCTS: Weapons, how many (a) arrests were made and (b) prosecutions were commenced as a result of those weapon confiscations.

Chris Philp:

HM Courts and Tribunals Service has a robust security screening process at the public entrance to its buildings to ensure any item that could be used as a weapon is removed from court and tribunal users. It keeps detailed information on those confiscations. Any article considered to be an illegal weapon is reported to the police for onward deliberation as to whether an offence has been committed.

HM Court and Tribunals service does not collate information on whether those referrals result in arrests or prosecutions.

Judges: Coronavirus

Sarah Olney: [131377]

To ask the Secretary State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to support fee-paid judges who have not earned enough this year to repay the loan offered by the judicial hardship fund.

Alex Chalk:

The Ministry of Justice is committed to supporting fee-paid judges who have been affected by reduced sittings as a result of COVID-19.

We introduced the hardship scheme in May to enable advance payments to be made to fee-paid judges who were struggling financially. This was on the understanding that this money would be recovered gradually from recipients as sittings resumed.

We reviewed the repayment terms in August and, as a result, have made the following changes to make it easier for fee-paid judges to repay the advance:

- the start date for repayments was moved from September to November 2020, to allow more time for sittings to recover;
- recipient judges need only begin repayments once their judicial fee income reaches 70% of their monthly average for 2019-20, to ensure that repayments are affordable; and
- judges can choose to spread repayments over the period up to 31 March 2022.

We will continue to monitor the situation and will review repayment arrangements, on request, for anyone in the scheme who is concerned that they may struggle to make payment in full by March 2022.

Legal Aid Scheme: Companies

Ed Davey: [133626]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will take steps to support legal aid firms during the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

We are aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a range of challenges for the legal profession. We have been working closely with legal aid providers across the justice system throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so, monitoring any impact and understanding their concerns.

A range of measures have been introduced to support providers during the pandemic while maintaining access to justice for the most vulnerable in society. These include:

- Reducing the levels of contract administration to allow providers to focus on supporting their clients;
- Expanding how domestic abuse requirements may be evidenced to make it easier for victims to access legal aid during this difficult period;
- Expanding the scope and relaxing the evidence requirements for hardship payments in crown court cases - including reducing the threshold for work done to £450, rather than the previous £5,000;
- Halting the pursuit of outstanding debts owed to the Legal Aid Agency (LAA);
- Suspending sanctions in relation to missed deadlines for delegated function applications, substantive amendments and appeals against LAA decisions;

 Publicising existing avenues of financial help for legal firms, such as the ability to apply for early payment for work already done on a case, and changing rules for payment on account for providers, benefitting cashflow in the short-term and ensuring that providers can claim the same amount of money for online hearings as they can for face-to-face hearings.

HM Treasury have introduced and recently extended a range of measures to support individuals and businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the furlough scheme, Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan and Bounce Back Loan, to provide some financial stability. We encourage the professions to continue to take advantage of this support where appropriate.

We will continue to closely monitor the situation, working with providers to keep these measures under review.

Personal Independence Payment: Epilepsy

Emma Hardy: [130821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of personal independence payment claimants with epilepsy have had their claim accepted at appeal following an initial rejection.

Chris Philp:

HM Courts & Tribunals Service does not categorise appeals by illness, or disability, of the appellant. This information is therefore not held centrally.

Prison Officers

Richard Burgon: [133070]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of (a) Band 3 prison officers on Fair and Sustainable terms and (b) all prison officers have (i) joined and (ii) left the Prison Service in each of the last eight quarters.

Lucy Frazer:

Table 1 - Band 3-5 Prison Officers¹, Joiners^{2,3} by quarter ending December 2018 to September 2020

Headcount

THREE MONTHS TO:

	31-Dec- 18	31-Mar- 19	30-Jun- 19	30-Sep- 19	31-Dec- 19	31-Mar- 20	30-Jun- 20	30-Sep- 20
New Joiners								
Band 3 Prison	1,165	771	499	757	449	591	807	361

THREE MONTHS TO:

	I HREE M	ONTHS TO:						
Officers on Fair and Sustainable terms)							
All Other Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers	1	2	3	14	4	0	1	2
Total Band 3-5 Prison Officers	l 1,166	773	502	771	453	591	808	363
Average number of staff in post								
Band 3 Prison Officers on Fair and Sustainable terms	11,408	11,767	11,735	11,797	11,700	11,672	11,951	12,127
All Other Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers	12,018	11,779	11,563	11,681	11,458	11,225	10,970	10,760
Total Band 3-5 Prison Officers	l 23,425	23,546	23,298	23,477	23,157	22,897	22,921	22,886
New Joiners as a percentage of staff in post								
Band 3 prison officers on	10%	7%	4%	6%	4%	5%	7%	3%

THREE MONTHS TO:

Fair and Sustainable terms								
All Other 0% Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Total Band 5% 3-5 Prison Officers	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	4%	2%	

Table 2 - Band 3-5 Prison Officer $^{\rm 1}$ Leavers $^{\rm 2,3}$ by quarter ending December 2018 to September 2020

Headcount

THREE MONTHS TO:

	31-Dec- 18	31-Mar- 19	30-Jun- 19	30-Sep- 19	31-Dec- 19	31-Mar- 20	30-Jun- 20	30-Sep- 20
Leavers Band 3 Prison Officers on Fair and Sustainable terms		454	475	585	487	437	266	367
All Other Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers	232 5	207	227	232	219	190	167	148
Total Band 3-5 Prison Officers		661	702	817	706	627	433	515
Average number of staff in post								
Band 3	11,408	11,767	11,735	11,797	11,700	11,672	11,951	12,127

THREE MONTHS TO:

Prison Officers on Fair and Sustainable terms							
All Other 12,018 Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers	11,779	11,563	11,681	11,458	11,225	10,970	10,760
Total Band 23,425 3-5 Prison Officers	23,546	23,298	23,477	23,157	22,897	22,921	22,886
Leavers as a percentage of staff in post							
Band 3 4% prison officers on Fair and Sustainable terms	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	2%	3%
All Other 2% Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Total Band 3% 3-5 Prison Officers	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%

Notes to Tables 1 and 2:

- 1. INCLUDES BAND 3-4/PRISON OFFICER (INCL SPECIALISTS), BAND 4/SUPERVISING OFFICER AND BAND 5/CUSTODIAL MANAGERS.
- 2. Movements due to machinery of Government changes or due to staff transferring to or from the private sector as a result of changes in the management of establishments are not included in these tables. Such movements are:

ON JULY 1, 2019, 468 FTE STAFF TRANSFERRED BACK INTO HMPPS, AS HMP BIRMINGHAM CAME BACK UNDER PUBLIC OWNERSHIP.

3. As with all HR databases, extracts are taken at a fixed point in time, to ensure consistency of reporting. However, the database itself is dynamic and where updates to the database are made late, subsequent to the taking of the extract, these updates will not be reflected in figures produced by the extract. For this reason, HR data are unlikely to be precisely accurate. We are working hard to retain staff with additional training to progress their careers, and significant investment to keep them safe. All staff have access to support, including 24/7 counselling, trauma support and occupational health assessments and we are professionalising the prison service with qualifications for new officers on completion of training.

Richard Burgon: [133071]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of prison officers are on (a) Fair and Sustainable terms and (b) closed grades, by rank.

Lucy Frazer:

Table 1 - Number and proportion of Band 3 to 5 Prison Officer by Fair and Sustainable and Closed term and grades, as at 30 September 2020

	HEADCOUNT		PERCENTAG	_		
	F&S	Closed	Total	F&S	Closed	Total
Band 5 / Custodial Managers	1,696	56	1,752	97%	3%	100%
Band 4 / Supervising Officer	1,407	571	1,978	71%	29%	100%
Band 4 /Prison Office Specialists	1,203 er	1	1,204	100%	0%	100%
Band 3 /Prison Office	12,018 er	5,765	17,783	68%	32%	100%
Total	16,324	6,393	22,717	72%	28%	100%

Prison Officers: Coronavirus

Mary Kelly Foy: [130224]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 23 November 2020 to Question 119223 on Prison Officers: Coronavirus, whether prison educators are categorised as agency or sessional workers.

Lucy Frazer:

Staff delivering educational services under the Prison Education Framework (PEF) and Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) contracts are directly employed by 3rd parties who are contracted to deliver these services. As such, they are not considered to be either HMPPS, agency or sessional staff.

Prisons: Coronavirus

Esther McVey: [130055]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what prediction Public Health England made of the number of deaths on the prison estate at the start of the covid-19 outbreak; and how many deaths there have been on the prison estate from covid-19 to date.

Lucy Frazer:

Verified data on the total number of prisoners, children in custody and probation service users who have died having tested positive for COVID-19 or where there was a clinical assessment that COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their deaths is published on GOV.UK. The latest published figures are for November which confirm 47 deaths. Non-cumulative weekly data is also released, these series can be found via the following links:

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-prison-and-probation-service-covid-19-statistics-monthly

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmpps-covid-19-management-information-weekly

In the COVID-19 population management strategy for prisons published in April it was estimated that approximately 2,700 prisoners would die if there were no changes to regimes in prison. The strategy can be found using the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-population-managementstrategy-for-prisons

We took decisive action to avoid thousands of prisoners and staff becoming infected with the virus. These included minimising movement between prisons and introducing measures to shield the vulnerable, isolate those with symptoms, and quarantine new entrants to custody. All our actions have been informed by the advice of experts from PHE and will be kept under constant review.

Mary Kelly Foy: [130222]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether vulnerable (a) prison staff and (b) prisoners will be prioritised for receipt of the covid-19 vaccine; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

Detailed planning is underway between Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the NHS and public health bodies to prepare for the delivery of vaccinations in prisons. In Phase 1 of the vaccine rollout, staff and prisoners are eligible for vaccinations according to vulnerability in the same priority order as the public.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised that vaccination of those at increased risk of exposure due to their occupation, including those involved in the justice system, could be a priority in the second phase. Prioritisation decisions will need to be made in line with wider prioritisation of access, and the availability of vaccines, across the community.

Prisons: Crimes of Violence

Mary Kelly Foy: [130221]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of assaults (a) between prisoners and (b) against staff were committed during education activities in (i) YOI institutions and (ii) all prisons in each of the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

Please find data showing assaults committed during education activities in the 12 months to June 2020 in the attached table. Please note that assaults committed during education activities are a total of the assaults that, when reported, had their location flagged as "Education".

Despite the progress made, the level of violence in prisons remains too high. We are continuing work to address this by giving all staff the tools and training to help them reduce violence.

Violence in prison is a crime. Any prisoner who commits an act of violence can expect to have action taken against them.

We are spending £100 million to bolster prison security, clamping down on the weapons, drugs and mobile phones that fuel violence and crime behind bars. This is funding tough measures including x-ray body scanners and phone-blocking technology.

Attachments:

1. Table [Copy of Table of Assaults_PQ_130221.xlsx]

Prisons: Drugs

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[133722]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will set a target for the reduction of drugs in prisons during the lifetime of the 2019 Parliament.

Lucy Frazer:

Stopping drugs getting into and circulating in prisons is a key priority. Whilst we will not be introducing a specific target, we are taking decisive action to improve our ability to disrupt this type of criminality by putting in place security counter-measures that would allow us to seize more items than ever before.

In August 2019, we announced £100 million investment to boost prison security and restrict supply with a focus on technology to detect and disrupt drugs and mobile phones from entering prisons. This is supported by enhancements to intelligence and counter corruption capabilities.

This investment supports our National Prison Drugs Strategy published in April 2019. The Strategy has three strands to tackle drugs in prisons: (1) restricting the supply; (2) reducing demand; and (3) building recovery from drugs and substance misuse. We are working with law enforcement and health partners across government to implement this and improvements to our drug testing framework are a key component of this strategy.

The Drug Recovery Prison (DRP) at Holme House, is a £9 million project which is jointly funded by the Department for Health and Social Care and MoJ. It provides an innovative, whole system approach to tackling substance misuse. The pilot aims to reduce the supply and demand for illicit substances in prisons, whilst supporting recovery. Findings from the evaluations of the pilot will help to identify successful initiatives that will be shared across the prison estate.

Prisons: Industrial Health and Safety

Mary Kelly Foy: [130223]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether it is his Department's policy to permit prison management to remove trade union health and safety posters from staff rooms in prisons.

Lucy Frazer:

HM Prison and Probation Service values the support of its Trade Union colleagues and supports all parties in the sharing of appropriate health and safety messaging, and as such will continue working together to ensure that appropriate health and safety messages effectively reach all staff as necessary.

Mary Kelly Foy: [130225]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of HMPPS adopting the Safe Inside Prisons Charter from the Joint Unions in Prisons Alliance; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

HM Prison and Probation Service continues to share with the Joint Unions Prisons Alliance (JUPA) its commitment to maintain safety in the workplace and will continue to progress this, including engagement with this Alliance on a quarterly basis to brief them on prison safety work.

We welcome the constructive contribution of JUPA, however we need to be inclusive of all our recognised trade unions and also of the third party employers it refers to. Currently JUPA is not representative of all HMPPS recognised unions. As such, whilst we do see merit in the continued engagement with JUPA, we do not see merit in the Charter as it is set currently. HMPPS already has a strong prison safety agenda which fully includes the recognised trade unions and which, in many ways also, reflect issues that JUPA has raised.

Probate

Dan Jarvis: [130080]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to reduce the length of time taken for a Grant of Probate to be issued.

Chris Philp:

The most recently published information regarding waiting times for a grant of probate covers July 2020 to September 2020 and is published on gov.uk via Family Court Statistics Quarterly (Table 26).

In 2020 the level of applications being made increased and the service faced unprecedented challenges due to the impact of Covid 19.

Despite this, and as a result of HMCTS increasing resources to meet demand, the average length of time taken for a Grant of Probate to be issued improved quarter on quarter throughout the year.

HMCTS continues to invest in the improvement of the online Probate system which was developed as part of the wider HMCTS Reform Programme to further streamline ways of working resulting in a system that is simpler and easy to understand for applicants; is accessible; and more efficient and robust to run.

Victim Support Schemes: Finance

Peter Kyle: [<u>130785</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish a breakdown of the £40 million in funding for victim services announced in the Spending Review 2020.

Alex Chalk:

The Spending Review will provide a total of £40m for victims and support services. We are continuing to provide £15 million this year to fulfil the manifesto commitment to increase support for victims of sexual violence and rape, including funding for new Independent Sexual Violence Advisors to support victims through the justice system. As well as this, we are providing an additional £25 million this year for victims and

support services. This recognises the negative impact that Covid-19 has had on vulnerable victims of crime, including victims of domestic abuse and builds on the £20 million we provided last year to help domestic abuse and sexual violence community-based services meet Covid-driven demand. In due course, more detailed allocations will be announced.

Youth Justice

Tulip Siddiq: [130791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to (a) respond to and (b) implement the recommendations of the Twelfth Report of the Justice Committee, Children and Young People in Custody, published on 12 November 2020, HC 306.

Lucy Frazer:

The Justice Select Committee published its report Children and Young People in Custody (Part 1) on 12 November 2020. The Government will respond to its recommendations in due course.

Youth Offending Teams: Probation

Peter Kyle: [<u>133072</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate he has made of the number of Youth Offending Teams offering Intensive Supervision and Surveillance as part of Youth Rehabilitation Orders.

Lucy Frazer:

A Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) with Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS) is a community order which may be given by a court in relation to an offence which would be serious enough to make a custodial sentence appropriate. The community order must include supervision, curfew and activity of between 90 and 180 days and may include electronic monitoring.

The information requested is not collected centrally. Youth Justice Statistics are published annually, including information of sentencing occasions resulting in a YRO, and the number and type of requirements given to children who received a YRO. This information can be found in the Youth Justice statistics: 2018 to 2019 supplementary tables, Chapter 5 – Sentencing of Children, Table 5.7

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/youth-justice-statistics

Youth Rehabilitation Orders

Peter Kyle: [130786]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to enact Paragraph 35 of Schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 to allow sentencers to review Youth Rehabilitation Orders.

Lucy Frazer:

Paragraph 35 in Schedule 1 to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 can now be found in section 194 of the Sentencing Act 2020. Section 194 gives the Secretary of State the power, by regulation, to make provision for the review of a Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) and to make provision about the frequency and conduct of those reviews and the court's powers on review. This has not changed with the commencement of the Sentencing Act 2020, no secondary legislation has been made under this power.

We are aware of innovative local approaches and informal arrangements between some magistrates and Youth Offending Teams to improve information sharing and involve magistrates in reviewing the ongoing progress of children in relation to their orders. We are actively considering how the Ministry of Justice can learn from and best support these approaches, while ensuring we maintain the impartial court process. We have no current plans to make an order under section 194 of the Sentencing Act 2020 but are considering this carefully.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Food Supply: Northern Ireland

Colum Eastwood: [134266]

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps the Government has taken to ensure that there are no food shortages in Northern Ireland as a result of the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement.

Mr Robin Walker:

The UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement is based on friendly cooperation between sovereign equals, centred on free trade and inspired by our shared history and values. This is the first free trade agreement the EU has ever reached based on zero tariffs and zero quotas and it is fantastic news for families and businesses in every part of the UK, including Northern Ireland.

The deal we have reached on the Northern Ireland Protocol provides a sensible, phased solution under which trusted traders such as supermarkets and their suppliers will benefit from a three month grace period from official certification. We will continue to work closely with traders as they adapt to the new arrangements

From all accounts these grace periods are working well, and where issues do arise, the government has well-established ways of working with the food industry. This includes extensive and ongoing engagement to support industry in preparedness for, and response to, potential food supply chain disruptions.

■ Motor Vehicles: Republic of Ireland

Carla Lockhart: [134278]

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if it is a legal requirement for vehicles registered in Northern Ireland to carry a green card, when driving in the Irish Republic.

Mr Robin Walker:

Motor insurance does not form part of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement. We have urged the EU to issue an Implementing Decision confirming the UK's participation in the green card-free circulation zone as a third country. Until the EU issues such a decision, our advice to all UK motorists taking their vehicle into any EU Member State, including Ireland, is to carry a green card for journeys from 1 January 2021 onwards.

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister: Press Conferences

Seema Malhotra: [132921]

To ask the Prime Minister, how many Downing Street covid-19-related press conferences have been held since the start of the outbreak; and how many of those press conferences have been led by a (a) male and (b) female member of the Cabinet.

Boris Johnson:

Transcripts of lead ministerial statements from covid-19 related press conferences can be found on the gov.uk website.

SCOTLAND

Fisheries: Rockall

Colum Eastwood: [134267]

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether the boarding of the Irish fishing vessel the Northern Celt by Marine Scotland was (a) necessary and (b) conducive to UK-Ireland relations.

Mr Alister Jack:

The Scottish Government has confirmed that a Marine Scotland patrol vessel carried out a routine inspection on 4 January 2021 of an Irish fishing vessel within 12 nautical miles of Rockall. Fisheries management is a devolved matter for the Scottish Government.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS **AUTHORITY**

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority: Allowances

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[133126]

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, if IPSA will provide volunteers working at home during the covid-19 outbreak with the lunch expenses as provided for in the model volunteer agreement.

Sir Charles Walker:

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) provides funding for staffing and business costs to support MPs in their parliamentary functions, in line with the rules and general conditions set out in its Scheme.

MPs may claim for the cost of reasonable food and travel expenses to be paid to volunteers who are supporting their parliamentary work, to ensure they are not out of pocket as a result of their volunteer activities. This may include, for example, the purchase of lunch when working away from home. Volunteer expenses may only be reimbursed to cover actual costs incurred as a result of supporting the MP and are not intended to be used as a daily food allowance to fund the consumption of food and drink in a volunteer's own home.

TRANSPORT

A303: Tolls

Rosie Cooper: 132824

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether a toll will be charged to access the proposed tunnel allowing the A303 to bypass Stonehenge.

Rachel Maclean:

The A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme is currently subject to a legal challenge but if the project was to proceed, as approved by the Secretary of State for Transport on 12 November 2020, then there will not be a toll for accessing the proposed tunnel. Provision for a toll was not included in the approved Development Consent Order.

Aviation

Rachel Hopkins: [130888]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when his Department plans to publish the UK's aviation contingency strategy in the event the UK leaves the EU without a a deal on the future relationship.

Robert Courts:

We have agreed a deal with the EU that provides the rights for UK and EU airlines to fly directly between the UK and EU, Covid restrictions allowing. This provides the air connectivity that is so vital for connecting people and businesses, facilitating tourism and trade.

This agreement means that UK and EU contingency measures for air transport are not required.

Gavin Newlands: [132988]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many of the nine freedoms of the air the UK aviation sector enjoyed as an EU member the UK will retain after the end of the transition period.

Robert Courts:

Following the end of the Transition Period, all existing UK airlines are able to continue flying between the UK and the EU, including overflights and technical stops – the first four freedoms of the air.

The UK and individual EU Member States may also negotiate additional so-called fifth freedom rights for all-cargo carriers and may permit additional flexibilities for non-scheduled services.

Aviation: Coronavirus

Dr Philippa Whitford: [130112]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what engagement his Department of Transport has had with the aerospace industry to identify measures that could (a) safely open up aviation and (b) increase consumer confidence in the context of the covid-19 outbreak.

Robert Courts:

The Government is working closely with the UK's aerospace and aviation industries, including at sector level through the Aerospace Growth Partnership.

In addition, the Global Travel Taskforce has undertaken extensive engagement with the transport industry, including aviation and aerospace, and are putting in place a range of measures to support a safe and sustainable return to air travel and encourage consumer confidence.

On 15 December we introduced the 'Test to Release for International Travel' scheme in England, allowing arrivals from countries not on the travel corridors list to pay for a privately provided Covid-19 test and reduce their period of self-isolation if the test is negative.

Dr Philippa Whitford:

[130114]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, which commercial aviation routes are being prioritised as part of the plan to restart aviation following the covid-19 outbreak.

Robert Courts:

The Government recognises the challenging times facing the aviation sector as a result of COVID-19 and is committed to tackling this virus while enabling a sustainable and responsible return to travel.

Commercial air transport routes are a matter for airlines, and therefore decisions on how soon to operate a route after a period of inactivity is a matter for those airlines.

Since 10 July under the Travel Corridor policy, passengers arriving from a number of countries and territories are no longer required to self-isolate on arrival unless they have visited or transited through a non-exempt country or territory. Ministerial decisions on Travel Corridors are informed by risk assessments provided by the Joint Biosecurity Centre, working closely with Public Health England, using a methodology endorsed by the 4 Chief Medical Officers of the UK.

As a further measure in support of travel, the Test to Release scheme was launched on 15 December. This provides passengers arriving in England with the option to shorten the self-isolation period by up to half following a negative COVID-19 test.

Ayr Station

Allan Dorans: [130218]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans Network Rail has for Ayr railway station.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Network Rail is committed to keeping Ayr station operating safely. The derelict hotel building adjacent to the Station is owned by a private landlord. It is undergoing a feasibility study into the long-term future of this building, this is being led by South Ayrshire Council and is due early this year. Once Network Rail have assessed the results of the feasibility study they will continue the conversation around Ayr station to find a workable solution.

British Transport Police: Railways

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130815]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential effect on British Transport Police working on the rail network of temporarily lifting covid-19 restrictions over the Christmas 2020 period.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

British Transport Police (BTP) had plans in place for the policing of the rail network over the Christmas period, including the period during which Covid-19 restrictions were temporarily lifted. BTP continues to work with the rail industry to ensure these plans reflect expected demand.

On 4 January 2021, the Government instructed all people living in England to stay at home. BTP are supporting rail operators to facilitate journeys for key workers across

the rail network and officers continue to patrol stations to support staff and protect the public.

Bus Services: Coronavirus

Grahame Morris: [132861]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will facilitate the extension of finance holidays for operators to support the coach industry.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government understands that many operators are concerned about meeting their finance payments, and appreciates that the current situation is one that coach operators could not be expected to have foreseen. The Government urges operators to speak to their lenders.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has extended the deadline for payment holiday applications on mortgages and other forms of consumer credit until 31 March 2021. Lenders can agree to give payment holidays of up to six months in total for these arrangements. The customer must apply for a payment holiday and they are granted at the lender's discretion.

More widely, there are measures available to support UK businesses, including coach operators. These include the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. Coach operators may also apply for either the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) or the coronavirus Bounce Back Loan (BBL).

There may be other sources of support available to coach operators depending on their individual circumstances. A 'support finder' tool has been launched to help businesses quickly and easily determine what financial support is available to them.

In addition to payment holidays, the Government has introduced a range of schemes offering direct financial support to businesses.

Grahame Morris: [132862]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, for what reason coach operators are not automatically eligible for payments made to support the leisure and tourism industry.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government is providing grant support to hospitality, leisure and tourism businesses that are required to close, as well as discretionary grant funding to support those businesses that are severely impacted but not required to close.

It is for Local Authorities to administer these schemes and determine on a case-bycase basis who is and is not entitled to funding. Coach companies that believe they may be eligible should contact their Local Authority.

■ Containers: Shortages

Alberto Costa: [130773]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the economic effect on British businesses of the international shortage of shipping containers.

Robert Courts:

We have not conducted a specific economic assessment. Government has been working closely with the freight sector and wider business to mitigate the impact on UK supply chains of this global issue.

Cycling: West Midlands

Colleen Fletcher: [130096]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much central Government funding has been spent on upgrading the cycling network in (a) Coventry and (b) the West Midlands in each of the last five years.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

A total of around £143 million has been invested in cycling and walking schemes in the West Midlands and £4 million in Coventry since the introduction of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) in 2016/17. This includes £22 million emergency active travel funding this year. Details of this investment, including a year by year breakdown to 2018/19, were published on 7th February alongside the first report to Parliament on progress made towards delivering the CWIS. Most of the investment benefits both cycling and walking, although some initiatives are focused more on one than on the other: further details are provided in the report.

■ Department for International Trade: Internet and Telephone Services

Emily Thornberry: [130003]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November 2020 to Question 119200 on Department for International Trade: Internet and Telephone Services, how many staff, by grade, operate the 45 information and advice sites for hauliers established by his Department; and what hours those services will be fully staffed and operational from 28 December 2020 to 4 January 2021 inclusive.

Rachel Maclean:

We have over 700 staff trained to work across our 46 Information & Advice Sites at truck stops and motorway service stations around Great Britain, which will rise to approximately 1000 in 2021. These sites are open between 06:00 and 22:00, with some regional variations, with three staff working at any one time across two shifts (06:00-14:00 and 14:00-22:00). As of 1 January, the site team will increase to four members of staff at any one time to support hauliers to become 'border ready'. Staff have been recruited externally to meet specific EU language requirements and received extensive training on new border requirements from 1 January 2021, enabling them to provide bespoke and targeted support to hauliers.

Dover Port: Coronavirus

Justin Madders: [132987]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what type of covid-19 tests were used at the port of Dover from 24 December to 28 December 2020; how many tests were used; and how many of those tests produced positive results for covid-19.

Rachel Maclean:

21,849 INNOVA SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Qualitative Test had been used at the Port of Dover by 28 December 2020 with 66 positive results. All hauliers waiting to cross the border have received an INNOVA SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Qualitative Test and the backlog had now been cleared.

Driving Licences: Foreign Nationals

Dan Carden: [134080]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to extend the 12-month period drivers can use non-GB driving licences.

Rachel Maclean:

Holders of driving licences issued outside of the European Union who become resident in Great Britain can drive small vehicles (motorcars and motorcycles) for up one year from the date they become resident.

To continue driving after this period the driver must either exchange their licence, if it was issued by a country which has been designated for licence exchange purposes, or apply for a provisional driving licence and pass both a theory and practical driving test.

The Government keeps the ongoing impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic and any changes that may be needed to existing arrangements under review.

Driving Tests

Kirsten Oswald: [131306]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the backlog of (a) theory and (b) practical driving tests in (i) Scotland and (ii) Great Britain; and how long he estimates it will take to clear each backlog.

Rachel Maclean:

The attached table shows the practical driving test backlogs as at 21 December 2020:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is working hard to reduce the backlog of tests whilst adhering to Government guidance to suspend its testing services to help stop the spread of coronavirus and keep people safe. It will continue to reschedule tests that are suspended in line with Government restrictions to the next available test dates.

Unlike driver practical tests, the DVSA is unable to make an estimate of the backlog of theory tests as these appointments are managed by re-scheduling candidates into a virtual centre, giving candidates the opportunity to choose an alternative date and time.

Demand for theory test services has increased as a result of national and local restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government's initiative to support vocational drivers, and the shortage of delivery and goods drivers due to Brexit.

Attachments:

1. Table of backlog of driving tests in Scotland & GB [Table - Backlog of driving tests in Scotland and Great Britain.docx]

Kirsten Oswald: [131309]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many applicants resident in Scotland have (a) been offered and (b) accepted an appointment for a driving test elsewhere in Great Britain since the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Rachel Maclean:

Candidates select the test centre of their choice when booking a driving test. Some candidates may be residing temporarily in an area away from their home address, for example, for study or work purposes.

In the period 25 March 2020 to 30 November 2020, there were 754 candidates with Scotland postcodes who took their driving tests in England or Wales.

Driving Tests: Coronavirus

Kirsten Oswald: [131302]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 21 October to Question 102858 on Driving Tests: Coronavirus, how many theory test certificates expired during the 6 months following the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 without the candidate sitting their practical test within the required timescale; and what the comparable figures are for the same six month period in the previous three years.

Rachel Maclean:

A total of 99,892 theory test certificates expired during the 6 months following the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 without a practical test being passed.

The table below shows the comparable figures for the same 6-month period in the previous 3 years are as follows:

2019	97,573	97,573	
2018	96,378		
2017	89,462		

Kirsten Oswald: [131303]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate he has made of the number of theory test certificates that will expire during the 12 months following the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 without the candidate being able to sit a practical test within the required timescale.

Rachel Maclean:

The validity period of the theory test certificate is 2 years.

The total number of theory test passes between 25 March 2018 – 25 March 2019 is 1,005,789.

It is not possible to estimate how many of those will expire without the candidate being able to sit a practical test.

Kirsten Oswald: [131304]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 21 October 2020 to Question 102859 on Driving Tests: Coronavirus, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to amend Section 91 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to permit the repayment of theory test fees where a candidate's theory test certificate expires after the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 without the candidate being able to sit their practical test within the required timescale.

Rachel Maclean:

There are no plans to bring forward such legislative proposals.

Kirsten Oswald: [131305]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 21 October 2020 to Question 102859 on Driving Tests: Coronavirus, what consultation he has conducted regarding legislative proposals to amend Section 91 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to permit the repayment of theory test fees where a candidate's theory test certificate expires after the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 without the candidate being able to sit their practical test within the required timescale.

Rachel Maclean:

A candidate whose theory test certificate expires will have received the service for which they paid the fee. Therefore, no consultation has been conducted. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency continues to refund the fee for the practical driving test as soon as a candidate's theory test certificate expires.

David Mundell: [132796]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will extend the expiry date of driving theory tests for people who have had their practical driving test cancelled during the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

The two-year validity period of the theory test certificate is set in legislation and the Government has taken the decision not to lay further legislation to extend it. The primary reason is that the two-year validity is in place to ensure that a candidate's

theoretical knowledge and hazard perception skills are up to date at the critical point they drive on their own for the first time. Extending the validity would provide less reassurance that this is the case. Those whose certificate previously expired and have since passed the theory test will now have a further two years in which to pass the practical test.

John McDonnell: [133621]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to make driving tests available for critical workers who may require them.

Rachel Maclean:

Following the announcement of the national lockdown in England, all practical driving lessons and tests have been suspended. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is not currently offering a critical worker service. However, essential delegated bus and emergency service testing, including ambulance tests, will continue where they are identified as a priority by bus companies, the emergency services or NHS trusts.

The DVSA will continue to keep critical worker tests under review and announce any changes on its social media platforms.

John McDonnell: [133622]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will extend the period of validity of theory tests for learner drivers who have had their driving test cancelled as a result of covid-19 restrictions.

Rachel Maclean:

The maximum duration of two years between passing the theory test and a subsequent practical test is in place for road safety reasons; to ensure that a candidate's knowledge is current. This validity period is set in legislation and the Government has no current plans to lay further legislation to extend it.

It is important that road safety knowledge and hazard perception skills are up to date at the critical point that new drivers drive unsupervised for the first time. Those who have not been able to practice are most likely to see their knowledge base diminish and research suggests that this would be particularly harmful for hazard perception skills.

Ensuring new drivers have current relevant knowledge and skills is a vital part of the training of new drivers, who are disproportionality represented in casualty statistics. Taking all this into consideration, the decision has been made not to extend theory test certificates and learners will need to pass another theory test if their certificate expires.

Andrew Rosindell: [133737]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will extend the validity of driving theory tests to take into account the cancellation of practical driving tests during lockdown measures.

Rachel Maclean:

The maximum duration of two years between passing the theory test and a subsequent practical test is in place for road safety reasons; to ensure that a candidate's knowledge is current. This validity period is set in legislation and the Government has no current plans to lay further legislation to extend it.

It is important that road safety knowledge and hazard perception skills are up to date at the critical point that new drivers drive unsupervised for the first time. Those who have not been able to practice are most likely to see their knowledge base diminish and research suggests that this would be particularly harmful for hazard perception skills.

Ensuring new drivers have current relevant knowledge and skills is a vital part of the training of new drivers, who are disproportionality represented in casualty statistics. Taking all this into consideration, the decision has been made not to extend theory test certificates and learners will need to pass another theory test if their certificate expires.

Driving Tests: Employment

Kirsten Oswald: [131307]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the number of applicants waiting for (a) theory and (b) practical driving test in (i) Scotland and (ii) England and (iii) Wales for whom a driving licence is a requirement of their current or potential employment.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency does not record, or hold, information to show candidates whose driving licence is a requirement of their current, or potential, employment.

Kirsten Oswald: [131308]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the economic cost to the (a) applicant and (b) wider economy of the wait for driving tests in (i) Scotland, (ii) England and (iii) where a driving licence is a requirement for the applicant maintaining or taking up employment.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is responsible for the delivery of driver and vehicle testing. It does hold data on the economic cost to the applicant or wider economy.

The DVSA does not record, or hold, information to determine if a driving licence is a requirement for the applicant maintaining or taking up employment.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Bill Wiggin: [130650]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of how much people who have received funding through the OLEV grant schemes have paid for the installation of an electric vehicle chargepoint at their home; and how much on average people who have not received a grant have paid for such installation in the last four years.

Bill Wiggin: [130651]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how companies offering to fit OLEV approved EV charging points advertise the cost of the work without the Government support.

Rachel Maclean:

The department has not performed bespoke analysis to assess the question asked.

An indicative assessment of the costs of installing a chargepoint was performed as part of the Building Regulations Impact Assessment. In a private off-street residential setting, based upon a 7kW smart chargepoint, it is estimated that the cost of installing a chargepoint will range from a low of £982 to a high of £2,415.

Analysis of the EVHS scheme is attached. This shows the average cost to the customer over the years that a grant has been available. This is based on data up until 5 May 2020. The average amount a customer has paid, when using the scheme, is £570. This will include the cost of the EV chargepoint, any ancillary equipment, labour and any VAT charged, less the grant rate available to the customer.

The department does not have data on what customers outside of the scheme would have paid. Nor do we have information on how companies advertise the cost of chargepoint installations.

Attachments:

1. Analysis of the EVHS scheme - table [130650, 130651 - Analysis of the EVHS scheme - table.docx]

Stephen McPartland:

[130716]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has made an assessment of grid capacity in relation to electric vehicle charging; and what plans he has to increase grid capacity to accommodate the electric vehicle charging infrastructure needed ahead of Government plans to ban the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030.

Rachel Maclean:

Electricity network operators at both the distribution and transmission levels are responsible for assessing the need for new investment to support electric vehicle charging as part of their business plans, which are then approved by Ofgem, the independent regulator. My officials regularly meet with network operators across Great Britain to discuss the impacts of the electric vehicle transition, including how the increasing demand will be managed whilst minimising the impact on businesses, workers and consumers.

'Smart' charging can help reduce constraints on the network by allowing electricity demand to be shifted throughout the day. In 2019 the Government consulted on mandating that all private charge points sold or installed in the UK must be smart enabled. We intend to lay the relevant legislation this year.

The UK electricity market is already set up to bring forward investment in generation to meet demand. For example, the Contracts for Difference scheme supports significant investment in low carbon generation. The Government is also investing more than £1.3bn to support new EV charging infrastructure, including £950m on future proofing electricity network capacity along the Strategic Road Network. The necessary investment in infrastructure and the adoption of smart charging will ensure that the electricity network is able to support the mass charging of electric vehicles.

Stephen McPartland:

[<u>130717</u>

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to support private sector investment into electric vehicle charging infrastructure in advance of the proposed ban on the sale of petrol and diesel cars in 2030.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government is not proposing to ban the sale of petrol and diesel cars and vans, merely to phase out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, this would not affect the second hand market in these vehicles. The Ten Point Plan confirmed £1.3 billion in funding to support the rapid expansion of the charging network in the 2020s, which includes £950 million in future proofing grid capacity along the Strategic Road Network. One of the aims of this funding is to support the growing private sector investment and expanding market opportunities in electric vehicle infrastructure. As set out in the National Infrastructure Strategy, we will produce an electric vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Strategy in 2021 to facilitate this further. We will be engaging with local authorities and stakeholders across the EV and energy sector to identify opportunities to harness private sector investment to deliver comprehensive UK EV charging infrastructure arrangements. This will ensure chargepoint infrastructure is rolled-out efficiently across all regions to deliver on the government's levelling up agenda.

Stephen McPartland:

[130718]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the financial incentives that will be required to support large fleet owners with the (a) cost of electric vehicle charging units and (b) infrastructure upgrades which will be needed to install rapid electric vehicle chargers.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government recognises the scope for fleets to be at the vanguard of the transition to zero emission driving, including the recently announced 2030 phase out of new petrol and diesel cars and vans and the phasing out of the sale of new diesel heavy goods vehicles, which we will be consulting on. We will continue to work with fleet operators towards this. Fleet operators are able to take advantage of a range of

grant funding schemes for cars and vans which are provided through the £1.5 billion the Government committed to support the early market.

To continue to accelerate the transition we have now pledged a further £2.8 billion package of measures to support industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles. This includes £1.3 billion to accelerate the roll out of charging infrastructure over the next four years, targeting £950m support on rapid chargepoints on motorways and major roads to around long journeys, and £365m for installing more on-street chargepoints near homes and workplaces to make charging as easy as refuelling a petrol or diesel car. We will consider what additional support might be appropriate to support large fleet operators and publish a clear delivery plan in 2021.

■ Electric Vehicles: Rural Areas

Damian Hinds: [131235]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to support the transition to electric vehicles in rural areas.

Rachel Maclean:

This Government is going further and faster to decarbonise transport by phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, and, from 2035, all new cars and vans must be zero emissions at the tailpipe. We want people across the country to have the opportunity to make the move to electric vehicles. The Government had already committed £1.5 billion to support the early market and remove barriers to electric vehicle ownership. Alongside the new phase out dates we have pledged a further £2.8 billion package of measures to support industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles. This support is available in both urban and rural areas across the UK

Today, a driver is never more than 25 miles away from a rapid chargepoint anywhere along England's motorways and major A roads. Local authorities in rural areas are able to take advantage of the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS), which assists them with the cost of installing chargepoints on residential streets. The Government will continue to monitor market developments to determine whether any significant gaps in charging infrastructure provision emerge where there may be a case for further measures.

Eurostar: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[133117]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to support Eurostar in response to its suspension of services from the UK to mainland Europe as a result of the French, Dutch and Belgian Governments closing its borders with the UK from 21 December 2020 as a result of the new variant of the covid-19 virus.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

International rail services, including Eurostar, resumed operating on 23 December 2020 following the lifting of border restrictions that had been temporarily imposed by a number of countries after the identification of a new variant of the virus.

During the Covid-19 response, the Government has made available an unprecedented package of financial support to all sectors of the economy, including the international rail sector.

The Government has also been engaging closely with Eurostar since the outbreak of Covid-19 earlier this year to monitor its ongoing impact, as well as support the company to access available support to address its particular needs, where appropriate, and will continue to do so.

Felixstowe Port

John Spellar: [132757]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment his Department has made of the reasons for (a) congestion and (b) delays at Felixstowe docks.

Robert Courts:

The last quarter of 2020 saw an unprecedented global demand surge for container freight, with shipping lines and ports worldwide handling volumes in excess of usual peak capacities and duration.

This is not an issue unique to Felixstowe, or UK ports, but is being experienced at many locations internationally.

■ Global Travel Taskforce

Dr Philippa Whitford:

[130113]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when the Global Travel Taskforce is next scheduled to convene to discuss the outstanding recommendations from that Taskforce's report of 24 November 2020.

Robert Courts:

The Global Travel Taskforce has concluded its work. However, the Government is working closely and at pace with industry and our international partners to implement the taskforce recommendations and ensure a safe and sustainable return to international travel.

The taskforce recommendations addressed three priorities: implementing effective public health measures; encouraging safe growth in demand; and driving a coordinated response with global partners.

As a first step, on 15 December the Government introduced the 'Test to Release for International Travel' scheme in England, allowing arrivals to pay for a privately provided Covid-19 test and reduce their required period of self-isolation if the test is negative.

■ Great Western Railway: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131413]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how he plans to minimise disruption on the Great Western Railway due to an outbreak of covid-19 among railway staff causing the cancellation of services during the Christmas period.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department agreed that Advanced Purchase tickets should be temporarily suspended through to 27 December to enable GWR to develop a resilient train operating plan.

GWR contacted passengers who had booked on affected trains to help make alternative arrangements. Passengers could choose to travel on a different train, or claim a refund if they no longer wished to travel. GWR updated its website and included advice about alternative options, including booking with National Express.

Demand over the Christmas period was reduced substantially from anticipated levels following the announcements over changes to tiering and Christmas bubble arrangements.

Heathrow Airport: Construction

Seema Malhotra: [132922]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress is being made on plans for the expansion of Heathrow Airport; and if he will make a statement.

Robert Courts:

On 16 December 2020 the Supreme Court overturned the earlier Court of Appeal decision and declared that the Airports National Policy Statement is lawful. We will carefully consider the Court's judgment and set out any next steps in due course.

The Government have always been clear that Heathrow expansion is a private sector project which must meet strict criteria on air quality, noise and climate change, as well as being privately financed, affordable, and delivered in the best interest of consumers.

High Speed Two Railway Line

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130814]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the National Infrastructure Commission report, Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North: final report, published on 15 December 2020, whether it remains his Department's policy to build High Speed Two in its entirety.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Government has made clear that it supports the Oakervee Review's recommendation of a 'Y' shaped network and the delivery of benefits across the North and Midlands from investment in HS2. Work on HS2 Phase One, and the

legislation for Phase 2a, are both making good progress. The Government will consider the National Infrastructure Commission's report carefully before publishing the Integrated Rail Plan, which will set out the sequencing and delivery of HS2 Phase 2b.

High Speed Two Railway Line: Construction

Dame Cheryl Gillan: [131161]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the cost to the public purse is of money spent outside the UK in the construction of High Speed Two; and if he will place that information in the Library.

Andrew Stephenson:

£8,163,809 has been spent with 23 companies registered outside of the UK. This equates to 0.12% of HS2 Ltd's total spend. These figures show the spend from December 2014 to the end of September 2020.

HS2 Ltd ensures a fair procurement process which complies with UK procurement law, and has an excellent track record of supporting British businesses with over 2,000 businesses delivering work so far on HS2, of which 98% are UK-based, and 70% of which are SMEs.

■ High Speed Two Railway Line: Contracts

Sarah Olney: [<u>133104</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the award of a 9,000-ton contract for steel plate for bridges on the HS2 route by joint venture Eiffage-Kier-Ferrovial-Bam to a French subsidiary of Eiffage, what steps he is taking to ensure that such contracts are awarded to UK companies.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Government's guidance on the procurement of steel was published in November 2015 and subsequently updated in December 2016. All major government projects are required to take cognisance of the Crown Commercial Service Procurement Policy Note 11/16: "Procuring Steel in Major Projects - Revised Guidance" (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procurement-policy-note-1116-procuring-steel-in-major-projects-revised-guidance).

Whilst HS2 Ltd. does not directly buy steel, it does apply a strategic and transparent approach to the sourcing of steel for the HS2 Programme through its Tier 1 contractors and their supply chains. HS2 Ltd is governed by the Utility Contract Regulations and ensures a fair procurement process which complies the with UK procurement law and the Government policy on the procurement of steel. I can confirm that the UK steel industry is already delivering for HS2 including 1,130 tonnes from Darlington-based Cleveland Bridge. Celsa Steel in Cardiff for 1,800 tonnes of loose steel and rebar. Caunton Engineering in Nottinghamshire for 2,400 tonnes of structural steel.

■ High Speed Two: Disclosure of Information

Esther McVey: [130715]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department agreed to allow non-disclosure agreements between (a) HS2 Ltd and local authorities, (b) HS2 and The National Trust and (c) HS2 Ltd and the Canal and River Trust.

Andrew Stephenson:

The use of confidentiality agreements is a matter for HS2 Ltd and its counter signatory. HS2 Ltd sign these agreements to ensure it can continue to work with businesses, communities and councils on sensitive issues. These agreements are voluntary and enable conversations about options under consideration to take place in a way that protects the commercial interests of both parties. The Government has committed HS2 Ltd to publishing the cumulative number of confidentiality agreements it has signed in its Annual Report & Accounts.

Esther McVey: [131258]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on transparency of public bodies of the decision to permit HS2 Ltd to enter into non-disclosure agreements with local authorities.

Andrew Stephenson:

The use of confidentiality agreements is a matter for HS2 Ltd and its counter signatory. HS2 Ltd sign these agreements to ensure that it can continue to work with businesses, communities and councils on issues that are sensitive. These agreements are voluntary and enable conversations about options under consideration to take place in a way that protects the commercial interests of both parties. The Government has committed HS2 Ltd to publishing the cumulative number of confidentiality agreements it has signed in its Annual Report & Accounts.

■ Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Conditions of Employment

Gavin Newlands: [132991]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to review the driver welfare provisions of Operations (a) Stack and (b) Brock; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

The provision of driver welfare in Operations Stack and Brock is the responsibility of the Kent Resilience Forum. In the event of significant disruption on the M20, the Kent Resilience Forum may take the decision to activate their Driver Welfare Plan, which includes the proportionate distribution of welfare at the roadside. Both the Department and the KRF monitor the situation closely and have the capability to increase the provision of welfare depending on the scale of demand, as demonstrated by the response to the extreme traffic disruption that occurred over the Christmas period as a result of France closing the border.

Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Working Hours

Gavin Newlands: [132990]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to his Department's guidance, Temporary relaxation of the enforcement of the EU drivers' hours rules: delivery of essential items to retailers, published on 10 December 2020 to be applicable for the period between 10 December and 30 December 2020, how many notification of relaxation forms his Department received; and whether he plans to extend the period of relaxed enforcement of those rules.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department has received 90 notifications from operators indicating that they would be using the temporary relaxation of the enforcement of the EU drivers' hours rules. The Department has not yet received the final notifications from all these operators about whether or not the relaxation was actually used. The relaxation ended on 30 December 2020 and there are no plans to extend this further given the current situation.

However, two separate and different relaxations of the enforcement of the EU drivers' hours rules were granted (which both began on 23 December 2020 and will end on 22 January 2021). One is for the general haulage of goods in Great Britain and the other is for the international carriage of goods by road, related to substantial delays to border crossings. Details can be found on the gov.uk website.

Large Goods Vehicles: EU Countries

Emma Hardy: [131434]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when the application process for ECMT permits for 2022 will open; and when those permits will be awarded.

Rachel Maclean:

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement sets out reciprocal market access rights for UK and EU road haulage operators in the UK that apply from 1 January 2021, with the vast majority of journeys not requiring ECMT permits.

We will review the demand and usage of annual ECMT permits for 2021 throughout the year and will, in due course, use this to decide how ECMT permits will be issued in 2022.

Emma Hardy: [131435]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether a haulier who has accepted their allocation of ECMT permits for 2021 will be prevented from entering the application process for the allocation of permits for 2022.

Rachel Maclean:

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement sets out reciprocal market access rights for UK and EU road haulage operators in the UK that apply from 1 January 2021, with the vast majority of journeys not requiring ECMT permits.

We will review the demand and usage of annual ECMT permits for 2021 throughout the year and will, in due course, use this to decide how ECMT permits will be issued in 2022.

Emma Hardy: [131436]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has for issuing European Conference of Ministers of Transport driver permits, or an equivalent to hauliers from EU member countries.

Rachel Maclean:

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement sets out reciprocal market access rights for UK and EU road haulage operators in the UK that apply from 1 January 2021, with the vast majority of journeys not requiring ECMT permits.

[131437] **Emma Hardy:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to limit the number of hauliers from EU Member States with access to the UK.

Rachel Maclean:

There are no plans to limit the number of hauliers from EU member states from accessing the UK. The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement sets out reciprocal market access rights for UK and EU road haulage operators in the UK that apply from 1 January 2021.

The Agreement allows frictionless transport to continue between the UK and the EU and ensures the continued flow of goods, food and medicine into the country.

M1: Repairs and Maintenance

Sarah Champion: [130089]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many additional smart motorway emergency refuges have (a) been constructed and (b) entered the design phase on the M1 since the publication of his Department's report entitled Smart Motorway Evidence Stocktake and Action Plan, published on 12 March 2020.

Sarah Champion: [130090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many miles of smart motorway on the M1 were covered by stopped vehicle detection technology in (a) March and (b) December 2020.

Rachel Maclean:

Since March 2020, six emergency areas have been constructed as part of the upgrade project between J13 and J16, which is currently in construction. These emergency areas will come into use when the first section of this project (Junction 13 to Newport Pagnell services) opens to traffic in Spring 2022. There are currently no other All Lane Running (ALR) upgrade schemes on other stretches of the M1 that have entered into design since March 2020.

The Government's Smart Motorway Safety Evidence Stocktake and Action Plan asked Highways England to accelerate its plans and install stopped vehicle detection technology (SVD) on ALR motorways within the next 36 months. The roll out of SVD is planned across the network by March 2023. Page 29 of Highways England's Delivery Plan 2020-25 sets out an indicative delivery programme over the years 2020-23 for each section of ALR motorway.

Motor Vehicles: Cameras

Mick Whitley: [131484]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to make dashboard cameras in motor vehicles mandatory.

Rachel Maclean:

The use of dashcam footage is important in tackling unsafe driving behaviour. The police accept and assess footage captured by witnesses using dashcams and sent to them in relation to a number of road traffic offences, such as using a hand-held mobile phone while driving.

The natural proliferation of dashcams has helped support enforcement; the Government has no plans to make dashcams mandatory.

Motor Vehicles: Republic of Ireland

Claire Hanna: [133281]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether Northern Ireland residents will require a motor insurance green card to drive freely from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and vice versa under the terms of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Rachel Maclean:

Motor insurance does not form part of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement. We have urged the EU to issue an Implementing Decision confirming the UK's participation in the Green Card-free circulation zone as a third country. Until the EU issues such a decision, our advice to all UK motorists taking their vehicle into any EU Member State is to carry a green card.

The Council of Bureaux has confirmed that all national bureaux have agreed to continue their mutual cooperation with the UK Motor Insurers' Bureau under the Multilateral Agreement, which guarantees that that Motor Insurers'

Bureaux will continue handling claims with MIB based on the system of 'deemed insurance cover' not requiring the existence of a Green Card, therefore at present a Green Card does not have to be carried to enter the UK.

Motor Vehicles: Testing

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[130638]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of MOT testing on vehicle emissions on air quality.

Rachel Maclean:

Specific analysis relating to the impact of the MOT test on air quality has not recently been conducted by the Department. Emission limits for vehicles undergoing MOT testing have previously been set at a European level, most recently by Directive 2014/45/EU. These regulations were transposed into UK law by the Motor Vehicles (Tests) (Amendment) Regulations 2017.

Motorways

Sarah Owen: <u> 131490</u>

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress his Department has made on the roll-out of SMART motorways.

Rachel Maclean:

Highways England's Delivery Plan 2020-25 sets out the activities and projects Highways England will deliver over the current road investment strategy period. In addition to ongoing work to upgrade sections of the motorway, a priority for Highways England is the delivery of the Secretary of State's 18 point action plan to raise the bar on safety and increase public confidence in the motorway network.

Highways England will implement the action plan in full and has already completed work, including the provision of 10 additional emergency areas on the M25 and making all emergency areas more visible by introducing a bright orange surface and better, more frequent signs. A nationally-targeted safety campaign to increase road user confidence, including what to do in the event of a breakdown in a live lane, will launch during January 2021.

Highways England will deliver all the remaining actions including the provision of stopped vehicle detection on ALR motorways and conversion of dynamic hard shoulder to ALR.

Northern: Rolling Stock

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131412]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with Northern Rail Ltd. on progress of cascading the class 323 rolling stock from West Midlands Trains and introduction of the class 769 Flex trains onto the network.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We have frequent discussions with Northern Trains Ltd on its rolling stock plans. The planned date for 769s to appear on the network is in March 2021. There is no date yet for the Class 323 cascade from West Midlands Trains, which is dependent upon the arrival of their new train fleet to release the Class 323s.

Public Transport: Antisocial Behaviour

Colleen Fletcher: [130747]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of anti-social behaviour incidents on public transport during the covid-19 outbreak in (a) Coventry, (b) the West Midlands and (c) England; and what steps his Department is taking to tackle anti-social behaviour on (i) buses and (ii) trains.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government is committed to reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime wherever it occurs in the transport system. The transport industry, local authorities, the police and others are already investing in, and undertaking wideranging initiatives to improve the personal security of public transport passengers and staff and to keep our public transport systems as low crime environments.

Public Transport: Visual Impairment

Colleen Fletcher: [130106]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to increase access to public transport for people with sight loss.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Through the Inclusive Transport Strategy, launched July 2018, we aim to give disabled people equal access to the transport network by 2030, with assistance where physical infrastructure remains a barrier.

The Government remains as committed to delivering inclusive transport for all passengers as we were before the COVID-19 pandemic. In November last year we published a report outlining the progress we have made in the two years since the Inclusive Transport Strategy was published. Further to this, we have recently launched a disability equality awareness training package. This is freely available for transport operators, and our expectation is that this will improve service for all disabled passengers, including people with sight loss.

Railways: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131406]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent steps he has taken to inform the public of plans put in place on the rail network to reduce the spread of covid-19 when people travel over the Christmas period.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department worked closely with train operators to put in place robust contingency plans in anticipation of an increased number of passengers travelling during the Christmas period, including alternative travel arrangements, passenger communications, regular demand monitoring and plans to protect key services in the event of staff absence.

The public were kept informed of travel news through coordinated information from train operating companies, Network Rail and independent train ticket retailers. Overall demand over the Christmas period was reduced substantially from anticipated levels following the announcements over changes to tiering and Christmas bubble arrangements.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[133116]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he made of the effect of the Government's decision to change the covid-19 restrictions on travel for Christmas 2020 on the number of train passengers travelling on Saturday 19 December 2020.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the railway has played a vital role in ensuring passengers can travel if required. Responding effectively to the challenges posed by this crisis meant that the government had to act urgently and make quick decisions, whilst retaining flexibility to respond to emerging information. Even before more stringent measures were implemented, the Chief Medical Officer urged people to avoid travelling unless essential, to limit the risks of transmission. Station staff were available throughout to help manage passenger movements.

Railways: Fares

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130811]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of increasing rail fares on encouraging passengers to return to rail travel, once covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We understand concerns about the cost of some rail fares and the impact that this can have on budgets. We have carefully considered the needs of passengers and the cost of operating a safe railway before arriving at a decision. This will be the lowest increase in four years. We have also temporarily frozen fares, enabling passengers to purchase tickets at current prices, including annual season tickets during January and February.

Taxpayers have been very generous in their support to keep trains running throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognising the scale of taxpayer support, it is vital that farepayers make a fair contribution. Ultimately, a small rise is necessary to ensure we are fair to taxpayers and can sustain investment on maintaining services, to enable social distancing and support our economic recovery.

The Government recognises the change in travel patterns, the impact of COVID-19 and therefore the need to accommodate a more flexible style of working and travelling. We are therefore continuing to work closely with industry to develop a solution that offers better value and convenience for those who work flexibly, which we will provide further details on in due course.

Railways: Hate Crime

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130205]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent steps he has taken to ensure customer-facing rail workers are not subject to verbal abuse whilst at work.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The question of workplace safety is a matter for rail employers to address with their staff. However, the British Transport Police is working in partnership with the rail industry and is committed to investigating all incidents of verbal and physical assault against staff. Anyone using physical violence, verbal treats, or intimidation towards any rail staff will not be tolerated.

Railways: Infrastructure

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130813]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he is planning to respond to the National Infrastructure Commission report, Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North.

Andrew Stephenson:

Following full consideration of the National Infrastructure Commission's report, the Government expects to publish the Integrated Rail Plan early in 2021.

Railways: Isle of Wight

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131411]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to minimise disruption to passenger journeys during the upgrade to the Island Line on the Isle of Wight.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

South Western Railway is providing alternative transport and passenger assistance at stations for the duration of the upgrade works. There will be an hourly bus substitution service provided along the route between Shanklin and Ryde Esplanade, with additional services in the timetable to cater for journeys for schools, and a shuttle minibus service operating between Ryde Pier Head and Ryde Esplanade.

Railways: Quarantine

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[<u>131401</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of rail workers who are self-isolating due to covid-19.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

As of 5 January 2021, 4% of operators' staff and 1.9% of NR staff were absent as a result of Covid-19. This figure includes those who have been diagnosed with the virus, those who have been told to self-isolate by the NHS Track and Trace system or the app, and those who are considered Clinically Extremely Vulnerable.

The Department is working closely with train operators to monitor staff absence levels including the proportion of rail workers who are self-isolating due to COVID-19.

Railways: Repairs and Maintenance

Olivia Blake: [<u>131515</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much has been spent on improving railways in the (a) Sheffield, (b) Leeds and (c) Manchester city regions in each of the last 30 years; and how much his Department plans to spend on railways in each region over the next 10 years.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Figures on public sector expenditure at national and regional levels are part of the Government's Country and Regional Analysis (CRA) statistics. These provide statistical allocations of public spending according to where the benefits of that spend are accrued. Unfortunately, spend at city specific level is not available.

The CRA statistics include spend on transport by all public sector organisations including the Department for Transport, Local Authorities, Public Corporations (in the case of transport, this is mainly spend by London Underground) and other government departments including devolved administrations.

Table 1: Public expenditure on the railway in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, by all public sector bodies (£ million)

	NORTH WEST	YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER
2015-16	1,499	885
2016-17	1,289	677
2017-18	1,593	668
2018-19	1,859	770
2019-20	1,784	716

These expenditure values are in nominal terms and have not been adjusted for inflation. In 2014, Network Rail was classified as a Central Government Body and thus spending on the railways before and after Network Rail's reclassification are not comparable.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/country-and-regional-analysis-2020

The Spending Review confirmed that the Government will continue to support the railway, investing in ambitious improvements to modernise our railway, committing over £40bn. This includes over £2 billion of funding confirmed in 2021-22 for rail services, building on the estimated £12.8 billion of support for transport services that the government has already committed to provide in 2020-21.

We continue to deliver ambitious enhancements to the rail network, investing in key priorities including the Transpennine Route Upgrade, restoring lines and stations closed during the Beeching cuts and in HS2, with an unrelenting focus on levelling up our country and ensuring all communities have the connections they need to support growth and prosperity.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[133125]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the rescheduling of planned engineering works to facilitate the covid-19 travel window that was planned for 23 to 27 December 2020.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department worked closely with train operators to put in place robust contingency plans in anticipation of an increased number of passengers travelling during the Christmas period, including alternative travel arrangements, passenger communications, regular demand monitoring and plans to protect key services in the event of staff absence.

The Department took all necessary steps to ensure people could travel safely, including postponing the start of a small number of engineering works. Network Rail advise that the cost to taxpayers of postponing these works was minimal.

Railways: Season Tickets

Lilian Greenwood: [131241]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what modelling has been undertaken on the requirements for new flexible season tickets.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department considered a range of surveys and evidence on expected commuting patterns post-COVID.

We are working closely with industry to develop a solution that offers better value and convenience for those who commute flexibly, including assessing the commercial impact of introducing the new products.

Railways: Social Distancing

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131405]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent steps he has taken to promote social distancing and covid-19 compliance on all rail networks.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department continues to work closely with train operators and the British Transport Police to build on existing measures to keep passengers and staff safe and promote COVID-19 compliance, particularly in light of the new strain of the virus. This has included reiterating the importance of reminding passengers how to travel safely by wearing face coverings, maintaining social distancing and hand sanitising, and

encouraging passengers to book ahead where possible to manage demand. Additional in station and on train announcements are also being made.

Railways: Standards

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131400]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with rail operators on contingency plans in the event that rail workers have to self-isolate as a result of covid-19 over the Christmas period.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131402]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with rail operators on potential train cancellations between 23 and 27 December 2020.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131403]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with rail operators on alternative travel arrangements in the event that trains are cancelled between 23 and 27 December 2020.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department worked closely with train operators to put in place robust contingency plans in anticipation of an increased number of passengers travelling during the Christmas period, including alternative travel arrangements, passenger communications, regular demand monitoring and plans to protect key services in the event of staff absence.

The public were kept informed of travel news through coordinated information from train operating companies, Network Rail and independent train ticket retailers. Overall demand over the Christmas period was reduced substantially from anticipated levels following the announcements over changes to tiering and Christmas bubble arrangements.

Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation: Hydrogen

Mr Clive Betts: [133662]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to amend the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) to promote private investment in green hydrogen production facilities at sites not directly adjacent to renewable energy production sites.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department has been considering with industry experts how to enable the more cost-effective development of new electrolysis facilities by allowing them to be located more closely with demand, rather than having to be limited to being built adjacent to renewable energy production sites. We plan to consult on potential changes to the RTFO scheme later this year; this will include proposals on how renewable hydrogen can be further supported.

Road Signs and Markings: Cultural Heritage

Andrew Gwynne: [131200]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answers of 14 December 2020 to Questions 127499, 127500 and 127501, what steps his Department is taking to support the implementation of the Government's guidance on Celebrating the historic counties of England dated 16 July 2019.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department for Transport has permitted the use of historic county boundary signs through the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016. Guidance is provided to local authorities in DfT Circular 01/2016 and in Chapter 7 of the Traffic Signs Manual. Decisions on whether to place such signs are for local authorities.

DfT Circular 01/2016 is available at

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-signs-regulations-and-general-directions-2016-an-overview

The Traffic Signs Manual is available at

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-signs-manual

Road Traffic Control

Lee Anderson: [133201]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress his Department is making on bringing forward legislative proposals under Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 to enable local authorities to enforce moving traffic contraventions.

Rachel Maclean:

The moving traffic enforcement powers under Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 require a set of statutory instruments to be made covering enforcement, level of penalties, financial provisions, approved devices, adjudication and representations and appeals. This will take several months to bring into force, after which those local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers can apply for a designation order for moving traffic enforcement. Statutory guidance is being developed for local authorities on how to use the powers, including publicising their introduction in advance, to ensure that enforcement is carried out fairly.

Rolling Stock: Disability

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130816]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2020 to Question 128719 on rolling stock, whether he plans to encourage operators to increase the number of carriages with built-in ramps.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

All new rolling stock must comply with modern accessibility standards. It would be a matter for operators working with manufacturers and owners to procure rolling stock that meets the needs of passengers whether that be through built-in ramps or other accessibility means.

Sevmorput

Caroline Lucas: [131216]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what his policy is on providing a safe haven to the disabled Russian nuclear powered freighter SEVMORPUT in the event that the UK is asked to do so; what the decision-making process is on a request to offer safe haven to a disabled nuclear-powered freighter; whether an affected coastal local authority is included in that decision-making process; what notice that authority is given of a decision to offer safe haven; and if he will make a statement.

Robert Courts:

The UK maintains a set of guidelines for dealing with a request for a place of refuge from a vessel in distress. These guidelines, currently under review, complement European Union guidelines that cover cooperation between neighbouring Coastal States for maritime place of refuge incidents. The UK and EU guidelines are both consistent with International Maritime Organization resolution A.949 (23); Guidelines on Places of Refuge for Ships in Need of Assistance.

The UK has designated the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP) as the Competent Authority concerning the accommodation of ships in need of assistance. Where a formal request is received by the UK from a vessel requiring provision of a place of refuge, in the first instance, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) will conduct an assessment of potential locations. Areas considered may be ports, harbours or anchorages in sheltered areas. The UK does not maintain a prescribed list of places of refuge; anywhere may be considered for suitability, depending on the nature of the incident, not least the potential hazards presented by the vessel in question. The MCA will provide a list of options to the SOSREP who ultimately decides whether the UK is prepared and able to offer a place of refuge, and if so, where that place will be.

For a nuclear-powered vessel, the Office of Nuclear Regulation and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary would be contacted. During the process of considering place of refuge options, the MCA will consult with local stakeholders, including the local Environment Group and relevant local authorities. However, the extent to which consultation is possible would depend on the urgency of the situation and ultimately, the SOSREP has the delegated authority to direct where a vessel will go. This decision would be made based on the best interests of the UK as a whole with specific regard to safety and/or the environment.

Caroline Lucas: [131217]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what marine contingency planning the UK has in place for responding to a nuclear accident involving a floating nuclear reactor; how quickly that response can be mobilised; whether contingency planning has taken place regarding the floating nuclear reactor aboard the disabled Russian nuclear-powered

freighter SEVMORPUT in relation to the current passage of that vessel; and if he will make a statement.

Robert Courts:

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) response planning to manage incidents involving dangerous cargo, including nuclear fuel, is contained in the 'The National Contingency Plan - A Strategic Overview for Responses to Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations' and other operational response procedures.

Her Majesty's Coastguard will provide an initial assessment and incident response within minutes of being made aware of any maritime incident. The timing of any subsequent response will depend on the nature, scope and scale of the incident and the risks to the public and the environment.

In the case of an incident involving a nuclear-powered vessel, Her Majesty's Coastguard will seek technical support from a ship's owners, classification society, naval architects and insurers. They would also seek the advice of International Nuclear Services, the Office of Nuclear Regulation and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and other relevant experts.

Her Majesty's Coastguard was aware of the routeing and passage plan of the SEVMORPUT through the English Channel on its way back to St Petersburg and was constantly monitored by both the UK and French Authorities. The ship arrived safely in Russia on 30 December 2020 without incident.

South Western Railway: Rolling Stock

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131410]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with South Western Railway on the introduction of Class 701 'Arterio' units; and in what order that operator will be removing the Class 455, 456, 458 and 707 trains.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Officials have regular discussions with South Western Railway as part of the management of the South Western Franchise, including discussions on delivery of the Class 701 'Arterio' trains. The planned order of the cascade as these new trains begin to enter passenger services is that Class 707s will leave the franchise first, then 458s, then 456s and 455s in combination. SWR will need to retain some flexibility within this plan so to be able to manage maintenance requirements for individual units.

Stockport Viaduct: Repairs and Maintenance

Andrew Gwynne: [129995]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 December 2020 to Question 127502, whether the £1 million fund for Control Period 6 (1 April 2019-31 March 2024) is specifically for brick repair and de-vegetation work on the Stockport rail viaduct and no other projects.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The £1 Million fund for Control Period 6 (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2024) is specifically for the upkeep of the Stockport Rail Viaduct, including brick repair, de-vegetation work and maintenance of rainwater goods (downpipes, weep pipes and troughing along the construction joints).

Supermarkets: Motor Vehicles

[13<u>0641</u>] Mr Barry Sheerman:

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking with supermarket leaders to help ensure that supermarket vehicle fleets are sustainable.

Rachel Maclean:

We recognise the important role large fleet operators have to play as we transition to zero emission driving. The Government plans to consult on phasing out the sale of new diesel heavy goods vehicles and we will continue to work with fleet operators towards this.

The Government's £20m Low Emission Freight Trials funded a series of R&D projects aimed at encouraging the widespread introduction of low and zero emission vehicles to UK fleets. Retailers including Sainsbury's, ASDA, Tesco and John Lewis were all part of this programme to cut emissions and improve air quality by focusing on emissions-busting technologies for trucks and vans.

The Government has to date already committed £1.5 billion to support the early market for greener cars and vans through various grant funding schemes which fleet operators are able to take advantage of. The Government has announced phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, and, from 2035, all new cars and vans must be zero emissions at the tailpipe. To facilitate this we have pledged a further £2.8 billion package of measures to support industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles.

Taxis: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell: [133044]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure that taxis do not travel from a higher covid-19 tier area to a lower tier area.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government has published guidance for the taxi and private hire vehicle sector on how to provide COVID-safe services during the pandemic. Taxis and private hire vehicles are therefore able to operate across tier boundaries.

Passengers must adhere to the local restrictions when considering travel and should follow the Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers.

■ Transport: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[130204]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with British Transport Police on the effect on transport of temporarily lifting covid-19 restrictions over the Christmas period.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Department for Transport ministers and officials have held regular discussions with the British Transport Police regarding its work to support COVID-19 regulations and Government guidance. This included discussions regarding BTP's planning for the Christmas period. BTP was also in regular dialogue with rail industry contacts to ensure a common understanding of likely travel patterns and demand on the rail network over the period.

On 4 January 2021, the Government instructed all people living in England to stay at home. BTP are supporting rail operators to facilitate journeys for key workers across the rail network and officers continue to patrol stations to support staff and protect the public.

■ Travel: Coronavirus

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131404]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to publish additional written guidance for members of the public who plan on travelling to an area under a different tier between 23 and 27 December 2020.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government's advice on the Christmas travel window was updated on 19 December 2020 following a review of the latest COVID data. Updated guidance, reflecting the decision to reduce the travel window, the introduction of tier 4 restrictions and travelling between tiers was published on gov.uk. Guidance is updated as the situation changes.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[131407]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on issuing guidance on (a) people returning to places of work in places and cities under different tiers and (b) other elements of travel between areas under different tiers between 23 and 27 December.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government's advice on the Christmas travel window was updated on 19 December 2020 following a review of the latest COVID data. Updated guidance, reflecting the decision to reduce the travel window, the introduction of tier 4 restrictions and travelling between tiers was published on gov.uk. Guidance is updated as the situation changes.

Rachael Maskell: [133045]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government is taking to prevent people travelling from higher to lower covid-19 tier areas.

Rachel Maclean:

The vast majority of people are continuing to follow the rules and act responsibly to control the virus. As they have done throughout the pandemic, the police will engage, explain and encourage people to follow the rules before moving to enforce the law.

In October, the Government announced an additional £60 million surge funding for police forces and local councils to step up enforcement of coronavirus rules.

Everyone should follow the restrictions in place for the area they live in, which are now common across England following the introduction of the national lockdown rules announced on 4 January 2020, which came into force on 6 January 2020.

Taiwo Owatemi: [133230]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps the Government is taking to monitor and ensure people travelling to and from Tier 4 covid-19 lockdown areas have legitimate travel exemptions when travelling (a) on public transport and (b) in their cars.

Rachel Maclean:

The Tier 4 rules, which were in place from 2 December to 4 January were clear that people must stay at home unless for an exempted purpose, such as education, work or accessing amenities that remain open. This means that people living within Tier 4 areas should not be travelling unless for those reasons.

The police have the powers to direct people to return home and to issue a fixed penalty notice, if they have left home without a valid exemption as set out in the regulations. The breach is leaving home, by any means including walking or cycling, rather than specifically travelling by either public transport or by car. Therefore, the Department does not hold data for breaches of these regulations where police have enforced the measures upon car drivers or those travelling on public transport.

The same applies to the national lockdown rules announced on 4 January 2020, which came into force on 6 January 2020.

Travel: North East

Chi Onwurah: [130722]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will provide Test to Release capacity in the North East of England.

Robert Courts:

There are a number of testing providers on the gov.uk providers' list, based in different locations around England. Many offer a choice between testing at a site or an at-home test, meaning that anyone who is not easily able to access a testing site has the option of having a test sent to the location where they are self-isolating.

We are continuing to work at pace to bring further providers on to the gov.uk providers' list as and when they have self-declared that they meet the minimum standards.

Vehicle Number Plates

Sir Greg Knight: [129986]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what changes he proposes to introduce in 2021 to the display and use of vehicle number plates and the information to be required or allowed to be displayed thereon; for what reason he plans to make each change; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

There are three changes to the regulations governing the display and use of vehicle number plates that will come into force in 2021.

Since 1 January 2021 it is no longer legal to display the European Union symbol on new number plates fitted to vehicles from that date. A GB sticker should be displayed on the rear of the vehicle when travelling abroad, but those vehicles which have both the letters "GB" and the Union Flag on their number plate do not need to display a separate GB sticker when travelling in the EU unless they are travelling to Spain, Malta or Cyprus.

Since 1 January 2021 it is also illegal to display an old style, pre-1973 black and silver number plate on vehicles recorded as historic i.e. vehicles that are 40 years old and over but were manufactured after 1 January 1980.

From 1 September 2021, it will also become mandatory for all new number plates fitted to vehicles to meet the revised technical standards contained in the British Standard for Retroreflective Number Plates (BS AU 145e). The new standard replaces BS AU 145d and introduces significant improvements to both the durability and readability of number plates.

TREASURY

Bankruptcy: Tax Avoidance

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[130647]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, What estimate he has made of the number of people subject to the Loan Charge who have been declared bankrupt.

Jesse Norman:

No estimate of the number of individual bankruptcies has been made, although the original impact assessment acknowledges that there are likely to be some. The impact assessment can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disguised-remuneration-further-update/disguised-remuneration-further-update.

HMRC cannot provide an estimate for the number of people subject to the Loan Charge who have been declared bankrupt, as they could have been declared bankrupt for many reasons and not necessarily as a direct result of a Loan Charge liability. HMRC are not always the only creditor and some people may be declared bankrupt as a result of a non-HMRC debt, and some individuals may choose to enter insolvency themselves based on their overall financial position.

HMRC only ever consider insolvency as a last resort, and encourage people to contact them to agree the best way to settle their tax debts. Anyone who is worried about being able to pay what they owe is encouraged to get in touch with HMRC as soon as possible on 03000 599110.

Bounce Back Loan Scheme

Mick Whitley: [<u>130836</u>]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of converting Bounce Back Loans into grants to provide further assistance to small limited companies during the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

The government launched the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLS) on May 4th to ensure that the smallest businesses can access loans of up to £50,000 in a matter of just days. As of 13 December, the scheme had supported more than 1.4 million businesses with facilities in excess of £43.5 billion.

With the government covering repayments for businesses for the first-year repayments for BBLS loans won't begin until June 2021 at the earliest. The Pay as you Grow options announced by the Chancellor will enable businesses to repay their Bounce Back Loans on the terms which work best for them, giving them more time to repay and giving them the flexibility they may need to help their business recover and grow. This includes the ability to extend the term of the loan from 6 to 10 years (reducing average monthly payments by almost half), as well as the option to temporarily switch to interest-only payments or to take a full repayment holiday for 6 months.

We have always been clear that these are loans and not grants, and that businesses are of course expected to make every effort to repay the loans, as is only right as the taxpayer stands behind these loans.

The Government recognises the significant challenges facing businesses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has responded to this with an unprecedent package of business support. These support measures include, but are not limited to: The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), A 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England, Cash grants of up to £3,000 per month to help businesses that are closed with their costs, including paying their supply chains, and a VAT deferral for up to 12 months.

Buildings: Insulation

Stephen McPartland:

[132897]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to waive Insurance Premium Tax on leaseholders' premiums that have increased as a result of the building's non-compliance with EWS1 tests.

John Glen:

Insurance Premium Tax is a tax paid by insurers on all general insurance premiums. Insurance pricing is a decision which is affected by a wide range of factors, and the taxes that insurers pay are just one part of this. It is hard to predict the impact of an exemption on insurance pricing for leaseholders, as this largely depends on how the insurers would react. In addition, any loss in tax revenue would have to be balanced by a reduction in public spending, increased borrowing or increased taxation elsewhere.

While there are no current plan to introduce an exemption on insurance pricing for leaseholders, all taxes are kept under review and the views expressed to us are carefully considered as part of the annual Budget process.

The Government is working closely with lenders and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors to address problems faced by homeowners caught up in EWS1 processes.

Bus Services: Yorkshire and the Humber

Dan Jarvis: [R] [130081]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much financial support has been granted to coach tour operators in (a) Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, (b) the Sheffield City Region and (c) Yorkshire and the Humber since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government recognises the challenging times facing the coach sector as a result of Covid-19. Throughout this crisis, the government has sought to protect people's jobs and livelihoods, and support businesses and public services across the UK. This has included support for business through access to finance schemes (CBILS, CLBILS, Future Fund, BBLS), with over £65bn dispersed through these schemes. These measures have been designed to ensure that firms of any size receive the help they need to get through this difficult time.

The sectoral breakdowns of these loans published by the Government shows the transport sector as a whole has received over 2,200 CBILS loans worth £500m and over 67,000 BBLS loans worth £1.7bn.

The Government have been publishing the number of applications approved and the volume of lending under the schemes which show continued support for over a million businesses. We will continue to consider what further details could be published, balancing the need for transparency while also considering the confidential and commercial nature of this data for firms and lenders.

HM Treasury also worked with other Departments to support key journeys, such as home to school and over the Christmas travel window, where coaches can play an important role

Dan Jarvis: [R] [130082]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the economic benefit the coach travel industry brings to the Yorkshire economy.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout this crisis, the Government's priority has been to protect people's jobs and livelihoods. As part of this, the Government has supported over 94,000 businesses in Yorkshire and the Humber with over £3.6 billion worth of loans through the Bounce Bank Loan Scheme and the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

As measures to control the virus have changed, government support has evolved and will continue to observe and address the impact the pandemic is having on the different regions and sectors.

Business: Coronavirus

Kate Osborne: [134201]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of people in (a) the Jarrow constituency, (b) the North East and (c) England that have not received support for their business as a result of being ineligible for Government schemes.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout this crisis, the government's priority has been to protect people's jobs and livelihoods. We have put in place an economic package of support which will provide businesses with certainty over the coming months, even as measures to prevent further spread of the virus change.

The government has put in place a comprehensive package of support worth over £280 billion, supporting millions of businesses and jobs, In the North East, 70, 400 jobs were furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme as of 31 October 2020. Businesses have also received billions in loans, tax deferrals, Business Rate reliefs, and general and sector-specific grants. In Jarrow, a total of 2, 400 jobs had been furloughed through the CJRS scheme as of 31 October 2020.

In addition, on 5th January, the Government announced an extra £4.6 billion to protect jobs and support affected businesses as restrictions get tougher. Businesses forced to close can claim a one-off grant of up to £9,000. Local authorities will also receive an additional £500m, to a total of £1.6bn, of discretionary funding to allow them to support their local businesses.

As measures to control the virus have changed, government support has evolved. We continue to keep all policies under review.

Cars: Northern Ireland

Colum Eastwood: [134262]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans his Department has to assist second hand car dealers in Northern Ireland who have been affected by changes to VAT margin after the end of the transition period.

Jesse Norman:

The Northern Ireland Protocol governs the approach to VAT on goods, including the second-hand margin scheme, in Northern Ireland. As is the case for tax policy generally, the Government is keeping this under review.

Cash Dispensing

Ronnie Cowan: [130780]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with stakeholders on access to cash; and which stakeholders he has met on that issue in the last six months.

John Glen:

Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

Details of ministerial and permanent secretary meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel

Cash Dispensing: Fees and Charges

Ruth Jones: [<u>134138</u>]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of banks on the provision of free-to-use ATMs.

John Glen:

Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

Details of ministerial and permanent secretary meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel

With regards to ATMs, LINK (the scheme that runs the UK's largest ATM network) has existing arrangements in place to protect free-to-use ATMs that do not have another free-to-use ATM or Post Office within one kilometre. LINK's members have also made £5 million available to fund ATMs at the request of communities with poor

access to cash. The Payment Systems Regulator has powers to regulate LINK and is holding it to account over its commitment to protect the broad geographic spread of free-to-use ATMs.

The Government recognises that cash remains important to millions of people across the UK and has committed to protecting access to cash for those that need it. The Government published a Call for Evidence on 15 October 2020 seeking views on the key considerations associated with cash access, including deposit and withdrawal facilities, cash acceptance, and regulatory oversight of the cash system. The Call for Evidence closed on the 25 November 2020 and the Government is considering responses. Next steps will be set out in due course.

■ Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme

John McNally: [131326]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in circumstances where a business has a successful Business Interruption policy claim met and the loss adjuster deducts from that claim the amount the business had received in furlough payments, whether insurance companies are paying to HM Treasury that deduction; and if it is Government policy that deductions of furlough payments from insurance claims should be paid to the Government.

John Glen:

The Financial Conduct Authority has advised that all deductions from business interruption insurance settlements should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The individual policy wording generally sets out the basis on which the sum due to the policyholder following an insured event will be calculated. Insurers should therefore calculate claims payments in accordance with the terms and conditions of the relevant policy.

The Government is in continual dialogue with the insurance sector regarding its response to this unprecedented situation, and is encouraging insurers to do all they can to support customers during this difficult period.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Tulip Siddiq: [133089]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of amending the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme eligibility requirements so that businesses that created jobs after the 30 October 2020 PAYE submission deadline can access wage subsidy support whilst tiered restrictions are in place.

Jesse Norman:

The CJRS has seen 1.2 million employers apply to help to pay the wages of 9.9 million furloughed jobs. Cut-off dates are necessary to protect taxpayers against fraud. HMT has widened access to more people by extending the cut-off to 30 October 2020, including as many people as possible by going right up to the day

before the announcement, while protecting the taxpayer against the risk of fraud that exists as soon as the scheme becomes public.

People who are ineligible for the CJRS may be eligible for the other elements of the substantial financial support package provided by the Government, including increased Local Housing Allowance rates, a relaxation of the Universal Credit minimum income floor, and measures to make Statutory Sick Pay and new style Employment and Support Allowance easier to access.

Claire Hanna: [133280]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to review the eligibility criteria for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in light of the April extension to that scheme in order to allow people excluded and represented by #excludeduk to access that scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) has helped to protect the livelihoods of millions of people. As of 13 December, 9.9m jobs have been supported by the CJRS, with the total value of claims over £46bn.

The Government has continued to adapt and try to include as many people as practically possible. For example, in April, the Government extended the cut-off date for the CJRS to 19 March (from 28 February), bringing in over 200,000 employees to the scope of the scheme; and similarly, has introduced new cut-off dates, most recently 30 October 2020. This allows as many people as possible to be included in the scheme by going right up to the day before the announcement, balancing the risk of fraud that existed as soon as the scheme became public.

There is also extensive additional support available for businesses which may support their workforce including over £65 billion in affordable finance to firms through business loan schemes, grants, a business rates holiday, and tax cuts and deferrals. This is in addition to a temporary £8 billion increase to welfare, mortgage holidays and help with council tax payments. The Government has also introduced further support worth £4.6 billion across the United Kingdom; this includes Barnett funding of £729 million to support local businesses.

Nadia Whittome: [133314]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of people affected by delays in payments under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme; what assessment he has made of the effect of those delays on potential recipients of support; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

97% of payments in respect of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) have been made within 6 working days.

There are several reasons why a payment could have been delayed, including mistakes made by the user when completing the claim, or the need for HMRC to conduct additional fraud checks before payment is made.

Where delays in payment have been identified, HMRC have worked quickly to establish the cause and ensure that any issues are resolved quickly.

Nadia Whittome: [133315]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of placing conditions on furlough payments under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to ensure employees receive payments on time.

Jesse Norman:

As with all decisions under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), the Government is balancing the need to support as many employers and individuals as fully as it possibly can, with the need to get the CJRS running quickly and making it easy to use by employers.

After an employer makes a claim under the CJRS, HMRC check that the claim is correct and pay the claim amount into the employer's bank account within six working days. The employer must then pay their employees' wages, if they have not already.

The employer must pay the full amount claimed for the employee's wages to the employee.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[133935]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to change the Job Retention Scheme eligibility date for employees on an employer's PAYE payroll after 23:59 on 30 October 2020 following the lockdown measures announced on 4 January 4th 2021.

[133985] Martyn Day:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will expand the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to include employees who were employed on a payroll notified to HMRC after 30 October 2020.

Ben Bradley: [134113]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to further extend the cut off date for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, in response to the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown measures, to allow people who have changed jobs between October and January to be eligible for support from that scheme.

[134176] **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department will consider extending the Job Retention Scheme to include employees employed after the 30th October 2020.

Jesse Norman:

For all eligibility decisions under CJRS, the Government must balance the need to support as many jobs as possible with the need to protect the scheme from fraud.

Under the CJRS extension, an employer can claim for employees who were employed and on their PAYE payroll on 30 October 2020. The employer must have made a PAYE Real Time Information (RTI) submission to HMRC between 20 March 2020 and 30 October 2020, notifying a payment of earnings for that employee. The

use of RTI allows HMRC to verify claims in the most efficient and timely way, ensuring payments can be made quickly while reducing the risk of fraud. Without the use of RTI returns it would be difficult to verify claims without significant additional checks, which would delay payment for genuine claims.

The 30 October 2020 cut-off date allowed as many people as possible to be included by going right up to the day before the announcement, while balancing the risk of fraud that existed as soon as the scheme became public. Extending the cut-off date further would have significantly increased the risk of abuse because claims could not be confidently verified against the risk of fraud by using the data after this point.

Owen Thompson: [133975]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme beyond April 2021.

Jesse Norman:

As the Chancellor set out to the House on 17 December, in order to provide certainty to businesses and employees so that they can plan for the remainder of the winter, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been extended until the end of April 2021 and the Government will provide a further update on COVID-19 economic support at the Budget.

Mr Richard Holden: [134230]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 30 November 2020 to Question 121034 on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, when HMRC plans to publish the information on the companies that made claims under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for periods starting on or after 1 December 2020; and how regularly that information will be published.

Jesse Norman:

In line with the published direction, as part of HMRC's commitment to transparency and to deter fraudulent claims, HMRC will publish information about employers who claim under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) for periods starting on or after 1 December. This will not cover employer details for use of the CJRS prior to December. The first of these publications will be made at the end of January and will be followed on a regular monthly basis subsequently.

The publication of information will be made in line with data protection law.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Disability

Bambos Charalambous:

[134052]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what additional financial support is being made available for workers living with disabilities who have been furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Individuals living with disabilities will benefit from the substantial financial support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the Coronavirus Job

Retention Scheme (CJRS), which has been extended until the end of April 2021. It is up to the employer to make the best decision for their organisation and their employees about whether to furlough staff. Standard discrimination law applies: an employer cannot decide who should be furloughed based on any protected characteristic. However, if people with a protected characteristic disproportionately request furlough, it is acceptable that furloughs would be disproportionately weighted towards that group. It is acceptable – indeed encouraged – to consult on the process with employees.

The Government recognises the challenges presented by COVID-19 for all those who are living with a disability and are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV). CEV individuals can access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), both of which can both be claimed during lockdown.

The Government's support package during the pandemic sits alongside a substantial set of welfare support for individuals with disabilities. The Government will spend over £55 billion in 2020/21 on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. The Personal Independence Payment remains the primary means of support to help with some of the extra cost of long-term ill-health or disability. Universal Credit and new style Employment and Support Allowance are available for those who have a disability or health condition that may affect how much they can work. The Government has implemented a range of measures to make access to disability benefits easier and to protect existing claimants during the current situation. This includes temporarily suspending face to face assessments.

Coronavirus: Disease Control

Owen Thompson: [133974]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend financial support to people who have previously been ineligible for Government financial support in previous covid-19 lockdowns.

Kate Osborne: [134202]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing support to people excluded from financial help from Government schemes as a result of the eligibility criteria of those schemes.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout this crisis, the Government's priority has been to protect people's jobs and livelihoods. Since the start of the pandemic we have committed over £280 billion to supporting the economy, including supporting 9.9 million jobs through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and around 2.7 million self-employed individuals via the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS).

The Government has continued to review its support and brought in ineligible groups where possible. For example, the extended Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) is available to those directors who paid themselves a salary between 19

March and 30 October 2020, and to new starters who were employed and on their employer's PAYE payroll on 30 October 2020. Both the CJRS and SEISS have also been updated to provide support to those on maternity leave and to reservists. The Government continues to work closely with stakeholders to explore how we can best support different groups.

Those who are ineligible for the CJRS and SEISS may still be eligible for other elements of the COVID-19 support available. This comprehensive package of support includes Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support and other business support grants. The Government has also temporarily increased the Universal Credit standard allowance for 2020-21 by £20 per week and relaxed the Minimum Income Floor, meaning that where claimants' earnings have significantly fallen, their Universal Credit award will have increased to reflect their lower earnings.

Credit Cards: EU Countries

John McNally: [130766]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether online purchases from the EU made by UK customers by credit card will have to be made by (a) bank transfer and (b) in Euros after the transition period in the event of no deal being reached with the EU.

John Glen:

Online purchases by payment card from EU retailers are still possible now that the UK has left the Transition Period of EU Withdrawal. Whether a retailer accepts credit or debit cards as a payment method is a commercial decision for individual retailers.

Furthermore, the UK has maintained its participation in the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA), enabling continued Euro credit transfers and direct debits through the SEPA payment schemes.

Customs

Anneliese Dodds: [131460]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of HMRC's arrangements for throughput at the UK's ports in January 2020 in the event that (a) the UK and the EU secure and (b) do not secure a new trade agreement before the end of the transition period.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has agreed a deal with the EU. The deal provides for streamlined customs arrangements, including recognising respective trusted trader schemes, to support the smooth flow of goods at the border, including ports.

HMRC have been working closely with the border industry, including ports, to ensure they are engaging with the new requirements and have taken the necessary steps to prepare. HMRC will continue to engage in order to identify any further support HMRC can provide.

Customs Officers

Gavin Newlands: [132989]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many customs officials were employed by HMRC on (a) 30 September 2020, (b) 31 October 2020, (c) 30 November 2020 and (d) 31 December 2020.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC are unable to provide the information requested as HMRC do not categorise employees as "customs officials".

Customs: Northern Ireland

Bridget Phillipson: 130703

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many words are in the most recent assessment prepared by HMRC on the security and infrastructure that would be required solely for customs purposes on the Ireland/UK land border in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a trade deal.

Jesse Norman:

As a consequence of the Northern Ireland Protocol, there is no requirement for any new security or infrastructure in respect of the Ireland/UK land border. Goods in Northern Ireland can move freely from and into Ireland and the rest of the EU without any customs checks or controls.

Debts: Coronavirus

[130860] Marco Longhi:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to tackle the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on levels of household debt in Dudley North constituency.

John Glen:

The Government has delivered unprecedented support for living standards during this challenging time, protecting livelihoods with the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and temporary welfare measures

The Government has extended the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme until 30 April 2021. Eligible employees will continue to receive 80% of their usual salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.

The Government has increased the overall level of the third grant under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to 80 per cent of average trading profits, meaning that the maximum grant available has now increased to £7,500

The Government has provided Local Authorities with £500 million to support people who may struggle to meet their council tax payments this year. The Government expects that this will provide all recipients of working age local council tax support with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of £150 this financial year

These measures are in addition to the changes this Government has made to make the welfare system more generous, worth over £7 billion according to recent OBR estimates. This includes a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element, and a nearly £1 billion increase in support for renters through increases to Local Housing Allowance rates

We have also worked with mortgage lenders, credit providers and the Financial Conduct Authority to ensure the financial sector provides support for people across the UK to manage their finances by providing payment holidays on mortgages and consumer credit products

The Government has also provided unprecedented support for businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This support includes the Coronavirus Business Interruption Scheme, Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Scheme, Bounce Back Loan Scheme and the Future Fund which, as of 13 December, have collectively supported over 1.5 million businesses with facilities worth over £68bn. The Chancellor has announced that the Government has extended the application deadline for these schemes to a single date, 31 January 2020, meaning that even more businesses will have access to financial support

To help people in problem debt get their finances back on track, an extra £37.8 million support package is being made available to debt advice providers this financial year, bringing this year's budget for free debt advice in England to over £100 million

In May, the Government also announced the immediate release of £65 million dormant assets funding to Fair4All Finance, an independent organisation that has been founded to support the financial wellbeing of people in vulnerable circumstances. The funding is used to increase access to fair, affordable and appropriate financial products and services for those in financial difficulties

From May 2021 the Breathing Space scheme will offer people in problem debt a pause of up to 60 days on most enforcement action, interest, fees and charges, and will encourage them to seek professional debt advice.

Data on levels of over-indebtedness in Dudley North was last published in 2018 by the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS), who continue to fund local delivery of debt advice through Dudley Citizens Advice. MaPS will be publishing updated figures in 2021.

Debts: Developing Countries

Preet Kaur Gill: [131393]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent steps he has taken to provide the tools necessary for low income countries to reduce debt from private lenders.

John Glen:

G20 Finance Ministers have agreed to a "Common Framework for Future Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI", which provides a process for coordinated debt

treatments by the Paris Club and G20 creditors. Under the Common Framework, private sector creditors will be required to implement debt restructurings that are at least equivalent to those agreed by official creditors. This agreement should pave the way for more equitable and effective case-by-case debt restructurings, which are likely to be required as part of the recovery from the Covid crisis. The Common Framework applies to any country that is International Development Association (IDA) - eligible or on the UN's list of Least Developed Countries.

The UK is providing £1m over two years to the African Legal Support Facility, which provides expert legal and financial advice to African countries, specialising in creditor litigation.

The UK is also providing £4m over 5 years to fund the Debt Management Facility, a joint IMF-World Bank trust fund focused on building debt management capacity in low income countries.

Eat Out to Help Out Scheme

Zarah Sultana: [130852]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many restaurants registered for the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme; how many meals were claimed through that scheme; and how much was claimed in each (i) Local Authority District, (ii) parliamentary constituency and (iii) Middle Layer Super Output Area in each week when that scheme was operational.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC published official statistics on the Eat Out to Help Out scheme on 25 November. Local area statistics covering local authority district and parliamentary constituencies will be published at a later date. The requested information cannot be provided by middle layer super output area due to the risk of identifying individual taxpayers.

Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Stephen McPartland:

[130720]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing a new annual investment allowance for electric vehicle infrastructure which would allow 100 per cent of investment costs for all electric vehicle infrastructure to be offset against corporation tax.

Jesse Norman:

A specific capital allowance is currently available to businesses investing in new equipment for electric vehicle charging points. This can provide a tax deduction of 100 per cent of the investment for the tax period in which it is incurred. It is available for qualifying expenditure for businesses chargeable to UK corporation tax until 31 March 2023, and those chargeable to income tax until 5 April 2023.

Dr Alan Whitehead: [131163]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what investments the UK Charging Infrastructure Investment Fund, managed by Zouk Capital, has made to date; in which companies those investments were made; and the amount of each investment.

Jesse Norman:

The CIIF was launched in August 2019, and Zouk Capital LLP was appointed to manage £200m of Treasury funds and raise matching funds from private investors. The aim of the CIIF is to accelerate the roll-out of publicly accessible charging infrastructure by investing in new and existing companies and projects that produce and install charge points; this is so that charging infrastructure is not an impediment to the growth of the electric vehicle market in the UK.

The fund's first investment in August 2019 was into *InstaVolt*, the UK's largest owner and operator of rapid EV charging stations with plans to nationally bolster rapid charge points to a total of 5,000. The second investment in May 2020 focuses on providing on-street charging facilities in large cities and towns where many residents have no access to off-street parking; *Liberty Charge*, a joint venture between multinational telecommunications company Liberty Global and Zouk Capital, will roll out on-street residential electric vehicle charging points in the UK to address this shortage.

The investment amounts are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

Electric Vehicles: Tax Allowances

Stephen McPartland:

[130719]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to extend the 100 per cent first year allowance on the purchase of electric vehicles to include the rental sector in order to facilitate the transition from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles.

Jesse Norman:

The existing 100 per cent first year allowances, which are available for the purchase of electric vehicles in respect of business cars and zero emission goods vehicles, are being extended to 2025 in order to continue to incentivise the transition to zero CO₂ emission vehicles. First year allowances are not available for equipment purchased for leasing; there are no plans to introduce this for zero emission goods vehicles or to reintroduce it for low emission cars, as such assets could be leased overseas. This ensures that the environmental benefits of such incentives remain within the UK to assist the Government in achieving its wider commitment to achieve net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050.

Energy: VAT

Stephen McPartland:

[<u>133837</u>]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of removing VAT from household energy bills.

Jesse Norman:

Under the current VAT rules, domestic fuels such as gas and electricity are already subject to the reduced VAT rate of five per cent. Although the Government keeps all taxes under review, there are no plans to change the current VAT treatment of domestic energy.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development: Animal Welfare

Tim Farron: [130674]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on the steps that Bank takes to ensure that all livestock projects it funds meet EU animal welfare standards as required by the terms of that Bank's environmental and social policy.

John Glen:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is the UK Governor for the EBRD. All prospective projects are reviewed and scrutinised by the EBRD in line with the Bank's project process, and this analysis is provided to shareholders ahead of discussion and approval by the Board of Directors. The UK assesses all projects to ensure that they meet the EBRD's mandate and the high environmental and social standards required by its 2019 Environmental and Social Policy.

Events Industry: Coronavirus

Nadia Whittome: [133318]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of financial support for the events industry during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government recognises the extreme disruption the necessary actions to combat Covid-19 are having on sectors like events and exhibitions.

During this difficult time the Treasury is working intensively with employers, delivery partners, industry groups and other government departments such as the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport to understand the long-term effects of COVID-19 on the events sector.

The Chancellor has already announced unprecedented support for individuals and businesses to protect against the current economic emergency. This includes the deferral of VAT payments and a year-long rates holiday for eligible businesses while some businesses have benefitted from a range of grants and government-backed and guaranteed loan schemes.

The Government has further set out our economic package of support for businesses over the Winter, including monthly grants for closed businesses worth up to £3,000 per month, extending the furlough scheme to April and providing further SEISS grants to support the self-employed to April.

But given the further national restrictions announced by the Prime Minister, the Treasury is providing additional support to the most affected businesses, worth £4.6 billion across the United Kingdom.

- A one-off grant for closed businesses in England of up to £9,000
- £500m discretionary funding provided to English local authorities to support local businesses

Furthermore, the application deadline for the loan guarantee schemes – Bounce Back Loan Scheme, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme – has been extended to the end of March 2021 and we will also adjust the Bounce Back Loan Scheme rules to allow businesses who have borrowed less than their maximum (i.e. less than 25 per cent of their turnover) to top-up their existing loan.

We will continue to monitor the impact of Government support with regard to supporting businesses, individuals, and sectors such as events as we respond to this pandemic.

Exports: VAT

James Murray: [130249]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment (a) his Department and (b) the Office for Budget Responsibility have made of the (i) direct and (ii) indirect effect on jobs of the decision to end the VAT Retail Export Scheme on 31 December 2020.

Kemi Badenoch:

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 the changes with stakeholders following the announcement of these policies.

The detailed rationale for these changes are included in the written ministerial statement and summary of responses to the recent consultation: https://questionsstatements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-09-11/hcws448 and https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-consultation-on-duty-free-and-taxfree-goods-carried-by-passengers. A technical note has also been issued to stakeholders to expand on this document and to respond to issues raised by stakeholders.

On 25 November the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) set out their assessment of the fiscal impact of the withdrawal of the VAT RES. Factoring in a higher-than-usual elasticity of 1.9 to account for spending on luxury goods, the OBR estimate that the withdrawal of the VAT RES will result in a significant direct Exchequer saving of around £400 million per year, once passenger numbers recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Based on the 1.2 million users of the scheme who received a refund in 2019, this includes an assumption that approximately 20,000 -30,000 fewer tourists visit Great Britain a year. That is 0.07% of the 40 million visitors to the UK in 2019.

The OBR also looked at this package in the round when assessing the indirect impact on the economy – including the effects of extending duty-free sales – alongside the substantial support provided to the economy and retail industry.

Financial Services: UK Trade with EU

Owen Thompson: [133051]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Government plans to publish detailed arrangements for equivalence decisions on access to EU markets for the financial services sector.

John Glen:

On 9 November 2020 the Chancellor announced a package of equivalence decisions for the EU and EEA member states in favour of openness and certainty for industry. The Government is not ruling out further equivalence decisions for the EU and EEA Member States in the future and remains open to further dialogue with the EU about their intentions with regard to equivalence decisions for the UK. Details covering the Government's equivalence decisions were published on GOV.UK in November and are available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-treasuryequivalence-decisions-for-the-eea-states-9-november-2020/hm-treasuryequivalence-decisions-for-the-eea-states-9-november-2020

Food: Wholesale Trade

Dr Julian Lewis: [133612]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the extent of the dependence of (a) NHS hospitals and (b) care homes on supplies provided by food and drink wholesalers; and if he will make it his policy to give (i) business rates relief backdated to the start of the covid-19 outbreak to such wholesalers in recognition of the importance of their support for the NHS and (ii) other financial assistance to such wholesalers in recognition that they cannot make full use of the furlough scheme on account of their role in supporting the NHS.

Jesse Norman:

This year the Government has provided an unprecedented business rates holiday for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties due to the direct adverse effects of COVID-19, worth about £10 billion, and has frozen the business rates multiplier for all businesses for 2021-22.

The Government does not expect the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme (CJRS) to be widely used by public sector organisations. Where employers receive public funding for staff costs, and that funding is continuing, the Government expects employers to use that money to continue to pay staff in the usual fashion, and correspondingly not to furlough them through the CJRS. This also applies to non-public sector employers who receive public funding for staff costs. In a small number of cases, for example, where organisations are not primarily funded by the Government and whose staff cannot be redeployed to assist with the coronavirus response, the scheme may be appropriate for some staff.

There are various schemes that can provide support to specific firms such as wholesalers, including Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans, Bounce Back Loans, grants and VAT deferrals.

Free Zones

Bridget Phillipson: [130695]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will place in the Library the estimates that were produced with regard to the UK Global Tariff and freeports policy of which forms of industrial activity using the standard industrial classification would benefit most from tariff inversion in new freeports in the UK.

Steve Barclay:

Freeports will benefit the UK by increasing trade, employment and investment. Firms importing goods into Freeports can take advantage of several customs benefits, including tariff inversion, alongside wider benefits. The Freeport Bidding Prospectus provides the full details that interested parties need in order to assess the benefits of Freeport status to them and join a Freeport Bidding Coalition.

■ Free Zones: Job Creation

Bridget Phillipson: [131249]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of jobs that will be created by the introduction of free ports in the UK; and what (a) methodology and (b) international examples he used to calculate that estimate; and if he will make a statement.

Steve Barclay:

The Freeports policy will unleash the potential of our ports, regenerating communities across the UK, attracting new businesses and spreading jobs, investment and opportunity to towns and cities up and down the country.

We have developed an extremely ambitious and attractive offer, built on engagement with industry experts and economists, examination of international best practice and public consultation.

On Monday 16 November 2020 the government published the bidding prospectus for Freeports in England, setting out further details on our proposals for the policy and inviting bids by Friday 5 February 2021.

The bids will be assessed against the objectives of the policy, with regeneration and job creation as the lead objective.

Hospitality Industry and Tourism: VAT

Sarah Olney: [131375]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending the 5 per cent VAT rate for tourism and hospitality until at least the end of 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary VAT reduced rate came into effect on 15 July 2020 and was initially scheduled to end on 12 January 2021.

In order to continue to support the cash flow and viability of over 150,000 businesses and to protect 2.4 million jobs, the Government extended the temporary reduced rate of VAT to goods and services supplied by the tourism and hospitality sectors until 31 March 2021.

While the Government keeps all taxes under review, this relief comes at a significant cost to the Exchequer, and there are currently no plans to further extend the length of the reduced rate.

Hospitality Industry: Coronavirus

Sarah Olney: [131374]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending the 100 per cent business rates holiday into 2021-22 for the hospitality industry.

Jesse Norman:

This year the Government has provided an unprecedented business rates holiday for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties due to the direct adverse effects of COVID-19, worth over £10 billion. The Government has also provided Local Authorities with £1.1 billion across England via the Additional Restrictions Grant, for businesses which are not legally closed, but are nonetheless severely affected by local or national restrictions.

In the 2020 Spending Review, the Government committed further support to businesses, including retail, hospitality and leisure, by freezing the business rates multiplier for 2021-22. In order to ensure that any decisions best meet the evolving challenges presented by COVID-19, the Government will outline plans for 2021-22 reliefs in the New Year.

Alex Sobel: [133150]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the level of financial support required by non-pub businesses affected by the hospitality curfew during the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

In December, the 10pm closing time for hospitality was modified to last orders at 10pm and closing time at 11pm. This was to allow customers to depart gradually and provide greater flexibility for hospitality venues. The Government recognises that nonpub businesses and restaurants, would have been impacted by these and other restrictions. This is why the Government has acted to deliver support to these businesses through:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), which has supported 1.4 million jobs across the hospitality sector, and has been extended until the end of April 2021.
- Businesses forced to close can claim grants of up to £3,000 per month. In addition, on 5th January, the Government announced an extra £4.6 billion to protect jobs and support affected businesses as restrictions get tougher. This includes retail, hospitality and leisure businesses forced to close can claim a one-off grant of up to £9,000. Businesses can receive multiple grants, as they are eligible on a per premises basis. The Government expect over 600,000 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure business premises in England to benefit from these grants.
- Local Authorities (in England) will also be given an additional £500 million of discretionary funding to support their local businesses. This builds on the £1.1 billion discretionary funding which local authorities in England have already received to support their local economies and help businesses impacted.
- A VAT deferral for up to 12 months.
- Access to affordable, Government backed finance through the Coronavirus
 Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) and the Coronavirus Large Business
 Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBLS) for and larger firms, along with the Bounce
 Back Loan Scheme (BBL) for small and micro enterprises.
- A reduced rate of VAT (5 per cent) to goods and services supplied by the tourism and hospitality sectors.
- A 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England, saving around 350,000 ratepayers a combined £10bn.

The Government is continuing to collect evidence on the impact of the pandemic on the sector and to work with businesses and representative groups to inform our efforts to support it.

HSBC: Bounce Back Loan Scheme

Patrick Grady: [130767]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect of HSBC's decision to stop offering Bounce Back loans to non-HSBC UK customers on the accessibility of that scheme; and if he will make a statement.

John Glen:

The Government launched the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLS) to ensure that the smallest businesses could access loans of up to £50,000 in a matter of just days. As of 13 December, the scheme has provided unprecedented support to business across the UK, with more than 1.4 million businesses accessing facilities totaling over £43.5 billion.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been unprecedented demand for banking services, this accompanied with working restrictions due to social distancing has meant banks have faced significant capacity pressures which has limited their ability to meet demand.

The Government have always made clear to lenders that they should open to new customers as soon as it is operationally possible for them to do so. Lenders are fully aware of the current urgency, so we would expect them to respond appropriately to their customers' needs. Whilst BBLS is 100% guaranteed by the Government, decisions about what products are offered to specific businesses remain commercial decisions for banks and building societies.

The British Business Bank has so far accredited 29 BBLS lenders, including several non-banks and alternative lenders. Some lenders are still inviting applications from new customers, and many of those that are still only open to existing customers are regularly reviewing that position.

Insurance: Coronavirus

Harriett Baldwin: [131260]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to engage with the insurance industry to assess the availability of pandemic insurance for businesses.

John Glen:

The Government is in continual dialogue with the insurance sector on its response to this unprecedented situation. We are working closely with the insurers, the trade bodies and regulators to understand what more the industry can do to help individuals and businesses in time of need, and how the insurance market delivers the support firms need as the economy reopens.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, some insurance companies have chosen to pause the sale of some insurance policies, or will not include cover for COVID-19 related claims in any new or renewed policies. Insurers take commercial decisions regarding the products they offer and risks they cover based on their view of the likelihood of a risk occurring, and have cited the likelihood of COVID-19 risk crystallising as a challenge to insure.

The Government recognises that businesses who do not have appropriate insurance cover will require support from elsewhere and encourages businesses to seek assistance through the wider support package if they are in financial difficulty.

Landlords: Tax Allowances

Kevin Hollinrake: [133962]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much additional revenue has been raised as a result of the decision to restrict mortgage interest relief for residential landlords to the basic rate of income tax, in each year since April 2017.

Jesse Norman:

From April 2017 to April 2020, the Government phased in a restriction of deductions for finance costs for landlords of residential properties to the equivalent of the basic rate of income tax. The restriction makes the tax system fairer by ensuring landlords with higher incomes no longer receive the most generous tax treatment.

The restriction is estimated to have increased income tax liabilities by about £150 million in its first year (2017-18). Estimates for subsequent years are not available.

Members: Correspondence

Rachel Hopkins: [134290]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Luton South of 24 November 2020 on pay in the civil service and related bodies.

Steve Barclay:

The letter received on 24th November 2020 regarding Civil Service pay concerned a petition in the name of Francesca Heathcote. The government responded to this petition in the debate on the 14th December 2020.

Minimum Wage: Non-payment

Bridget Phillipson: [133813]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 December 2020 to Question 130041 on Minimum Wage: Non-payment, what estimate he has made of the (a) amount of national minimum wage (NMW) arrears identified by HMRC, (b) number of firms identified by HMRC as liable to pay NMW arrears, (c) amount of those arrears paid to workers who should have been paid them in the first instance, (d) number of workers identified as eligible for such arrears, (e) amount of arrears paid to such workers and (f)

number of workers identified as eligible for such arrears but not traced and paid in each year since 2010-11.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is determined that everyone who is entitled to the National Minimum Wage (NMW) should receive it.

HMRC enforce the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) in line with the law and policy set out by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

The table below provides a breakdown of figures for the total amount of arrears outstanding, number of businesses and the number of workers identified by HMRC for breaches of National Minimum Wage legislation since 2010.

YEAR	AMOUNT OF ARREARS (A)	NUMBER OF BUSINESSES (B)	NUMBER OF WORKERS (D)
2010 - 2011	£3,818.396	1,140	22,919
2011 - 2012	£3,582,685	968	17,371
2012 – 2013	£3,974,008	736	26,519
2013 – 2014	£4.645,547	680	22,610
2014 – 2015	£3,291,529	735	26,318
2015 – 2016	£10,281,396	958	58,080
2016 – 2017	£10,918,047	1,134	98,150
2017 – 2018	£15,615,609	1,016	201,785
2018 – 2019	£24,447,919	1,357	221,581
2019 - 2020	£20,836,609	1,260	263,350

In all cases where employers are found to owe arrears to workers HMRC are able to recover almost all arrears and carry out checks to ensure the money is repaid to the workers in question. Where an employer fails to pay back arrears, HMRC will take legal action through the civil courts on behalf of the worker to enforce the debt. (c, e)

Where an officer identifies arrears for workers, they may issue a Notice of Underpayment (NOU) requiring the employer to pay those workers within a 28-day period. Any worker placed on a Notice of Underpayment must be able to be contacted/traced at the time the NOU is issued. Every effort is made to trace workers, but this is not always possible if for example they have moved and left no forwarding address. HMRC are unable to provide data about workers who were not included on Notices of Underpayment. (f)

National Savings and Investments: Discrimination

Bridget Phillipson: [130697]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many complaints have been made by staff of National Savings & Investments of sexist behaviour in the workplace in each of the last five years.

John Glen:

NS&I treats all discrimination, bullying and harassment, as misconduct and follows disciplinary procedure.

NS&I has not received any formal complaints of sexist behaviour in the workplace in each of the last five years.

■ National Savings and Investments: Racial Discrimination

Anneliese Dodds: [131456]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the National Savings & Investments, how many complaints have been received of racist behaviour in the workplace in each of the last five years.

John Glen:

NS&I treats all discrimination, bullying and harassment, as misconduct and follows disciplinary procedure.

NS&I has not received any formal complaints of racist behaviour in the workplace in each of the last five years.

National Savings and Investments: Recruitment

Bridget Phillipson: [130696]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many staff have taken up a post in National Savings & Investments, in each of the last five years.

John Glen:

Table: Number of staff NS&I has recruited in each of the last five years.

YEAR	NUMBER OF STAFF	
2019-20	24	
2018-19	22	
2017-18	17	
2016-17	21	
2015-16	16	

National Savings and Investments: Sick Leave

Bridget Phillipson: [130702]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many working days have been lost to staff sickness in National Savings & Investments in each month of the last five years.

John Glen:

The table attached provides the information requested.

Attachments:

1. Table 1 [OWPQ Template HMT_PQW_19-21_2020_46099 (1).pdf]

National Savings and Investments: Termination of Employment

Anneliese Dodds: [131455]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to National Savings & Investments, how many staff have left a post in each of the last five years.

John Glen:

Table: Number of staff in NS&I who have left a post in each of the last five years.

YEAR	NUMBER OF STAFF	
2019-20	34	
2018-19	19	
2017-18	27	
2016-17	23	
2015-16	34	

National Savings and Investments: Vacancies

Anneliese Dodds: [131454]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to National Savings & Investments, for how many person-days posts have been vacant in each of the last five years.

John Glen:

NS&I does not hold data for how many person-days posts have been vacant in each of the last five years.

Nurseries: Non-domestic Rates

Dr Kieran Mullan: [133302]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the business rates holiday granted for nurseries beyond March 2021.

Kemi Badenoch:

This year the Government has provided an unprecedented business rates holiday for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties, and nurseries, due to the direct adverse effects of COVID-19, worth over £10 billion. In the 2020 Spending Review, the Government committed further support to businesses by freezing the business rates multiplier for 2021-22.

The Government recognises the important contribution that nurseries and childminders are making to the national response to COVID-19. In the Spending Review we announced that we're providing £44 million next year to increase hourly rates paid to childcare providers. This is on top of the additional £66m increase confirmed in Spending Round 2019.

In order to ensure that any decisions best meet the evolving challenges presented by COVID-19, the government will outline plans for 2021-22 reliefs in early 2021.

■ Parents: Coronavirus

Tracy Brabin: [134043]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support he has made available to parents who are home schooling due to the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Steve Barclay:

The government has invested over £300 million to support remote education, including providing devices and internet access to pupils who need it most.

Since its introduction, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) has been available to anyone who has been unable to work due to caring responsibilities arising from COVID-19, such as caring for children who are at home as a result of school and childcare facilities closing, or caring for a vulnerable individual in their household. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme is also available to parents and carers who cannot work because of childcare commitments.

In order to support businesses to retain their employees and protect the UK economy, the Chancellor has extended both the CJRS and SEISS until the end of April 2021.

Individual families have also benefitted from increased welfare payments, enhances statutory sick pay, a stay of repossession proceedings and mortgage holidays.

Performing Arts: Coronavirus

Bridget Phillipson: [130705]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on eligibility for financial support of people who found new work on or after 31 October 2020 as a result of the planned resumption of live performances in December and January and have since been affected by the introduction of new covid-19 restrictions announced on 14 December 2020.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government recognises the extreme disruption the necessary actions to combat Covid-19 are having on the live events industry.

The Government has put in place an economic package of support which will provide businesses and individuals with certainty over the winter months, even as measures to prevent further spread of the virus change. This includes the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), the Self Employed Income Support Scheme and government-backed loan schemes.

An employer can claim CJRS for employees who were employed and on their PAYE payroll on 30 October 2020. The employer must have made a PAYE Real Time Information (RTI) submission to HMRC between 20 March 2020 and 30 October 2020, notifying a payment of earnings for that employee. This means that the former cut-off date for CJRS (which was 19 March) no longer applies for claim periods from 1 November, and will now include all new employees that have been hired since, so long as their employer have notified payment to HMRC about the employee (via a Real Time Information claim) between 20 March and 30 October.

However, eligible businesses organizing liver performances may benefit from the £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund. To date, more than £790m of grants and loans have been allocated to over 3,000 cultural organisations in England. Organisations supported include theatres, performing arts, galleries, museums, orchestras, music venues, comedy clubs and festivals. This funding will help to enable performances to restart, protect jobs and create opportunities for freelancers.

The government has also provided funding to local authorities, to support both open and closed businesses through the Local Restrictions Support Grants and the Additional Restrictions Grant.

Treasury Ministers and officials are working intensively with departments like the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in order to understand the impact that Covid-19 is having on workers and sectors.

We will continue to take a flexible approach and keep all impacts and policies under review as we respond to this pandemic.

Ports: Wales

Hywel Williams: [133720]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions officials in his Department have had with (a) small maritime ports and (b) wharves in (i) Amlwch, (ii) Menai bridge and (iii) the rest of Wales on the necessary infrastructure for compliance with regulations in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC carried out high level engagement with small maritime ports and wharves ahead of the end of the transition period; this includes those within Wales.

Ports indicating an intention to operate CTC will have also received direct communications from HMRC to understand their position for January 2021. Officials will carry out more detailed engagement with these stakeholders ahead of July 2021 to ensure they are ready for the introduction of staged controls.

Protective Clothing: VAT

Bridget Phillipson: [130027]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the ending of the temporary VAT reduction on personal protective equipment on funeral director companies.

Bridget Phillipson: [130028]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of which sectors of the economy have been most affected by increases in the cost of personal protective equipment since the ending of the temporary VAT exemption on that equipment on 31 October 2020.

Bridget Phillipson: [130029]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to support funeral director companies to access Government stocks of personal protective equipment after the end of the temporary VAT reduction on those items.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary zero rate was an extraordinary measure introduced to help affected sectors (such as hospitals and care homes) during the initial shock of the COVID-19 crisis, when global supply of PPE did not meet demand and PPE was procured directly from the open market.

DHSC have now committed in the Winter Plan to provide free PPE for COVID-19 needs to adult social care until March 2021 via the PPE portal and will supply all other adult social care services that will not be supplied via the PPE portal via a combination of the local resilience forums and local authorities.

The funeral sector source their own PPE through their normal supply routes. In extreme circumstances, there is provision for them to approach their local resilience forum or local authority to discuss access to an emergency supply.

Redundancy: Coronavirus

Nadia Whittome: [133316]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of employees made redundant from companies who have been in receipt of financial support from the public purse during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

An estimate of the number of employees made redundant from companies receiving financial support during the COVID-19 outbreak is not available.

HMRC publish experimental monthly estimates of payrolled employees and their pay from Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) data (jointly with the ONS):

https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/earningsandemploymentfrompayasyouearnrealtimeinformationuk/previousReleases.

On 22 October HMRC published secondary analysis which matched CJRS and PAYE Real RTI data. This showed that 90% of employees who left the CJRS furlough scheme between April and July were still on their original payroll in August, suggesting they remained working for their original employer. This analysis does not distinguish between employees who have chosen to leave their jobs and those who have been made redundant. There are many other reasons that people leave, for example to start a new role, retirement, or to enter full time education. The secondary analysis can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-secondary-analysis/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-secondary-analysis-of-ended-furloughs

Redundancy: Females

Ed Davey: [133627]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what safeguards are in place to protect women from a higher job loss rate than men as a result of economic damage from the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

To help protect people's jobs, the Government announced the unprecedented Coronavirus Job Retention, or "furlough", Scheme (CJRS) to help firms keep millions of people in employment. In total, up to 31 October, almost 4.5 million female jobs had been supported through the scheme. The CJRS has been extended until the end of April.

Alongside this, the government has announced additional support for working parents. Any working parent usually eligible for Tax Free Childcare or 30 hours free childcare in receipt of support through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme or Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will temporarily remain eligible if they fall

below the minimum income requirement due to COVID-19. This supports parents with childcare commitments who are temporarily working less as result of Covid-19.

In its Plan for Jobs, the Government has announced unprecedented support to help unemployed people in Great Britain find a job. We are providing £1.2bn this year to significantly expand and enhance work search support, including doubling the number of work coaches, additional investment into the Flexible Support Fund to provide direct support at a local level, and using externally contracted provision to expand support even further.

This Spending Review builds on this by providing £3.6 billion additional funding in 2021-22 for DWP to deliver employment support to those who need it most – from helping the recently unemployed to swiftly find new work, to offering greater support for people who will find that journey harder.

These measures will help provide job opportunities to women.

Regional Planning and Development

Dan Jarvis: [R] [133855]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what definition his Department has of the term levelling up; what metrics his Department uses to measure levelling up; and whether those metrics include targets.

Kemi Badenoch:

The government is levelling up opportunity across the UK. HM Treasury is committed to levelling up the economy, by ensuring strong employment and increasing productivity across the regions and nations of the UK.

The Spending Review established a set of provisional priority outcomes and metrics across all departments and policy areas which have been published here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents.

Retail Trade: Coronavirus

Kirsten Oswald: [131301]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 15 December 2020 to Question 127486 on Retail Trade: Coronavirus, what plans he has to ensure that online retailers make a significant contribution towards the cost of reopening local high streets across the UK.

Kemi Badenoch:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the retail sector. People are shopping online more frequently, however, online sales and click and collect services have provided many high street businesses with an important revenue stream during this period. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that despite many store closures in November, nearly 90% of retail businesses continued to trade in some form through this month. This suggest that despite store closures, many high street businesses were able to continue to trade online.

Online retailers have also provided a vital lifeline for those self-isolating or shielding. Goods ordered online have helped people receive the food and supplies they need, supported home working, education, entertainment, helped friends and family stay connected, and enabled people to have the parts they need to carry out home repairs.

The Government has always been clear that online retail can continue to operate and is encouraged. These online retail businesses however must meet legal and tax obligations like any other. For example, the threshold for VAT registration is the same whether you sell online or from a physical store.

The Government will continue to support high street businesses as it has done through the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund, and the Future High Streets and Towns Funds. This is in addition to the wide-ranging support the Government has already delivered to these sectors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including extending the CJRS until April; and protecting businesses with cash grants, Government backed finance through loan schemes, a VAT deferral, a 12-month business rates holiday; and a moratorium on evictions to protect commercial tenants.

Revenue and Customs: Contracts

Navendu Mishra: [130256]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what HMRC's policy is on using companies that engage in tax avoidance.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC, as the tax authority, adopt a robust approach to tax compliance for their own procurements. HMRC conduct tax compliance checks for their own competitive tenders, reserving the right to exclude a supplier where they can demonstrate a breach of tax/social security obligations by the supplier, including in instances where no binding judicial or administrative decision has been made.

Suppliers bidding for HMRC contracts valued at over £5 million are also required to self-certify their tax compliance status (Cabinet Office Procurement Policy Notice 03/14), including declaring: (i) any convictions for tax related offences/civil penalties for fraud or evasion; (ii) successful challenges under the General Anti-Abuse Rule (GAAR) or the 'Halifax' abuse principle; or (iii) involvement in a failed avoidance scheme which was/should have been notified under the Disclosure of Tax Avoidance Scheme (DOTAS). The circumstances surrounding any such declaration would be considered before any decision is taken on contract award.

HMRC also undertake extensive tax compliance checks both as part of the procurement process and at least annually for all high value/risk/complexity contracts and for some selected low value/high risk or high complexity contracts. HMRC's standard contractual terms and conditions allow them to terminate a contract where a supplier is in breach of tax law during the term of a contract.

Revenue and Customs: Debt Collection

Navendu Mishra: [130251]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much money has been recovered by debt collection companies contracted by HMRC since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

Since March 2020, private sector debt collection agencies have collected £321 million on behalf of HMRC. To put that into context, HMRC have collected £38.7 billion of debt in total in the period from April to November 2020.

Patrick Grady: [130768]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the employment by HMRC of debt collection companies based in off-shore tax havens; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC do not hire Debt Collection Agencies (DCAs) directly. DCAs are hired via the Debt Market Integrator (DMI) Framework, currently with Indesser. As a tax authority HMRC adopt a strengthened approach to tax compliance for their own procurements, conducting robust checks on each of the DCAs engaged through the DMI. None of the DCAs onboarded to the HMRC panel (of which there are 8) is based in offshore tax havens; all are registered and based in the UK.

Navendu Mishra: [130869]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many debt collection companies whose accounts are based in offshore tax havens have been hired by HMRC since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC do not hire debt collection agencies (DCAs) directly. DCAs are engaged to collect a small proportion of HMRC tax debt via the Debt Market Integrator (DMI) Framework, currently with Indesser. None of the eight DCAs brought onto the HMRC panel (from the framework) is based in offshore tax havens; all are registered and based in the UK. Even though the DCAs are not hired directly by HMRC, as a tax authority HMRC conduct robust compliance checks on each of the DCAs on the panel, on at least an annual basis.

Revenue and Customs: Foreign Companies

Navendu Mishra: [130254]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what HMRC's policy is on using companies that are not registered in the UK.

Jesse Norman:

Public sector procurement is subject to a legal framework which encourages free and open competition and value for money, in line with internationally and nationally agreed obligations and regulations. In line with these regulations, HM Revenue and

Customs (HMRC) are required to treat suppliers from third-party countries equally to companies registered in the UK. In compliance with these obligations, HMRC may award a contract to a company not registered in the UK, should such a supplier be successful as part of a relevant procurement process.

Navendu Mishra: [130255]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what HMRC's policy is on using companies registered in tax havens.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC's standard contract terms and conditions prohibit the use of any arrangements involving the use of offshore companies, or other offshore entities, whereby the main purpose is to achieve a reduction in United Kingdom tax of any description. Failure to meet such requirements may constitute a 'Supplier Termination Event', allowing HMRC to terminate the contract with the supplier.

Navendu Mishra: [130870]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many companies whose accounts are based in offshore tax havens have been hired by HMRC since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

The information requested could only be made available at disproportionate cost. Due to the high number of contracts awarded by HMRC, it would take a significant amount of HMRC staff resource to obtain the information requested. HMRC records are not held in such a way as to identify companies by the location of their accounts.

However, HMRC do include clauses within their standard contract terms and conditions that prohibit the use of arrangements involving the use of offshore entities, whereby the main purpose is to achieve a reduction in UK tax of any description.

Revenue and Customs: Internet and Telephone Services

Anneliese Dodds: [131463]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has for HMRC staffing levels in the next six months for (a) telephone and (b) webchat services providing businesses and individuals with advice on customs arrangements.

Jesse Norman:

Resource deployed on to the Customs & International (CIT) line from 9 November was 20 full time equivalent (FTE), increasing to the planned core level of 100 FTE by 14 December 2020. This provides capacity to handle 10,000 calls/chats per week.

HMRC have also have trained standby resource of a further 100 FTE to support any increase in demand. The standby resource increased to 300 FTE from 21 December 2020. This resource when added to core resource, delivers capacity to handle 38,000 calls/week. Further contingency has also been identified requiring a change in operational priorities across HMRC's Customer Services Group. Core, standby and

contingency resource combined would provide capacity to handle 60,000 calls per week.

Regular reviews are planned to ensure core deployment matches underlying demand.

Alongside the scalable resourcing plan, HMRC extended the opening hours of the CIT line. From 14 December, opening times were 08.00-20.00 Monday-Friday. HMRC also provided a service on 1 st and 2 nd January 2021 from 08.00-16.00 and are providing a service for each Saturday thereafter.

Revenue and Customs: Recruitment

James Murray: [130247]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many of the approximately 7,000 additional staff that HMRC aimed to recruit by 1 January 2021 to manage post-transition period processes (a) have been recruited, (b) will be based in call centres and (c) will be directly employed by HMRC.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC had c.7,000 permanent (directly employed) staff by 1 January to deliver post-transition requirements.

HMRC forecast that about 200 telephony advisers would be required to meet customer demand. However, HMRC developed deployment plans to make 300 staff available, who had the capacity to answer about 8,000 calls per day, with the capability to flex more resource if required. HMRC have put in place streamlined routes for customers to support more complex customs arrangements.

James Murray: [130248]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what roles will be filled by the approximately 7,000 additional staff whom HMRC aimed to recruit by 1 January 2021 to manage post-transition period processes; and how many hours of training an employee will have received by the time they start work in each role.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC had c.7,000 permanent staff by 1 January to support delivery of post-transition requirements, sourced through both redeployment and external recruitment. The post-transition roles comprise specialist and non-specialist, and operational and support, roles. Not all roles require additional training and HMRC do not track their training requirements against all 7,000 staff. HMRC are therefore unable to provide a breakdown of training time across the full permanent complement without incurring significant additional costs. Newly recruited operational staff will have received five weeks of training, including induction.

Revenue and Customs: Sick Leave

Bridget Phillipson: [130031]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many working days have been lost to staff sickness in HMRC in each month of the last five years, by directorate.

Jesse Norman:

The tables attached detail the average sick absence working days lost in HMRC directorates from 1 April 2015–30 November 2020.

Attachments:

1. Tables to support answer [AWDL Rolling Summary.docx]

Revenue and Customs: Staff

Bridget Phillipson: [130030]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the accuracy of the workforce management information published by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

Jesse Norman:

There are processes in place to assure the accuracy of workforce management information before it is published. Workforce information published in the Annual Report is assured within HMRC's Chief People Officer Group where the information is checked, approved and signed off by the Finance Director. Further internal assurance is carried out by the Audit and Risk Committee, as well as internal verification by the Chief Finance Officer and Permanent Secretary. The management information is then subject to external review and clearance by the NAO. These combined provide strong assurance over the accuracy of the workforce information published in the Annual Report.

James Murray: [130246]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many staff by (a) headcount and (b) full-time equivalent were employed by HMRC on 1 January in each year from 2010 to 2020.

Jesse Norman:

In accordance with their HR data retention policy, HMRC do not retain headcount data for more than six years. The table below details the headcount and full-time equivalent in HMRC on 1 January 2016–2020:

YEAR	HEADCOUNT	FTE	
2016	67,195	60,035.83	
2017	69,280	62,587.98	
2018	67,088	60,689.55	
2019	63,390	57,337.74	

YEAR	HEADCOUNT	FTE
2020	65,679	59,572.91
YTD 30 Nov 20	64,110	58,466.88

HMRC do measure and publish annually in their accounts, information on FTE on a fiscal year basis (1 April – 31 March). The table below details the FTE in HMRC from 2010/11 to 2015/16 as published in their accounts:

YEAR	FTE	
2010/11	67,553	
2011/12	64,483	
2012/13	61,568	
2013/14	59,494	
2014/15	57,510	
2015/16	60,036	

■ Revenue and Customs: Telephone Services

Emily Thornberry:

[130002]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many staff, by grade, operate the HMRC business support (a) email enquiry service and (b) telephone enquiry service via the 0300 200 3310 helpline; and what hours those services will be fully staffed and operational from 28 December 2020 to 4 January 2021 inclusive.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC do not run a general enquiries email service.

HMRC customer service advisers are predominantly at Administration Officer grade. In November 2020 there were 14,215.94 Full Time Equivalent staff in post; they were deployed across the helplines and webchat over the specified period in line with forecast demand.

Opening times were as follows:

	TELEPHONY	WEBCHAT
Mon 28 Dec	Closed	Closed
Tue 29 Dec	08:00 to 18:00	08:00 to 20:00
Wed 30 Dec	08:00 to 18:00	08:00 to 20:00

	TELEPHONY	WEBCHAT	
Thu 31 Dec	09:00 to 16:00	09:00 to 16:00	
Fri 1 Jan	Closed	Closed	
Sat 2 Jan	Closed	Closed	
Sun 3 Jan	Closed	Closed	
Mon 4 Jan	08:00 to 18:00	08:00 to 20:00	

Sanitary Protection: VAT

Alison Thewliss: [133916]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether (a) post-natal pads and (b) all nonmedical incontinence products and (c) breast pads are included in the zero rate announced on sanitary products on 1 January 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The zero rate of VAT for women's sanitary products was introduced on 1 January 2021. The zero rate applies to products which would have previously attracted the reduced rate and can be described as products which are designed and marketed solely for the absorption or collection of menstrual flow or lochia (discharge from the womb following childbirth). Examples include sanitary pads, tampons and maternity pads for the collection of lochia.

Further information on what is covered can be found in VAT Notice 701/18 on women's sanitary products on GOV.UK: https://www.gov.uk/quidance/vat-onwomens-sanitary-products-notice-70118.

Retail sales of incontinence products are zero-rated, under a long-standing separate relief. Further information on this can be found in VAT Notice 701/7 on reliefs for disabled and older people on GOV.UK: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vat-relief-oncertain-goods-if-you-have-a-disability.

Self-employed: Coronavirus

Robert Halfon: [133791]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to support self-employed individuals who have not previously earned enough money to be eligible for support during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

Throughout the crisis, the Government's priority has been to protect lives and livelihoods. This is why it has introduced a comprehensive package of support that self-employed individuals can benefit from.

Applications are open for eligible individuals to claim the third grant under the Self Employment Income Support Scheme. The third taxable grant is worth 80% of average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering 3 months' worth of profits, and capped at £7,500 in total. There will also be a fourth grant covering February 2021 to April 2021. The Government will set out further details, including the level of the fourth grant, in due course.

Those ineligible for the SEISS may still be eligible for other elements of the support available. The Universal Credit standard allowance has been temporarily increased for 2020-21 and the Minimum Income Floor relaxed for the duration of the crisis, so that where self-employed claimants' earnings have fallen significantly, their Universal Credit award will have increased to reflect their lower earnings. In addition to this, they may also have access to other elements of the package, including Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments and other business support grants.

Self-employment Income Support Scheme

Bridget Phillipson: [130691]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he plans to announce details of the fourth grant for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises the importance of supporting the self-employed during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) provides generous support to self-employed people who meet the eligibility criteria.

The first SEISS grant supported 2.7 million individuals with claims totalling £7.8 billion. A further £5.9 billion has been claimed through the second SEISS grant.

Applications for the third SEISS grant could be made from 30 November. The third grant covers the period from November 2020 until January 2021.

There will be a fourth grant covering February to April 2021. The Government will set out further details, including the level of the fourth grant, in due course.

Bridget Phillipson: [131244]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he made of the potential merits of the second, third and fourth grants under the Self Employment Income Support Scheme to have a ceiling for the amount of support received, rather than a ceiling for eligibility for support, similar to the model of the Coronavirus Job Retention Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The eligibility criteria for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) grants have been designed to target support at self-employed people who most need it and who are most reliant on their self-employment income. In addition, the first three SEISS grants have a cap on the amount of support it is possible to receive.

The first SEISS grant was a taxable grant calculated at 80 per cent of three months' average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment and capped at £7,500 in total. The second SEISS grant was a taxable grant calculated at 70 per cent of three months' average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment and capped at £6,570 in total. The third SEISS grant is a taxable grant calculated at 80 per cent of three months' average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment and capped at £7,500 in total.

There will be a fourth SEISS grant covering February to April 2021. The Government will set out further details in due course.

Claire Hanna: [133279]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the eligibility criteria for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme prior to the application process opening for the fourth grant to allow people represented by #ExcludedUK to access that scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided, and will continue to provide, generous support to the self-employed during the COVID-19 pandemic through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). The third grant, combined with up to £14,070 worth of support for each individual from the first and second grants, makes the SEISS one of the most generous schemes for the self-employed in the world. The Government continues to take a flexible approach and keeps all impacts and policies under review. Details of the fourth SEISS grant will be available in due course.

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme is one part of a substantial package of support available for the self-employed. Those ineligible for the SEISS Grant Extension may still be eligible for other elements of the support available. The Universal Credit standard allowance has been temporarily increased for 2020-21 and the Minimum Income Floor relaxed for the duration of the crisis, so that where self-employed claimants' earnings have fallen significantly, their Universal Credit award will have increased to reflect their lower earnings. In addition to this, they may also have access to other elements of the package, including Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments, and other business support grants.

Stephen McPartland:

[133838]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to the end of April 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has already announced that a fourth grant for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme will be made available from February to April 2021. Details of the grant will be published in due course.

Peter Kyle: [133991]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the eligibility criteria for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to provide greater coverage during the January 2021 ovid-19 lockdown period.

Jesse Norman:

Throughout the crisis, the Government's priority has been to protect lives and livelihoods. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) was designed to target support at those who most need it, while protecting the Exchequer against error, fraud, and abuse.

The Government has taken a flexible and responsive approach and will continue to consider the matter carefully and work closely with stakeholders to explore how it can best support different groups.

Moreover, the SEISS continues to be just one element of a substantial package of support for the self-employed. Those ineligible for the SEISS may still be eligible for other elements of the support available. The Universal Credit standard allowance has been temporarily increased for 2020-21 and the Minimum Income Floor relaxed for the duration of the crisis, so that where self-employed claimants' earnings have fallen significantly, their Universal Credit award will have increased to reflect their lower earnings. In addition to this, they may also have access to other elements of the package, including Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments, and other business support grants.

■ Taxation: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes: [130153]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) self-employed people, (b) freelancers and (c) sole-directors of small limited companies have deferred their tax payments from July 2020 in response to the covid-19 outbreak; and what assessment he has made of the ability of those people who have so deferred their tax payments to begin making repayments in January 2021.

Jesse Norman:

1.5 million Self Assessment taxpayers took advantage of the opportunity to defer their July 2020 payment on account. It is not possible to specify how many of these were (a) self-employed people, (b) freelancers and (c) sole directors of small limited companies.

The Chancellor and HMRC understand that many Self-Assessment taxpayers who deferred their July 2020 Payment on Account may have difficulty in paying their Self-Assessment payments becoming due on 31 January 2021.

HMRC have enhanced their automated online Time to Pay service, enabling taxpayers to clear their January 2021 Self-Assessment liabilities in up to 12 monthly instalments, without the taxpayer needing to contact HMRC directly to set up their payment plan.

Helen Hayes: [130154]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to support (a) self-employed people, (b) freelancers and (c) sole-directors of small limited companies who have deferred their tax payments in response to the covid-19 outbreak and remain unable to make those payments.

Jesse Norman:

The Chancellor understands that many Self-Assessment taxpayers, including self-employed persons, freelancers and sole directors of small limited companies, who deferred their tax payments in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, may be unable to make those payments.

Those taxpayers within the Self-Assessment tax system who deferred paying their July 2020 Payment on Account will have that payment and possibly two other payments to make on 31 January 2021. In order to assist those taxpayers, HMRC have enhanced their self-service Time to Pay online facility.

Prior to October 2020, that service could only be used to pay tax liabilities of up to £10,000. However, HMRC increased the threshold to £30,000, so that it is now available to far more Self-Assessment taxpayers than before. Self-Assessment taxpayers eligible to use this service can set up a direct debit payment arrangement online without having to contact HMRC directly. HMRC estimate that up to 95% of Self-Assessment taxpayers owing Self-Assessment payments on 31 January 2021 will be able to use this online payment service to spread their payments over 12 instalments.

Taxpayers with Self-Assessment tax liabilities over £30,000 may still agree a Time to Pay arrangement with HMRC by contacting them directly. Further information is available on GOV.UK.

■ Taxation: Self-assessment

Gavin Robinson: [131287]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the deadline for submission of tax returns given the varying and continuing covid-19 restrictions throughout the UK.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has carefully considered the arguments for extending the Self-Assessment filing date from 31 January and has decided on balance not to do so. The January deadline has been in place for many years and changing it could undermine customer understanding and trust in how the Self-Assessment system works. However, the Government recognises that some taxpayers will have difficulty submitting their Self-Assessment return due to the impact COVID-19 has had on their personal or business circumstances.

HMRC do not charge penalties for failure to submit a return on time where taxpayers have a reasonable excuse. HMRC's guidance explains that they will accept the

impact of COVID-19 as a reasonable excuse for submitting a return late, provided that taxpayers explain how they were affected and submit the return as soon as they can. More information is available in the HMRC online guidance covering the reasonable excuse provisions.

Once they have submitted their return, taxpayers who are unable to pay all of their Self-Assessment tax due on 31 January can access HMRC's enhanced Time to Pay arrangements. These allow liabilities of up to £30,000 – increased from £10,000 – to be paid in up to 12 instalments without having to contact HMRC beforehand.

Kirsten Oswald: [132964]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of taxpayers who will be unable to meet the deadline of 31 January 2021 for payment of tax for the tax year 2019-20 as a result of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the income levels of self-assessment taxpayers.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises that because of the exceptional circumstances posed by COVID-19, some taxpayers will have difficulty paying their 2019/20 Self-Assessment (SA) liabilities on time.

For that reason, the Chancellor announced in March 2020 that SA taxpayers could defer paying their July 2020 Payment on Account until 31 January 2021. This provided an immediate financial easement to about 1.5 million taxpayers who took up the option and deferred a total of about £5.8 billion.

The Government understands that many taxpayers will still struggle to pay their SA payments becoming due on 31 January 2021. Although it is not possible accurately to estimate the number of taxpayers who will be affected in this way, the numbers may be considerably higher than in previous years.

Therefore, in order to support taxpayers facing financial difficulty, HMRC have made significant changes to their online self-service Time to Pay Service, enabling taxpayers to set up a Direct Debit instalment payment arrangement with HMRC without having to contact HMRC beforehand.

Previously, this service was only available to taxpayers with Self-Assessment liabilities of up to £10,000. That threshold has been increased to £30,000 to enable more taxpayers to use the service, allowing payment in up to 12 monthly instalments.

Taxpayers with Self-Assessment liabilities over £30,000 will still be able to contact HMRC directly to agree a Time to Pay arrangement.

Kirsten Oswald: [132965]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on income levels for self-assessment taxpayers, what assessment he has made of the level of (a) interest and (b) penalties that will be charged to self-assessment taxpayers who do not meet the deadline of 31 January 2021 for payment of tax for tax year 2019-20.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises that because of the exceptional circumstances posed by COVID-19, some taxpayers may have difficulty paying their 2019/20 Self-Assessment (SA) liabilities on time.

Although the numbers may prove to be considerably higher than in previous years, it is not possible to make an accurate assessment of the level of interest and penalties that will be charged to SA taxpayers who do not meet the deadline of 31 January 2021 for payment of tax for tax year 2019-20.

In order to support taxpayers facing financial difficulty, HMRC have made significant changes to their online self-service Time to Pay Service, enabling taxpayers to set up a Direct Debit instalment payment arrangement with HMRC without having to contact HMRC beforehand.

Where a taxpayer does this within 30 days of the 31 January deadline they will not have to pay a late payment penalty as long as they keep to the terms of the Time To Pay agreement. However, late payment interest will still be payable on any amounts which remain unpaid after the 31 January due date.

A late payment penalty will not be payable if a taxpayer has a reasonable excuse for not paying their tax on time. HMRC will consider the impact of coronavirus as a reasonable excuse for missing return deadlines.

Kirsten Oswald: [132966]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much (a) interest and (b) penalties was charged to self-assessment taxpayers who failed to meet the deadline for payment of tax for the previous financial year in each of the last three years; and how many taxpayers received such a charge in each year.

Jesse Norman:

The value of interest raised on late tax return payments and late payment of penalties, and the number and value of penalties charged to self-assessment taxpayers for late payments of tax for each of the previous three tax returns, are provided in the following tables. It has not been possible to separate interest for late tax payments from interest for late payment of penalties.

These figures are correct as at 28 December 2020 but are not final. The 2018-19 figures are particularly subject to change because they do not include the 12-month late payment penalties due to timing and large value penalties which can be raised based on information held at the time, but which are subsequently cancelled or reduced once the correct information is provided. For this reason it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between figures from different years.

Late payment penalties can only be issued following receipt of a Self Assessment tax return, or where HMRC make a determination of tax liability for the financial year where no return has been delivered. As HMRC receive further late returns or amended returns from taxpayers, additional late payment interest and penalties may be issued or cancelled for earlier years.

1. THE VALUE OF INTEREST CHARGED ON LATE TAX PAYMENTS

Tax Year to which Interest Relates	Value of Late Payment Interest (£)
2016-17	£73,757,000
2017-18	£64,990,000
2018-19	£43,528,000

1A. THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS WITH INTEREST CHARGED ON LATE TAX PAYMENTS TAX YEAR TO WHICH INTEREST RELATES NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS 2016-171, 195, 8002017-181, 191, 7002018-19922,700

2. THE VALUE OF PENALTIES RAISED FOR LATE TAX PAYMENTS

	Tax Year to which Penalties Relate	Value of Late Payment	Penalties (£)
Raised	Cancelled or reduced to nil	Net remaining	
2016-17	£161,219,000	£46,701,000	£114,518,00 0
2017-18	£146,004,000	£34,376,000	£111,628,00 0
2018-19	£311,867,000	£196,420,000	£115,447,00

2A. THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS WITH PENALTIES RAISED FOR LATE TAX PAYMENTS

	Tax Year to which Penalties Relate	Number of Customers
Raised	Cancelled or reduced to nil	Net remaining

2A. THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS WITH PENALTIES RAISED FOR LATE TAX PAYMENTS

2016-17	363,100	62,100	301,00 0
2017-18	336,800	49,300	287,50 0
2018-19	348,500	31,500	317,00 0

3. THE VALUE OF INTEREST CHARGED AND PENALTIES RAISED FOR LATE TAX PAYMENTS

Tax Year to which Interest/Penalties Relate	Value of Late Payment Interest and Penalties (£)
2016-17	£188,275,000
2017-18	£176,619,000
2018-19	£158,975,000

3A. THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS WITH INTEREST AND/OR PENALTY CHARGES RAISED FOR LATE TAX PAYMENTS

Tax Year to which Interest/Penalties Relate Number of Customers

2016-17	1,210,300
2017-18	1,227,300
2018-19	1,034,400

Notes on the tables:

All counts have been rounded to nearest 100; all values have been rounded to nearest 1000. As such, totals may not always sum due to rounding.

Interest is chargeable on late payments on account and late balancing charge payments. Penalties are chargeable on late balancing charge payments only. As such a taxpayer may be liable to late payment interest charges or late payment penalties, or both.

These figures have been produced using an extract of the data provided for analytical purposes, and there may be small differences between this and the live Self-Assessment system.

Penalties are not used as a means of generating revenue. HMRC want taxpayers to comply with their obligations.

HMRC charge penalties to encourage taxpayers to meet their tax obligations and to act as a sanction for those who do not, so the majority who do pay correctly and on time are not disadvantaged.

HMRC recognise that because of the exceptional circumstances presented by COVID-19 some taxpayers will not be able to meet their tax obligations on time, or appeal or review HMRC decisions within the usual time limit; HMRC's approach has been to collect the tax and penalties due in a way that recognises the very real needs and challenges that businesses and individuals are facing, supporting those in difficulty, including considering coronavirus as a reasonable excuse for missing return deadlines.

■ Tobacco: Smuggling

Martyn Day: [130149]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who will be responsible for holding the supply chain data for tobacco products entering the UK as part of track and trace arrangements.

Martyn Day: [130151]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has made a comparative assessment of the potential merits of incorporating an internationally-recognised tax stamp as part of the UK's tobacco track and trace regime and a security label to safeguard the UK's tobacco tax revenue and reduce illicit tobacco flows; and whether his Department plans to introduce such a tax stamp.

Kemi Badenoch:

Now the transition period has ended the UK will operate a standalone tobacco track and trace system, with Northern Ireland forming part of both the UK and EU systems.

The UK's track and trace service provider 'De la Rue' will be responsible for holding all data generated by the tracking of products manufactured in, or imported into the UK up to the first point of retail. The EU will also continue to hold data in respect of Northern Ireland at the end of the transition period. HM Revenue and Customs will have full access to the data in respect of the UK track and trace arrangements.

Alongside the introduction of the track and trace system, a new anti-tamper proof security label was introduced in May 2019 for all packs of cigarettes and hand rolling tobacco destined for the UK market. The anti-counterfeit security label incorporates overt and covert authentication elements, which complement the track and trace system to prove the authenticity of the product. As such, the government has no plans to introduce tax stamps for tobacco products.

UK Trade with EU: Customs

Dave Doogan: [133193]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many and what proportion of businesses are prepared for the completion of customs paperwork for export to the EU.

Jesse Norman:

For over a year, the Government has been working to help businesses to understand and prepare for their new obligations, including customs paperwork for export to the EU. The Government will continue to assess carefully how traders are adapting to the new customs arrangements over the next few weeks and months.

The Government undertook significant readiness activity prior to 1 January, identifying key customer groups and delivering a high volume of targeted communications and engagement, including sending over 11 million letters and emails and hosting 50 webinars with over 30,000 attendees to date, preparing businesses for the new rules.

Through the cross-Government campaign since August the Government has reached 41m adults (15+) and 16m business decision makers through radio, and 18m adults (15+) and 3.5m business decision makers through print and digital articles, promoting key readiness messaging for importers and exporters.

The Government will continue to run this comprehensive engagement campaign with regular (and increasingly directive) letters to VAT registered traders, targeted phone calls and emails, events, webinars and video tutorials. Regular engagement with business representative organisations and devolved governments continues, with emphasis on trader readiness.

As well as providing extensive communications and guidance helping traders, the Government has made available grants of up to £1,000 per organisation for any importer and or exporter who is new to customs to support the cost of customs training. The grants have in particular helped small businesses to understand customs processes and to provide accurate information to intermediaries; for example, for entries into declarants' records.

Recognising the impact of coronavirus on businesses' ability to prepare, the Government has taken the pragmatic and flexible decision to introduce new border controls in three stages up until 1 July 2021, giving industry extra time to adjust to the new procedures. The priority from 1 January is reminding traders and the border industry about staged controls for imports and other temporary contingency milestones and supporting them to embed the new processes.

The Government will continue to provide support for the rest of this year.

UK Trade with EU: Origin Marking

Sir Greg Knight: [133718]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to reduce paperwork and other bureaucracy required on issues relating to rules of origin affecting companies exporting to the EU from 2022; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has been clear that leaving the Single Market and Customs Union will result in new customs processes for businesses trading with the EU. The UK has moved to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) relationship, and Rules of Origin are a standard part of all FTAs.

The Government has secured a number of administrative facilitations, such as self-certification of origin, and, until 31 December 2021, an easement on the need for UK businesses to hold supplier declarations at the time they issue statements on origin, which will considerably reduce the administrative burdens of complying with rules of origin in trade with the EU. The easement on supplier declarations has been introduced to allow businesses time to establish the necessary arrangements to meet the requirements of the agreement.

WALES

Farmers: Wales

Ben Lake: [131398]

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what discussions has he had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on funding for sheep farmers after the transition period in the event of the UK not reaching a deal with the EU.

Simon Hart:

The UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement honours the instruction of the British people - expressed in the 2016 referendum and the 2019 General Election - to take back control of our laws, borders, money, trade and fisheries.

The Agreement ensures tariff free and quota free access to the EU market for Welsh farmers. It also provides continued protection in the EU for world-renowned Welsh products such as Welsh lamb, Welsh laverbread and Traditional Welsh Caerffili and establishes a mechanism for protecting future geographical indications in both the EU and the UK.

The Government is also focused on enabling Welsh farming to seize the opportunities of the UK once again being an independent trading nation. We will open new export markets for UK sheepmeat, including Welsh lamb, to provide a profitable and sustainable future for our sheep farmers. As part of our recently signed Trade Agreement with Japan, Welsh lamb is among fifteen world-class Welsh products that could be protected in Japan for the first time.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Disadvantaged: Coronavirus

Jonathan Gullis: [133269]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of its policies on tackling the covid-19 outbreak on white, working class, disadvantaged communities.

Kemi Badenoch:

The government is committed to supporting all groups in society, including white, working class and disadvantaged communities from the challenges caused by COVID-19. This includes taking action to support those on lower incomes, including through income protection schemes, mortgage holidays and additional support for renters. The government is also supporting those in education by keeping colleges, primary and secondary schools open for vulnerable children and for the children of critical workers. The government continues to monitor the impact of these measures.

Discrimination: Business Premises

Jonathan Gullis: [133268]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to tackle discrimination in (a) offices, (b) factories and (c) shop floors.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) provides protection for those aged 16 or over, against direct and indirect discrimination in employment settings (including offices, factories and shop floors), the provision of goods, services, public functions and in private clubs. The Act makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee or a job applicant due to a protected characteristic. Similar rules apply to service providers.

The Act is civil law, meaning that a person who believes that they have experienced discrimination may take their case to an employment tribunal or, in non-employment cases, a County Court (Sherriff's Court in Scotland).

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is responsible for enforcing the Equality Act 2010, and is increasingly focusing its work on effective enforcement. In December a new Chair and four new Commissioners were appointed to the EHRC to help drive this agenda forward.

The Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS), the helpline for anyone who believes that they have been discriminated against in the provision of goods, services and public functions, can provide free bespoke advice and in-depth support. The EASS can be contacted via its website - www.equalityadvisoryservice.com, by telephone on 0808 800 0082, or by text phone on 0808 800 0084. Acas can assist in relation to employment discrimination issues, their number is 0800 464 0979.

Equality

Dr Matthew Offord: [132870]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's policies on improving equality of opportunity.

Kemi Badenoch:

We made a Manifesto commitment to improve the quality of evidence within Government about the types of barriers people face.

To deliver that promise, in December, The Secretary of State for Women and Equalities launched the Government's equality data programme. That programme will consider socio-economic background and geography alongside factors such as sex, ethnicity and sexual orientation to enable us to understand where individuals are being held back across the UK.

The project aims to publish its first outputs in Summer 2021. The evidence from this inquiry will support the development of policy across Government to make the UK a fairer place to live and do business.

Hate Crime

Helen Hayes: [133999]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what discussions she has had with the (a) Secretary of State for Justice and (b) Home Secretary on strengthening hate crime legislation.

Kemi Badenoch:

Any hate crime is completely unacceptable and the Government is committed to stamping it out. As part of the Hate Crime Action Plan Refresh in October 2018, the Government asked the Law Commission to conduct a review into the coverage and approach of hate crime legislation, including consideration of whether other protected characteristics should be included. The Law Commission's consultation to support the review closed on 24 December 2020. The Government will respond to the review when it is complete.

Maternal Mortality: Ethnic Groups

Ms Lyn Brown: [<u>133764</u>]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what conclusions were reached on the causes of ethnic disparities in maternal mortality, following the roundtable of 2 September 2020.

Kemi Badenoch:

At the roundtable on 2 September, leading experts in the field clarified that underlying health conditions and comorbidities largely explain ethnic disparities in maternal mortality rates.

Maternity experts also linked this to a reluctance by some women from minority backgrounds to attend routine appointments and check-ups where many of these conditions are typically identified.

The government continues to work with maternal health practitioners and ethnic minority women to drive positive actions and interventions in this area so that our actions can benefit more women. This includes the recently launched NHS campaign 'Help us Help You', informing pregnant women about the importance of attending check-ups, and providing reassurance that the NHS is there to see them safely.

Ms Lyn Brown:

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what conclusions were reached on further actions that can be taken to tackle ethnic disparities in maternal mortality, following the roundtable of 2 September 2020.

Kemi Badenoch:

Following the roundtable on 2 September, officials in the Cabinet Office Race Disparity Unit are supporting the Department of Health and Social Care in driving positive actions through a number of interventions on maternal mortality from an equalities perspective.

For example, NHS England and Improvement are introducing a funded and comprehensive national support offer which will be mobilised later this year. This will require Local Maternity Services to work towards achieving the ambition that 75% of Black and Asian women receive continuity of care by 2024.

Pupils: LGBT People

Daisy Cooper: [133220]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, pursuant to the Answer of 24 November 2020 to Questions 118113 and 118112, when the evaluation of the programme to support schools in preventing and addressing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, reaching 2,250 schools in England will be completed and published.

Kemi Badenoch:

Since 2016, we have invested £4m to support schools in preventing and addressing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. This programme concluded in March 2020 and continues to be evaluated, in order to increase our evidence base on what works in schools. We plan to publish the evaluation in due course.

The Government remains committed to helping teachers tackle bullying, including homophobic bullying, and are continuing to fund anti-bullying projects. The Department for Education announced £750k of funding in June 2020 for three charitable organisations, including a project for victims of hate-related bullying.

The Department for Education is also rolling out new inclusive statutory Relationships Education in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education in all secondary schools, so that children leave school prepared for life in modern, diverse, Britain.

Religious Hatred: Islam

Apsana Begum: [124891]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps her Department took to mark Islamophobia Awareness month in November 2020.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government notes Islamophobia Awareness Month but takes the view that combatting Islamophobia is not a time-limited task and such thinking and behaviour should be tackled whenever it occurs. For that reason we continue to work closely with Muslim communities to tackle hate against them, including understanding issues and trends. This includes supporting Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with just over £2.8m distributed over the last five years to monitor, combat and raise awareness of anti-Muslim hatred.

Shukri Abdi

Apsana Begum: [126157]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she has made an assessment of the role of Islamophobia in the events leading to the (a) death of 12-year-old Shukri Abdi and (b) subsequent investigation.

Kemi Badenoch:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State at the Home Office, to PQ126154.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Additional Voluntary Contributions

Helen Hayes: [133079]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential benefits of advising people prior to retirement age of whether it would be in their interests to make voluntary additional National Insurance contributions in order to increase their pension.

Guy Opperman:

Information on filling National Insurance gaps through voluntary National Insurance contributions and credits is already widely available. Information is available on Gov.uk and as part of the personalised forecasts which are available through the online Check your State Pension Forecast service. People can also telephone the Future Pensions Centre on 0800 731 0175, where personalised information about voluntary National Insurance Contributions is also available.

Carers' Benefits

Margaret Greenwood:

[132952]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of people in receipt of (a) the carer element of universal credit, (b) the carer addition and (c) the carer premium.

Justin Tomlinson:

The available information on the number of households with a carer entitlement on Universal Credit, currently for August 2020, is published and can be found at:

https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/

Guidance on how to extract the information required can be found at:

https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/Getting-Started.html

The latest available statistics on the number of Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Housing Benefit claimants in receipt of the carer premium, and the number of Pension Credit claimants in receipt of the carer addition are shown in the following table.

Number of Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Housing Benefit claimants in receipt of the carer premium and the number of Pension Credit claimants in receipt of the carer addition, Great Britain, Feb 20, May 20 and Aug 20

BENEFIT	LATEST QUARTER AVAILABLE	NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS	
Jobseeker's Allowance	Feb-20	1,600	
Income Support	May-20	200,000	
Pension Credit	May-20	134,800	
Housing Benefit	Aug-20	152,080	

Source: DWP Quarterly Statistical Enquiry 5% dataand 100% Work, Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) and DWP Single Housing Benefit Extract

Notes

- Figures for Income Support, Pension Credit and Housing Benefit are rounded to the nearest 10 and Jobseeker's Allowance is rounded to the nearest 100.
- 2. JSA figures have been uprated using 5% proportions against 100% Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) totals.

The information requested is not readily available for Employment and Support Allowance claimants and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Mick Whitley: [133206]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of current levels of support available to carers.

Mick Whitley: [133208]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential effect of increasing carer's allowance on the mental wellbeing of carers.

Mick Whitley: [133209]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason the Government has not taken the decision to increase carer's allowance during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

The primary purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support and recognition for people who give up the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide regular and substantial care for a severely disabled person.

As of May 2020, there were 2,514 carers in Birkenhead receiving Carer's Allowance and in 2019/20 we spent approximately £9.1 million on Carer's Allowance there.

Information on the number of people in receipt of Carer's Allowance by Parliamentary constituency is published and available at:

https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk

Guidance for users is available at:

https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/index.html

The latest information on benefit expenditure by parliamentary constituency including Carer's Allowance is also published and available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/920543/benefit-expenditure-by-parliamentary-constituency-2019-20.xlsx

The rate of Carer's Allowance was last increased in April 2020 and it will be increased again in April 2021 to help ensure it maintains its value. Since 2010, the rate of Carer's Allowance has increased from £53.90 to £67.25 a week, meaning nearly an additional £700 a year for carers.

Between 2020/21 and 2025/26 real terms expenditure on Carer's Allowance is forecast to increase by nearly a third (around £1 billion). By 2025/26, the Government is forecast to spend just over £4bn a year on Carer's Allowance.

Carers also have access to the full range of social security benefits according to their circumstances. Income replacement benefits help people and households on lower incomes, and can include a carer premium, currently £37.50 a week. An equivalent additional amount applies in Pension Credit. Universal Credit also includes a carer element at the rate of £162.92 per monthly assessment period. These amounts

recognise the additional contribution and responsibilities associated with caring and mean that lower-income carers can receive more money than others who receive these benefits. Between the existing carer-specific support, and the temporary Covid-19 uplift, 270,000 carer households receiving Universal Credit have benefitted from up to an extra £2,990 this financial year.

Child Maintenance Service

Karin Smyth: [133929]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service's Financial Investigation Unit since it was established in 2014.

Guy Opperman:

The Financial Investigations Unit (FIU) is equipped with powers to conduct full and in depth investigations in to allegations made against a paying parent's financial circumstances. They will then determine the most appropriate action to get Child Maintenance Payments flowing to the receiving parent.

Please see available statistics below of actions taken by the FIU. These can be found on Table 12 of the National Tables available on Gov.uk. Table 11.2 also refers.

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/child-maintenance-service-statistics-data-to-march-2020-experimental

Karin Smyth: [133930]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many cases the Financial Investigation Unit has investigated since it was established in 2014; and how many and what proportion of those cases resulted in (a) an increase in payment to the receiving parent and (b) a fraud prosecution.

Guy Opperman:

Information relating to the number of cases the Financial Investigations Unit (FIU) has reviewed back to 2017 is available on Gov.uk. These can be found on Table 12 of the National Tables available on Gov.uk which provides information on intake at lines 11, 20, 32 and 42. And line 25 shows volumes of assessments changed. Table 11.2 also refers and this shows applications to court for prosecutions and resulting sanctions applied by the court.

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/child-maintenance-service-statistics-data-to-march-2020-experimental

Children: Maintenance

Justin Madders: [131324]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many child maintenance cases via Direct Pay have been found to have overpayments; and how many of those cases her Department has agreed to reimburse.

Guy Opperman:

It may be helpful to explain when our customers opt to use the Direct Pay service and a balance of unpaid child maintenance accrues or an overpayment occurs, normally they need to make repayment arrangements between themselves.

However, where this action has failed and the paying parent has made a request, the Child Maintenance Service has issued 37 reimbursements for Direct Pay cases, since 2018 where overpayments occurred.

Department for Work and Pensions: Epilepsy

Kirsten Oswald: [132961]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support employees in her Department who have active epilepsy.

Kirsten Oswald: [132962]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of employees in her Department who have active epilepsy.

Guy Opperman:

As at September 2020, 47 staff declared themselves on Departmental systems as having epilepsy. This figures include unpaid staff.

Please note that it is not mandatory for staff to declare a disability or long-term health condition, and if they have declared this, to state the type of condition, so this is likely to be an underestimate. It also does not differentiate between active/inactive epilepsy.

The Department is committed to becoming the most inclusive employer and increasing the representation of under-represented groups to make DWP more diverse. In order to maintain our focus on disability issues we have developed and agreed a Disability Action Plan for the forthcoming year. We implement all practical steps to remove barriers for our employees with any kind of disability, including epilepsy. Specifically:

- We have a comprehensive reasonable adjustments provision in place to support line-managers and colleagues, they can involve specialist equipment, assistive software and/or non-physical adjustments such as changing work patterns.
- We have developed strong employee networks and our disability network THRIVE is providing invaluable support to colleagues.
- We are members of Business Disability Forum who provide specific guidance on epilepsy, which we signpost via our intranet pages.

Disability

Florence Eshalomi: [133320]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans the Government has for a public consultation on the forthcoming National Disability Strategy.

Florence Eshalomi: [133321]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, which disabled people's (a) charities, (b) organisations and (c) campaign groups have been consulted on the forthcoming National Disability Strategy to date.

Florence Eshalomi: [133322]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the Government plans to publish its National Disability Strategy.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Government is committed to transforming the lives of disabled people, and will publish the National Strategy for Disabled People this year.

It will be informed by insights from the lived experience of disabled people. The Government has already engaged widely to support the development of the National Strategy and future work. This has taken place with a diverse range of stakeholders, including: the Disability Charities Consortium, Disabled People's Organisations Forum and Regional Stakeholder Network (which includes disability organisations and individual disabled people), as well as businesses and business organisations, regulators, academia, professional bodies and the Devolved Administrations.

This engagement will include online surveys and virtual round tables across the UK to enable disabled people to share views and insights on key challenges as the National Strategy is developed and implemented.

Lilian Greenwood: [133803]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether further engagement events are planned as part of the national strategy for disabled people.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Government is committed to transforming the lives of disabled people, and will publish the National Strategy for Disabled People this year.

It will be informed by insights from the lived experience of disabled people. The Government has already engaged widely to support the development of the National Strategy and future work. This has taken place with a diverse range of stakeholders, including: the Disability Charities Consortium, Disabled People's Organisations Forum and Regional Stakeholder Network (which includes disability organisations and individual disabled people), as well as businesses and business organisations, regulators, academia, professional bodies and the Devolved Administrations.

This engagement will include online surveys and virtual round tables across the UK to enable disabled people to share views and insights on key challenges as the National Strategy is developed and implemented.

Employment Schemes

Seema Malhotra: [130088]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Sector-based work academy programme starts there have been in each month since the initiative started in each (a) region, (b) nation and (c) sector.

Mims Davies:

The data available shows cumulative starts to the programme for the current financial year. Data collection began in June 2020, with staff retrospectively reporting starts from April to June 2020 to provide a full picture of the financial year.

Data up to 6 th December 2020 shows that there have been a total of 44,130 starts to a Sector-based work academy programme (SWAP). The breakdown of these starts by nation and region is displayed in the following tables:

Table 1: SWAP starts by nation

	TOTAL
England	39,670
Scotland	4,370
Total	44,130

Table 2: SWAP starts by region

	TOTAL
West Midlands	3,210
Central, East & North Scotland	3,320
South & West Scotland	1,050
London & Essex	8,530
North & East Midlands	5,470
North Central	4,880
North East	3,940
North West	3,500
South East	5,730
South West	4,510
Total	44,130

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. Components may not sum due to rounding.

We do not hold data on Sector-based work academy programme starts by month, or by sector.

These figures reflect the number of starts by claimants in receipt of Universal Credit (UC), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Income Support (IS).

Official Statistics for the period August 2011 (scheme launch) to November 2017 were published in July 2018. These show there were 330,090 starts to sector-based work academy training. This data covers legacy benefit claimants only.

Data for claimants using the current Universal Credit Full Service is not available for this time period.

Further statistics can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/employment-schemes-work-experience-sector-based-work-academy-and-skills-conditionality-starts-to-november-2017

Employment Schemes: Local Government

Gill Furniss: [<u>130177</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of devolving (a) the Kickstart scheme and (b) other employment schemes and resources to local authorities.

Mims Davies:

The Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme is providing job placements for 16-24 year olds across the UK. Many local authorities have been successful in bidding to participate directly in the scheme. Beyond this, local authorities are working with us acting as Kickstarters gateways to facilitate local businesses who would like to take on less than 30 participants to ensure that as many young people benefit as possible.

We have made available a number of additional labour market provisions over recent months which are evidenced through the recent Spending Review and July Plan for Jobs announcements. The principle remains that we look to local partners to complement the national government offer where possible.

■ Employment: Disability

Marion Fellows: [133027]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of potential effect of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement on reducing the disability employment gap in the UK.

Justin Tomlinson:

We routinely monitor the employment of disabled people using the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) along with other relevant sources. This will continue as we enter the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Lilian Greenwood: [133801]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to increase the number of disability employment advisors.

Justin Tomlinson:

Disability Employment Advisers are an integral part of our services and we remain absolutely committed to supporting disabled people, including ensuring access to Disability Employment Advisers. We are planning to increase resourcing levels of Disability Employment Advisers during 21/22. Alongside this we are doubling the number of Work Coaches who provide support to all claimants including those who are disabled, and continue to provide support for disabled people through the Work and Health Programme and Access to Work.

Employment: Epilepsy

Kirsten Oswald: [132960]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help companies support employees who have active epilepsy.

Justin Tomlinson:

People with active epilepsy and classed as disabled are protected from discrimination at work under The Equality Act. Employers have a duty to provide reasonable workplace adjustments where necessary. If employees with epilepsy need workplace support beyond the cost of reasonable adjustment, Access to Work can help. Access to Work is supporting thousands more people with disabilities and health conditions than ever before. In 2019, Access to Work funded tailored and flexible support for 43,000 people, a 20% increase on the previous year.

Access to Work has actively worked with employers during the pandemic. For example, Access to Work worked with employers to transport assistive technology from the workplace to the home to enable home working. And where the support cannot be removed from the workplace, Access to Work has put in place alternative adjustments or supported adaptations to standard equipment.

We also, through Disability Confident, provide employers with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people in the workplace.

Kirsten Oswald: [132963]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of companies in Scotland with employees who have active epilepsy.

Justin Tomlinson:

The specific information requested is not held by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Background

The number of disabled people (aged 16 to 64) in the UK who are employed and report epilepsy as their main health condition is 38,000 ¹. Sample sizes are too small to draw robust estimates for Scotland from this data.

¹ Figure shown in table 3.3 of 'The employment of disabled people 2019' Official Statistics publication using data from Annual Population Survey, April 2018 to March 2019. This can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2019.

Fireworks: Storage

Alexander Stafford: [131523]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of strengthening existing regulations on the storage of fireworks by retailers.

Mims Davies:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is an independent regulator and has policy responsibility for the Explosives Regulations 2014 (as amended) which set out the framework for the safe and secure manufacture and storage of explosives, including fireworks.

These Regulations are supported by overarching guidance on safety - https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l150.htm and security - https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l151.htm

Subsector guidance is also available for storing and selling fireworks safely - https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg407.htm - and detailed guidance relating to fireworks in retail premises - https://www.hse.gov.uk/explosives/er2014-fireworks-retail-prem.pdf

There is already comprehensive legislation and guidance in this area to enable retailers involved in the storage of fireworks to do so safely and so there are no plans at this time to strengthening existing regulations in this area.

■ Food Poverty: Coronavirus

Colleen Fletcher: [130749]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on trends in the level of food poverty in (a) Coventry North East constituency, (b) Coventry, (c) the West Midlands and (d) England.

Will Quince:

No assessment has been made.

Housing Benefit

Shabana Mahmood: [130680]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much enhanced housing benefit is paid directly to landlords of supported exempt accommodation by (a) housing benefit and (b) universal credit in each local authority area in each of the last three years.

Will Quince:

To source this information would be at a disproportionate cost to the Department. However, we can clarify that, wherever a claimant's accommodation meets the definition of exempt accommodation, their housing costs support is paid through Housing Benefit, not Universal Credit.

Shabana Mahmood: [131214]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much the Government has spent on (a) housing benefit and (b) housing benefit for supported exempt accommodation in each of the last three years.

Guy Opperman:

Information showing expenditure on Housing Benefit for each of the last three years are published here: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/benefit-expenditure-tables

We have been unable to source information showing Housing Benefit expenditure for exempt accommodation claims in each of the last three years due to the disproportionate cost to the Department of doing so.

Independent Case Examiner

Mr David Davis: [133657]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that complaints to the Independent Case Examiner are being promptly investigated.

Guy Opperman:

In the current financial year the Department provided additional funding to the Independent Case Examiner's Office, to allow it to increase its headcount from 89 to 112. The recruitment and rigorous training of additional Investigation Case Mangers, to reduce the time complaints wait to be brought into investigation, is underway.

Mr David Davis: [133658]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average length of time is between a complaint being accepted by the Independent Case Examiner and the case being allocated to a caseworker; and what the average length of time is between a case being accepted by the Independent Case Examiner and the complainant receiving an outcome.

Guy Opperman:

When the Independent Case Examiner's Office accept a complaint for investigation, they will initially try to broker a solution between the complainant and the relevant

department or supplier, without having to request evidence to inform an investigation – this is known as "resolution". If it's not possible to resolve the complaint, the evidence will be requested and the case will await allocation to an Investigation Case Manager (ICM). The cases that reach the Independent Case Examiner are the most complex and usually require investigation. Complainants are kept updated about the timings involved with their case and the vast majority are satisfied with the service they receive.

Based on the complaints that were allocated for investigation during the 2020 calendar year, the average length of wait between the complaint being accepted for examination and it being allocated to an Investigation Case Manager was 64.5 weeks.

During the 2020 calendar year, the average length of time between a case being accepted for examination by the Independent Case Examiner's Office and the complainant receiving an outcome was 81.4 weeks (this total includes the 64.5 weeks average wait before being allocated to an Investigation Case Manager. It excludes those cases which are resolved without the need for a full investigation).

Whilst the Unit has received additional resource during the current financial year, to help reduce the time complaints wait to be brought into investigation, progress has been constrained by the effects of Covid, which included the redeployment of some staff, and the delay in recruitment of new staff.

Industrial Accidents

Virginia Crosbie: [134280]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential for delays in reporting work place accidents to allow employers time to conceal evidence important to investigations.

Mims Davies:

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) places duties on employers, the self-employed and people in control of work premises (the Responsible Person) to report certain workplace injuries, occupational diseases and specified dangerous occurrences (near misses).

The timescales for submitting reports under RIDDOR are contained within Schedule 1 to the regulation. In respect of injuries, fatalities and dangerous occurrences the responsible person must notify the relevant enforcing authority of the reportable incident by the quickest practicable means without delay; and send a report of that incident in an approved manner to the relevant enforcing authority (the Health and Safety Executive) within 10 days of the incident occurring.

Should there be either a failure or significant delay in a report being made by the responsible person, then the Enforcing Authority would include this factor as a line of enquiry in any subsequent investigation.

Failure to report under RIDDOR is a criminal offence and the responsible person can be sentenced in the Magistrates' Court with a fine up to £20,000, or in the Crown Court with an unlimited fine.

Infant Foods

Fleur Anderson: [134221]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what stepss he is taking to ensure that baby banks and food banks are being provided with clear and effective guidance to facilitate the provision of formula milk to vulnerable infants who cannot safely be fed any other food.

Kim Johnson: [134241]

To ask the Secretary of State Work and Pensions, what information his Department holds on whether the provision of first infant formula milk to formula fed babies at (a) baby and (b) food banks across the UK complies with relevant regulatory requirements.

Will Quince:

Foodbanks are independent, charitable organisations and the Department for Work and Pensions does not have any role in their operation. Decisions about which donations to accept and make available to food bank users are therefore a matter for food bank providers.

Healthy Start vouchers support pregnant women or households with children under four, who are on a low income, with the cost of milk (including infant formula), fruit and vegetables helping to boost children's long-term health. We are increasing the weekly value of these vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 in April.

Jobcentres: West Midlands

Marco Longhi: [130858]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many job work coaches her Department is planning to deploy in (a) Dudley, (b) the Black Country and (c) the West Midlands region.

Mims Davies:

The Department currently has 71 Work Coaches allocated to two Jobcentres in the Dudley North constituency; 21 at Tipton and 50 at Dudley. A proportion of a further 55 new entrants are due to be deployed by early 2021.

In the Black Country as a whole we are looking to deploy a total of 574 by early 2021, and there is projected to be a total of 1702 Work Coaches across West Midlands by the time that our current recruitment concludes.

Kickstart Scheme

Hilary Benn: [<u>132770</u>]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of applications to be KickStart Gateways have been (a) received (b) approved, (c) rejected or (d) received and are still awaiting consideration.

Mims Davies:

I refer the Honourable Member to PQ 118516 regarding the number of applications from gateway organisations. Officials are working hard to develop our data gathering and analysis processes.

Fleur Anderson: [134222]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether an Equality Impact Assessment will be published for the Kickstart scheme.

Mims Davies:

The Department of Work and Pensions will publish an Equality Impact Assessment on its Kickstart Scheme in due course.

■ Kickstart Scheme: Disability

Emma Hardy: [133131]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to promote the Disability Confident scheme to employers offering Kickstart placements.

Mims Davies:

The Disability Confident Scheme encourages employers to think differently about how they can improve the way they attract, recruit and retain people with disabilities in their workforce. We encourage all employers to consider each young person fairly and promote a wide-range of roles that will suit all those in need of a Kickstart job. Information on the scheme is included with the Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme guidance alongside the existing disability confident employer engagement. This guidance can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-employers-apply-for-a-kickstart-scheme-grant-kickstart-gateway

Our ongoing evaluation of the Kickstart Scheme will consider potential barriers faced by young people from different demographic groups or with particular protected characteristics. Our learning from this exercise will be fed back into the programme.

Lilian Greenwood: [133802]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many disabled young people have (a) applied to the Kickstart scheme and (b) started a placement under that scheme.

Mims Davies:

I refer the honourable member to the answer given for PQ114936.

Local Housing Allowance: Greater London

Nickie Aiken: [130834]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of (a) the effect of the local housing allowance cap on the affordability of rented accommodation in Central London and (b) the potential merits of further increasing that cap to allow a higher proportion of tenants to afford rented accommodation in Central London.

Will Quince:

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates determine the maximum amount of housing benefit or universal credit housing costs available for renters in the private rented sector. LHA rates were increased in April 2020 to the 30th percentile of local market rents costing almost £1 billion and providing 1.5 million claimants with around £600 more housing support per year than they would otherwise have received.

At the same time, we increased the national maximum caps, ensuring all rates including those in central and inner London received an increase. This year the monthly Central London rates were increased by:

CENTRAL LONDON INCREASE IN LHA MONTHLY RATE APRIL 2020

Room	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed
£40.63	£82.47	£196.32	£286.01	£657.57

In 2021/22 all LHA rates will be maintained at their increased level, meaning claimants renting in the private rented sector will continue to benefit from the significant increase in the rates applied this year.

National Insurance: EU Nationals

Stuart C McDonald: [130119]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps EU nationals with settled and pre-settled status need to take to access a National Insurance number; and when procedures will be in place for EU nationals without settled or pre-settled status to access National Insurance numbers.

Guy Opperman:

When applying for a National Insurance Number (NINo) all applicants are required to have their identity verified. For some applicants whose identity has been verified by another UK Government Department, primarily the Home Office, we are able to offer a postal service. For the remainder, UK and EU/EEA citizens, their ID is verified at a face-to-face appointment.

Due to COVID-19, the face-to-face identity verification appointment process is presently suspended.

The NINo allocation service has continued to offer a service, throughout the pandemic, to our most vulnerable customer groups and students who are entitled to Student Finance. In June 2020, we resumed our postal service for visa applicants.

DWP started testing a partial digital solution on a small scale in mid-October to support the issuing of NINos, which is still ongoing. This solution enables collection of the applicant's data, but not the online verification of their identity. Alternative identity verification solutions to reduce the need for a face-to-face identity check for some customer groups, including EU nationals with Settled or Pre-Settled status, is under development as part of this test.

The digital solution will be considered by the Government Data Service for its ability to move into Public Beta, and thereby deliver a service to a greater number of customers early next year.

EU nationals without Settled or Pre-Settled status will still be required to attend a face-to-face appointment with DWP for identity verification.

Jonathan Reynolds:

[132901]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the suspension of processing applications for new national insurance numbers for EU nationals and EU/UK dual nationals since March 2020 on those groups.

Guy Opperman:

The Department is aware of the effect that not having a National Insurance Number (NINo) may be having on some individuals.

It is worth noting that it is possible for an individual to start work before they receive a NINo as long as they are able to prove they have the Right to Work in the UK. The following link provides examples of how an individual is able to prove this:

https://www.gov.uk/prove-right-to-work

Her Majesty's Revenue and Custom's (HMRC) guidance to employers makes it very clear that they are able to employ individuals without a NINo. However, it is of course important that individuals make an application for a NINo once the process recommences, as this will enable their contributions to be recorded against their National Insurance account.

Pension Schemes Bill (HL)

Ms Angela Eagle:

[131181]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the timetable is for the implementation of (a) new criminal offences and (b) information-gathering powers contained in the Pension Schemes Bill; and whether they will apply (i) retrospectively and (ii) to pension schemes that have already closed.

Guy Opperman:

Subject to Parliamentary processes, the Pension Schemes Bill should gain Royal Assent in due course. The Pensions Regulator will be producing guidance on the use of the new criminal sanction powers and it plans to undertake a consultation first with industry to ensure these vital views are captured. There are also other powers in Part 3 of the Bill that require implementing regulations and the aim is for these powers to be available to the Pensions Regulator by autumn 2021. None of the provisions in Part 3 of the Bill will be retrospective and the new criminal sanctions and information gathering powers will apply to all schemes where the act occurs, or in the case of a series of acts commences, after the powers come into force.

Pension Wise: Airdrie and Shotts

Neil Gray: [130091]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people living in Airdrie and Shotts constituency had a Pension Wise guidance appointment by telephone or in person in the period from (a) 1 April 2019 to (b) 31 March 2020.

Neil Gray: [130092]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people living in the Strathclyde region had a Pension Wise guidance appointment by telephone or in person in the period from (a) April 2019 to (b) March 2020.

Neil Gray: [130093]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people living in Scotland had a Pension Wise guidance appointment (a) by telephone and (b) in person in the period from (i) April 2019 and (ii) March 2020.

Guy Opperman:

The Money and Pensions Service publishes data on pension wise appointments across 2019-2020 here:

https://moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Pension-Wise-Service-Evaluation-report-2019-2020.pdf and notes there were over 97k face to face and around 62k telephone appointments.

Pensions: Australia and Canada

Andrew Rosindell: [131193]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to have discussions with the Governments of (a) Australia and (b) Canada on frozen overseas pensions; and is she will make a statement.

Guy Opperman:

The Secretary of State has no plans for discussions with either Australia or Canada, and the Government has no plans to change its policy on the uprating of UK State Pensions overseas. This is a longstanding policy which has been supported by successive Governments for over 70 years.

Personal Independence Payment: Coronavirus

Apsana Begum: [131499]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the extension of personal independence payment awards, what data or estimates her Department holds on the number of claimants who are (a) yet to be notified of the extension of their awards and (b) have not been notified of the extension of their award by the time their award ends.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department has been automatically applying extension of awards of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and have issued around 756,000 notifications to date. We still have c850,000 notifications to issue and remaining customers will be notified of their new award end date early 2021, the planned completion date for all extension activity.

Andrew Gwynne: [133744]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the average time it will take for her Department to process a personal independence claim during the period of the new national lockdown that commenced in England in January 2021.

Justin Tomlinson:

As throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, we are committed to ensuring that people can access financial support through Personal Independence Payment in a timely manner. We always aim to make an award decision as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to review all available evidence.

We are currently operating within expected levels. Average clearance times from initial claim to a decision being made for new claims are currently 16 weeks (October 2020).

Daisy Cooper: [134178]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether personal independent payment benefit award periods set by benefit tribunals will be extended in response to delays to reassessments as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Daisy Cooper: [134179]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether personal independent payment benefit award periods decided by her Department will be extended by six months in response to delays to reassessments as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department has been automatically extending awards of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for decisions which have an award review scheduled, including decisions made following a First Tier Tribunal hearing. This action has been taken in order to provide continuity of payments for claimants whose award review is delayed as a result of Covid-19.

Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations

Jonathan Reynolds: [132899]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if claimants are able to exercise their right to record personal independence payment (PIP) assessment by using mobile phone or laptop computer for audio recordings.

Jonathan Reynolds: [132900]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if claimants must exercise their right to record their personal independence payment (PIP) assessment by producing recordings on either audio cassette or CD.

Justin Tomlinson:

Claimants may use their own equipment to record their Personal Independence Payment (PIP) face-to-face consultation, should they wish to. As stated in the PIP assessment guide (PIPAG), recording of consultations are subject to: informing the assessment provider in advance that they wish to record the consultation, the ability to provide a complete and accurate copy of the audio recording to the health professional (HP) at the end of the consultation, and signing a consent form to provide a copy of the audio recording and not use the audio recording for unlawful purposes.

Certain devices that are capable of editing, real-time streaming or video recording the session are not approved. Non-approved devices include (but are not limited to) PCs, tablets, smart phones, MP3 players, smart watches, and devices that are not capable of providing a verifiable media copy that can be easily checked during the assessment. Acceptable formats for such recordings are restricted to CD and audio cassette only.

For telephone assessments, claimants cannot record the assessment themselves as it is not possible for them to provide the HP with a copy of the audio recording in an acceptable format at the end of the consultation. However, audio recording of PIP telephone assessments is now available when requested by a claimant, this went live with Independent Assessment Services (IAS) on Monday 21 September 2020 and with Capita 30 November 2020.

Section 1.6.57 can be found in part 1 of the PIPAG at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-independence-payment-assessment-guide-for-assessment-providers/pip-assessment-guide-part-1-the-assessment-process#face-to-face-consultation

There is no requirement for claimants to record their PIP assessment.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [134172]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many times a verbal meeting with the assessment providers has generated a satisfactory personal independence payment award.

Justin Tomlinson:

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

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [134173]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to make personal independence payment assessment forms available online.

Justin Tomlinson:

We are committed to providing a digital channel - "PIP Apply" - to widen claimants' choices on how to make a new claim for PIP. In October 2020 we introduced – testing on a small scale - an online version of the PIP 2 claim form for claimants to complete using an HTML link sent via an email. We will use the learning from this as we develop this service further. Our aim is to scale this service by Spring 2021. We are also working on how we enable claimants to access this service directly from gov.uk removing the need for the initial telephone call. As this digital channel will be optional, we will ensure we continue to offer our telephony service and paper form for those who are unable or prefer not to use our online services.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [134174]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to improve access to the personal independence payments assessment.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department is committed to assessing people with health conditions and disabilities fairly and accurately. We have introduced telephone assessments as part of the Department's Covid-19 response and we are now testing video assessments. Building on changes already made, the upcoming Health and Disability Support Green Paper will consult on how to make further improvements to our services to make them better and easier for disabled people to access and use.

Poverty

Marion Fellows: [133015]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment she has made of the potential effect of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement on levels of poverty in (a) the UK and (b) Scotland.

Will Quince:

No such assessment has been made.

Estimating the potential impact of individual policies on future levels of poverty is not possible as it would require making judgements about what will happen to every persons' income in the future and then also isolating potential changes in income due to the effect of specific policies on certain individuals. It is not possible to do this accurately as there is so much uncertainty involved in projecting incomes.

Prison Officers: Retirement

Neil Gray: [132934]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what impact assessment has been carried out for increasing the state pension age of prison officers to 68.

Guy Opperman:

The Pensions Act 2007 increased State Pension age to 68 between 2044-46.

A general Regulatory Impact Assessment was conducted for the Pension Act 2007. It did not look at specific professions.

Government committed in legislation to undertake a review of State Pension age every six years, which means that the statutory deadline for the publication of the next Government review is 2023.

Severe Disability Premium

Apsana Begum: [131498]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2020 to Question 124879 on disability premium, whether any compensation is offered to claimants affected by accidental cessation of the severe disability premium on employment and support allowance awards; and how long on average claimants have had to wait before that premium was reinstated in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Justin Tomlinson:

Where claimants have been affected by accidental cessation of the severe disability premium as part of their Employment and Support Allowance, we are taking swift action to rectify the mistake. The Department's position on compensation is that each case must be considered on its own merits, taking into account the particular circumstances of that case.

Specific information on the waiting times for reinstatement of the premium is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Sharing Economy: Industrial Health and Safety

Kirsten Oswald: [132958]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 7 December 2020 to Question 123620 on Sharing Economy: Industrial Health and Safety, whether the HSE plans to bring forward proposals to transpose article 3 of the Council Directive 89/656/EC to extend to all workers the protections that employees are granted by Regulation 4(1) of the PPE at Work Regulations.

Mims Davies:

The Health and Safety Executive will amend health and safety legislation to extend the PPE at Work Regulations to all workers as soon as possible. Work is underway to timetable the legislative changes in accordance with parliamentary processes.

Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus

Jonathan Reynolds: [133840]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many welfare claimants have seen their benefit cap grace period come to an end since March 2020.

Mims Davies:

Information relating to the total number of welfare claimants whose benefit cap grace period has ended since March 2020 is not available.

A benefit cap grace period is applied irrespective of whether or not the household has sufficient benefit income to be in scope for the cap. This ensures that a claimant will benefit from the grace period exemption should any change of circumstances bring them into the scope of the cap during that period. Many claimants who have the grace period applied will not be in scope of the cap when the grace period ends.

Social Security Benefits: Disability

Vicky Foxcroft: [133064]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason the publication of the health and disability Green Paper and reform of the assessment processes for employment support allowance and personal independence payments, has been delayed.

Justin Tomlinson:

Given the focus on the departmental response to Covid-19 and providing citizens with the support they need, we are working to a longer timescale than previously anticipated. We will continue to develop the Green Paper, supported by virtual engagement with charities and disabled people, and plan to publish the formal consultation later in 2021. The Green Paper aims to better understand the needs of disabled people and will seek views and ideas on what improvements should be made to the health and disability benefits system.

Vicky Foxcroft: [133065]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans her Department has to engage directly with (a) disabled and (b) seriously unwell people who have been through its assessments for (i) employment support allowance and (ii) personal independence payment during the consultation on the Health and Disability Green Paper.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Green Paper aims to better understand the needs of disabled people and will seek views and ideas on what improvements should be made to the health and disability benefits system.

The Department has ensured a strong emphasis on engaging with stakeholders and we have hosted a series of workshops across the country with local disability organisations, disabled people and people with health conditions. This engagement has continued virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue until publication and during the consultation period.

Vicky Foxcroft: [133066]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the Gunning Principles will be applied to the consultation on the Health and Disability Green Paper in the event that paper is published during a period when covid-19 lockdown restrictions are in place.

Justin Tomlinson:

The consultation on the Health and Disability Support Green Paper will follow the Government consultation principles which provide clear guidance to Government departments on conducting consultations. These principles are published on gov.uk. We will be mindful of any covid-19 restrictions that are in place at the time of publication.

Social Security Benefits: EU Countries

Marion Fellows: [133016]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of excluding (a) family benefits, (b) long-term care and (c) special contributory benefits from the Protocol on Social Security Coordination of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Marion Fellows: [133026]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential effect of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement on access to social security payments for (a) disabled UK citizens in the EU and (b) disabled EU citizens in the UK.

Justin Tomlinson:

Those covered by the social security co-ordination provisions of the Withdrawal Agreement are not impacted by the changes to the rules agreed with the EU under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation agreement. Those individuals will remain covered by the EU Social Security Co-ordination Regulations for as long as they remain scope of the Withdrawal Agreement. UK and Irish nationals travelling between the UK and Ireland are also unaffected.

Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations

Liz Saville Roberts: [134027]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of allowing registered healthcare professionals other than GPs to sign statements of Fitness for Work.

Justin Tomlinson:

We recognise that the changing nature of primary care services and the associated workforce means that there are professionals other than GPs who are well placed to have work and health conversations and issue statements of Fitness for Work.

We have assessed the benefits of extending certification to other healthcare professionals by carrying out research and consultation with key stakeholders including professional bodies.

We have also worked closely with our stakeholders to ensure that we have considered a range of options and that any changes to the operation of the fit note will meet the needs of healthcare services, their workforce and their patients.

■ State Retirement Pensions

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [133212]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department has taken to compensate people who were eligible to claim State Pension under the basic State Pension system, but did not make a claim as they unaware of their eligibility.

Guy Opperman:

The provisions of the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 (Schedule 4, para 13), as amended in 2008, set out the rules in relation to this matter. Where an individual is required to make a claim to be entitled to State Pension the law allows for such claims to be backdated for a maximum period of up to 12 months.

■ State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad

Claire Hanna: [133278]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the December 2020 APPG report on Frozen Pensions.

Guy Opperman:

The policy on the up-rating of UK State Pensions for recipients overseas is longstanding and has been supported by successive Governments for over 70 years. The Government has no plans to change this policy.

State Retirement Pensions: Commonwealth

Kim Johnson: [133277]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential benefits of bringing the pensions of UK citizens residing in primarily Commonwealth countries into line with UK citizens resident in the (a) EEA or (b) Switzerland.

Guy Opperman:

The UK State Pension is payable worldwide to those who meet the qualifying conditions. Entitlement to the UK State Pension is based on a person's National Insurance record without regard to nationality. The annual index-linked increases are paid to UK State Pension recipients where there is a legal requirement to do so. For example, where UK State Pension recipients are living in countries where there is a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating. The Government has no plans to change this policy.

State Retirement Pensions: Females

Jane Stevenson: [130220]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to mitigate the effect of state pension age changes on women born in the 1950s; and if she will make a statement.

Guy Opperman:

Since 1995, successive Governments have taken the same approach to this issue. The reforms have focused on maintaining the right balance between the sustainability of the State Pension, fairness between generations and affordability for the taxpayer who funds on-going State Pension.

The welfare system continues to provide a strong safety net for those who cannot work.

Statutory Sick Pay: Coronavirus

Owen Thompson: [133972]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will raise the level of statutory sick pay to protect people affected by covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

This government has a strong safety net that helps people who are facing hardship and are unable to support themselves financially and we have taken steps to strengthen that safety net as part of the government's response to the pandemic.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) provides a minimum level of income for employees when they are sick or incapable of work. For those who are sick, self-isolating or shielding due to coronavirus, SSP is now payable from the first day of work missed, rather than the fourth. Some employers may also decide to pay more, and for longer, through Occupational Sick Pay.

SSP is just one part of our welfare safety net and our wider government offer to support people in times of need. Where an individual's income is reduced while off work sick and they require further financial support, for example where they are not eligible for SSP, they may be able to claim Universal Credit and new style Employment and Support Allowance, depending on their personal circumstances.

Working people on low incomes who are required to remain at home by NHS Test and Trace to help stop the spread of the virus and cannot work from home could be eligible for a £500 payment to financially support them while self-isolating.

Background

- Individuals are eligible for SSP, from day one rather than day 4, where they are unable to work because they are:
- o Sick, displaying symptoms or have tested positive for coronavirus

o self-isolating because they, or someone in their household (including an extended or linked household), is displaying symptoms or has tested positive for coronavirus

- o self-isolating because they have been notified by the NHS or public health authority that they have come into contact with someone who has coronavirus.
- o Self-isolating because they have been advised to do so by their doctor or health clinician before being admitted to hospital for planned or elective surgery
- o shielding because they live or work in an area where shielding is reintroduced and they have been advised to do so by their doctor or health authority

Other SSP eligibility criteria will apply.

Universal Credit

Alison McGovern: [132894]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish her Department's projections for business planning purposes of the universal credit claimant count (a) in each year for which it has been projected and (b) aged 16 - 24 in each year for which it has been projected.

Mims Davies:

The Department published its latest benefit expenditure and caseload tables, including Universal Credit caseload over the next 5 financial years, which is available here [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/benefit-expenditure-and-caseloadtables-2020]. This was published in December.

Estimates by age-group are not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Universal Credit: Coronavirus

Charlotte Nichols: [130868]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make it her policy to allocate funding to maintain the £20 uplift to universal credit payments beyond April 2021.

Will Quince:

The £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit was announced by the Chancellor as a temporary measure in March 2020 to support those facing the most financial disruption as a result of the public health emergency. This measure remains in place until March 2021. As the Government has done throughout this crisis, it will continue to assess how best to support low-income families, which is why we will look at the economic and health context before making any decisions.

Mick Whitley: [133202]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential effect on the mental wellbeing of benefit claimants of reducing the £20 universal credit uplift.

Mick Whitley: [133205]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of making the £20 universal credit uplift permanent.

Will Quince:

The £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit was announced by the Chancellor as a temporary measure in March 2020 to support those facing the most financial disruption as a result of the public health emergency. This measure remains in place until April 2021. As the Government has done throughout this pandemic, it will continue to assess how best to support low-income families, which is why we will look at the economic and health context before making any decisions.

Mick Whitley: [133203]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential effect on levels of child poverty in (a) Birkenhead and (b) the North West of reducing the £20 universal credit uplift.

Mick Whitley: [133204]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential effect on levels of child hunger in (a) Birkenhead and (b) the North West of reducing the £20 universal credit uplift.

Will Quince:

No assessment has been made.

The £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit was announced by the Chancellor as a temporary measure in March 2020 to support those facing the most financial disruption as a result of the public health emergency. This measure remains in place until April 2021. As the Government has done throughout this pandemic, it will continue to assess how best to support low-income families, which is why we will look at the economic and health context before making any decisions.

Throughout this pandemic, this Government has delivered an unprecedented package of support to protect jobs and businesses and, for those in most need, injected billions into the welfare system. The new Covid Winter Grant Scheme builds on that support, with an additional £170m for local authorities in England, to support families with children and other vulnerable people with the cost of food and essential utilities this winter.

Ms Angela Eagle: [133716]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make it her policy to reintroduce the suspension on (a) repayment of universal credit advances and (b) sanctions for claimants during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Will Quince:

There are no plans to introduce suspension of a) a repayment of UC advances and b) sanctions. Work coaches will work with claimants to ensure claimant commitments

are reasonable for claimants' circumstances, and allows them to continue to continue to adhere to Covid-19 public health advice.

Owen Thompson: [133973]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make the £20 universal credit uplift permanent in light of the new January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Will Quince:

The £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit was announced by the Chancellor as a temporary measure in March 2020 to support those facing the most financial disruption as a result of the public health emergency. This measure remains in place until April 2021. As the Government has done throughout this pandemic, it will continue to assess how best to support low-income families, which is why we will look at the economic and health context before making any decisions.

Winter Fuel Payments: Maladministration

Carla Lockhart: [133292]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many errors have been recorded in the payment of winter fuel payments by reason of (a) incorrect address (b) being paid into incorrect bank account, in each of the last three years.

Guy Opperman:

The Department for Work and Pensions Is not required to retain this information. In the circumstances the information is only possible to obtain at disproportionate cost to the DWP.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

Advance from the Contingencies Fund

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): [HCWS691]

The Cabinet Office has sought a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £56,500,000.

The requirement has arisen due to increased costs relating to urgent expenditure, including that relating to the COVID-19 response.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £56,500,000 will be sought in the Supplementary Estimate for the Cabinet Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £56,500,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Update on the Government's response to the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review

Minister of State (Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health) (Ms Nadine Dorries): [HCWS692]

The Report of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review (IMMDS Review) was published on 8 July last year. I would like first to sincerely thank Baroness Cumberlege and her team for their work on the Review. I also pay tribute to the women and their families who bravely shared their experiences and brought these issues to light. Without their tireless efforts to have their voices heard, this Review would not have been possible.

The overriding question investigated by the Review is how the health and care system listens and responds to patient concerns raised by patients, and women in particular. We must not forget that the Cumberlege Review, alongside other independent inquiries including the Paterson Inquiry, was commissioned because women did not feel listened to or their concerns acknowledged – today is another step towards righting this.

On the Paterson inquiry, I would also like to provide a very brief update. Work on the Government response was temporarily paused last Spring due to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts have since resumed at pace, and I can confirm today that I will announce and publish the Government's initial response in Parliament shortly.

Returning to the IMMDS Review, many of the Report's recommendations have already been discussed in detail during the Committee stage of the Medicines and Medical

Devices Bill, and this has helped us to determine our future direction. We are very grateful to Members from both Houses who have worked with us on this.

I am today updating the House on the Government's response to the Report of the IMMDS Review, taking each recommendation in turn.

Recommendation 1: The Government should immediately issue a fulsome apology on behalf of the healthcare system to the families affected by Primodos, sodium valproate and pelvic mesh. In July, when I introduced this Report to the House, I made an unreserved apology on behalf of the health and care system to those women, their children and their families for the time the system took to listen and respond. I assure those affected that the Government has listened, and will continue to listen.

Recommendation 2: The appointment of a Patient Safety Commissioner who would be an independent public leader with a statutory responsibility. The Commissioner would champion the value of listening to patients and promoting users' perspectives in seeking improvements to patient safety around the use of medicines and medical devices.

The central recommendation in the Report is for the establishment of an independent Patient Safety Commissioner. This recommendation has rightly ignited much interest and debate in both Houses, and the Government has listened carefully to the arguments made for a Commissioner, and how this might sit within the wider patient safety landscape.

Patient safety is a key priority for the healthcare system. In my role as Minister of State for patient safety, I often hear from and meet with people who have been affected by issues of patient safety. Their stories have common themes – of suffering avoidable harm, of not being listened to and of a system that is then difficult to navigate when things go wrong. We want to make the NHS as safe as anywhere in the world, and we must retain an absolute focus on achieving this goal.

I can therefore confirm that the Government tabled an amendment to the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill before the Christmas Recess to establish the role of an independent Patient Safety Commissioner, in line with Baroness Cumberlege's second recommendation.

The Commissioner will act as an independent advocate for patients, and strengthen the ability of our health services to listen to the voice of patients. The Commissioner will be established as a statutory office holder, appointed by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and will act independently on behalf of patients.

The Commissioner's core duties will be to promote the safety of patients and the importance of the views of patients in relation to medicines and medical devices. To help in carrying out these duties, the Commissioner will have a number of powers and functions, including the ability to make reports and recommendations to the NHS and independent sector, and to request and share information with these bodies.

The Government looks forward to working with Members of both Houses to ensure this new post acts as a beacon for listening and reflecting the safety concerns of patients, so that we can drive positive culture change in our healthcare system.

Recommendation 3: A new independent Redress Agency for those harmed by medicines and medical devices should be created based on models operating effectively in other countries. The Redress Agency will administer decisions using a non-adversarial process with determinations based on avoidable harm looking at systemic failings, rather than blaming individuals.

The Government has no current plans to establish a redress agency as set out in recommendation three. The Government and industry have previously established redress schemes without the need for an additional agency.

Recommendation 4: Separate schemes should be set up for each intervention – HPTs, valproate and pelvic mesh – to meet the cost of providing additional care and support to those who have experienced avoidable harm and are eligible to claim.

Recommendation four on redress schemes for sodium valproate, mesh, and HPTs remains under consideration.

Recommendation 5: Networks of specialist centres should be set up to provide comprehensive treatment, care and advice for those affected by implanted mesh; and separately for those adversely affected by medications taken during pregnancy.

Good progress is being made on establishing specialist mesh services, which are the fifth recommendation in the Report. NHS England is working with NHS hospitals to establish specialist mesh services which are currently planned to go live from the Spring this year.

These services will bring together leading experts to provide multi-disciplinary care and treatment for all women who have experienced complications due to vaginal or abdominal mesh procedures.

With a centre in every NHS region, these new services will ensure nationwide provision, and centres will work together to hone their expertise and share best practice.

We continue to consider the second part of recommendation five, which is for specialist centres for those adversely affected by medicines in pregnancy.

Recommendation 6: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) needs substantial revision particularly in relation to adverse event reporting and medical device regulation. It needs to ensure that it engages more with patients and their outcomes. It needs to raise awareness of its public protection roles and to ensure that patients have an integral role in its work.

Patient safety is the MHRA's top priority. The MHRA recognises that the major changes highlighted by the Report, particularly recommendation six, are very important.

The MHRA has already begun a substantial programme of work to improve how it involves patients in all aspects of its work, to reform systems for reporting adverse

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incidents with medicines and medical devices, and to strengthen the evidence base for its regulatory decisions.

Within the MHRA's work to strengthen the evidence base, the safety of medicines in pregnancy is of utmost importance.

In the UK, three quarters of a million babies are born each year, and more than half of expectant mothers will need to take medicines when pregnant. We must ensure that women have high-quality, accessible information to be able to make informed decisions about their healthcare.

To that end, I would like to highlight two important developments of MHRA reform.

Firstly, the MHRA Expert Working Group on Optimising Data on Medicines used During Pregnancy is today publishing its report which recommends ways in which healthcare data can be better collected and made available for analysis. This will enable the generation of better evidence on medicines used in pregnancy and will be vitally important when developing clear and consistent advice for women.

Secondly, the MHRA has established a Safer Medicines in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Consortium. This brings together 16 leading organisations from across the NHS, regulators, and key third sector and charitable organisations. Today, they are launching a strategy setting out how they will work to improve information on medicines for women who are thinking about becoming pregnant, are pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

Sodium Valproate

On sodium valproate, in response to concerns raised during the previous debate on the IMMDS Review, I am pleased to announce that the National Director of Patient Safety has recently established a Valproate Safety Implementation Group.

This Valproate Safety Implementation Group will drive forward work to reduce harm from valproate through taking action to reduce the number of women prescribed valproate, and improving patient safety for women for whom there is no alternative medication, for example by increasing adherence to the Valproate Pregnancy Prevention Programme. The Programme will ensure that every girl or woman knows about the risks of valproate in pregnancy, that where appropriate she is on effective contraception, and that she has a review by her specialist prescriber at a minimum once a year, when a risk acknowledgement form will be discussed and signed by both prescriber and woman herself. Importantly, the Valproate Safety Implementation group will work with patients to understand how women can be supported to make informed decisions about their health care.

In addition, last week the MHRA published the conclusions of a safety review into antiepileptic drugs conducted by the Commission on Human Medicines. This will help clinicians identify safer alternatives to valproate for the treatment of epilepsy in women who may become pregnant.

I am also pleased to announce that the first data from the new Valproate Registry will become available later this month. The registry is being developed by the MHRA and NHS Digital, and will support work to monitor adherence to the Valproate Pregnancy

Prevention Programme, and allow for long-term individual patient follow up.

Recommendation 7: A central patient-identifiable database should be created by collecting key details of the implantation of all devices at the time of the operation. This can then be linked to specifically created registers to research and audit the outcomes both in terms of the device safety and patient reported outcomes measures.

The seventh recommendation in Baroness Cumberlege's Report rightly reflects on the importance of collecting the right data for monitoring the safety of medical devices. We recognise the need for improved data collection and analysis for medical devices.

That is why the Government acted in June last year to amend the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill to create the power to establish a UK-wide medical device information system prior to the review report being published, as we recognised the need to deliver such an information system. This system will mean that in future, subject to regulations, we can routinely collect medical device, procedure and outcome data from all NHS and private provider organisations across the UK, ensuring that no patient in the UK falls through the gaps.

The Government is grateful to Members in both Houses, including Baroness Cumberlege, for their support for establishing a medical device information system

Recommendation 8: Transparency of payments made to clinicians needs to improve. The register of the General Medical Council (GMC) should be expanded to include a list of financial and non-pecuniary interests for all doctors, as well as doctors' particular clinical interests and their recognised and accredited specialisms. In addition, there should be mandatory reporting for the pharmaceutical and medical device industries of payments made to teaching hospitals, research institutions and individual clinicians.

The Government is considering recommendation eight, which is that doctors' financial and non-pecuniary interests should be declared and publicly available.

Any publication of declarations of interest should cover all clinical decision-making staff, not just doctors: it would also need to be held where patients could most easily access and interpret the information, with appropriate governance arrangements. We will consider these issues in discussion with the GMC, other stakeholders and the patient reference group to ensure the views of patients are listened to and incorporated.

Recommendation 9: The Government should immediately set up a task force to implement this Review's recommendations. Its first task should be to set out a timeline for their implementation.

The Government has no plans to establish an independent taskforce to implement the Report's recommendations. A cross-system working group has already been set up, meeting regularly, to develop the Government's detailed response to the Report.

However, the Government recognises the need for effective patient engagement both to build trust, and ensure effective implementation. I am pleased to announce today that we are establishing a Patient Reference Group, which is part of Baroness Cumberlege's

ninth recommendation. The Patient Reference Group will ensure that patient voices are heard as we move forward towards a full response to the Report.

Conclusion

The Report of the IMMDS Review powerfully demonstrates the importance of hearing the patient voice in patient safety matters. The actions outlined here demonstrate the Government's commitment to learning from this report, and will support vital work already underway to hear the voice of the patient as part of the NHS Patient Safety Strategy. We currently plan to respond further to the Report of the IMMDS Review during 2021.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [HCWS694]

Last week I announced further support to protect the most vulnerable through the national lockdown. This includes further efforts and funding to protect rough sleepers and ensure they are registered with a GP, where they are not already. I also confirmed that evictions will not be enforced by bailiffs until at least 21 February, except for in the most egregious situations. I have set out below the comprehensive set of measures the Government has put in place to protect the tenants, whilst ensuring landlords have access to justice for the most serious cases.

Rough sleeping

Given the new variant of COVID-19 that is driving infection rates and the Prime Minister's announcement of a new national lockdown, it is clear we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that people who sleep rough, who we know are vulnerable to this disease, are kept as safe as possible and that we do everything we can to protect the NHS.

As a result, I am launching an additional £10 million fund, as part of the over £700 million deployed this year, to help ensure even more rough sleepers are safely accommodated and will be asking that this opportunity is actively used to make sure all rough sleepers are registered with a GP, and are factored into local area vaccination plans, in line with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) prioritisation for Covid vaccinations. In due course, those vaccination efforts will be simpler and more successful where rough-sleepers are in safe accommodation.

This Government is committed to ending rough sleeping and we have taken huge steps working with local authorities and their partners to protect rough sleepers during the pandemic. This work has not stopped, and in November we had supported around 33,000 people with nearly 10,000 in emergency accommodation and over 23,000 already moved on into longer-term accommodation.

This work has had a huge impact; intelligence from local authorities indicates that numbers on the streets have fallen significantly. A recent study published by the Lancet showed that because of this response 266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of

the pandemic among England's homeless population, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 admissions to Intensive Care Units.

These efforts have been backed by significant government support. We have given councils over £4.6 billion in unringfenced grants to help them to manage the impacts of COVID-19, which we have been clear includes their work to support rough sleepers.

We have also been in close contact with councils to develop plans for the coming months, supported by the £266 million Next Steps Accommodation Programme which aims to ensure that as few people as possible return to the streets. This includes bringing forward 3,300 new homes this year for rough sleepers, leaving a national legacy of this Government's support for these individuals.

In addition, to prepare for winter months, we launched a £10 million Cold Weather Fund for all local authorities to bring forward COVID-secure accommodation this winter and to keep vulnerable people safe from the cold. This is accompanied by a £2 million Transformation Fund for the voluntary sector, as well as comprehensive guidance on reopening night shelters more safely, where not doing so would endanger lives.

With the introduction of national restrictions in November, we asked all local authorities to update their plans for rough sleepers to make sure they had somewhere safe to go over the winter. We provided targeted support through the Protect Programme to support local authorities with higher numbers of rough sleepers to meet the specific challenges they faced. In total, we are spending over £700 million in 2020/21 on homelessness and rough sleeping.

Despite the success of ongoing interventions, we know there are some people on the streets who have not engaged with that support, or have lost accommodation provided to them, which is why I have asked local authorities to make further efforts to accommodate all rough sleepers again, even those who have previously refused help.

The Government has asked local areas to ensure that vulnerable groups will be able to access the vaccine, when they fall into one of the JCVI priority groups, and this should include people experiencing rough sleeping. Local authorities should work with their local health partners to ensure that – when they are prioritised - individuals experiencing homelessness are able to access the vaccine by other means if mainstream provision is unsuitable. This will help ensure that the wider health needs of people who sleep rough are addressed, supporting them now and for the future.

I encourage all relevant partners and local authorities to consider how they can best use the available support to protect the most vulnerable.

Ongoing protection for renters

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government has put in place unprecedented support to protect renters. Further legislation to extend protections for renters has come into force today, continuing to prevent bailiffs from attending residential premises to enforce a writ or warrant of possession except in the most egregious circumstances. This will ensure we continue to protect public health during the new period of national lockdown restrictions,

at a time when the risk of virus transmission is very high, and to avoid placing additional burdens on the NHS and local authorities.

The measure contains some exemptions for the most serious cases. These exemptions are for:

- cases where the court is satisfied that the claim is against trespassers who are persons unknown;
- cases where the court is satisfied that the order for possession was made wholly or partly on the grounds of anti-social behaviour, nuisance or false statements, domestic abuse in social tenancies or substantial rent arrears equivalent to six month's rent: or
- where the property is unoccupied and the court is satisfied that the order for possession was made wholly or partly on the grounds of death of the tenant.

Many landlords have been compassionate and shown huge forbearance for tenants over this period. However, in order to ensure that the restrictions do not disproportionately impact landlords, some of whom rely on rental income for their livelihoods, we have amended the rent arrears exemption from the earlier regulations, to apply in cases where there are six months' rent arrears or more. Recognising the need for landlords to be able to access justice in cases such as this, the Government has amended the rent arrears exemption to apply in cases where there are six months' rent arrears or more.

This legislation will be in place for at least six weeks, when it will be reviewed and consideration taken to the latest public health data. The legislation applies to England only.

These continued restrictions on bailiff enforcement build on protections for renters announced last year, including 6-month notice periods until at least the end of March for all but the most serious cases. This means that renters served notice today can stay in their homes until July 2021, with time to find alternative support or accommodation.

Courts will continue to remain open throughout the new period of national lockdown restrictions. The Court rules and procedures introduced in September to respond to the pandemic remain in place and will be regularly reviewed. This includes the requirement for landlords to send the court information about the impact the pandemic has had on their tenant. The judiciary will continue to prioritise the most serious cases, such as antisocial behaviour or fraud.

In addition, the Government is piloting a new mediation service as part of the possession action process to support landlords and tenants to resolve disputes before a formal court hearing takes place. This new service will be free to use for tenants and landlords that agree to do so. We anticipate the pilot rolling out in February for six months. It will help more tenants at an early stage of the possession process, mitigating the risk of tenants becoming homeless and helping to sustain tenancies where possible.

We've taken action to prevent people getting into financial hardship by helping businesses to pay salaries, with the Job Retention scheme extended to the end of April, and boosted the welfare safety net by billions. This helps to ensure that tenants are able to pay their rent, minimising the impact on landlords. We strongly encourage all tenants to pay their rent and if they are having difficulty in doing so, they should have an early conversation with their landlord.

To further support landlords with buy to let mortgages, the mortgage holiday has been extended with applications open to 31 March 2021. Borrowers impacted by Coronavirus that have not yet had a mortgage payment holiday will be entitled to a six-month holiday, and those that have already started a mortgage payment holiday will be able to top up to six months without this being recorded on their credit file.

Taken together, our package of protections for renters strikes the right balance between prioritising public health and supporting renters, whilst ensuring landlords can access and exercise their right to justice. This, along with the measures being announced today to step up the Government's ongoing support for rough sleepers and ensure their wider health needs are addressed, will safeguard the most vulnerable people across England through the national lockdown.

Leasehold update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [HCWS695]

The Government is committed to promoting fairness and transparency for homeowners and ensuring that consumers are protected from abuse and poor service.

Last week I announced the most significant set of reforms to how we hold property for at least 40 years and the beginning of even more fundamental change to English property law, through the widespread introduction of the Commonhold tenure.

To deliver this, we will bring forward legislation in the upcoming session to set future ground rents to zero. This will be the first part of seminal two-part legislation to implement reforms in this Parliament.

Enfranchisement valuation and lease extensions

In 2017 the Government asked the Law Commission to review the legislation on leasehold enfranchisement, with the aim of making it easier, quicker and more cost effective for leaseholders to buy their freehold or extend their lease.

The Law Commission have now completed this work and their findings are clear. Under the current system, too many leaseholders find the process for extending their lease or buying their freehold prohibitively expensive, too complex and lacking transparency. I am addressing this, addressing historic imbalance to ensure fairness for leaseholders, whilst taking account of the legitimate rights of freeholders. I will continue to ensure we meet this objective as we bring forward reforms.

The Government will reform the process of enfranchisement valuation leaseholds must follow to calculate the cost of extending their lease or buying their freehold. Taken together these measures could save leaseholds thousands of pounds, depending on the remaining term of their lease.

The Government will abolish marriage value, cap the treatment of ground rents at 0.1% of the freehold value and prescribe rates for the calculations at market value. The Government will also introduce an online calculator, further simplifying the process for leaseholds and ensuring standardisation and fairness for all those looking to enfranchise.

Existing discounts for improvements made by the leaseholder and for security of tenure will be retained, alongside a separate valuation methodology for low-value properties known as 'section 9(1)'. Leaseholders will also be able to voluntarily agree to a restriction on future development of their property to avoid paying 'development value'.

Leaseholders of houses can currently only extend their lease once at a 'modern ground rent' for 50 years, compared to leaseholders of flats who can extend as often as they wish at a zero 'peppercorn' ground rent for 90 years.

I am confirming that the Government will give leaseholders of all types of property the same right to extend their lease as often as they wish, at zero ground rent, for a term of 990 years. There will continue to be redevelopment breaks during the last 12 months of the original lease or the last five years of each period of 90 years of the extension, subject to existing safeguards and compensation.

We will also enable leaseholders, where they already have a long lease, to buy out the ground rent without the need to extend the term of the lease.

Commonhold

In 2017 the Government also asked the Law Commission to recommend reforms to reinvigorate commonhold as a workable alternative to leasehold, for both existing and new homes.

Having closely reviewed their report, I am confirming I will establish a new Commonhold Council as a partnership of industry, leaseholders and Government that will prepare homeowners and the market for the widespread take-up of commonhold. I will start this work immediately, including considering legislation. I know this will take time and close working with consumers and industry, and the Commonhold Council will be the critical first step of this.

Restricting future ground rents

Finally, ahead of legislating to restrict future ground rents to zero for future leases, I am also confirming that this policy now also applies to retirement properties. Restricting future ground rents to zero is a basic matter of fairness and including retirement properties will ensure that those who live in retirement housing benefit from the same reform as other leaseholders.

I do not see a compelling argument to exclude the elderly from this new protection in fact, they deserve it more than most.

In recognition of the previous announcement of the ground rent exemption in June 2019, and wishing to mitigate potential impact on these developers, commencement of this provision will be deferred and come into force (for retirement properties) 12 months after Royal Assent.

This announcement is the beginning of a programme of historic leasehold and property reforms. This package is only part of Government's response to the Law Commission's reports. The Government will respond to the Law Commission's remaining recommendations on enfranchisement, commonhold and right to manage in due course. We will translate these measures into law as soon as possible, starting with legislation to set future ground rents to zero in the upcoming session. This will be the first part of major two-part legislation to implement leasehold and Commonhold reforms in this Parliament.

It is my ambition that together these fundamentally enhance the fairness of English property rights and be seen in the future as landmark reforms to the way we own homes.

JUSTICE

Implementation of the Whiplash Reform Programme

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): [HCWS693]

I would like to provide an update on the Whiplash Reform Programme.

The Government remains firmly committed to the implementation of the necessary and proportionate measures set out in Part 1 of the Civil Liability Act 2018 and the associated increase to the small claims track limit for road traffic accident related personal injury claims.

In my Written Ministerial Statement of 21 April 2020, I spoke of the effect and impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the medical, legal and insurance sectors and the action that Government was taking to ease the difficulties caused by the outbreak. This included delaying the implementation of the Whiplash Reform Programme to April 2021 in order to enable key sectors of this country's business to focus on delivering their response to Covid-19. This pause also allowed the Government to focus resource on the priority delivery of key justice services during the pandemic.

Despite the challenges the pandemic has presented, MoJ continues to work with the Civil Procedure Rules Committee to finalise the supporting rules and pre-action protocol. In addition, MoJ's delivery partner the Motor Insurers' Bureau continues to make excellent progress on the build of the Official Injury Claim Service.

I do however acknowledge the challenges experienced by all this year in the face of the pandemic. I said at the time of my April statement that the Government will continue to monitor developments in relation to the current pandemic and will, if necessary, make further announcements in regard to the implementation of these important reforms. So we have listened carefully to the concerns raised by stakeholders, in particular the need for as much notice as possible to take the necessary steps in anticipation of these reforms and to prepare their businesses for the changes to how small road traffic personal injury claims are managed. We understand the importance of industry preparedness and, after consideration, it is for that reason we have decided to allow an additional short period of time to further accommodate this. As such, we will implement the Whiplash Reform Programme in May 2021.

This is a sensible and pragmatic approach to take in order to achieve successful and effective implementation of the Whiplash Reform Programme. Delivering these reforms remains a key Government priority and we will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that all are sufficiently prepared for the new measures upon implementation.