

**Daily Report****Thursday, 21 January 2021**

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 21 January 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:22 P.M., 21 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

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Databases

Chi Onwurah:

[\[138966\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how many information gateways there are in operation in her Department; and how those gateways are managed and monitored.

Michael Ellis:

The Attorney General's Office ('AGO') takes the security of its data very seriously. All electronic gateways are managed and monitored through Government Legal Department (GLD) and Crown Prosecution Service HR, Finance, IT and the Unduly Lenient Sentence ('ULS') casework shared service provision. Where issues are identified, appropriate actions are taken. Revealing details of AGO monitoring capabilities in public would likely prejudice the capability, effectiveness and ability to strongly preserve those systems. In order to safeguard processing systems, we are unable to provide the information requested.

■ Slavery: Children

Jess Phillips:

[\[140123\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how many prosecutions for offences against children there have been for the Offence of Slavery, Servitude and forced or compulsory Labour under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 in each year since its enactment.

Jess Phillips:

[\[140124\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how many prosecutions for offences against children have there been for Human Trafficking under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 in each year since its enactment.

Michael Ellis:

The Crown Prosecution Service ('CPS') maintains a central record of the number of offences in which a prosecution commenced, including offences charged by way of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. This data may be further disaggregated by the child abuse case monitoring flag. The CPS definition of child abuse covers any case where the victim was under 18 years of age at the time of the offence and includes allegations or crimes perpetrated by both adults and under 18s.

Section 1 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides an offence of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour; Section 2 provides for a single offence of human trafficking covering sexual and non-sexual exploitation; and, Section 4 provides that it is an offence to commit another offence with a view to committing a trafficking offence under Section 2.

Since the Act came into force and up to the end of March 2020, the number of Modern Slavery Act offences flagged as child abuse is as follows:

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Modern Slavery Act 2015 { 1 }	0	0	0	3	0
Modern Slavery Act 2015 { 2 }	1	21	26	5	30
Modern Slavery Act 2015 { 4 }	0	0	0	0	0

Data Source: CPS Management Information System

This data does not indicate the number of individual defendants prosecuted for these offences or the final outcome of the charged offence.

It is not possible to separately report the nature of, or type of exploitation carried out on victims of modern slavery or trafficking offences other than by manually examining case files at disproportionate cost.

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Bounce Back Loan Scheme

Mr Steve Baker:

[R] [\[138941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the potential default rate for SMEs that took out loans under the Bounce Back Loan Scheme; and what steps he is taking to reduce that rate.

Paul Scully:

The preliminary estimate of default rates was published in the BEIS Annual Report and Accounts for 19/20, is based on losses observed in previous programmes which are similar to the Scheme. However these estimates are highly uncertain.

In order to reduce the potential default rate for SMEs, on 24th September my Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Pay As You Grow measures. Under the measures, the Government will give all businesses that borrowed under the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs) the option to repay their loan over a period of up to ten years. This will reduce their average monthly repayments on the loan by almost half. UK businesses will also have the option to move temporarily to interest-only payments for periods of up to six months (an option which

they can use up to three times), or to pause their repayments entirely for up to six months (an option they can use once and only after having made six payments).

These changes will provide greater flexibility to repay these loans over a longer period and in a way that better suits businesses' individual circumstances. A business which took out a £30,000 Bounce Back Loan would see their average monthly repayments fall from £532 to £309 (42% reduction) if they repaid the loan over 10 years rather than six. The same borrower could temporarily reduce their monthly repayments to just £63 if they switched to interest-only repayments.

The first Bounce Back Loans repayments will begin in May 2021, and businesses will have the opportunity to request these Pay as you Grow measures before their first repayments fall due.

■ **Business: Government Assistance**

Anneliese Dodds:

[\[139127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether a state aid limit operates on payments to businesses made after 31 December 2020; what the value of that limit is; and over what time period that limit is applied.

Paul Scully:

EU State aid limits, which vary depending on the basis on which aid is granted, no longer apply to subsidies granted from 1 January 2021 in the UK. The only exception is aid within scope of the Withdrawal Agreement, specifically Article 10 of the Northern Ireland Protocol and Article 138 in relation to aid for EU programmes and activities within the Multiannual Financial Framework. Instead, the principles and conditions in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) must be followed, for example, any subsidies must be appropriate, proportionate, and limited to what is necessary to achieve the economic or policy objective. The TCA does not apply to subsidies below 325,000 Special Drawing Rights, approximately £345,000, given to a single enterprise over three fiscal years.

■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

Ian Paisley:

[\[137201\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2020 to Question 122697 on Coronavirus: Vaccination, how much funding his Department plans to allocate towards vaccine research that does not involve human fetal tissue in its development, production and laboratory testing in 2021; and whether his Department has plans to increase the level of such funding in future years.

Ian Paisley:

[\[137202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 8 December 2020 to Question 122697 on Coronavirus: Vaccination, how much funding his Department allocated towards vaccine research that did not involve

aborted human fetal tissue in its development, production and laboratory testing in each of the last five years.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Department's Research and Development (R&D) settlement has increased to £11.1 billion for 2021/22. This settlement supports our commitments as set out in the R&D Roadmap and helps to consolidate our position as a science superpower. Specific funding is subject to our departmental allocations process, which is now underway and progressing at pace, including the allocation of this funding to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Most of the research into vaccines for human use that is funded by the Department is carried out through the Medical Research Council (MRC), part of UKRI. The latest available data shows that in 2017/18, the MRC funded £25 million into research aimed at developing vaccines. This data does not record whether this work involved the use of aborted human foetal tissue.

Any use of such tissue would require an ethical review and must be in accordance with legal requirements. The MRC has produced guidance on the ethical and legal requirements for the use of human tissue in the research that it funds.

UKRI welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health. Where specific funding is allocated in advance for a strategic area of research, such as vaccines, such allocations would not normally specify the research methodology to be used.

Barry Gardiner:

[\[138844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many individual doses of the (a) Pfizer Biontech vaccine and (b) Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine NHS England had taken delivery of as at 5.00pm on 15 January 2021.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Vaccines are a precious resource and are in very high demand across the world; therefore, for security reasons it is not possible to provide detail about the size of our supplies or give exact detail about future deliveries.

As of 18 January 2021, over 4.6 million people in the UK had been vaccinated with the first dose of the vaccine. We are in the process of understanding the implications of Pfizer's announcement on 15 January, regarding upgrades to its manufacturing capacity. We continue to work to meet our target of vaccinating all four priority groups, as advised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, by the middle of February.

Stephen Doughty:

[\[139002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether the decision by Pfizer to make changes to manufacturing processes of its covid-19 vaccine to

boost production will affect the distribution of that vaccine to the UK from late January to early February 2021.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Vaccines are a precious resource and are in very high demand across the world; therefore, for security reasons it is not possible to provide detail about the size of our supplies or give exact detail about future deliveries.

We have been monitoring the requirements across the supply chain from supplier through to patients for some time. All vaccine candidates' supply and onward deployment have clear supply chain plans across the value chain, including materials, manufacturing, transportation, storage, and distribution.

As of 18 January 2021, over 4.6 million people in the UK had been vaccinated with the first dose of the vaccine. We are in the process of understanding the implications of Pfizer's announcement on 15 January regarding upgrades to its manufacturing capacity. We continue to work to meet our target of vaccinating all four priority groups, as advised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, by the middle of February.

Marsha De Cordova:

[\[139129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to avoid gaps in the delivery of supplies of the covid-19 vaccine affecting areas of (a) London and (b) the UK.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Vaccines are a precious resource and are in very high demand across the world; therefore, for security reasons it is not possible to provide detail about the size of our supplies and exact detail about future deliveries.

We have been monitoring the requirements across the supply chain from supplier through to patients for some time. All vaccine candidates' supply and onward deployment have clear supply chain plans across the value chain, including materials, manufacturing, transportation, storage, and distribution. We continue to work to meet our target of vaccinating all four priority groups, as advised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, by the middle of February.

The vaccine is being rolled out as quickly as doses can be supplied and quality checked, with over 4.6 million people already vaccinated across the UK. The UK COVID-19 Vaccines Delivery Plan sets out how the Government will work with the NHS, devolved administrations, local councils, and the Armed Forces to deliver the largest vaccination programme in British history.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**

Stuart Anderson:

[\[138078\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what additional support the Government is providing to local authorities to ensure the provision of accessible electric vehicle charge-points in built-up areas.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government is investing over £2.8bn across the whole of the UK to help people buy zero emission vehicles and accelerate the roll out of charging infrastructure. The Government's On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) has supported over 60 local authorities to fund more than 2,000 chargepoints for residents who do not have off-street parking. The doubling of funding for the ORCS to £20 million announced last year by my Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will allow local authorities to install up to 7,200 charging devices, making charging at home and overnight easier for those without an off-street parking space. Government recognises the need to address non-financial barriers faced by Local Authorities and provides regularly updated guidance on chargepoint procurement and installation via the Energy Savings Trust.

■ Employment: Coronavirus**Tim Loughton:**[\[138843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure employees are not forced to go into workplaces that are not covid-compliant.

Paul Scully:

The Government has provided extensive guidance for businesses and employers on how to conduct a Covid-19 risk assessment and the steps that should be taken to make the working environment Covid-secure for employees or volunteers that cannot work from home.

Under existing health and safety laws, employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other people who might be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is reasonably practicable to achieve this.

If workers think their employer is exposing them to risks or is not carrying out their legal duties with regards to health and safety, they can report this to their local authority or the Health and Safety Executive who can take a range of actions.

■ Manufacturing Industries: Origin Marking**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[138092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of requiring British manufacturers to clearly market the origin of their product on their items to assist buyers to consider buying British brands.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, traders are banned from using misleading statements about the geographical or commercial origin of products. Aside from certain specified products such as food there is no requirement for goods to be labelled with their country of origin.

■ Motor Vehicles: Sales

Jim Shannon:

[\[137211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to help support car sales during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government continues to offer a comprehensive support package for businesses including loan schemes, grant funding, tax deferrals, the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, all of which have been designed to be accessible to businesses in most sectors and across the UK.

In order to further support businesses, we have announced one-off grants worth up to £9,000 for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors and cash grants of up to £1,500 per 2-week closure period, for businesses which are closed during the national restrictions.

Automotive retailers are able to continue to offer click-and-collect and delivery services.

■ Remote Working: Coronavirus

Sir Alan Campbell:

[\[137884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether the Government is planning to provide any further support with fuel and utility costs for people working from home throughout the covid-19 outbreak.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

From 6 April 2020 employers have been able to pay employees up to £6 a week tax-free to cover additional costs to their household bills if they have been told to work from home to stop the spread of Covid-19. On 1 October 2020 HMRC launched a new online portal for employed workers whose expenses have not been covered to apply for tax relief for additional expenses from home-working.

In addition, emergency measures with the energy industry have been agreed by the Government to protect the domestic energy supply of those most in need during the disruption caused by COVID-19. In the first instance, any energy customer in financial distress should get in touch with their supplier. Suppliers can then assist customers appropriately. This could include debt repayments and bill payments being reassessed, reduced or paused where necessary. Disconnection of credit meters have also been completely suspended.

The energy price cap currently protects around 11 million households in Great Britain on standard variable and default tariffs. From January 2021 a further 4 million households with prepayment meters will also come under the protection of the cap after the prepayment meter price cap expires. The cap ensures that loyal energy customers are protected from poor value tariffs, saving consumers a total of around £1 billion on their bills annually.

■ Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme: Coronavirus**Rosie Duffield:****[139106]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will instruct Ofgem to extend the claims period for the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The requirement for accreditation applications to the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive scheme to be made within 12 months of the renewable heating system being commissioned, is set out in the Renewable Heat Incentive regulations. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we are already taking steps to amend the regulations, and relax this requirement. Should these amendments pass successfully through Parliament, they will come into force in April 2021.

In March 2021, we intend to publish a consultation on closing the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive to new applications, as scheduled, at the end of March 2022.

■ Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund: Take-away Food**Ruth Cadbury:****[138460]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether businesses providing takeaway services during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown are eligible for the top up grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses announced on 5 January 2021.

Paul Scully:

The Government has introduced an unprecedented package of support for businesses that are required to close, or which are severely affected by the restrictions put in place to tackle Covid-19 and save lives.

Businesses that are mandated to close by law due to the current national restrictions can access grants of up to £4,500 per 6 weeks of closure through the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum: 5 January onwards. Furthermore, the Closed Business Lockdown Payment will provide each closed business with a one-off payment of up to £9,000. This includes businesses who have been mandated to close but have adapted to operate takeaway, click and collect or online delivery services.

Those who provide takeaway as their main business prior to the restrictions will not be eligible for the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum: 5 January onwards but can still receive discretionary funding through the Additional Restrictions Grant.

■ Shops: Hygiene

Anne Marie Morris:

[\[138995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has been made of the potential merits of making the use of hand sanitiser mandatory in shops.

Paul Scully:

We have published comprehensive guidance to allow businesses to be able to work safely. The offering of hand sanitiser is part of a range of measures that businesses can take to protect staff and customers.

The Government welcomes efforts by retailers to reduce the spread of Covid-19 through the implementation of this advice.

We have also launched a campaign urging people to act like they have got the virus, reinforcing the message that if it's essential to go out, you should wash your hands, cover your face indoors and keep your distance from others. We are also encouraging people to shop alone and infrequently to reduce the number of people in stores.

Anne Marie Morris:

[\[138996\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of making it mandatory for shops to offer hand sanitiser to customers.

Paul Scully:

We have published comprehensive guidance to allow businesses to be able to work safely. The offering of hand sanitiser is part of a range of measures that businesses can take to protect staff and customers.

The Government welcomes efforts by retailers to reduce the spread of Covid-19 through the implementation of this advice.

We have also launched a campaign urging people to act like they have got the virus, reinforcing the message that if it's essential to go out, you should wash your hands, cover your face indoors and keep your distance from others. We are also encouraging people to shop alone and infrequently to reduce the number of people in stores.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Blood: Contamination

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[138913\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what progress the Government has made on implementing a framework for compensation for the victims of the contaminated blood scandal.

Penny Mordaunt:

Work is currently underway and I will update Parliament as soon as possible on this.

■ **Coronavirus: Disease Control****Emma Hardy:**[\[133127\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of lifting the 11.00pm curfew in tier 1 and tier 2 areas for the businesses affected by those restrictions.

Penny Mordaunt:

On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in England. Details and guidance are available on gov.uk, as well as information on restrictions applicable in other parts of the United Kingdom. Restrictions are kept under review.

Anne Marie Morris:[\[137212\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will ensure that what is guidance and what is law in relation to covid-19 restrictions is clearly determined on the Gov.uk website.

Penny Mordaunt:

Both legislation and Government guidance is set out online, and both are important.

The guidance on how best to stay safe and help control the spread of Coronavirus is set out at: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>. Where applicable, you should also refer to the relevant websites for guidance published by the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

UK Government Coronavirus legislation is set out at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

■ **Honours: Chinese****Sarah Owen:**[\[139150\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 13 January 2021 to Question 134601, if he will publish data by year on the number of honour recipients over the last five years who self identified their ethnic group as (a) Chinese or (b) any Chinese background.

Chloe Smith:

Information is accessible on the honours recipients page on the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/civic-participation/honours-recipients/latest>

■ **UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement****Hywel Williams:**[\[138882\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of including representatives of the (a)

Senedd Cymru, (b) Scottish Parliament and (c) Northern Ireland Assembly in the membership of a potential Parliamentary Partnership Assembly with the European Parliament.

Hywel Williams:

[\[138883\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department plans to develop a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly with the European Parliament as outlined in Article INST.5 of the UK-EU Trade Cooperation Agreement.

Penny Mordaunt:

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement states that the European Parliament and the Parliament of the United Kingdom may, if they so choose, establish a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly consisting of Members of the European Parliament and of Members of the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

The exact membership of this Assembly would be for the European Parliament and the Parliament of the United Kingdom to determine. The UK Government is committed to continue working closely with the devolved administrations to ensure that our relationship with the EU works in the interests of citizens and businesses across the whole of the UK.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Deployment

John Healey:

[\[138863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the judge-led review into how allegations of wrongdoing are raised and investigated, announced on 13 October 2020, is planned to be (a) concluded and (b) published.

Johnny Mercer:

The Judge-led Review was commissioned by the Government to ensure that we have the most up-to date and future-proof skills and processes in place to investigate and, where appropriate prosecute, cases where serious allegations of criminal wrongdoing are made against UK forces on operations overseas. Where necessary, improvements will be made. The Review is due to report by the summer and we aim to publish it once we have considered the recommendations.

■ Armed Forces: Immigration

Dan Jarvis:

[\[138987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2020 to Question 102930 on Armed Forces: Visas, when he plans to launch that public consultation.

Johnny Mercer:

The Defence Secretary and the Home Secretary have continued to work closely on this issue and met again in December. It is our intention, subject to collective agreement, to launch a public consultation soon and we will make an announcement once we are in a position to do so.

Ben Lake:[\[139111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to inform foreign or commonwealth citizens currently serving in HM Forces of the eligibility criteria and steps they need to take in order to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK following their discharge.

Johnny Mercer:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) takes a number of steps to ensure our Commonwealth and Gurkha personnel are informed about the process for achieving indefinite leave to remain once they leave Service. It is signposted on all the Service websites for recruits to understand prior to application, so they can make an informed choice about joining the British Armed Forces. Guidance is provided to all units to help them support their Commonwealth and Gurkha personnel throughout their career in the Armed Forces, including signposting them to sources of qualified immigration advice, to ensure that they have the information and support they need to make decisions about their and their families' immigration status, including prior to discharge. This information is also included in the Service Leavers Pack, which is provided to all those coming to the end of their careers. MOD continues to work with the Joining Forces Credit Union to provide financial education, savings packages and loan packages to help non-UK personnel pay for visa costs, should they wish to remain and settle in the United Kingdom after their service.

 **NATO****Richard Fuller:**[\[138428\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the UK will remain committed to NATO's conventional deterrence tasks, including Enhanced Forward Presence; what role the UK will play in those deterrence tasks; and what the planned timescale is for that commitment.

James Heappey:

NATO is the cornerstone of UK defence policy, and we are proud of our enduring commitment to its valuable deterrence role. As the leading European Ally, the UK makes significant contributions to operations, including as framework nation for the enhanced Forward Presence deployment in Estonia as well as in operations and defence activity from the High North to the Baltic region, the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. We regularly contribute to NATO's enhanced Air Policing mission, to the NATO Readiness Force and to Standing NATO Maritime Groups. Working on a rolling timeline of five years, we are firmly committed to

Estonia's regional security, through eFP and NATO, and I have made it clear that we will continue our presence for as long as it is required.

■ **Type 31 Frigates: Procurement**

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[138884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 135843, what the optimal delivery rate is for the Type 31 programme.

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[138885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 135843, what the optimal delivery rate is for the Type 26 programme.

Jeremy Quin:

The delivery rate for vessel acceptance for all classes of ship is planned to be the optimum that can be achieved considering all relevant factors. On current plans, the average delivery rate for vessel acceptance from the Contractor of Type 26 Batch 1 is one ship every 18 months, while that for Type 31 is contracted as one ship approximately every eight-12 months. For both classes the time between the delivery of successive ships is not constant across the whole of the class.

■ **Yemen: Military Intervention**

Mr Virendra Sharma: [\[138907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many breaches of international law in Yemen by Saudi forces and its allies have been documented by his Department in its tracking document since January 2020 to date.

James Heappey:

I am unable to answer the hon. Member's question due to ongoing legal proceedings.

Alyn Smith: [\[140269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the completeness of his Department's database of alleged breaches of international humanitarian law in Yemen.

James Heappey:

I am unable to answer the hon. Member's question due to ongoing legal proceedings.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Arts: Visas**

Claire Hanna: [\[137345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will take steps to ensure the inclusion of creative professionals on the list of self-employed professionals eligible for visa-free travel for work purposes within the EU.

Caroline Dinenage:

I refer the honourable member to the Secretary of State's answer to Written Question 135862 on 14th January.

■ **Internet: Older People****Stuart Anderson:****[138516]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to ensure that elderly people are able to access online services safely.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government supports the provision of basic digital skills training for adults in community settings through the Adult Education Budget. We have introduced new essential digital skills qualifications (EDSQs) based on [new national standards for essential digital skills](#). Adults with no or low digital skills can study essential digital skills qualifications for free.

Public libraries are also a vital component in tackling digital exclusion. There are around 2,900 public libraries in England providing a trusted network of accessible locations offering free Wi-Fi, computers, and other technology. The library staff, supported by volunteers, have been trained on digital skills to enable them to provide library users with support in using digital. Their vital role has been recognised in exceptions to tier and national restrictions, where after the first lock-down public libraries have been permitted to allow people to use library buildings for public PC use to access essential public services.

As set out in the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper Consultation, the Government is developing an Online Media Literacy Strategy. This Strategy will explore the existing media literacy landscape, and ensure a strategic and coordinated approach to media literacy education. We are committed to ensuring that the Strategy is inclusive and supports all users, including older people, to improve their media literacy levels. The Strategy will be published in Spring 2021.

■ **Museums and Galleries: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme****Catherine West:****[139083]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether his Department is providing support to national museums on the furloughing of their staff under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Caroline Dinenage:

In accordance with the guidance issued by HM Revenue & Customs, the national museums - as publicly funded bodies - are expected to consult their sponsor department before applying to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. In recognition of their reliance on self-generated income which would normally supplement their Grant in Aid from government, DCMS has agreed that the national museums and galleries may furlough staff where it is necessary and proportionate to do so, and in such a way that ensures value for public money.

■ Tech Nation: Expenditure

Chi Onwurah:

[\[138964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how much Government funding has been allocated to Tech Nation in each of the last five years.

Caroline Dinenage:

The total DCMS grant allocation for the last five financial years was:

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL GRANT
2016/17	£4,236,000
2017/18	£4,335,333
2018/19	£5,709,605
2019/20	£6,963,725
2020/21	£7,553,429

In addition MOJ have allocated a £2m grant to Tech Nation from October 2019 to March 2022.

Tech Nation delivered a total of £158 million of Gross Value Added (GVA) in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 combined and expects to deliver over £200 million (approx. £248 million) by the end of the 2020/21 financial year. This represents a return on investment of over 10x.

EDUCATION

■ Basic Skills: Qualifications

Steve McCabe:

[\[138861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how functional skills qualifications are planned to be (a) graded and (b) assessed in 2021.

Gillian Keegan:

The consultation on alternative arrangements for the award of vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications in 2021 was published on 15 January. It seeks views on the department's position that Functional Skills qualification assessments should continue to take place remotely or in line with public health guidelines where possible, and that alternative arrangements should be introduced for those learners who are unable to access assessments. The approach for providing learners with a result through alternative arrangements will be determined in light of the consultation.

Ofqual will revise its regulatory framework to allow awarding organisations to provide learners with a result where assessments do not take place, and to determine what

the minimum assessment evidence should be, so that valid and reliable qualifications are awarded.

■ **Construction: Coronavirus**

Sarah Olney:

[137275]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will classify construction workers as key workers to allow them to send their children to school.

Nick Gibb:

During this period of national lockdown, schools should allow only vulnerable children and the children of critical workers to attend. All other pupils should not attend and should learn remotely. The Department has resisted restrictions on attendance at schools since the first lockdown but, in the face of the rapidly rising numbers of cases across the country and intense pressure on the NHS, we now need to use every lever at our disposal to reduce all our social contacts wherever possible. Limiting attendance is about supporting the reduction of the overall number of social contacts in our communities.

Parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 and EU transition response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors. The following guidance sets out who is able to attend school to receive face to face education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>.

The document sets out the high-level role types, and the list in the guidance is not exhaustive, but it should offer sufficient information to help parents and carers to identify if their work falls under one of the umbrella groups.

The Department will continue to review the restrictions on schools and will ensure that children and young people return to face to face education as soon as possible.

■ **Educational Institutions: Coronavirus**

Marco Longhi:

[131492]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Christmas 2020 holidays for students in schools and universities by one week to provide a circuit breaker for the covid-19 virus.

Nick Gibb:

On 4 January, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, announced new national restrictions in England. During this period, primary, secondary, alternative provision, special schools and colleges will remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers only. In universities, we are prioritising the return to face to face teaching only for courses which are most important to be delivered in-person in order to support the pipeline of future key workers. Wherever possible, teaching should be provided online. The list of subjects where face to face learning can continue is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950583/Students_returning_to_and_starting_higher_education_in_Spring_Term_2021_FINAL_v3.pdf.

The reason for restricting attendance, more broadly, is to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 by reducing mixing of households in the community. This decision to restrict attendance in the spring term does not suggest that schools and colleges are no longer safe places for children and young people. Instead, limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households.

The Government is doing all it can to minimise the risks to those working and studying in our registered childcare settings, schools, colleges, and universities in this unprecedented situation, while mitigating the impact on education.

On the 7 January, the Department published:

- Guidance to universities and students returning to higher education in the spring term:
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. 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
- Guidance: Actions for schools during the COVID-19 outbreak:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>. This sets out what all schools will need to do during the COVID-19 outbreak from January 2021.
- Guidance for all early years settings and local authorities in England:
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. This provides information on how the national lockdown restrictions, to control the spread of COVID-19, impact early years and childcare settings.

On the 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>.

On the 14 January, the Department published additional guidance for special schools, specialist post-16 providers and alternative provision during the national lockdown:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952377/Guidance_for_special_schools_specialist_post-16_providers_and_alternative_provision_during_the_national_lockdown.pdf. This

provides further information on actions schools can take to support and encourage the attendance of vulnerable children and young people, as attending their school is crucial so that they can receive high quality teaching, remain engaged in education and are kept safe from harm, and receive the specialist professional support they need.

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

■ Free School Meals

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [\[136528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the cost to the public purse is of the contract with Chartwells UK for providing free school meals parcels to children.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [\[136529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what specification his Department provided to Chartwells UK for the composition of free school meals parcels.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [\[136532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many children are eligible but not registered for free school meals in each local authority.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck: [\[137220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what companies have been awarded contracts to deliver free school meals during school closures; and what the value is of each contract.

Vicky Ford:

The continuing provision of free school meals to children from out of work families or those on low incomes is of the utmost importance to this government.

School catering contracts are agreed locally, and the department does not hold a contract with Chartwells UK or any other provider to provide free school meals of lunch parcels to children. We have guidance in place allowing schools to decide the best approach for their pupils. This can be through lunch parcels, local vouchers or the national voucher scheme.

The images circulating of poor-quality food parcels are unacceptable. On 13 January 2021 my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education met with Chartwells and other leading school food suppliers and caterers to insist on urgent action to make sure lunch parcels meet the standards we expect. We are grateful to those firms who are working hard with schools to provide nutritious, balanced lunches for children.

If a parent is concerned about the standards of their lunch parcel, they should speak directly with their school. If a parent cannot resolve their concern through their school, they can contact the department. The department will make contact with suppliers where concerns are escalated, to ensure they are following the good practice

guidance we have set out. We will also alert the school to confirm appropriate contract management arrangements are in place, so that immediate improvements are made.

We do not collect data on families that do not take-up their free school meals entitlement.

We know that take-up of free school meals is high, and we want to make sure as many eligible pupils as possible are claiming their free school meals, and to make it as simple as possible for schools and local authorities to determine eligibility.

To support this, we provide an Eligibility Checking System (ECS) to make the checking process as quick and straightforward as possible for schools and local authorities. We have also developed a model registration form to help schools encourage parents to sign up for free school meals, and we have provided guidance to Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they can make Universal Credit recipients aware that they may also be entitled to wider benefits, including free school meals.

Dan Carden:

[136602]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what checks are in place to ensure that private companies contracted to supply food parcels as part of the free school meals scheme comply with the guidance set by LACA, Public Health England and the Department for Education; and what penalties apply to contractors who fail to meet those standards.

Vicky Ford:

The continuing provision of free school meals to children from out of work families or those on low incomes is of the utmost importance to this government.

School catering contracts are agreed locally. We have guidance in place allowing schools to decide the best approach for supporting free school meal pupils who are at home. This can be through lunch parcels, local vouchers or the national voucher scheme which will be up and running from next week.

The images circulating of poor-quality food parcels are unacceptable. On 13 January, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, met the leading school food suppliers and caterers to insist on urgent action to make sure lunch parcels meet the standards we expect. I'm grateful to those firms who are working hard with schools to provide nutritious, balanced lunches for children.

If a parent is concerned about the standards of their lunch parcel, they should speak directly with their school in the first instance. If the issue is not resolved then, a hotline is available at the department. The department will make contact with suppliers where concerns are escalated, to ensure they are following the good practice guidance we have set out. We will also alert the school to confirm appropriate contract management arrangements are in place, so that immediate improvements are made.

■ Free School Meals: Slough**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:****[136595]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of free school meal packages provided to children in Slough.

Vicky Ford:

We know there is, understandably, concern about free school meal support during the period that schools will be restricted from opening. Schools in Slough can decide how best to support eligible free school meal pupils who are at home. We have not had any direct queries regarding lunch parcels from parents of children in Slough.

We will provide extra funding to support schools to provide lunch parcels, or locally arranged vouchers. We have also re-opened the national voucher scheme from the week commencing 18 January 2021.

The photos of poor-quality lunch parcels shared on social media are completely unacceptable and do not reflect the high standard of free school meals we expect to be sent to children.

We expect a high standard of free school meals to be provided to eligible pupils. We are working with caterers to ensure that they meet the standards set and are delivering high quality lunches to pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals and who are at home during term time.

■ Further Education: Computers**Thangam Debbonaire:****[137964]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when further education institutions will receive further information on the (a) Government provision of laptops for students and (b) date by which those institutions should expect to receive the laptops which have been allocated to them.

Gillian Keegan:

The Government is investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, including securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people.

For those learners aged 16-19 in both schools and further education (FE) settings, we had existing means of supporting disadvantaged learners through the 16-19 bursary fund. We, therefore, asked schools and FE providers to use this to meet the tech needs of their most disadvantaged students.

During the summer, we enabled schools and FE providers' to boost their bursary funds to meet any extra costs for student technology needs.

Many FE providers have reported challenges in procuring devices due to the current global shortage caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. Procurement and distribution of devices by Government provides a reliable supply of devices.

We have now extended the Get Help with Technology programme to provide disadvantaged 16 to 19 year olds with technological support. This is part of the £400 million investment to help children and young people continue their education at home and to get any online social care services they need. We expect to be able to invite most eligible FE providers, including colleges, sixth form colleges and school sixth forms, to order devices before the end of January. Other FE providers, such as independent training providers and special post-16 institutions will also be in scope if they have learners receiving free meals.

■ GCE A-level and GCSE: Assessments

Emma Hardy:

[136599]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support his Department is making available to private GCSE and A Level candidates in response to the cancellation of examinations due to take place in summer 2021.

Nick Gibb:

As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, the Department will not be asking pupils to sit GCSE, AS and A level exams this summer as planned.

The Department has been clear that it is important to find an accessible route for private candidates, and those not in school this year, to be assessed and receive a grade. We have launched a two week consultation on how to fairly award all pupils a grade that supports them to progress to the next stage of their lives. We will continue to engage with a range of relevant stakeholders when developing plans for our policy on GCSE, AS and A level assessments in 2021, as will the exams regulator Ofqual. A full equalities impact assessment, informed by the results of the consultation, will be published in due course.

■ GCSE: Assessments

Robert Halfon:

[135908]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of students who were due to sit GCSE exams in summer 2021, whose GCSE exams were also cancelled in the 2019-20 academic year.

Nick Gibb:

The Department concluded a successful Autumn exam series, allowing pupils who didn't receive a grade in the summer 2020, and pupils who received a grade but wanted the chance to improve their grade, the opportunity to sit exams. We understand, however, that some pupils may have decided to wait until the Summer 2021 series to re-take their exams. The department and Ofqual have launched a two-week consultation on how fairly to award all pupils, including private candidates and those not in school or college this year, a grade that supports them to progress to the next stage of their lives. The Department will continue to engage with a range of relevant stakeholders when developing plans for our policy on GCSE, AS and A level assessments in 2021, as will the exams regulator Ofqual.

While the Department is unable to collect data on the number of individuals retaking their GCSEs, Ofqual will receive full entry data in the early Summer, enabling us to gain a broader understanding of the number of students who are due to enter for GCSEs. These data are usually published by Ofqual in May or June.

Full Autumn entry data can be found here for AS and A level here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/entries-for-as-and-a-level-autumn-2020-exam-series>. For GCSE here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/entries-for-gcse-autumn-2020-exam-series>. For GCSE English and Maths here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/entries-for-gcse-november-2020-exam-series>. A summary is provided below.

SERIES	NO. OF ENTRIES
A level autumn 2020 series	20,100
AS level autumn 2020 series	1,925
GCSE autumn 2020 series (excludes English language & maths)	18,450
GCSE English language & maths November 2020 series	131,300

■ Members: Correspondence

John Penrose:

[\[136473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when he plans to reply to the letters of 9 November and 8 December 2020 from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare on behalf of his constituent Chris Hildrew, headteacher of Churchill Academy & Sixth Form, on the effect of covid-19 on schools.

Nick Gibb:

I can confirm that a response has been sent ref JP56663, to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare.

■ Nurseries: Coronavirus

Fleur Anderson:

[\[134208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will) provide additional financial support to nurseries during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown period.

Vicky Ford:

During the COVID-19 outbreak, we have provided unprecedented support to the early years sector by continuing to fund the free childcare entitlements, making grants and loans available and ensuring early years providers can access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) for their non-government funded income, and

childminders the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). We continue to ensure that providers can access the support available.

On 17 December 2020, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that both the CJRS and SEISS will be extended to April 2021. We also updated the CJRS guidance for early years so that all providers who have seen a drop in their overall income are able to furlough any staff (who were on payroll on or before 30th October) and who are not required for delivering the government's funded entitlements. This guidance is available here:

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

Where Early Years providers are struggling financially, they may be eligible to access support from the Additional Restrictions Grant, if not eligible for the Local Restrictions Support Grant schemes. Further information on both grants is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-youre-eligible-for-the-coronavirus-additional-restrictions-grant> and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-youre-eligible-for-the-coronavirus-local-restrictions-support-grant-for-open-businesses>.

We stay in regular contact with the early years sector and will keep under constant review whether further action is needed.

■ Oak National Academy: Coronavirus

Damian Hinds:

[136493]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish data on relative usage levels for Oak National Academy in the current covid-19 lockdown compared to previous periods.

Nick Gibb:

To support the hard work of schools in delivering remote education, Oak National Academy was very quickly brought together by over 40 teachers, their schools and other education organisations. The Department has made £4.84 million available for Oak both for the summer term of the academic year 2019-20, and then for the 2020-21 academic year, to provide video lessons in a broad range of subjects for Reception up to Year 11. Specialist content for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is also available.

The number of users to have visited the Oak National Academy platform (correct as of 12 January 2021) can be found in the following table:

	AVERAGE USERS/ DAY	TOTAL USERS
April- July 2020	200K-250K	4.7M
September- December 2020	50-100K	2.3M
4 – 12 January 2021	950K-1M	3.5M

Oak will remain a free optional resource for 2020-21.

■ Remote Education

Alex Cunningham:

[133843]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to provide support to parents who have to home school their children while working full time.

Nick Gibb:

It is critically important to ensure that all children and young people continue to learn during the national lockdown. The Department has updated the remote education guidance for schools and colleges to clarify and strengthen expectations while on-site attendance is restricted, drawing on our evolving understanding of best practice in remote education. The guidance is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf.

Schools are expected to provide a set number of hours of remote education for pupils, increased from the Government's previous minimum expectations. This includes time for independent study and recorded or live direct teaching. The Department recognises that different expectations are appropriate for younger and older age groups when learning remotely. The minimum number of expected hours therefore vary by Key Stage: 3 hours for Key Stage 1, on average across the cohort with less for younger pupils; 4 hours for Key Stage 2; and 5 hours for Key Stages 3 and 4. Schools are also expected to provide daily check ins on pupil engagement.

The Department also recognises that younger children in Key Stage 1 or Reception often require high levels of parental involvement to support their engagement with remote education, which makes digital provision a particular challenge for this age group. We therefore do not expect that solely digital means will be used to teach these pupils remotely.

To provide further clarity for pupils, parents, and carers about what they can expect, schools are expected to publish information about their remote education provision on their website by 25 January 2021. An optional template is available to support schools with this expectation. It is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-remote-education-information-to-parents-template>. Colleges were also expected to publish information about their remote education provision on their websites by 18 January.

The Government is investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care services securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people, 800,000 of which were delivered to schools, trusts and local authorities by 17 January. All schools have been invited to order devices. 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 restrictions.

The Department has partnered with the UK's leading mobile network operators, such as EE, Three, O2, and Vodafone, to provide free data to disadvantaged families, which will support access to education resources, including Oak National Academy, and other websites. Families will benefit from this additional data until July 2021. Schools will be able to request free mobile data uplifts via the Get Help with Technology service.

In addition, the Department has already provided 4G wireless routers, with free data for the academic year, and continue to provide 4G wireless routers where children need to access remote education.

■ Remote Education: Computers

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[\[138909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to Answer of 18 January 2020 to Question 137170 on Children: Computers, by which date his Department expects that every child in need of a device for remote learning during the covid-19 lockdown will have adequate access to that device.

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[\[138910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January to Question 137170 on Children: Computers, what assessment he has made of (a) the number of children remote learning during the covid-19 lockdown, (b) how many devices those children require, and (c) how much funding his Department will allocate to provide those devices.

Nick Gibb:

All primary schools, secondary schools and colleges in England are now expected to provide remote education for the majority of their pupils and students. To support this, the Government is investing over £400 million, including securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people. This includes over 800,000 laptops and tablets that were delivered to schools, academy trusts and local authorities by 17 January. Schools already owned around 2 million laptops and 1 million tablets before the COVID-19 outbreak, and they have been invited to order more devices to help meet demand.

Delivery of devices is continuing over the course of this term. The Get Help with Technology scheme will email schools with information on the number of additional devices allocated to them, and when they will be able to order.

We have estimated the number of laptops and tablets needed by disadvantaged children in Years 3 to 11 using data on the number of pupils eligible for free school meals data and external estimates of the number of devices that schools already own. Schools, local authorities and academy trusts are able to request additional devices if their original allocation does not meet their needs.

■ Remote Education: Disadvantaged

Margaret Greenwood:

[134472]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of his policy of including as vulnerable those children and young people who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study on the projected infection rates of covid-19 in areas of deprivation (a) in Wirral and (b) in England.

Nick Gibb:

Following my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister's announcement of a new national lockdown, the Department published updated guidance on 8 January for children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings, which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>. The Department also published updated guidance on remote education:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf.

In the remote education guidance, the Department set out that some children who have difficulty engaging in remote education may be considered to be vulnerable children and, therefore, eligible to attend school. It is up to the child's school or local authority to make this decision. The decision would be based on the needs of the child and their family, and a range of other factors, as set out in the guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision#vulnerable-children-and-young-people>.

The updated remote education guidance also sets out that, where pupils continue to experience barriers to digital remote education, we expect schools to work to overcome these barriers. This could include distributing school-owned laptops or supplementing digital provision with different forms of remote education such as printed resources or textbooks. This should be supplemented with other forms of communication to keep pupils and students on track, or answer questions about work.

The Department has also published a good practice guide, which provides advice to teachers and school leaders to support effective delivery of the curriculum remotely: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-good-practice/remote-education-good-practice>. This is part of our broader package of support for schools, which are able to be accessed through the Get Help with Remote Education page: <https://get-help-with-remote-education.education.gov.uk/good-teaching-practice.html>.

■ Remote Education: Printing Machinery

Damian Hinds:

[\[136492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the availability of printers in pupils' homes by (a) phase of education, (b) free school meals eligibility, and (c) any other division of data available.

Nick Gibb:

The Department does not have data or estimates of the availability of printers in pupils' homes.

Schools can provide printed resources, such as textbooks and workbooks, to structure learning. We expect schools to work to overcome any barriers experienced by pupils in accessing remote education. This could include distributing school owned laptops or supplementing digital provision with different forms of remote education such as printed resources or textbooks. This should be supplemented with other forms of communication to keep pupils and students on track or answer questions about work.

The Government is supporting access to remote education and online social care services, through an investment of over £400 million that includes securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people who do not have access to their own device. Over 800,000 laptops and tablets have been delivered to schools, academy trusts and local authorities by 17 January.

We have also partnered with the UK's leading mobile operators to provide free data to help disadvantaged children get online as well as delivering 4G wireless routers for pupils without connection at home.

Support is available for schools to get set up on Google or Microsoft 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, 6,900 schools have applied for a digital education platform.

■ Remote Education: Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough

Gill Furniss:

[\[138474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many laptops have been requested by schools in Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough constituency during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown to date; and how many laptops have been allocated to those schools.

Gill Furniss:

[\[138475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the minimum specifications are for laptops provided to schools and local authorities during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Gill Furniss:**[138476]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what contracts his Department has in place for the provision laptops or other digital equipment to schools and local authorities during the covid-19 outbreak; and what proportion of those contracts have been fulfilled.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, including securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people. The Government is providing this significant injection of devices on top of an estimated 2.9 million laptops and tablets already owned by schools before the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

On 12 January, the Department announced that it will be providing a further 300,000 devices over the course of this term. The Get Help with Technology scheme will email all schools with information on the number of additional devices allocated to them, and when they will be able to order.

The number of devices available for each school, academy trust or local authority is based on children eligible for free school meals and takes into account existing devices available in schools. Schools, academy trusts and local authorities are responsible for distributing the laptops and tablets and are best placed to know which disadvantaged children and young people need access to a device.

Figures on the number of devices delivered is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-progress-data>. These figures are broken down by local authority and academy trust. Information on delivery by constituency is not available.

Laptops and tablets provided under the Get Help with Technology scheme meet defined technical specifications to enable remote education and allow for use in schools and colleges. Information on devices specifications is published at: <https://get-help-with-tech.education.gov.uk/devices/device-specification>.

Details of the contracts for this programme are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>, in line with normal Government commercial practice. Information on the proportion of each contract that has been fulfilled is not available.

■ Schools: Ancillary Staff

Sarah Olney:**[138004]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the cancellation of exams in summer 2021, what his guidance is on payments to exam invigilators employed on zero hour contracts; and if he will publish that guidance.

Nick Gibb:

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, the Government considers that examinations cannot be held in a way which is fair. We have, therefore, announced that GCSE, AS and A level examinations will not go ahead this summer as planned.

Schools will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure. Schools have autonomy over these budgets and their employment arrangements and decisions on staffing are made at the local level. The Department is considering what further guidance may be helpful to schools with their workforce planning and schools should continue to check updates to our guidance on restricting attendance in the national lockdown:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952443/210114_School_national_restrictions_guidance_FINAL_14012021.pdf.

■ Schools: Buildings

Rachael Maskell:

[136560]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will provide financial support to schools to enable them to occupy larger buildings so that they can provide education to pupils in a covid-secure environment in classroom settings.

Nick Gibb:

On 7 January we published further guidance, 'Restricting attendance during the national lockdown: schools', which sets out what all schools will need to do during the COVID-19 outbreak from January 2021. This includes the system of controls that schools must continue to adopt to the fullest extent possible to reduce risks in their school and create an inherently safer environment. Guidance is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf

Schools should continue to minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible. This can be achieved through keeping groups separate and by maintaining the distance between individuals. Whilst schools are attended by vulnerable children and the children of critical workers only, where possible schools should keep group sizes small. Any additional space available where there are lower numbers of pupils attending should be used wherever possible to maximise the distance between pupils and between staff and other people.

We do not consider it necessary for schools to make significant adaptations to their site to enable them to operate in this way. Following a risk assessment, some schools may determine that small adaptations to their site are required. This will be at the discretion of individual schools, based on their particular circumstances. As such, schools should use their existing resources for this purpose, where necessary.

Schools continue to receive their budgets this year, as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure. School budgets are rising by £2.6 billion in 2020-21, £4.8 billion in 2021-22 and £7.1 billion in 2022-23, compared to the 2019-20 financial year. This increase in funding will help schools with costs associated with the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[136557]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of the eligibility for attendance at school by pupils during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown on (a) the numbers of children attending school and (b) the ability of schools to practice social distancing.

Nick Gibb:

During this period of national lockdown, schools should allow only vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers to attend. All other pupils should not attend and should learn remotely.

The Department publishes weekly national-level data on pupil attendance. The data for 13 January shows that attendance in state primary schools in England was at 21% and at 5% in state secondaries. Further information on this data is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>.

Limiting attendance does not suggest that schools have become significantly less safe for young people. Instead, limiting attendance is about supporting the reduction of the overall number of social contacts in our communities.

For vulnerable children and young people, the children of critical workers who still attend school, and their teachers, the Public Health England endorsed system of protective measures that schools have been implementing throughout the autumn term means that any risks are well managed and controlled.

Schools should continue to minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible as part of their wider set of protective measures. This can be achieved through keeping groups separate and by maintaining the distance between individuals. Whilst schools are attended by vulnerable children and the children of critical workers only, where possible, schools should keep group sizes small. Any additional space available where there are lower numbers of pupils attending should be used to maximise the distance between pupils, and between staff and other people.

■ Schools: Inspections

Rachael Maskell:

[136559]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will instruct Ofsted to prioritise their role in supporting and advising schools in responding to the covid-19 outbreak above returning to their inspection regime while the national covid-19 lockdown remains in place.

Nick Gibb:

The intention is that Ofsted's routine graded inspections will remain suspended for the spring term, and that during this period Ofsted will carry out monitoring inspections of schools most in need. These will include inadequate schools and some

schools that require improvement. These non-graded inspections will have a strong focus on remote education, and an emphasis on being supportive, with inspectors helping schools to prioritise the right things and pointing them to sources of support.

Ofsted will also continue to have the power to inspect schools where it has significant concerns, including where those concerns relate to remote education or safeguarding.

■ Supply Teachers: Coronavirus

Daisy Cooper:

[139145]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of his Department funding local education authorities to directly employ supply teachers for the duration of the covid-19 outbreak to ensure teaching capacity shortfalls can be quickly addressed.

Nick Gibb:

A key principle behind the Government's education reforms is to give teachers and school leaders the freedom to use their professional judgement to decide the structure of their workforce to best meet the needs of their pupils. This autonomy extends to employment arrangements with temporary staff, including supply teachers.

Schools will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure and they can continue to engage supply teachers to assist with the delivery of face-to-face and remote education during the period of national lockdown.

Where schools choose to use employment agencies to source supply staff, we recommend that schools consider using the agency supply deal, operated by the Department in conjunction with Crown Commercial Services, as this offers a list of preferred suppliers that must be transparent about the rates they charge. Further information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/deal-for-schools-hiring-supply-teachers-and-agency-workers>.

Schools can access further guidance on other workforce planning options within our guidance on restricting attendance within the national lockdown here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952443/210114_School_national_restrictions_guidance_FINAL_14012021.pdf.

■ Supply Teachers: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Hilary Benn:

[138867]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason education supply staff are not automatically signed up to the flexible furlough scheme.

Nick Gibb:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) has been extended until 30 April 2021. Employers can claim 80% of an employee's usual salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month.

If supply staff employed via employment agencies are unable to work due to COVID-19, under some circumstances their employment agency can place them on furlough and use the CJRS to claim for 80% of their wages, including during school holiday periods, provided that the eligibility criteria are met:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-which-employees-you-can-put-on-furlough-to-use-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>.

Employers can now flexibly furlough their employees for the hours the employee would usually have worked in that period, whilst also being able to work outside of the hours they are furloughed: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme#flexible-furlough-agreements>.

Employees can work for any amount of time and any work pattern, but they cannot do any work for their employer during hours that employers record them as being on furlough.

The decision to furlough an employee, fully or flexibly, is entirely at the employer's discretion as it is dependent on a range of factors that the employer is best placed to determine, for example, the amount of work available for employees.

Uni Connect Programme

Maria Eagle: [137130]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when he will set a budget for the next phase of the Uni Connect scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Maria Eagle: [137131]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish a Letter of Strategic Direction to the Office for Students in respect of the next phase of the Uni Connect programme; and if he will make a statement.

Maria Eagle: [137132]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions the Office for Students has had with Shaping Futures, the Liverpool City Region arm of the Uni-Connect programme, on what budget it can expect to have for the next phase of the programme from August 2021.

Michelle Donelan:

The Uni Connect outreach programme operated by the Office for Student (OfS) has, since its inception in 2017, established 29 regional partnerships of universities, colleges, employers and other local partners, to provide sustained outreach to young people in schools and colleges in areas with low or unexplained gaps in higher education (HE) participation. The programme has been successful in addressing cold spots in outreach and enabling engagement from schools and colleges. Funding this

programme has embedded a collaborative approach to widening access and enabled local partners to galvanise action around HE outreach to complement the funding already spent by Higher Education Providers on outreach as part of their Access and Participation Plans.

The initial investment in the Uni Connect programme to establish a collaborative model and set up a regional infrastructure comes to an end in July 2021, and so this is an appropriate time to consider the scope and objectives of the programme, including funding other areas of increasing importance for students and prospective students.

The OfS is currently consulting on the future of the programme. Whilst it has not undertaken individual discussions with Shaping Futures regarding the next phase of funding for Uni Connect, programme-wide updates have been provided to partnerships at regular meetings with the Programme Leads and Chairs.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, writes annually to the OfS, setting out the available teaching grant funding, and will issue the letter for 2021/2022 in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Selaine Saxby:

[\[911176\]](#)

What steps he is taking to promote sustainable fisheries.

Victoria Prentis:

The Fisheries Act sets out clear objectives on sustainability with detailed policies published in the Joint Fisheries Statement. We will publish our Fisheries Management Plans to meet our commitment to fishing within sustainable limits. As an independent coastal state, we are committed to working with our international partners to manage our shared stocks sustainably.

Nick Fletcher:

[\[911177\]](#)

What steps his Department is taking to promote the development of environmentally friendly pesticides to help support the domestic farming of rapeseed.

Victoria Prentis:

The consultation on the National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides outlines how the Government will support the development of nature-based solutions, low toxicity methods, and biopesticides, in line with the principles of Integrated Pest Management.

In partnership with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, Defra is funding field trials for Integrated Pest Management in oilseed rape.

Defra also supports research on the genetic improvement of rapeseed to increase resilience to pests.

■ Animal Welfare

Henry Smith:

[\[911180\]](#)

When he plans to bring forward legislative proposals on animal sentience.

Victoria Prentis:

We have committed to bringing in new laws on animal sentience. Any necessary changes required to domestic legislation will be made in an effective and credible way and will be brought forward when parliamentary time allows.

■ Assistance Animals: Pet Travel Scheme

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[139080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with organisations representing assistance dog owners on (a) the implications of losing part one listed status under the Pet Passport Scheme and (b) further negotiations to obtain part one listed status under the Pet Passport Scheme in the future.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[139081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support assistance dog owners travelling to (a) the EU and (b) Northern Ireland since the UK ended part one listed status under the Pet Passport Scheme.

Victoria Prentis:

We are proactively engaging with the assistance dog community and relevant stakeholders on the impacts on dog movements from Great Britain to the EU and to Northern Ireland. We are in a continuing dialogue with Guide Dogs UK and meet with them on a regular basis. 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.

After the end of the transition period the UK became a third country in relation to the EU Pet Travel Scheme. In February 2020 we submitted an application to allow the UK to become a Part 1 listed third country, this status would mean similar animal health and documentary requirements to pet movements between Member States. On 3 December 2020 the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed of the EU voted in favour of giving the United Kingdom Part 2 listed status for the purposes of non-commercial pet travel after the Transition Period. This listed status has been formally adopted by the EU.

We will continue to press the EU Commission in relation to securing Part 1 listed status, recognising that achieving this would alleviate some of the new requirements for assistance dog users travelling to the EU and to Northern Ireland. We are clear that we meet all the animal health requirements for this and we have one of the most rigorous pet checking regimes in Europe to protect our biosecurity.

Regarding pet travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government is working with the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural

Affairs (DAERA) on a long term solution which respects the rights of assistance dog users and pet owners to travel with the minimum of friction. Guidance on pet travel to Northern Ireland is available on the DAERA's NIDirect website.

■ Chemicals: Regulation

Dr Philippa Whitford:

[\[139027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has obtain data from REACH on previously tested chemicals.

Rebecca Pow:

On 1 January, legislation to bring EU REACH into UK law came into force. This means that businesses wishing to sell or distribute chemicals domestically now need to comply with UK REACH as part of our domestic chemicals regulatory framework

UK REACH retains the fundamental approach and core principles of EU REACH, including the core principle of "no data no market". This means that businesses that wish to access the GB market will need to supply relevant data to the Health and Safety Executive in order to support the registration of a substance.

Under EU REACH, data is owned by individual businesses and industry consortia. For GB businesses who do not own the data they need, obtaining it is a matter of commercial negotiation between themselves and the businesses that do hold that information. Industry has some time to make these arrangements. This is because we have put in place provisions for the deadlines for the full submission of data to underpin registration dossiers to be staggered, according to the quantity and hazard profile of a substance, over a period of 2, 4 or 6 years from 28 October 2021.

■ Environment Protection: Job Creation

Andrea Leadsom:

[\[911182\]](#)

What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the creation of green jobs.

Rebecca Pow:

Green jobs form a key element of the Government's approach to our economic recovery, in which this department is closely involved. The Government's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution will support up to 250,000 jobs. As part of this, Defra will support thousands of nature jobs through the £80 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund; and deliver up to 20,000 jobs through our investment in flood defences to support 2,000 flood schemes across England.

■ Environment Protection: Offences

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[139079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) stakeholder on the French Government's proposals to create a new offence of ecocide.

Rebecca Pow:

We have had no discussions on the proposals to create a new offence of ecocide.

■ **Fisheries: Quotas**

Cat Smith:

[\[911179\]](#)

Whether he has plans to reallocate (a) new and (b) existing UK fishing quota to small boat fishers.

Victoria Prentis:

We recently consulted on how to apportion additional quota between the UK administrations. We also consulted on how we allocate England's share. We will publish the Government's response and our English allocation policy after annual negotiations conclude. It is for the devolved administrations to decide how to allocate their share.

We have been clear since the 2018 White Paper that we would allocate our existing quota using the current method.

■ **Neonicotinoids**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[139058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the environmental risks to allow the use of neonicotinoid thiamethoxam pesticides on sugar beet seed; and what assessment he has made of how that evidence differs from the evidence used in 2018.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government considered the potential risks to the environment posed by the use of the product Cruiser SB on the basis of expert scientific assessment, and in accordance with the requirements for the grant of an emergency authorisation set out in Regulation (EC) 1107/2009. The Government concluded that, when mitigated by the strict conditions attached to the emergency authorisation, these risks were acceptably low in the circumstances and outweighed by the benefits of use. The Government remains committed to tight controls on neonicotinoids and has no intention of lifting the restrictions that were put in place in 2018.

Each application for emergency authorisation is considered on its own merits and particular facts. The application made for use this year contained new scientific information relevant to the assessment of environmental risks and made some different proposals for conditions of use, including a reduced application rate and a longer period between sowing the treated sugar beet seed and planting any flowering crop.

■ Pesticides: Forests

Olivia Blake:

[\[139172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the health risks to forest workers of handling (a) acetamiprid, (b) cypermethrin, (c) glyphosate and other highly hazardous chemicals.

Olivia Blake:

[\[139174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of continued usage of chemicals that contain active ingredients (a) acetamiprid, (b) cypermethrin, and (c) glyphosate in forestry management in the context of the Forestry Stewardship Council categorising these respectively as being (i) of acute toxicity to mammals and birds, (ii) of extremely or highly hazardous/acute toxicity to mammals and birds; and (iii) carcinogenic.

Olivia Blake:

[\[139175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of banning the use of (a) acetamiprid, (b) cypermethrin, (c) glyphosate and (b) other chemicals designated as toxic by the Forestry Stewardship Council.

Olivia Blake:

[\[139176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the risk of bladder cancer from working with (a) acetamiprid, (b) cypermethrin and (c) glyphosate.

Victoria Prentis:

Products containing active substances such as acetamiprid, cypermethrin and glyphosate are regulated as pesticides. This means that they may only be used if the active substances are approved and the products are authorised. Approval is only given if scientific assessment shows that at least one potential use of the substance will not harm people or pose unacceptable risks to the environment (including birds and mammals). Authorisation applies the same process to the proposed uses of the product. Conditions may be attached to authorisations to ensure that these safety standards are met (for example, the use of protective equipment by those using the pesticide).

The Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) requirements for the control of forestry pests in certified operations include Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to avoid the use of pesticides. Where pesticides are needed as a last resort, the FSC has further measures in place to determine the lowest risk option. The Government is committed, under the 25 Year Environment Plan, to developing and promoting IPM across agriculture and other sectors where pesticides are currently used. This is being taken forward through the National Action Plan for the sustainable use of pesticides. The draft National Action Plan is currently out to public consultation and outlines steps to limit the use of pesticides and reduce their impacts.

■ Pollution: Parliamentary Scrutiny**Mr Virendra Sharma:**[\[138908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what legislative proposals on pollution he plans to bring forward in this Parliament.

Rebecca Pow:

The Environment Bill will bring forwards legislative proposals for tackling pollution.

It will drive significant environmental improvement and tackle pollution by setting and achieving legally-binding, long-term targets in key areas including air quality, water, and resource efficiency and waste.

Some of the leading measures in the Bill to support the delivery of targets include:

- Air Quality: The Bill introduces a duty on the government to set at least two air quality targets by October 2022:
 - o To reduce the annual average level of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) in ambient air
 - o A further target to improve air quality
- Water: The Bill makes drainage and sewerage management planning, through which companies develop the capacity of their networks, a statutory duty.
- Resource Efficiency and Waste Reduction – The Bill will enable Government to make waste producers cover the cost of collecting and recycling packaging waste, introduce deposit returns schemes, and introduce charges for single-use plastic items.

■ Recycling: Beverage Containers**Dr Alan Whitehead:**[\[138840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has modelled the financial effect on local authority budgets of including (a) glass and (b) aluminium drinks containers in a proposed Deposit Return Scheme.

Dr Alan Whitehead:[\[138841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential effect on food and drink manufacturers choosing to switch to using (a) plastic and (b) other cheaper packaging materials in the event that a proposed Deposit Return Scheme includes provision for glass drinks containers.

Dr Alan Whitehead:[\[138842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has modelled the potential effect on levels of kerbside recycling rates in the event that a proposed Deposit Return Scheme includes provision for glass drinks containers.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government's commitment to introducing a DRS is part of our commitment to reform producer responsibility systems to incentivise producers to take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products.

The Government is keen to avoid any unintended consequences of introducing a DRS. We have consulted widely with industry stakeholders on the design and delivery of our proposed DRS and intend to continue engagement this year. An Impact Assessment will be published alongside the second consultation in 2021 which assesses the costs and benefits of a DRS, including the costs to business and the expected impact a DRS will have on kerbside recycling rates. No specific assessment has been made of the potential effect on food and drink manufacturers choosing to switch to plastic and other cheaper packaging materials as a result of the DRS. We intend to carry out a new burdens assessment to reflect the impact on local authority budgets stemming from the waste reforms policies, which will include DRS.

We recognise that the introduction of a DRS will remove in-scope materials from existing local authority waste streams as they become part of the DRS. However, we propose local authorities will be reimbursed for the costs incurred in managing any DRS materials that do still end up in these waste streams where consumers choose to forego the deposit on containers. Funding options for local authorities in this scenario are explored further in our forthcoming consultation.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Brazil: Human Rights****Preet Kaur Gill:****[139093]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on protecting the human rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil's Amazon basin.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government is committed to promoting and defending the human rights of all individuals, including indigenous peoples. The Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for International Trade have spoken about a range of issues.

The UK is supporting the work being done with indigenous communities across Brazil, including in the Amazon region. This is through supporting the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation Early Movers programme (REDD), which helps indigenous communities develop sustainable income sources, and strengthen food security, and from which 19,593 families have benefitted so far. We also work with these communities through Partnerships for Forests, supporting almost 2,000 indigenous people to strengthen livelihoods through sustainable forest management.

■ Brazil: Imports

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[139092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on protecting forests in Brazil's Amazon basin by banning UK imports of produce grown on illegally-deforested land.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is committed to encouraging and contributing to international action to address the problem of deforestation in the Amazon region. We believe environmental issues can be addressed most effectively through leadership and action taken in Brazil, supported by international partners. The UK has committed £259 million in International Climate Finance to programmes on sustainable agriculture, avoiding deforestation, and improving livelihoods in Brazil.

The Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for International Trade have spoken about a range of issues. They raised the crucial importance of combating illegal deforestation with their counterparts at the UK-Brazil Strategic Dialogue, and Joint Economic and Trade Committee.

■ Business: Climate Change

Andrew Griffith:

[\[136680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what progress UK embassies and consulates are making in securing international business co-operation on tackling climate change.

James Duddridge:

The FCDO has a key role in delivering a successful COP including in securing international business co-operation in tackling climate change. The Foreign Secretary and FCDO Ministers raise climate change in their engagements with businesses, and our diplomatic network are regularly engaging companies across the globe. These efforts to drive action from businesses and investors on climate change are complemented by the work of Nigel Topping, as the UN High Level Action Champion for COP26 and Mark Carney as the UN Special Envoy for Climate Action and Finance.

At the UK co-hosted Climate Ambition Summit in December, a number of leading firms came forward with major pledges. For instance Apple pledged carbon neutrality for its supply chain and products by 2030. At the same summit, the UK launched the Race to Resilience: a campaign which brings together businesses and insurance companies, alongside mayors, community leaders and others, to commit to building resilience to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of 4 billion people who are vulnerable to climate risks.

■ China: Buddhism

Jim Shannon:

[\[137203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to the Chinese Government on the alleged (a) demolition of Buddhist temples in Hebei Province and (b) confiscation of Buddhist materials that are not approved by the Chinese Government from temples in China.

Nigel Adams:

We are aware of reports of demolition and closure of religious sites across China. The UK remains concerned by restrictions placed on Buddhists and other religious groups in China. We regularly raise Freedom of Religion or Belief issues directly with the Chinese authorities and via multilateral action at the UN. The freedom to practice, change or share ones faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy.

■ China: Human Rights

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[137146\]](#)

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 and recommendations in the Conservative Human Rights Commission's report on China, published in January 2021.

Nigel Adams:

We are studying carefully the evidence and recommendations from the recently published Conservative Human Rights Commission's report on China. On 12 January, the Foreign Secretary announced a series of robust measures to build on our response to the human rights situation in Xinjiang. We will keep our policies under close review.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Layla Moran:

[\[139126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the report by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England and NHS Improvement, and Public Health England, entitled Investigation into preparations for potential COVID-19 vaccines, what plans his Department has made to redistribute the UK's vaccine surplus to countries struggling to obtain sufficient supplies of covid-19 vaccines.

Wendy Morton:

Equitable global access is an integral part of the UK's approach to vaccine development and distribution. The health of every country depends on the whole world having access to safe and effective vaccines. We are supporting the COVAX Facility as the best mechanism to deliver this, and have committed £548 million to its work in supporting access for low and middle income countries, which makes the UK one of its largest donors.

It is too early to determine how many doses of the vaccines that the UK has ordered will not be needed for domestic use. We are working through multilateral institutions, such as the UN and G20, as well as the World Health Organisation and other international partners like the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness (CEPI) and Gavi the Vaccine Alliance to support vaccine development, manufacturing scale-up, and distribution to meet domestic as well as international needs both now and in the future.

■ Developing Countries: Nutrition

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[139094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December 2020 to Question 128190, when the internal prioritisation process will be completed.

Nigel Adams:

The Prime Minister has set an ambitious agenda to increase UK impact overseas through closer integration of cross-Government activity. This includes all UK Missions working to a single, whole-of-government set of objectives for which the Head of Mission (HoM) is fully accountable. Whole-of-Government Country Plans will be crucial to delivering coherent, consistent and impactful international work. Ministers will be engaged during February and March so plans can be implemented in financial year 2021/22.

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[139095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 17 December 2020 to Question 128190, what criteria will inform the internal prioritisation process.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign Secretary set out to the House of Commons on 26 November how a new strategic approach will allow us to drive greater impact from our £10 billion of Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending next year, notwithstanding the difficult financial pressures faced.

Budgets will be allocated based on this strategy as well as considerations of need including levels of poverty, ability of countries to fund themselves and to ensure that every pound we spend on ODA goes as far as possible and has greatest impact the UK could help achieve.

■ Ethiopia: Genocide

John Penrose:

[\[137900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) number, (b) ethnicity and (c) religious beliefs of the victims of recent massacres in Tigray; and what assessment he has made of the part that elements of the Ethiopian regime played in those massacres.

James Duddridge:

We are shocked and saddened by further reports from Tigray of massacres of civilians, sexual violence, and attacks on humanitarian facilities and places of worship. An ongoing lack of access to the Tigray region for human rights organisations means that it remains difficult to confirm these reports. We will continue to work with partners to seek further information and to raise the need for humanitarian access.

We have made clear with Ethiopian Ministers the need to protect civilians and adhere to international law and international human rights law. We continue to call for independent, international, investigations into allegations of human right abuses and violations, and that the perpetrators of those incidents that are proven are held to account, whoever they may be. We will continue to make this point in upcoming conversations with the Government of Ethiopia.

■ EU Countries: British Nationals Abroad**Hilary Benn:**[\[138868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what guidance his Department has provided to UK airlines on the documentation required by a UK national resident in the EU to board a flight to an EU destination after 1 January 2021.

Hilary Benn:[\[138869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what information his Department holds on the number of UK nationals who have not been allowed to board a flight from a UK airport to a destination in the EU since 1 January 2021 as a result of the airline not believing the passenger had the required documentation showing their right of residence in an EU Member State.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government is monitoring the situation closely and is liaising with the EU, Member States and carriers to ensure the correct rules are applied. Following the end of the transition period, new rules for the treatment of UK nationals at the Schengen border came into effect. UK nationals and their family members, protected by the Withdrawal Agreement, should be allowed to enter the EU provided they present documentary evidence of residence in the EU before the end of the transition period. They should be allowed to enter the EU without having their passport stamped, being subject to routine intentions questioning or being required to prove sufficient means of subsistence.

The Government has written to UK airlines regarding compliance with the new rules and documentation that should be accepted. This includes any document that credibly evidences status under the Withdrawal Agreement, including a residence permit; a certificate of application; a frontier worker permit or other documents that include an address in the EU. Those who present this evidence to airlines, along with a valid travel document, should be allowed to board and enter the EU, including Member States other than the country of residence for transit purposes. The

International Air Transport Association's (IATA) TIMATIC service is also providing this information to airlines. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has also established a dedicated contact route, on gov.uk, for UK nationals encountering disruption at the Schengen border.

■ **Gender: Equality**

Sarah Champion:

[\[138447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if his Department will reinstate the Director level board for overseeing the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality.

Wendy Morton:

Gender equality is a core part of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's work as a force for good in the world. The Strategic Vision for Gender Equality continues to reflect and respond to the UK Government's ambitions on this agenda. We will retain and build on the Strategic Vision, including bringing a clear focus on implementation and taking advantage of our diplomatic and development levers. We do not see the core ambitions of the Strategic Vision changing. Our structural re-organisation following the launch of the FCDO continues, including at board level.

■ **Greek Islands: Migrant Camps**

Alex Sobel:

[\[138034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of hygiene and health care support provided at refugee camps in the Greek Aegean Islands.

Wendy Morton:

The UK recognises the challenges faced by Greece in dealing with irregular migration, including with regard to the conditions of migrant camps on the Greek islands. We engage regularly with Greek ministers and senior officials on the issue. In 2020, the UK provided over £500,000 in humanitarian supplies and equipment to provide support to vulnerable people on Lesbos and other islands. In addition to this the UK responded to requests by the Greek government following the Moria fires to provide specific humanitarian goods for the migrants affected. UK support has helped nearly 2,000 vulnerable families prepare, cook and serve food, and solar lanterns will help people stay safe. We have also provided support to international organisations working in the camps on a range of issues, including healthcare, and will continue to do so.

Alex Sobel:

[\[138035\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help provide long-term solutions for vulnerable, unaccompanied children at refugee camps in the Greek Aegean Islands.

Wendy Morton:

We are committed to supporting Greece's efforts to manage migration effectively and provide practical support to this end. In 2020, the UK provided over £500,000 in humanitarian supplies and equipment to support vulnerable people on Lesbos and other islands. In addition to this the UK responded to requests by the Greek government following the Moria fires to provide specific humanitarian goods for the migrants affected. UK support has helped nearly 2,000 vulnerable families prepare, cook and serve food, and UK-provided solar lanterns will help people stay safe. We also engage regularly with the Greek authorities and UNHCR on conditions in the Greek Aegean island camps, and will continue to work with Greek partners to identify opportunities to further support improved conditions for migrants in Greece.

Alex Sobel:[\[138036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with stakeholders on the safety of refugees in the Greek Aegean Island camps during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

We understand that the Greek Government is continuing to implement its national Coronavirus action plan specifically for migrant camps across the country, which includes measures to reduce the risks to migrants on the islands. We continue to monitor the situation very closely, engaging regularly with the Greek authorities and UNHCR on conditions in the Greek Aegean island camps.

Alex Sobel:[\[138037\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure refugee camps in the Greek Aegean Islands are not over capacity.

Wendy Morton:

The UK recognises the challenges faced by Greece in dealing with the difficulties presented by the migration situation, including the conditions and overcrowding of migrant camps on the Greek islands. We regularly engage with Greek ministers and senior officials on these issues and will continue to work with Greek partners to identify opportunities to further support improved conditions for migrants in Greece.

Alex Sobel:[\[138038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support healthcare in the refugee camps on the Green Aegean Islands during the covid-19 pandemic.

Wendy Morton:

The UK has provided support to international organisations working in the camps on a range of issues, including healthcare, and will continue to do so. We understand that the Greek Government is continuing to implement its national Coronavirus action plan specifically for migrant camps across the country. This includes measures to reduce the risks to migrants on the islands as well as the mainland, such as

strengthening health facilities. We continue to monitor the situation via our Embassy in Athens very closely.

■ **Occupied Territories: Education**

Andrew Bowie:

[\[138479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to prevent UK support for education in the West Bank and Gaza being undermined by extremist educational material.

James Cleverly:

The UK does not fund textbooks in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). UK Aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) contributes to the salaries of carefully vetted teachers/education workers.

An independent review of the content in Palestinian textbooks led by our European partners is currently underway. The study is due to be completed in early 2021. We continue to press our European partners to complete the review as soon as possible.

We have a regular dialogue with the PA in which we raise concerns about allegations of inappropriate content in textbooks. We continue to urge the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to avoid engaging in, or encouraging, any type of action and language that makes it more difficult to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict.

■ **Palestinians: Schools**

Andrew Bowie:

[\[138478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the quality of the education received by Palestinian children in schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

James Cleverly:

FCDO uses a variety of tools to monitor UNRWA's performance and ensure it continues to deliver quality services including via programme monitoring and annual assessments. UNRWA has a robust review system of each host country's textbooks to ensure education in its schools reflects the values and principles of the UN. We accompany our support to UNRWA with stringent attention to implementation of their neutrality policy, including how they apply this to textbooks.

■ **Research: Overseas Aid**

Layla Moran:

[\[139125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 130827, when the (a) prioritisation exercise will be completed and (b) results of that exercise will be published.

James Cleverly:

The Prime Minister has set an ambitious agenda to increase UK impact overseas through closer integration of cross-Government activity. This includes all UK Missions

working to a single, whole-of-government set of objectives for which the Head of Mission (HoM) is fully accountable. Whole-of-Government Country Plans will be crucial to delivering coherent, consistent and impactful international work. Ministers will be engaged during February and March so plans can be implemented in financial year 2021/22. We will confirm plans to publish in due course.

■ Syria: Coronavirus

Mr Ben Bradshaw:

[\[138856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help ensure the equitable distribution of covid-19 vaccines in Syria.

James Cleverly:

The UK is committed to equitable access to vaccines, across Syria and globally, as demonstrated by our £548 million contribution to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment. UK support will help distribute one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine to 92 developing countries, including Syria, in 2021. We recognise that the political situation in Syria is complex, and we are lobbying the UN and working with health partners to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are distributed to those in greatest need across the whole of Syria.

This complements the UK's existing support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in Syria, providing water, healthcare, hygiene kits and sanitation support for vulnerable Syrians across the country.

■ Turkey: Prisoners

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[139100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he plans to take to support the conclusion from the Council of Europe's Committee Against Torture on the unacceptable circumstances for prisoners on Turkey's prison island of Imrali.

Wendy Morton:

We are clear in our expectation that Turkey, like all countries, should live up to its human rights obligations towards all its citizens. We continue to encourage the authorities to ensure that all detainees are treated in accordance with relevant international human rights standards, such as access to legal representation and medical care. We welcome Turkey's response to the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) 2019 report which reinforced its commitment to zero tolerance against torture and determination to cooperate with the CPT. We will continue to encourage Turkey, including at Ministerial level, to act in line with the conventions of the Council of Europe and to make greater progress on wider human rights reforms.

■ Uganda: Elections

Stephen Doughty: [\[139004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the integrity of recent elections in Uganda.

Stephen Doughty: [\[139005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of levels of violence, voter intimidation and interference in Uganda's recent elections.

James Duddridge:

While voting in Uganda's recent Presidential elections has concluded, significant concerns remain unaddressed including the treatment of opposition candidates in the run-up to and since the elections, as well as the shut-off of the internet during the elections. This does not suggest an open political landscape, within which democracy can flourish. Following the arrest of opposition leader, Robert Kyagulanyi, and subsequent violence in November, I [Minister Duddridge] tweeted my concerns on 20 November and called for the authorities to respect the rights of all Ugandans to express their views in a peaceful manner. I [Minister Duddridge] outlined in my tweet on 13 January the UK view that the elections should be free, fair and transparent, having raised this with the Ugandan High Commission on 12 January. Staff at the British High Commission observed the conduct of the elections and I [Minister Duddridge] would like to also commend the Ugandan media for their reporting on the elections. As I [Minister Duddridge] and the British High Commissioner stated in our tweets on 14 January, we are concerned that the recent internet shutdown in Uganda impacted the transparency of the elections and broader freedom of expression. Following the Presidential election results on 16 January, I [Minister Duddridge] set out in a statement our significant concerns about the overall political climate surrounding the elections and have urged the Government of Uganda to meet its international human rights commitments. The treatment of opposition figures post-election including Robert Kyagulanyi is unacceptable and I [Minister Duddridge] expressed my concerns about this in my tweet on 19 January. Political freedoms are vital for democracy to prevail and the UK will continue to make representations on this issue to the Ugandan authorities.

■ Yemen: Humanitarian Aid

Kate Osamor: [\[137981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of the US Administration's designation of the Houthis as a terrorist group on humanitarian (a) operations and (b) access in Yemen.

Kate Osamor:

[\[137983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the US designation of the Houthis as a terrorist group on Yemen's (a) economy, (b) level of food imports and (c) access to humanitarian support.

James Cleverly:

We are deeply concerned by assessments from the UN and NGOs that the US Administration's decision to designate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation is likely to disrupt the humanitarian response and stop vital food supplies getting in to Yemen. We have already engaged with the US to urge them to ensure that the vital humanitarian response, including food supplies, is not disrupted. Ministers and officials will continue to engage closely with the UN and other donors, including the US, to ensure life-saving humanitarian aid reaches the millions of Yemenis in need, to prevent famine where we can and to work with all parties involved to bring this extended conflict to a conclusion.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Ashworth Hospital

Bill Esterson:

[\[132887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what risk assessment has been made of the decision to stop weekly testing of the all-clear siren at Ashworth high-security hospital.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: Ashworth High Secure Hospital continues to test its escape alarm siren at 9am each Monday morning for a five-minute duration. This has been the case for the last 30 years. The hospital has never sounded an all clear alarm therefore no risk assessment was required.

■ Autism

Marsha De Cordova:

[\[137305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his oral contribution of 13 January 2021, Official Report, on a new impactful all-age autism strategy, when in spring he plans to publish that strategy.

Helen Whately:

We aim to publish this strategy, subject to COVID-19 pressures, at the earliest opportunity in spring 2021.

■ Carers: Coronavirus

Kim Johnson:

[\[113678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) steps he (i) is taking and (ii) plans to take and (b) financial support he (i) is providing and (ii) plans to provide to unpaid carers caring for relatives who are (A) vulnerable, (B) older, (C) disabled and (D) living with a mental or physical illness during (1) the November 2020 and (2) future covid-19 lockdowns.

Helen Whately:

During the pandemic the Government's focus has been on supporting unpaid carers to continue to care. We have:

- produced guidance specifically for carers and young carers,
- provided funding to Carers UK's support phoneline;
- produced a leaflet to help carers self-identify when someone is discharged from hospital;
- ensured carers can continue to provide essential care and are exempt from rules preventing mixing with other households where they are providing care; worked with NHS England and NHS Improvement on guidance and a letter (template) enabling unpaid carers to identify themselves and their needs, so these can be more easily met;
- introduced two important temporary measures to help unpaid carers financially to be able to continue to claim Carer's Allowance if they have a temporary break in caring, because they or the person they care for gets COVID-19 or if either have to isolate because of it;
- and made clear that providing 'emotional support' rather than just more traditional forms of care to a person in need of care and support also counts towards the Carer's Allowance threshold of 35 hours of care a week.

We have also continued to iterate the regulations on lockdown to ensure that the care and support needs of people and their carers can be met. The regulations for the lockdown that commenced on 5 November allow for someone to come into the home of the person who needs care to provide that care for the purpose of giving the main carer respite. The person receiving care can also go to someone else's home to receive respite care. These legislative provisions will enable some carers to arrange and access respite and support during this period.

■ Carers: Young People

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[138407\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the Government plans to update its guidance for young carers and young adult carers on the gov.uk website.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 20 January 2021]: Work is ongoing to update the Government's COVID-19 guidance for those under 25 years old who provide care for someone. The guidance is due for publication shortly. The Government's guidance for those who provide unpaid care to friends or family was recently updated and published on GOV.UK on 14 January.

Children: Coronavirus**Sir Alan Campbell:**[\[137885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if the Government will review its policy on children under 12 meeting outdoors during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Under the current restrictions, you cannot leave home for recreational or leisure purposes. It is against the law for anyone, including children under 12 years old, to meet socially with friends outdoors unless they are part of the same household or a support bubble. The Government keeps its restrictions under continual review and will make changes if the data and science supports it.

Children: Day Care**Rachael Maskell:**[\[135994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that people are able to continue to use their bubbles to support their childcare needs during the covid-19 lockdown that has been in place since 5 January 2021.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Parents and carers continue to be able to form a childcare bubble with one other household for the purposes of informal childcare, where a child in their household is under 14 years old, although bubbles are allowed for all single adult households. Some households will also be able to benefit from being in a support bubble, including any household with a child under the age of one year old, a child under the age of five years old with a disability that requires continuous care, or single adults living with one or more children under 18 years old.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Health Services**Caroline Lucas:**[\[136484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to increase provision of specialist chronic fatigue syndrome services to meet demand for these services from people living with long covid.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

COVID-19 is a new disease and therefore it is not yet clear what the medical, psychological and rehabilitation needs will be for those experiencing long-term effects of the virus. In October 2020, NHS England announced a £10 million investment in

their five point plan to support people with 'long' COVID-19. As part of this investment, 69 post-COVID-19 assessment service centres are now operational across England to assess people with long-term effects of COVID-19 and to direct them to effective treatment pathways. A further 12 long COVID-19 assessment service centres are expected to launch in early 2021

Care for people with chronic fatigue syndrome and myalgic encephalomyelitis is a local matter commissioned by local primary, community and secondary care services via clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). CCGs are best positioned to understand and provide for the needs of local populations.

■ **Contact Tracing: Computer Software**

Maria Eagle:

[\[137882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether it is his policy to encourage employers to require employees to disable the use of the NHS Test and Trace app at work in non-healthcare settings; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: Although there should be no requirement for employees to use the app, employers should not be preventing staff from using it if they wish to. There are some specific scenarios when users should pause the app's contact tracing function. For non-health and social care workers these are if the phone is stored in a locker or communal area or if the user is working behind a fixed perspex or equivalent screen.

■ **Coronavirus: Death**

Philip Davies:

[\[135881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment this Department has made of the number of daily deaths from covid-19 at which all covid-19 restrictions on (a) social and (b) economic activities can be removed.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The restrictions on social and economic activity are necessary to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and in pursuing these policies we do take account of the burden on people, and on the economy. It was necessary to announce a national lockdown on 4 January to curb the spread of COVID-19 whilst we continue to vaccinate as many people as possible.

The Government keeps the restrictions under continual review and will make changes as and when the data and science support it but we expect that the national lockdown to last until at least mid-February.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

Taiwo Owatemi:

[\[126147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the High-value Business Travelers Exemption policy on (a) public health and (b) the rate of covid-19 transmission.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

From 18 January, the exemption was removed along with all travel corridors meaning that these people will need to self-isolate on arrival until 10 days have passed since they last left a country outside of the Common Travel Area.

When in place, the exemption was narrowly designed such that individuals were only exempt when undertaking business activities that qualify for the exemption. They were otherwise required to self-isolate at all other times. Specific guidance was developed for this exemption which set out the steps to be taken to ensure that public health risks are minimised.

Jane Stevenson:

[\[134156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to ease covid-19 restrictions in local authority areas as covid-19 vaccinations are rolled out.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: We will keep the restrictions under review with a statutory review required every two weeks. We anticipate the current restrictions will be needed until at least mid-February.

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[138095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, in which (a) professions, (b) settings and (c) activities are covid-19 transmission rates highest.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Public Health England does not hold information on transmission rates in the format requested.

Ian Mearns:

[\[138928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to introduce an exemption to the existing covid-19 regulations to clarify what (a) contact and (b) travel is permitted between a non-cohabiting couple in England, in circumstances where the couple (i) cannot live together and (ii) live in households with other people.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 21 January 2021]: If a non-cohabiting couple fulfil the eligibility criteria for a support bubble, they have the choice to form a bubble and can then travel and have contact with each other during this national lockdown. If both partners live with other people, they will not be able to form a support bubble. This is because the formation of a support bubble and therefore the ability to have close contact with those they do not live with, carries transmission risks. As such the eligibility criteria is necessarily limited to smaller households most at risk of isolation. The Government

keeps the social contact restrictions under continual review and will make changes as and when the data and science supports it.

■ **Coronavirus: Educational Institutions**

Jon Trickett: [\[134355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many education staff have contracted covid-19.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Data on the number of COVID-19 cases are not available in the format requested. Data on the number of acute respiratory infection incidents, including COVID-19, influenza or other respiratory pathogens, are reported by education setting. These figures include pupils as well as staff.

■ **Coronavirus: Employment**

Emma Hardy: [\[138491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department categorises as essential work during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown period; and if he will publish guidance on that matter.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Essential work includes but is not limited to doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the United Kingdom's health and social care sector; and those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

■ **Coronavirus: Health Services**

Seema Malhotra: [\[137930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to Question 117267 answered on 25 November 2020, on Coronavirus: Health Services, how many patients in (a) Feltham and Heston constituency and (b) England are attending specialist clinics for the treatment of long covid.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Government does not currently hold this data. COVID-19 is a new disease and therefore it is not clear what the medical, psychological and rehabilitation needs will be for those experiencing long-term effects of the virus.

■ **Coronavirus: Hospitals**

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[138532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the cost to the public purse has been of (a) establishing the NHS Nightingale hospital in Yorkshire, (b)

operating the site from its establishment through to 15 January 2021 and (c) per patient treatment by that hospital as of 15 January 2021.

Edward Argar:

Estimates previously provided by NHS England and NHS Improvement to the Department indicated that the set-up cost for the Nightingale hospital in Harrogate would be £27.314 million. Accurate estimates for per-site running costs, per patient treatment and stand-by costs are not yet available. NHS England and NHS Improvement are in the process of reviewing all spending incurred for each individual site.

■ **Coronavirus: Kingston Upon Hull**

Emma Hardy:

[121910]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the average turnaround time for covid-19 test results in Kingston Upon Hull West and Hessle constituency.

Helen Whately:

We do not publish data in the format requested.

Data on weekly individual capacity across all pillars in England is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nhs-test-and-trace-statistics-england-weekly-reports>

■ **Coronavirus: Laboratories**

Olivia Blake:

[92946]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many volunteer scientists have been volunteering in covid-19 testing laboratories in each month since June 2020.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 24 September 2020]: Three laboratories – Cambridge, Alderley Park, and the National Biosample Centre at Milton Keynes – have used volunteers since June. The total number of volunteers in June was 196, falling to 65 by July, 40 by August, 17 in September and minimal numbers since.

■ **Coronavirus: Liverpool**

Dan Carden:

[128235]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how his Department is evaluating the effectiveness of the mass covid-19 testing pilot in Liverpool; and when he plans to publish the findings of that evaluation.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 15 December 2020]: The Liverpool COVID-19 Community Testing Pilot Evaluation Interim evaluation report is available at the following link:

<https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2020/12/23/covid-19-liverpool-community-testing-pilot-interim-findings-published/>

■ Coronavirus: Medical Treatments

Mary Glindon:

[135939]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of herbal medicine in treating long covid; and if he will make a statement.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

In October 2020 NHS England and NHS Improvement announced a commitment to a five point plan for 'long' COVID-19, which included the commissioning of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to develop a clinical case definition and associated guidance for long COVID-19 alongside the Royal College of General Practitioners. The 'COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of COVID-19' was published on 18 December 2020. Since evidence is not yet available on the effectiveness of herbal medicine in treating long COVID-19, NICE has made no recommendation relating to it. As more evidence emerges on the condition and its management, it will give us a better understanding on the most appropriate interventions and guidance and recommendations will be reviewed accordingly.

■ Coronavirus: Screening

Jane Stevenson:

[121917]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to roll out mass covid-19 testing in (a) Wolverhampton and (b) Tier 3 areas.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 2 December 2020]: On 12 December it was confirmed that Wolverhampton is amongst the first 67 local authorities to begin enhanced testing support via the Community Testing Programme. On 10 January, we announced that regular testing for people without symptoms of COVID-19 will be made available across the country, with the eligibility of the community testing programme expanded to cover all 317 local authorities.

Taiwo Owatemi:

[134191]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reasons Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency guidance does not allow care staff to take lateral flow tests at home.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has issued an exceptional use authorisation to the Department, who have taken on the role of legal manufacturer, for lateral flow self-tests 'to find' COVID-19 positive cases in asymptomatic individuals. The Exceptional Use Authorisation (EUA) was issued on 22 December 2020, MHRA reference, DEU/012/2020/003. EUAs are published on GOV.UK and is updated regularly

Tests cannot be deployed until the legal manufacturer has accepted and addressed the conditions of the EUA and this has been agreed with MHRA. It is the responsibility of the organisation procuring and deploying medical devices including tests to satisfy themselves that the test will perform and intended and meets their requirements.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Catherine West:

[\[130173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of prioritising school staff for covid-19 vaccines.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: 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.

Neil Coyle:

[\[136537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to make the covid-19 vaccination available to European nationals who have not confirmed their status under the EU Settlement Scheme after the 30 June 2021 deadline for applications has passed.

Nadhim Zahawi:

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 live.

Andrew Griffith:

[\[136682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has commissioned a best practice assessment of countries that are issuing covid-19 vaccinations at the fastest rates.

Nadhim Zahawi:

We are working through multilateral channels, such as the G7 and G20, and with the World Health Organization and international partners, including industry. We are discussing collaborative approaches to supporting vaccine development,

manufacturing scale-up, and future distribution to meet both domestic and international needs, including for the world's poorest countries.

■ Dentistry: Coronavirus

Judith Cummins: [\[129022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether (a) NHS general dental practitioners, (b) private general dental practitioners, (c) community dentists and (d) other staff providing dental services will be given priority access to the BioNTech/Pfizer covid-19 vaccine.

Judith Cummins: [\[129023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the timetable is for (a) NHS general dental practitioners, (b) private general dental practitioners, (c) community dentists and (d) other staff providing dental services to be vaccinated against covid-19.

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[131352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether dental care staff will receive priority access to the covid-19 vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised that phase one of the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be targeted at reducing mortality, as well as protecting health and social care staff and systems. As a result, vaccines have first been prioritised amongst care home residents and staff, followed by people aged over 80 years old and health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors.

As set out by the JCVI, dental care staff fall under the second priority cohort during phase one, comprising of health and social care workers. The JCVI's advice states that this not only includes those working for the NHS, but also those in independent, voluntary, non-standard and community healthcare settings.

■ Eating Disorders: Mental Health Services

Wera Hobhouse: [\[137278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 131380, what the planned timescale is for testing and evaluating the new integrated models of primary and adult community mental health care, including the eight sites that have received additional funding to improve the adult eating disorders pathway.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Due to current pressures on the system as a result of the impact of COVID-19, a number of our assurance and evaluation activities have been paused. Timescales relating to the early implementer phase are under review. Implementation learnings from the eight sites which have received additional funding to improve the adult

eating disorders pathway are being shared to ensure that the lessons from these early implementer sites are made available. These include peer support sessions to share learnings with each other, as well as national webinars where lessons from these sites are shared with those starting their expansion and transformation from 2021/22.

■ **Epilepsy: Pregnancy**

Valerie Vaz:

[\[138437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Commission on Human Medicines review of available safety data for epilepsy medicines during pregnancy, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure research is conducted on the use of those medicines during pregnancy.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 20 January 2021]: The Department, through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), funds a range of research in maternal and neonatal health focussing on the safety of maternity and neonatal services and the national maternity ambition to halve maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal deaths and brain injury by 2025. The NIHR has funded three studies on anti-epilepsy medication use during pregnancy. The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including anti-epilepsy medication use during pregnancy.

Valerie Vaz:

[\[138438\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Commission on Human Medicines' review of the use of epilepsy medicines in pregnancy, published on 7 January 2021, whether the provisions of the Pregnancy Prevention Programme will be extended to include any other anti-epileptic drugs identified in posing a risk.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 20 January 2021]: The Commission on Human Medicines' review concluded that lamotrigine and levetiracetam are safer to use during pregnancy than other epilepsy medicines and that some of the other reviewed antiepileptic drugs may also be associated with harms to the child. Where the data support evidence of harm, neither the magnitude nor the nature of the risks observed with the reviewed epilepsy medicines are as severe as that associated with the use of valproate during pregnancy. A Pregnancy Prevention Programme therefore has not been recommended for any of the other reviewed epilepsy medicines at this time.

■ **Epilepsy: Research**

Valerie Vaz:

[\[137916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much public money has been granted to research into epilepsy in each of the last five years.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: The Department funds research on health and social care through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The figures for the NIHR's epilepsy funding in each of the last five financial years is shown in the following table:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2019/2020
£2,986,689	£2,528,262	£1,561,313	£2,174,787	£2,143,181

■ Health Professions: Re-employment

Jeremy Hunt:[\[138413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many retired (a) doctors, (b) nurses and (c) other health professionals have signed up to tackle covid-19 as of January 2021.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 20 January 2021]: The former healthcare professionals who came forward to help the NHS in the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak have wide ranging skills and experience and have been employed across health and social care - for example, within NHS 111, secondary care, mental health and community services. More recently, efforts have focused on matching these former healthcare professionals to the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Data on the numbers of those on the temporary registers who are employed is not collected centrally. Thousands of these former healthcare professionals remain in touch with NHS England and NHS Improvement's regional 'Bring Back Staff' teams and are available for deployment to a range of clinical settings and programmes, including the Nightingale hospitals.

■ Members: Correspondence

Thangam Debbonaire:[\[137962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when his Department plans to respond to the letter from the Hon Member for Bristol West reference ZA6937 sent by email to the Minister for Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety on 28 October 2020 and resent on 1 December 2020.

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.

Rosie Cooper:

[138900]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 9 November 2020 on actions to improve mental health care.

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.

Rosie Cooper:

[138901]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of 11 December 2020 on continuing care.

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.

■ **Mental Health Services: Equality**

Mick Whitley:

[137315]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce (a) regional and (b) socioeconomic inequalities in mental health care.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

This Government is committed to reducing inequalities in mental health care. To support local health systems in addressing inequalities in access and outcomes for groups with characteristics that may increase the risk of experiencing inequalities, NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioned the Advancing Mental Health Equalities resource. The resource is a guide for local commissioners and providers to identify and address inequalities in mental health care and is available at the following link:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/nccmh/care-pathways/advancing-mental-health-equality

■ **Mental Health Services: Families**

Mick Whitley:

[137314]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support available to family members of people experiencing serious mental health issues.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 18 January 2021]: Most people with severe and long-term mental ill health have a right to social care support under the Care Act 2014 and this extends to their carer. The Act requires that, where an adult or carer appears to have care and support needs, the local authority must carry out an assessment.

In addition, most people with a severe mental illness will have a care plan under the Care Programme Approach (CPA), a framework used to assess a person's needs, make sure that they are supported and to carry out regular reviews to see if the person's need have changed. Under the CPA, carers have a right to their own assessment of needs, and plan of support, including a choice about the level of support, a life outside of caring, regular breaks and support to maintain employment.

■ NHS: Re-employment**Anne Marie Morris:**[\[133862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the 47,000 retired doctors and nurses who volunteered to help the NHS in the first wave of the covid-19 outbreak are volunteering to help in the second wave of the outbreak; and whether those staff will be deployed to Nightingale hospitals.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: The former healthcare professionals who came forward to help the National Health Service in the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak have wide ranging skills and experience and have been employed across health and social care - for example within NHS 111, secondary care, mental health and community services. More recently, efforts have focused on matching these former healthcare professionals to the covid vaccination programme.

Data on the numbers of those on the temporary registers who are employed is not collected centrally. Thousands of these former healthcare professionals remain in touch with NHS England and NHS Improvement's regional 'Bring Back Staff' teams and are available for deployment to a range of clinical settings and programmes, including Nightingale hospitals.

■ NHS: Vacancies**Colleen Fletcher:**[\[91659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to fill vacancies for medical staff in the NHS.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 22 September 2020]: 'We are the NHS: People Plan 2020-2021' sets out actions to expand and develop our workforce by retaining staff for longer and building on the renewed interest in National Health Service careers. The next phase of the NHS People Plan will focus on workforce growth and ensuring it has the right skills mix in place for a flexible and modern NHS.

■ Nurses: Registration

John Spellar:

[\[133635\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many nurses are on the temporary register created by the Nursing and Midwifery Council; and how many of those nurses have been employed to date.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: As of 4 January 2021, there are 11,983 nurses on the Nursing and Midwifery Council's COVID-19 emergency register. Data on the numbers of those on the temporary register who are employed is not collected centrally.

■ Paramedical Staff: Students

Thangam Debbonaire:

[\[137961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of ensuring that student finance is available for people who already have a degree who wish to study for a degree in paramedic science, as is the case with medicine and allied subjects.

Helen Whately:

The Department of Health and Social Care is in discussions with the Department for Education about providing an exemption to the student finance equivalent or lower qualification rules for paramedicine. This would allow paramedic students with a degree to access both tuition fee and maintenance loan payments subject, as with all students, to the individual's eligibility whilst undertaking a second degree.

■ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: Mothers

Jeremy Hunt:

[\[138414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many new mothers developed PTSD after childbirth in each year from 2010 to 2020.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 20 January 2021]: The information requested is not available.

■ Pregnancy: Employment

Sarah Owen:

[\[138088\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect on the safety of pregnant women of attending work when they cannot do their job from home during the covid-19 outbreak.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: Advice for pregnant employees was published by the Government, in partnership with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, The Royal College of Midwives and The Health and Safety Executive on 23 December 2020.

The guidance sets out that if a woman is pregnant and has let their employer know in writing, the employer should carry out a risk assessment. Pregnant women of any gestation should not be required to continue working if this is not supported by the risk assessment.

Women who are 28 weeks pregnant and beyond or are pregnant and have an underlying health condition that puts them at a greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19 at any gestation, are advised to take a more precautionary approach. Employers should consider how to redeploy these staff and maximise the potential for homeworking, wherever possible.

■ Secure Psychiatric Units

Derek Twigg: [\[136451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many assaults on patients by other patients in secure mental health units were recorded by (a) Clinical Commissioning Group and (b) local authority area in each year since 2015.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 18 January 2021]: The attached table shows the number of assaults in secure mental health wards for each year, by local authority area, from 2018 to November 2020, the most recent data available.

Due to changes in coverage in the Mental Health Services Dataset in 2016/17, it is not possible to provide comparable figures from 2015 to 2017.

Attachments:

1. Number of assaults in secure mental health wards [Formatted table 136451.docx]

■ Social Services: Fees and Charges

Jeremy Hunt: [\[138411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have had to sell their homes to pay for care in England in each year from 2010 to 2020.

Jeremy Hunt: [\[138412\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of people aged over 65 are paying £100,000 and above for someone's care.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 20 January 2021]: We do not collect this information centrally.

■ Vaccination: Coronavirus

Marco Longhi: [\[137333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential effect of covid-19 vaccines on fertility.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Based on the available pre-clinical data, the vaccines are not expected to affect a woman's fertility.

HOME OFFICE**■ Asylum: Housing****Holly Lynch:**[\[139062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the information her Department holds on covid-19 safety in establishments being used as asylum accommodation; and if she will commission a review on that matter.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office is currently reviewing the recommendations of the rapid review and, as previously stated, will seek to publish a summary of the recommendations.

■ Asylum: Napier Barracks**Apsana Begum:**[\[139155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many adults are held at Napier Barracks in Folkestone.

Apsana Begum:[\[139156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many detainees at Napier Barracks in Folkestone are on hunger strike.

Apsana Begum:[\[139157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people detained at Napier Barracks in Folkestone have received positive covid-19 tests in the last 14 days; and what steps she is taking to prevent the transmission of covid-19 amongst adults held at Napier Barracks.

Apsana Begum:[\[139158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many suicide attempts there have been amongst detainees at Napier Barracks in Folkestone in the last 14 days.

Chris Philp:

There are currently 381 asylum seekers accommodated at Napier Barracks, Kent. Those we are accommodating are not detained and are free to come and go.

We take the welfare of those in our care seriously and we have robust measures in place to deal with any cases of Covid-19. Our accommodation provider Clearsprings have an outbreak management plan which is enacted if there are positive Covid-19 tests and the Home Office is following national guidance in relation to testing.

Despite our best efforts a number of those accommodated at the site have tested positive for coronavirus and are self-isolating.

Asylum seekers at the barracks must self-isolate if they test positive or have been exposed to someone who has. We are working closely with the local health authority and Public Health England and additional support staff, as well as on site medical staff, are there to ensure that all individuals who have to self-isolate can do so and are following all medical advice.

Regular welfare checks are conducted on service users, including behavioural monitoring of those who show signs of vulnerability, and where appropriate safeguarding referrals are made to relevant bodies.

We work closely with our accommodation providers to ensure that all asylum seekers in supported accommodation are aware of, and have access to, Migrant Help's helpline. This service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, if service users need help, advice or guidance, including signposting to relevant mental and medical health services.

The Home Office does not publish statistics of service users who refuse fluid or food or have attempted suicide in supported accommodation.

■ **Asylum: Scotland**

Stuart C McDonald:

[139028]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people residing at an address in Scotland made an in-country asylum application in each of the last five years.

Chris Philp:

Whilst we hold data on the current addresses of asylum claimants, data on the place of residence at the time they made an in-country asylum application could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However, the Home Office does publish data on how many people applied for asylum in each of the last five years, broken down by location (in-country or at Port) found in the Immigration Statistics, Asy_D01:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets>

■ **Courts: Weapons**

Alex Cunningham:

[138957]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 7 December 2020 to Question 122689 on HMCTS: Weapons, how many (a) arrests have been made made and (b) prosecutions commenced as a result of weapon confiscations in courts in the last five years.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office collects and publishes data on arrests for possession of weapons offences. These figures are published annually in the 'Police Powers and Procedures, England and Wales' statistical bulletin. The latest bulletin, covering arrests from 2006/07 to 2019/20, can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2020>

In the last five years, there have been 92,991 arrests for possession of weapons offences in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police and Lancashire Police).

Data on prosecutions resulting from weapons confiscations is not held by the Home Office or by HM Courts and Tribunals Service.

■ Deed Poll

Sarah Champion:

[137218]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant of the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 132926 on Deed Poll, what steps her Department is taking to monitor gaps in the name changing process in relation to safeguarding.

Victoria Atkins:

The UK has some of the toughest powers in the world to deal with sex offenders. These include the notification requirements, which require registered sex offenders to notify their personal details, including their name and address, to the police. They must do this annually and whenever their details change. Failure to do so constitutes a breach of an order which is punishable by up to 5 years' imprisonment.

■ Immigrants: Test and Trace Support Payment

Holly Lynch:

[139061]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether people with no recourse to public funds are eligible for test and trace support payments.

Chris Philp:

To qualify for the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme, individuals must be employed or self-employed, unable to work from home, will lose income as a result of self-isolating, and be in receipt of certain 'public funds' benefits. Therefore, people with no recourse to public funds are not eligible for test and trace support payment.

However, a discretionary fund akin to the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme, in the form of a £500 discretionary payment, paid by local authorities is available to those with no recourse to public funds, 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 remains committed to protecting vulnerable people and has acted decisively to ensure that we support everyone through this pandemic.

■ Immigration: Armed Forces

Ben Lake: [139108]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the number of foreign or commonwealth citizens residing in the UK who have not made an application for indefinite leave to remain despite being eligible upon their discharge from HM forces since 2000.

Ben Lake: [139109]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what support her Department is providing to otherwise eligible foreign or commonwealth citizens who apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK at least 28 days after their discharge from HM Forces.

Ben Lake: [139110]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of waiving visa fees for otherwise eligible foreign or commonwealth citizens who apply for indefinite leave to remain at least 28 days after their discharge from HM Forces.

Kevin Foster:

This Government hugely values every member of our outstanding Armed Forces and we are humbled when non-UK nationals choose to serve our country. It is for these reasons we explicitly provide for non-UK veterans discharged from HM Forces to obtain settlement in the UK.

Home Office guidance gives caseworkers the flexibility to consider cases outside the Immigration Rules for discharged members of HM Forces who have not yet regularised their immigration status:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-forces-applications-on-discharge>

It is not possible to estimate the number of non-UK former members of HM Forces living in the UK who have not made an application for indefinite leave to remain despite being eligible to do so, as there are other options available to those who discharge. Some may choose to return to their country of nationality, while others may naturalise as British citizens during their service.

The Home Office is engaging with MPs, campaigners and members of the public to assess whether those who have served in the Armed Forces should continue to pay settlement fees. The Home Secretary recently met the Defence Secretary to consider how we can offer greater flexibility and support for such people, and their families, in future. Subject to collective agreement, the Ministry of Defence will be launching a public consultation on this issue in due course.

■ Immigration: EU Nationals

Patrick Grady:

[\[139047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to ensure that the digital record of an EU citizen's settled status in the UK is protected against data loss.

Kevin Foster:

Immigration decisions - and the rights and conditions which flow from those decisions - have been recorded digitally by the Home Office since the turn of the century and maintaining digital records of immigration status is not a new concept.

The following safeguards are in place to protect this data from accidental or deliberate loss:

- the data in the central repository for immigration data is copied across three different data centres (or 'availability zones' within the Home Office cloud service provider's region), which prevents any loss of data in the event of a catastrophic failure to one of those data centres. As a further precaution, the data is also copied across the Home Office cloud service provider's regions which prevents any loss of data in the event of a catastrophic failure to an entire region
- data is modelled in such a way it allows accidental deletions to be undone and a full audit maintained to allow a rollback due to accidental corruption
- frequent backups of immigration data are carried out to act as a point in time snapshot if there is ever a need to refer back in time
- robust security controls are in place to protect personal data against unauthorised access and only those who need access to perform their job are granted. Security and background checks are performed on all staff in these roles to further mitigate the risk there may be a deliberate attempt to corrupt or delete the data.

The Home Office will also look to apply any lessons learnt from the recent issues affecting the PNC to the ongoing management of immigration data, including digital records of immigration status.

■ Paul Cleeland

Damian Collins:

[\[138926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of to Question 125990, when her Department plans to complete its review of files relating to Mr Paul Cleeland (a) in its possession or (b) transferred to the Criminal Case Review Commission; and if she will make a statement on the findings of that review.

Kit Malthouse:

Further to the answer provided to the Hon Member's PQ 125990 on 10 December, the Home Office has searched its own holdings and files held by the CCRC are being transferred. These will be examined as soon as practicable and the Home Office will

provide the Hon Member with an update on next steps. It would not be appropriate to comment further while legal proceedings are ongoing.

■ **Police: EU Countries**

Joanna Cherry: [\[139038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Government plans to agree bilateral treaties with EU Member States for cross border policing.

Kevin Foster:

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement includes a deal on law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation which delivers a comprehensive package of capabilities that will ensure we can work with counterparts across Europe to tackle serious crime and terrorism. Hence the UK Parliament's support for the agreement was a vital part of ensuring we can use these capabilities to protect the public and bring criminals to justice across our Union.

We also have excellent bilateral cooperation with Member States across the EU on a wide range of law enforcement and criminal justice issues. We will continue to consider ways we can strengthen this.

Joanna Cherry: [\[139039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the cost to the public purse was of transitioning to the replacement systems for (a) Europol, (b) Eurojust and (c) Schengen Information System II.

Kevin Foster:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer given to PQ 133894 on 15 January 2021.

■ **Refugees: Resettlement**

Joanna Cherry: [\[139041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of the UK-EU Trade and cooperation agreement on refugee resettlement programs and when those programs will be restarted in full.

Chris Philp:

The UK's refugee resettlement schemes operate outside of the EU and we don't envisage any impact on them from the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Following the temporarily pause to the resettlement of refugees, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, arrivals recommenced in December 2020. The final arrivals under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme will take place during early 2021, delivering on our commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria to rebuild their lives safely in the UK.

We will continue to honour our commitment to those who have been invited to the UK and we will roll out a new global resettlement scheme in the future, along with a new firm and fair asylum system which will welcome people through safe and legal routes.

■ UK Border Force: Recruitment

Joanna Cherry:

[\[139042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many additional UK border force staff are planned to be recruited in 2021 following the UK-EU Trade and cooperation agreement.

Chris Philp:

Border Force has recruited over 1000 permanent staff for 1 Jan. In addition to the 900 FTE recruited in 19/20 we will have brought in a further 1,100 by July 2021, in advance of full customs controls.

■ Violence: Females

Wera Hobhouse:

[\[138007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the Government's decision to separate its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy from the Domestic Abuse Strategy on tackling gender-based violence.

Wera Hobhouse:

[\[138008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions the Government had with Violence Against Women and Girls charities and organisations on the decision to separate its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy from the Domestic Abuse Strategy.

Victoria Atkins:

Addressing Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) remains a key priority of this Government. We are committed to fighting VAWG crimes, of which domestic abuse is a high-harm and high-volume subset.

Our aim in having two strategies is for twice as much focus on these crimes. allowing space, within the VAWG strategy, for consideration of other evolving or less understood crimes, such as those perpetrated through digital or online means. The approach does not separate domestic abuse out from the umbrella term of VAWG, but allows a dedicated focus on it.

The two strategies will be complementary and work together to drive down VAWG crimes and their impact on society and will put victims and survivors at the heart of our response.

We meet regularly with organisations that support survivors to discuss our approach to the VAWG and DA strategies, and will continue to engage with women's, girls' and victims' organisations on this important work, including several sector-wide sessions

in the last few months, individual calls with leading VAWG organisations, and participation in the Domestic Abuse Commissioners regular sector calls.

Wera Hobhouse:

[138009]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to introduce a single comprehensive and integrated policy framework for (a) protection against gender-based violence and domestic abuse and (b) support for victims that is aligned to the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Istanbul Convention.

Victoria Atkins:

Addressing Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) remains a key priority of this Government. We are committed to fighting VAWG crimes, of which domestic abuse is a high-harm and high-volume subset, warranting a dedicated strategy.

Our aim in having two strategies is for twice as much focus on these crimes. allowing space, within the VAWG strategy, for consideration of other evolving or less understood crimes, such as those perpetrated through digital or online means. The approach does not separate domestic abuse out from the umbrella term of VAWG, but allows a dedicated focus on it.

The two strategies will be complementary and work together to drive down VAWG crimes and their impact on society and will put victims and survivors at the heart of our response.

The UK signed the Istanbul Convention in 2012. Chapter IV (Articles 18-28) of the Istanbul Convention relates to protection and support for victims. As set out in the recent report on our progress towards ratification of the Convention, published on 22 October 2020, we are fully compliant with the articles which comprise Chapter IV.

We take seriously our responsibilities under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and were examined by the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in February 2019. The Committee welcomed progress made by the UK in relation to violence against women and girls.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

■ House of Commons: Coronavirus

Grahame Morris:

[138923]

To ask the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what discussions representatives of the House authorities have had with trade unions representing staff employed on the Parliamentary estate on Public Health England's recommendations on the risks to those staff of contracting covid-19 in their place of work.

Pete Wishart:

The House authorities have met with representatives of the trade unions (including PCS) for staff in the House of Commons and PDS formally at least once per week since the beginning of March 2020, and with representatives of MPSA and Unite as representatives of Members' staff.

All trade unions recognised by the House were provided with the opportunity to comment on the covid-19 risk assessments.

Grahame Morris:[\[138924\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many instances have been reported of staff working on the Parliamentary estate contracting covid-19.

Pete Wishart:

Where data is recorded in relation to House of Commons staff, a total of 86 positive test results have been recorded for the period of March 2020–January 2021. The data held does not distinguish between staff working on the estate or from home.

■ **Remote Divisions****Caroline Lucas:**[\[140026\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 136483 on Remote Divisions, what information the Commission holds on how many hon. Members were (a) unable to use the electronic method of voting and (b) used the back-up system provided for electronic voting during the two weeks that electronic voting was used in the House of Commons in 2020; what discussions the Commission has had with the Leader of the House on electronic voting in the House of Commons during the period of the national covid-19 lockdown that has been in place since January 2021 to help prevent the transmission of covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Pete Wishart:

Electronic voting was used for 10 divisions between 12 May and 20 May inclusive. Members voted using MemberHub. The Public Bill Office operated a back-up system: if a Member could not register their vote using MemberHub, they contacted the Public Bill Office during the division and their vote was recorded. The table below shows how many Members registered their vote using the back-up method, and the total number of votes cast in each division.

DATE	DIVISION NUMBER	TOTAL VOTES CAST	VOTES CAST USING BACK-UP SYSTEM
12 May 2020	41	611	2
13 May 2020	42	605	4
	43	574	6

DATE	DIVISION NUMBER	TOTAL VOTES CAST	VOTES CAST USING BACK-UP SYSTEM
	44	419	6
	45	571	3
18 May 2020	46	603	1
20 May 2020	47	608	3
	48	614	2
	49	609	2
	50	585	2

The Commission received an update on the House Service's response to the pandemic at its meeting on 11 January, and agreed a number of measures to further improve the safety of people on the Parliamentary estate. Electronic voting was raised at the meeting, and there is a range of views among Commissioners on this issue. However, the means by which Divisions are conducted are ultimately a matter for the House to determine.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Building Safety Fund

Thangam Debbonaire:

[137954]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much and what proportion of the Building Safety Fund has been paid out to date.

Christopher Pincher:

The latest Building Safety Fund: Registration Statistics published on 21 January 2021, which includes data on funding allocation, can be found at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/remediation-of-non-acm-buildings#building-safety-fund-registration-statistics .

■ Buildings: Insulation

Gareth Thomas:

[138848]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions he has had with the Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors about the EWS1 process; and if he will make a statement.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department has regular discussions with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and awaits the results of the RICS consultation, which will help to

make clearer the circumstances when EWS1 valuations are, and are not, to be requested.

■ **Flats: Insulation**

Gareth Thomas:

[\[138849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the effect of the EWS1 process on the sale of flats in 2020; and if he will make a statement.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department is aware that the EWS1 process has been used more broadly than intended, which has affected the sale of some flats. The Government is working with industry to support a more proportionate approach to EWS1 use, and awaits the results of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors consultation which will help to make clearer the circumstances when EWS1 valuations are, and are not, to be requested.

■ **Homelessness: Coronavirus**

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[137342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will announce further funding for the Everyone In scheme.

Eddie Hughes:

Given the new variant of COVID-19, and the new national lockdown, we are redoubling our efforts to ensure that people who sleep rough are kept as safe as possible and that we do everything we can to protect the NHS. This is backed by £10 million to protect rough sleepers and ensure their wider health needs are addressed.

We have asked all local authorities to ensure that even more rough sleepers are safely accommodated, and will be asking that this opportunity is actively used to make sure that all rough sleepers are registered with a GP where they are not already and are factored into local area vaccination plans, in line with JCVI prioritisation for COVID-19 vaccinations.

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 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.

In total, we are spending over £700 million in 2020/21 on homelessness and rough sleeping.

Housing: Mortgages

Andrew Gwynne: [138897]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 December 2020 to Question 128640 on Flats: Insulation, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that mortgage lenders do not require EWS1 forms for (a) terraced houses, (b) houses with cladding, (c) houses that have been converted into flats, (d) maisonettes and (e) listed buildings.

Christopher Pincher:

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) continues to work with wider industry, including lenders, on new guidance for surveyors which should make clearer the circumstances when EWS1 valuations are, and are not, to be requested. The RICS consultation ends on 25 January 2021: <https://www.rics.org/uk/surveying-profession/contribute/consultations/valuation-of-properties-in-multi-storey-multi-occupancy-residential-buildings-with-cladding-1st-edition-guidance-note/>.

Housing: Safety

Andrew Gwynne: [138896]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 131202 on Housing: Insulation, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of the January 2020 consolidated guidance 'Building safety advice for building owners, including fire doors' on trends in (a) sales of flats, and (b) sales in the wider housing market.

Christopher Pincher:

This information is not held. The consolidated advice note is non-statutory advice for building owners about the actions they should take to ensure their buildings are safe.

Local Government: Meetings

Steve Reed: [139009]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to bring forward legislation to allow local authorities to continue meeting remotely after May 2021.

Luke Hall:

To extend the facility for councils to continue to meet remotely, or in hybrid form after 7 May 2021 would require primary legislation.

There is no option to extend the current regulations under the Coronavirus Act 2020 as section 78 (3) contains the sunset date of 7 May 2021.

There is considerable pressure on the Government's legislative programme, but the Government is carefully considering next steps in this area.

■ Planning Permission

Steve Reed:

[\[139010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 133882 on planning permission, how long on average the 31 referenced holding directions have been in place.

Christopher Pincher:

Of the 31 holding directions in place as of the 8 January, 3 are no longer in place. There are currently (as at 19 January 2021) 28 Article 31 Holding Directions in place. Directions are often used in respect of controversial or complex planning applications, and the average length of time these 28 Directions have been in place is 132 days. Directions restrict local authorities from granting planning permission for planning applications. They do not prevent authorities from considering applications and forming a view on them. Ministers will generally not consider requests to call applications in until authorities have formed a view on them.

■ Planning Permission: Coronavirus

Catherine West:

[\[139085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to extend planning permissions set to expire during the 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Christopher Pincher:

The Business and Planning Act 2020 introduced measures to enable certain planning permissions and listed building consents in England which had lapsed or were due to lapse during 2020 to be extended to 1 May 2021.

The measures provide for the power to extend the eligibility date for permissions and the time period for implementation. This is being kept under review at this time.

■ Planning Permission: Forests

Ed Davey:

[\[138853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to include provisions to protect woodland in his proposals for planning reform.

Christopher Pincher:

In *Planning for the Future* we proposed a quicker and simpler framework for assessing environmental effects: one which does not compromise on environmental standards, and indeed encourages opportunities for environmental enhancements to be identified and pursued early in the development process. Proposals will leave an inheritance of environmental improvements with environmental assets protected, more green spaces provided, more sustainable development supported and new homes that are more energy efficient

Though we are still considering the responses to the White Paper consultation, I can confirm that the protections for landscape, habitat and wildlife will remain in force, including ancient woodland, and ancient and veteran trees, and reforms will support the implementation of the proposals in the Environment Bill. Consultation on the White Paper closed on 29 October 2020. The Government will publish its response following consideration of all the feedback received.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Arms Trade: Export Controls

Alyn Smith:

[140268]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps she is taking to improve reporting on open licences.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

The United Kingdom operates one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world. We rigorously examine each export licence application on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

HM Government publishes Official Statistics on a quarterly and annual basis on export licences (including open individual licences) granted, refused and revoked. We also provide information on registrations and de-registrations of open general licences. This information is publicly available at:
gov.uk/government/collections/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data

We have made public the ability to search and run reports on published licensing data too. This is available at: exportcontroldb.trade.gov.uk

My Department has explored further increasing transparency on open licence usage, whilst being mindful of administrative burdens on industry and will continue to do so.

■ Arms Trade: Exports

Janet Daby:

[140251]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what armaments the UK exported from January 2018 to January 2021.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

HM Government publishes Official Statistics (on a quarterly and annual basis) on export licences granted, refused and revoked to all destinations on GOV.UK containing detailed information including the overall value, type (e.g. Military, Other) and a summary of the items covered by these licences. This information is available at: gov.uk/government/collections/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data and the most recent publication was on 13th October 2020, covering the period 1st April – 30th June 2020.

Information covering 1st July – 30th September 2020 will be published on 9th February 2021 and information covering 1st October 2020 – 31st December 2020 will be published on 13th April 2021.

■ **Arms Trade: Israel**

Janet Daby:

[\[140254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent amendments her Department has made to export controls in the context of the potential provision of armaments to the Israeli Government.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

The Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the “Consolidated Criteria”) remains the policy for assessing all licence applications on a case-by-case basis.

The Consolidated Criteria has long provided a thorough risk assessment framework and requires us to assess the impact of licensing equipment and its capabilities. HM Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated Criteria

JUSTICE

■ **Children: Maintenance**

Marion Fellows:

[\[139050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many cases regarding the Child Maintenance Service have been heard at the Social Security and Child Support Tribunal in each of the last five years.

Chris Philp:

Information about Child Maintenance Service appeals received into the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support) (SSCS) is published at www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics.

The latest period for which data are available is January to March 2020. The most recent tribunal statistics publications covering the period April to September 2020 do not include SSCS data due to issues identified as the Tribunal was being migrated to a new operational system. The data will be made available as soon as this is resolved and the data quality assured.

■ **Courts: Coronavirus**

Mr David Lammy:

[\[138854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish the scientific advice supporting the decision to keep courts open throughout the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Mr David Lammy:

[138855]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish the Public Health England guidance on the continued operation of HMCTS during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Chris Philp:

The HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) approach to risk assessment is set out in our Organisational Risk Assessment (available on gov.uk), and is implemented on the ground by site-specific assessments carried out and kept under regular and frequent review. We work closely with Public Health officials to ensure our approach is entirely in line with prevailing standards and best practice.

Public Health experts have confirmed to HMCTS that our arrangements are strong enough to deal with the challenges provided by the new variants of the virus. In the first week of January we sought and received confirmation from Public Health experts that the policies we have in place to mitigate against the risks of transmission continue to be satisfactory. Public Health experts have confirmed that they are.

Public Health bodies consider scientific advice (including that on the new variant) when making their recommendations on Covid-secure arrangements for all workplaces. HMCTS and PHE officials work alongside one another to produce the documentation already published.

HMCTS's guidance is published on Gov.uk and can found by using the web address below.

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation

PHE agreed statement on the matter is published at the link below:

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation#public-health-experts-confirm-court-and-tribunal-covid-secure-arrangements-appropriate

■ **HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Coronavirus**

Ellie Reeves:

[139107]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish the guidance that HMCTS has received from Public Health England during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

The HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) approach to risk assessment is set out in our Organisational Risk Assessment (available on gov.uk), and is implemented on the ground by site-specific assessments carried out and kept under regular and frequent review. We work closely with Public Health officials to ensure our approach is entirely in line with prevailing standards and best practice.

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■ Remand in Custody: Children

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[138905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to exempt children from the increases in remand custody time limits introduced in The Prosecution of Offences (Custody Time Limits) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[138906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he plans to introduce further changes to the remand custody time limits introduced in The Prosecution of Offences (Custody Time Limits) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, apart from an exemption for children.

Chris Philp:

Forthcoming regulations will be introduced to remove children from the remit of The Prosecution of Offences (Custody Time Limits) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 as soon as Parliamentary time allows. No further changes to these regulations are currently planned.

■ Remote Hearings

Catherine West:

[\[139082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of changing court proceedings to remote hearings to ensure the safety of the people involved during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

Listing is a judicial function. Therefore, the decision as to how a hearing is conducted is a matter for the judiciary and they will determine how best to uphold the interests of justice. When deciding on the suitability of holding a hearing remotely by video/audio, judges will consider issues such as the nature of the matters at stake and any problems the use of video/audio technology may present for participants in the hearing.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY**■ Members' Staff: Allowances**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[139115\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 136593, whether Members' staff working on the parliamentary estate or in a constituency office incur a work-related expense that is additional to usual living costs by needing to purchase food at that location.

Sir Charles Walker:

As is common in most employment arrangements, Members' employees are expected to provide for their own nourishment and refreshment at work, whether they purchase that or bring it in from home. The position is different for volunteers as they are not employed and provided with a salary from which to provide that sustenance. For that reason, volunteers can claim for the additional costs associated with volunteering for an MP, for example when on the parliamentary estate or in a constituency office (which includes food) which Members' staff cannot.

■ Members' Staff: Voluntary Work

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[139116\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 136594, for what reasons IPSA recognise that Members' staff incur additional costs while working at home through introducing a monthly working from home payment, but do not consider volunteers to be similarly incurring additional costs while volunteering from home for an hon Member.

Sir Charles Walker:

The payment the Hon Member refers to is IPSA's administration of the tax-free allowance which can be paid to employees who are required to work from home, under HMRC rules. As a tax mechanism, this does not apply to people who volunteer.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Alan Brown:**[\[911080\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for City of Chester, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, whether the Committee has made an assessment of the implications for the (a) administration of elections and (b) strength of the Union of a reduction in the number of Scottish parliamentary seats.

Christian Matheson:

The Electoral Commission's role relates only to aspect a) of the question.

On the administration of elections, it will provide the necessary support to the electoral community in responding to any changes made to constituency boundaries by Parliament, to ensure the continued delivery of well-run elections.

TRANSPORT■ **Aviation: Portugal****Sir Desmond Swayne:**[\[138837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his restriction on direct flights from Portugal includes Madeira; and if he will make a statement.

Robert Courts:

From 4am on 15th January 2021, the government introduced travel restrictions to the UK from several South American destinations, Portugal, Madeira, the Azores, Panama and Cape Verde in order to prevent the spread of a new strain of coronavirus into the UK. This includes a flight ban on countries with direct flights to the UK, including Argentina, Brazil, Cape Verde and Portugal (including Madeira and the Azores). The decision to ban travel from these destinations follows the discovery of a new coronavirus variant first identified in Brazil, that may have spread to countries with strong travel links to Brazil.

■ **Blue Badge Scheme****Stephen Morgan:**[\[137296\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to encourage local authorities to improve the approval rate of blue badge applications for people with hidden disabilities.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department for Transport is responsible for the legislative and policy framework of the Blue Badge Scheme. It has also has issued clear non-statutory guidance to local authorities in England on how to administer the scheme.

Day to day administration is the responsibility of individual local authorities. Local authorities must determine and implement assessment procedures which they believe are in accordance with the governing legislation.

■ Driving Tests

Alex Cunningham:

[138959]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the operation of the driving test system; and if he will extend the expiry date of theory tests.

Rachel Maclean:

In line with national lockdown restrictions, all routine practical driving tests have been suspended until the restrictions are lifted. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has rescheduled affected tests by moving them to the next available test dates and has notified candidates accordingly.

Once it is safe for driving tests to resume, the DVSA will ensure measures are in place to increase testing availability wherever possible; this will include offering overtime and annual leave buy back to examiners, asking all those qualified to carry out tests (warrant card holders) to do so, and conducting out of hours testing (such as on public holidays).

The maximum duration of two years between passing the theory test and a subsequent practical test is in place to ensure a candidate's road safety knowledge is current. This validity period is set in legislation and the Government has no current plans to lay further legislation to extend it.

■ Driving Tests: Fees and Charges

Liz Saville Roberts:

[139078]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of offering free driving theory tests to individuals who have been prevented from take a driving test due to covid-19 restrictions, and whose driving theory certificate is no longer valid.

Rachel Maclean:

A candidate whose theory test certificate expires will have received the service for which they paid the fee.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) pays its contractor, Pearson, per theory test delivered. If candidates were exempted from having to pay for a retake, then the DVSA and in turn the taxpayer would incur these costs. In addition, applications for a re-test would need to be validated and systems amended to remove the requirement for payment in these cases. The DVSA's focus should rightly be on developing solutions to address the backlog of practical driving tests that has arisen as a result of the pandemic.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[138893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the funding allocated to local authorities in England for electric charging infrastructure in (a) 2019-20 and (b) 2020-21.

Rachel Maclean:

In 2019-20 £14.5 million was allocated to English local authorities to support electric vehicle charging infrastructure. This included £4 million for the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS), to fund chargepoints for residents without access to private parking and £6.5 million to support electric vehicle infrastructure for taxis. In 2020-21, £20 million has been made available for ORCS, over £6 million of this funding has already been allocated to English local authorities.

In addition, there has also been £9.5 million of funding allocated to Derby and Nottingham as part of their Future of Transport Zone trials. This funding will be used for seven e-mobility hubs, which will include charging infrastructure. These are based in neighbourhoods, depots and campuses across the two cities. The first tranche of this funding was delivered in 2019-20, with a further tranche in 2021-22.

■ Free Zones: Finance

Jack Lopresti:

[\[137181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what funding is available for (a) the port of Bristol and (b) other free ports now that the UK has left the EU.

Robert Courts:

On 17 December 2020, awards were announced regarding the £200 million Cabinet Office-led Port Infrastructure Fund (PIF). Bristol Port was allocated a Government grant of £1.75 million with which it intends to build a border control point (BCP) to allow effective import of EU goods in line with the UK's new Border Operating Model.

Decisions on which ports shall be Freeports have not yet been taken. In November, the Government published the bidding prospectus for Freeports in England, setting out how ports can apply for Freeport status, and further policy details. The bidding period will close on 5 February 2021, with successful locations announced in the Spring following a fair, open and transparent selection process. Devolved administrations are following their own processes to a slightly later schedule.

Successful bidders to the Freeports competition will have the opportunity to access a share of £175 million of seed capital funding, as well as a small amount of revenue funding.

■ Heathrow Airport: Construction

Theresa Villiers:

[\[138894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make it his policy to oppose a third runway at Heathrow.

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 are carefully considering the Court's judgment.

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.

Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Coronavirus**Emma Hardy:**[\[139123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he has taken to ensure the suitability of the location of covid-19 testing sites for goods drivers requiring a negative test before embarkation for continental Europe to ensure significant distances are not added to journeys, with particular respect to the ports of Kingston upon Hull and Killingholme.

Rachel Maclean:

Covid-19 testing sites have been located at thirty-five Information and Advice sites (Motorway Service Areas and Truck stops) across the country linked to key haulier stopping spots on their journey to ports.

Currently the closest Covid testing Information and Advice sites to the ports of Hull and Killingholme are Doncaster, Wetherby, Hartshead Moor and Woodhall (Northbound). In addition, interim testing services have been setup at the port of Hull and Humberside Airport to provide additional facilities for hauliers bound for the Humber ports.

Their location has been determined by analysing such criteria as proximity to port, proportion of haulage traffic using the route, and capacity of the parking available. Covid-19 security has also informed the locations and site infrastructure.

The Department for Transport (DfT) continues to urge hauliers not to leave testing to the last opportunity and to get tested well before arriving at their port of departure.

Leamside Railway Line**Bridget Phillipson:**[\[138936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has undertaken an environmental impact assessment of (a) reopening the Leamside Line and (b) opening a Leamside South line.

Bridget Phillipson:[\[138937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate his Department has made of the length of time it would take to (a) reopen the Leamside Line and (b) open a Leamside South line.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[138938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect on congestion on the East Coast Mainline of (a) reopening the Leamside Line and (b) opening a proposed Leamside South line.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[138939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has undertaken an assessment of the potential economic benefits to the (a) North East and the (b) UK of (i) reopening the Leamside Line and (ii) opening a Leamside South line.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department received a bid to reinstate the Leamside Line (South of Tyne and Wearside) in the first round of the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund. The bid was not successful at that stage and feedback was provided on how it could be improved.

A further round of the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund will open shortly and we expect to receive a stronger revised bid at that point.

At this stage it is solely for the promoters of any bid to determine its scope.

■ **Luton Airport: Coronavirus**

Sarah Owen:

[\[139149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions his Department has had with representatives of Luton Airport on the ban on international travel during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Robert Courts:

The Department for Transport has not had any bespoke discussions with representatives of Luton Airport specifically on the ban on international travel during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021. The Department's Airports Team however held its regular monthly meeting with representatives of Luton Airport on 7th January 2021 and representatives of Luton Airport attended a pre-departure testing airports round table hosted by the Aviation Minister on 8th January 2021.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Testing**

Jonathan Edwards:

[\[138919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of allowing a MOT extension for drivers who are in high risk groups and shielding as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

The Department is not currently planning to issue MOT exemptions, but the situation is being kept under review. The Road Traffic Act 1988 does not permit the issuing of MOT extensions on the basis of the circumstances of the vehicle owner. Vulnerable people or those self-isolating should use a pick-up and drop-off service, which is offered by many MOT test stations.

■ Railway Stations: Access**Sarah Owen:** [\[139148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions his Department has had with stakeholders on Access for All funding for Legrave Train Station.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Legrave was nominated for Access for All funding in 2019, but was not selected as other stations in the region better met the selection criteria. The Department looks forward to receiving a further bid for Legrave when we open a new round of Access for All in the future.

■ Railways: Coronavirus**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[137283\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 130811 on Railways: Fares, what the cost to the public purse is of keeping trains running during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

When COVID-19 hit, we took emergency action to keep the trains running by temporarily transitioning train operators onto Emergency Measures Agreements under which the Government bears nearly all financial risks on both costs and revenues.

This swift intervention has ensured key rail services have continued to run for those who rely on them, despite passenger numbers having fallen very significantly as a result of the pandemic.

In September 2020, we renewed that support with new agreements, called Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements (ERMAs), to support the UK recovery and continue the fight against the pandemic. These agreements run for up to 18 months.

Total payments made to all train operating companies under franchise contracts with the Department (including those in public ownership) from 1 March 2020 to 20 September 2020 was £4.07 billion. Full payment data for this period has been published on the Government website, GOV.UK, and we will continue to release periodic updates there in future.

At the Public Accounts Committee on 15 October 2020, the Department's Permanent Secretary estimated that the total cost of this support for the 2020/21 financial year will be between £7 billion and £9 billion for train operating companies under franchise contracts with the Department.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[137284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 133116 on Railways: Coronavirus, what measures his Department introduced to ensure the safety of railway staff on Saturday 19 December 2020.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Our priority is ensuring the safety of hard-working frontline railway staff, who are helping passengers at stations and keeping key services on the network running.

Following the announcement on 19 December 2020, the Government and Chief Medical Officer urged people to avoid travelling unless essential to limit the risk of transmission, and the Department updated its safer travel guidance.

Rail operators had already taken steps to minimise the risk of overcrowding, for example by advising passengers to reserve tickets in advance and follow the safer travel guidance. Rail operators reacted quickly to the increase in passengers by adding additional carriages to trains and adding in extra trains wherever possible. In addition, extra staff were deployed quickly on to stations to help provide passenger assistance and manage the crowding that took place on a small number of central London stations for a brief period. The British Transport Police (BTP) also deployed additional officers on 19 December 2020. The Department continues to work closely with the BTP to build on existing measures to keep passengers and staff safe and promote COVID-19 compliance.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[137285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 133116 on Railways: Coronavirus, what assessment he has made of the effect on the number of passengers who travelled by train on Saturday 19 December 2020 of the Government's announcement of Tier 4 on that day.

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.

In the majority of cases, train services did not breach social distancing capacity on Saturday 19 December 2020, as passengers had been advised to reserve tickets in advance and follow the Government's safer travel guidance. There was crowding for a limited period at a small number of stations in central London in the evening prior to the Tier 4 restrictions coming into force at midnight that night. Station staff were available throughout to help manage passenger movements.

Overall demand over the Christmas period was reduced substantially from anticipated levels following the announcements over changes to tiering and Christmas bubble arrangements. The public were kept informed of travel news through coordinated information from train operating companies, Network Rail and independent train ticket retailers. Overall footfall on 19 December 2020 was 30 per cent of the equivalent day in 2019, and 3 percentage points lower than the same day the previous week.

■ Railways: Disability

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[137281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to make the rail network more accessible to those who have (a) autism and (b) other hidden disabilities.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Through the Department's Access for All programme, which provides accessible routes at stations, Network Rail engages with local disability groups to ensure that designs meet the needs of all passengers.

We are also currently reviewing the Disabled Persons Railcard criteria with a view to making it available to more disabled people including those with non-visible disabilities.

Marsha De Cordova: [\[138052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many applications for dispensations or exemptions from the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2010 his Department has received in the last two years; from which rail operators those applications were received; what dispensations or exemptions were sought; and what the outcome was for each of those applications.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Secretary of State publishes an Annual Report to Parliament on the granting of exemptions and dispensations against accessibility standards. Reports are available from 2010 onwards and the most recent report can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-vehicle-accessibility-regulations-exemption-orders-annual-report-2019>.

The 2020 annual report will be published shortly, which contains the details of the one exemption granted under the Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non-interoperable Rail System) Regulations 2010 in 2020 and the one application received.

All requests for exemption are subject to public consultation and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-rvar-exemption-orders/list-of-rail-vehicle-accessibility-regulations-exemption-orders>

Marsha De Cordova: [\[138053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the proportion of each Train Operating Company's fleet that is not compliant with the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2010.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Details on the level of compliance in each operator's fleet can be found in the regular statistics publication on accessible rail vehicles

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-rail-vehicles-built-or-refurbished-to-modern-accessibility-standards>.

■ Railways: Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements

Marsha De Cordova:

[\[138049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the rail Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements allow rail operators to seek dispensations or exemptions from Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2010 compliance.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The provisions of the Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non-interoperable Rail System) Regulations 2010 in relation to seeking for exemption from accessibility standard(s) are unchanged by the Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements.

Marsha De Cordova:

[\[138050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements amend any rail operator's franchise obligations in relation to providing accessible services for disabled passengers.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The ERMAs (Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements) preserve the existing accessibility obligations under the franchise agreements, they also include an additional requirement that TOCs undertake a diversity impact assessment on all projects that will or may affect the interests of persons with protected characteristics.

■ Railways: Quarantine

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[137286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 131401 on Railways: Quarantine, if he will make it his policy to publish sector wide data on the number of railway staff members self-isolating due to covid-19 on a regular basis.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department monitors absence rates across the rail industry, including the proportion of rail workers who are ill and those who are self-isolating due to COVID-19. The level of staff absence due to COVID-19 varies daily and between operators, and each operator manages the running of their operations as necessary. There are currently no plans to regularly publish sector-wide data on staff absence rates.

■ Railways: Repairs and Maintenance

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[137282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 133125 on Railways: Repairs and Maintenance, what discussions he has had with stakeholders to minimise the cost to the public purse of future engineering works.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Carrying out engineering works is essential to ensure that the railway remains safe for passengers and staff, and that changes can be made to improve passenger journeys. The Department continues to work closely with Network Rail to ensure that future engineering works are cost-efficient.

■ South Western Railway: Catering**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[139130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, the date on which he was informed of South Western Railway's plans to terminate its on-board catering contract with Elinor.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department was informed of South Western Railway's plans on 5 August 2020.

■ South Western Railway: Disability**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[138051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has (a) received an application for and (b) granted a dispensation from the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2010 requirements in relation to South Western Railway and the improvement notice issued to it by the Office of Rail and Road concerning access for passengers who use wheelchairs at Liphook station.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Secretary of State can confirm that no applications under the Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non-interoperable Rail System) Regulations 2010 has been received from South Western Railway in relation to passengers who are wheelchair users at Liphook station.

■ South Western Railway: Rolling Stock**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[137280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 131410 on South Western Railway: Rolling Stock, what the proposed timeline is for the South Western Railway Class 455, 456, 458 and 707 fleet leaving the operator; and when the new Class 701 will be open for passenger service.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The first of the new Class 701 trains is expected to be in passenger service from early Summer this year, with the full fleet to be deployed in passenger service over the following 12 months, enabling the cascade of the current fleets out of South Western Railway on a like-for-like basis as the new trains enter passenger service. This timeline is contingent upon there being no further delays in the delivery and acceptance of the new trains, a risk that is heightened with the current situation with COVID-19, and completion of the associated training for the traincrew to enable the trains to be operated in passenger service. However, I can confirm that first two Class 707 units have already been cascaded to Southeastern Railway.

■ Transport for London Financial Review

Sarah Olney:

[139087]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when the review into Transport for London's future financial position and future financial structure being conducted by KPMG and as set out in the extraordinary funding and financing agreement of 14 May 2020 will be published in full.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government's review into Transport for London's future financial position continues to be a matter of live policymaking. Ministers continue to monitor the public interest test for when publication is appropriate.

TREASURY

■ Beverage Containers: Recycling

Dr Alan Whitehead:

[138839]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of the Deposit Return Scheme and its effect on carbon emissions as part of its Net Zero Review.

Kemi Badenoch:

The government's 2019 manifesto committed to introduce a deposit return scheme (DRS) to incentivise people to recycle plastic and glass drinks containers, subject to further evidence and analysis. The objectives of this system include boosting recycling levels, offering greater opportunities to collect higher quality, uncontaminated materials in greater quantities, thus promoting a circular economy, and reducing littering. The specific details of a DRS will be developed further and presented in a second consultation in 2021.

HM Treasury's Net Zero Review is not considering detailed policies to decarbonise specific sectors, including the planned deposit return scheme. This is in line with the Review's terms of reference, published in November 2019 and available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-review-terms-of-reference/hm-treasurys-review-into-funding-the-transition-to-a-net-zero-greenhouse-gas-economy-terms-of-reference>. The Review will instead explore how the transition to a net zero economy will be funded and where the costs will fall. It will look at options for a balance of contributions between households, businesses and the taxpayer, and how to maximise economic growth opportunities from the transition. The Review will be published in spring 2021. HM Treasury published an interim report in December 2020 which set out our approach and analysis which will inform the final report.

■ Business: Coronavirus**Mr Steve Baker:****[R] [138942]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of setting up an equity finance scheme to support businesses through the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Kemi Badenoch:

As part of the government's response to Covid-19, we developed the Future Fund, which provides equity finance for high growth, highly innovative companies. As of December, more than 900 firms have taken part in the scheme.

■ Charities: Finance**Grahame Morris:****[138922]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will remove the 31 March 2021 deadline by which charities and the voluntary sector must spend any grant funding received from the £750 million fund for frontline charities.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government has announced a £750 million support package for charities to enable vital work during the pandemic.

This includes up to £200m for hospices and £360 million direct from Government departments, supporting organisations like St John Ambulance and the Citizens Advice Bureau as well as charities supporting children, victims of domestic abuse, or disabled people.

£200 million is being distributed by the National Lottery Community Fund through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund. More than 98% of this funding has been disbursed to recipient charities.

The Government has matched public donations to the BBC's "Big Night In" charity appeal, with over £37 million being distributed by Comic Relief, Children In Need and the National Emergencies Trust to charities on the frontline.

The Government has also announced 19 philanthropists, foundations and grant-making organisations to receive a share of match funding from the £85 million Community Match Challenge, generating £170 million for charities' vital work.

The government keeps all sector support packages under review

■ Child Benefit**Wendy Chamberlain:****[139186]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing child benefit to cover the cost of free school meals.

Steve Barclay:

The Government is committed to managing the public finances in a responsible way by targeting support where it is most needed. Child Benefit is not one of the qualifying

benefits for Free School Meals. As individuals with an income of up to £60,000 are entitled to Child Benefit, many claimants will not have children who are eligible for Free School Meals and increasing Child Benefit to support this cohort would be poorly targeted. From April 2021 Child Benefit will increase in line with CPI (0.5 percent) to ensure that it retains its value. We will continue to review levels of Child Benefit alongside other benefits annually through the uprating process.

Schools have continued to receive their core funding in full, including for free school meals, during the national lockdown. In addition to this, we are providing extra funding to support schools to work with their school catering team or food provider to supply food parcels or meals to eligible pupils learning at home. Schools can alternatively claim funding to provide local vouchers worth £15 per child per week, giving families the flexibility to use these where it is most convenient for them and on healthy, nutritious items of their choice. Where schools cannot offer food parcels or use local solutions, a national voucher scheme is in place to ensure that every eligible child can access free school meals.

■ Children: Day Care

Rosie Cooper:

[\[137163\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what security measures his Department has put in place to secure funds that members of the public have deposited in tax-free childcare accounts.

Steve Barclay:

Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) is delivered from GOV.UK alongside other government digital services through the secure Government Gateway. The Childcare Service (on GOV.UK) complies and adheres to the following best practice security measures which secure funds in TFC accounts:

- HMG Baseline Personnel Security Standard • HMG Government Security Classifications • HMG Personnel Security Controls • HMG Security Policy Framework
- ISO20001: IT Service Management • ISO22301: Business Continuity Management • ISO27001:2013 Information technology, Security techniques, Information security management systems, Requirements • Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Emma Hardy:

[\[139119\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to review the eligibility criteria for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to include people employed throughout November and December 2020.

Jesse Norman:

For all eligibility decisions under Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (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 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.

The Government understands that the new restrictions are challenging for some businesses. On 5 January, the Chancellor announced an extra £4.6 billion to protect jobs and support affected businesses as restrictions get tougher, including a new one-off grant of up to £9,000 to support businesses in England which are legally required to close. This comes in addition to the existing monthly grants for closed businesses of up to £3,000 per month. Local authorities will also receive an additional £500 million, to a total of £1.6 billion, of discretionary funding to allow them to support their local businesses.

The CJRS is not the only support available for employees. The Government has boosted the generosity of the welfare system by £7.4 billion in 2020-21 including through a temporary £20 a week increase in the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element.

■ **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Teachers**

Daisy Cooper:

[139144]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support he plans to offer teaching (a) agencies and (b) umbrella companies unable to afford the costs associated with using the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to furlough supply teachers.

Jesse Norman:

Under the CJRS extension until 30 April 2021, employers will only be asked to cover National Insurance and employer pension contributions for hours not worked. For an average claim, this accounts for just 5 per cent of total employment costs or £70 per employee per month.

This is a fair way to ask employers to contribute because it protects lower paid workers, by limiting the cost of them to employers.

Since March 2020, the Government has provided support for people, businesses and public services totalling an estimated £280 billion. In particular, businesses have received billions in loans, tax deferrals, Business Rate reliefs, and general and sector-specific grants. This support can be used by businesses to cover the costs of NICs and pension contributions, ensuring that they can continue to furlough their employees.

The Department for Education has published detailed guidance on the application of financial support schemes for the education sector, including for supply staff with various different employment arrangements, on GOV.UK.

■ Economic Cooperation

Gareth Thomas:

[\[138851\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which countries the Government has had an (a) economic and (b) financial dialogue with in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement.

John Glen:

The government engages internationally with a range of countries through regular and established economic and/or financial dialogues. Over the last four years this has included:

- UK-Brazil Economic and Financial Dialogue (July 2017, August 2018, and December 2020);
- UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue (December 2017 and June 2019);
- UK-Hong Kong Financial Dialogue (May 2019);
- UK-India Economic and Financial Dialogue (April 2017 and October 2020);
- UK-Japan Financial Dialogue (January 2018, December 2018, and December 2020);
- UK-Singapore Financial Dialogue (September 2017, September 2018, and July 2020);
- UK-South Korea Financial Dialogue (November 2017 and June 2018);
- UK-Switzerland Financial Dialogue (November 2017, December 2018, and September 2020); and
- UK-US Special Relationship Economic Working Group (September 2020); and UK-US Financial Regulatory Working Group (September 2018, May 2019, and October 2020).

Where applicable additional information about these dialogues is published on www.gov.uk. Further details are also available in HM Treasury's annual reports.

■ English Language: Education

Hilary Benn:

[\[138875\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of including English language schools in the covid-19 Business Rates Relief scheme.

Hilary Benn:

[\[138876\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend eligibility for the support available to the retail and leisure sectors to the English language school sector.

Jesse Norman:

Business rates are administered by local government and it is for local authorities to determine eligibility for reliefs, having regard to guidance issued by the Government.

The Government understands the many areas of difficulty for businesses caused by the COVID-19 disruption and has introduced a number of measures to support businesses through this challenging period.

If any business is in a difficult position with regard to business rates bills, they are encouraged to contact their local authority to discuss whether other support may be available. A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, has also been made available. Further information can be found at: www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support.

As set out at the Spending Review, 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 due course.

Food: Wholesale Trade**Carolyn Harris:**[\[138471\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will grant business rates relief to food service wholesalers that are closed due to the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors. Business rates are devolved in Wales, and so are a matter for the Welsh Government.

The Government has sympathy with all businesses affected by COVID-19, and has provided various schemes that can support specific firms such as wholesalers, including Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans, Bounce Back Loans, grants and VAT deferrals.

Lendy**Seema Malhotra:**[\[138998\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many complaints the Financial Conduct Authority received on financial promotions issued by the firms with company numbers 743416 and 622666, currently known as Lendy Ltd, in each year since 2014.

Seema Malhotra:[\[138999\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many times the Financial Conduct Authority intervened with firms with company numbers 743416 and 622666, currently known as Lendy Ltd, to ask them to modify or withdraw a financial promotion in each year since 2014.

Seema Malhotra:

[\[139000\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment the Financial Conduct Authority has undertaken on promotions issued by firms with company numbers 743416 and 622666, currently known as Lendy Ltd.

John Glen:

As you may be aware, there is an ongoing Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) enforcement investigation into the collapse of the firms known as Lendy Ltd. It is important to stress that the independence of the FCA's investigation, and its wider supervision of firms, is vital to its role. The FCA's credibility, authority and value to consumers would be undermined if it were possible for the Government to intervene in such operational matters.

As such, it is not appropriate for the Government to publicly discuss the FCA's discharging of their supervisory duties in respect of Lendy's financial promotions. However, I have passed your requests onto the FCA for them to respond to directly. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

■ **London Capital and Finance: Insolvency**

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[138838\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what progress he has made in setting up a compensation scheme for London Capital and Finance bondholders.

Deidre Brock:

[\[139034\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the (a) timescale and (b) process is for compensation to London Capital and Finance bondholders under the Financial Conduct Authority's complaints scheme.

Deidre Brock:

[\[139035\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the timescale is for setting up the compensation scheme for London Capital and Finance bondholders.

Deidre Brock:

[\[139036\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who will administer the London Capital and Finance compensation scheme.

Deidre Brock:

[\[139037\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department is planning to impose any restrictions on compensation to bondholders under the London Capital and Finance compensation scheme.

John Glen:

In my Written Ministerial Statement on 17 December 2020, I outlined the three main channels through which London Capital & Finance plc (LCF) bondholders can seek compensation. These are the administration process, the Financial Services

Compensation Scheme (FSCS), and the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) Complaints Scheme.

My statement also announced that, taking into consideration the specific and complex set of circumstances surrounding the collapse of LCF, the Treasury will set up a compensation scheme which will assess whether there is justification for further one-off compensation payments in certain circumstances for some LCF bondholders .

The Government will announce further details, including on timescales, the scheme's administering body, and the eligibility of compensation, in due course.

■ Non-domestic Rates: Coronavirus

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[139073\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) extending the current business rates holiday for 12 months after the 1st of April 2021, and (b) substantially reducing the 2022-23 business rates to at least 40 per cent of pre-covid-19 outbreak levels.

Dr Rupa Huq: [\[139074\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he plans to announce the business rates for the period after the 1st April 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is considering options for further COVID-19 related support through business rates reliefs. 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 due course.

In 2020, the Government launched the Fundamental Review of Business Rates, which sought views on the level of the business rates multiplier. A final report to be published in due course will set out the conclusions of the Review on this and other areas.

■ Public Expenditure

Andrew Gwynne: [\[138898\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the distributional effects of his Department's recent changes to the Green Book methodology.

Steve Barclay:

The Green Book is the government's guidance on how to develop and appraise policies that meet Government objectives. The guidance provides a framework for policymakers to think through all relevant costs and benefits of a proposal, including any distributional effects that may arise in particular parts of the UK, or to groups within UK society. It also makes clear that all proposals must take equalities impacts into account as required by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010.

The updated Green Book contains stronger references to equalities requirements alongside further detailed guidance and requirements on distributional and place-based appraisal to ensure that distributional effects are not overlooked.

However, the Green Book is not a decision-making tool with direct distributional effects. Instead, the Green Book provides a framework for considering and presenting relevant information which helps to shape advice to Ministers and decisionmakers who take the final decision.

Andrew Gwynne:

[\[138899\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what evidence was used to inform his Department's recent changes to the Green Book methodology; and if he will publish that evidence.

Steve Barclay:

The review of the Green Book was informed by extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including academics, the National Audit Office, the National Infrastructure Commission, analytical experts and users of the Green Book both in Whitehall and in the Devolved Administrations, the Northern Powerhouse and regional and local government. HM Treasury also reviewed past policy development to understand how appraisal was being applied in practice.

The process and findings of the review are outlined in detail in the Final Report of the 2020 Green Book Review published on the 25th of November on the Government website.

■ Retail Trade: VAT

Dr Rupa Huq:

[\[139075\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Brexit business taskforce, if he will take steps to ensure that retailers can recover VAT that they have paid in the country of destination when goods are returned for refund.

Jesse Norman:

Retailers in Great Britain who sell goods to customers in other countries should normally zero-rate the sale of those goods for UK VAT purposes. Where import VAT is due on arrival in the destination country, the recipient in that country is responsible for paying that import VAT and then recovering it, if the goods are subsequently returned.

Where the retailer in Great Britain is registered for VAT in the destination country, the retailer can account for the VAT, including VAT adjustments for returned goods, through the VAT return process in that country.

■ Revenue and Customs: Tax Avoidance

Ian Lavery:

[\[138440\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many contractors have worked for HMRC while using disguised remuneration schemes to date.

Jesse Norman:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer given to UIN 119261.

■ **Small Businesses: Coronavirus**

Nadia Whittome:

[139183]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with major banks on support for small businesses during the covid-19 outbreak.

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>

The Treasury recognises the vital role that major banks, non-banks, and challenger banks play in the provision of credit to SMEs. It is grateful for the way the sector has responded to the crisis, providing a range of commercial support to their customers and participating in the coronavirus guarantee loan schemes.

On 23 March 2020, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) was launched to support small and medium sized businesses' access to lending, with viable businesses eligible to apply for loans of up to £5m. Furthermore, on 4 May 2020, the Government launched the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs) which ensures that the smallest businesses can access loans from £2,000 up to £50,000, capped at 25% of businesses' turnover in a matter of just days.

The British Business Bank has so far accredited 29 BBLs lenders, including challenger banks and non-bank lenders, and more than 100 CBILS lenders. Together, as of 13 December, the schemes have supported more than 1.5 million businesses with facilities totalling over £63 billion.

In order to give the smallest businesses further support and flexibility in making their repayments for BBLs, the Chancellor has announced "Pay as You Grow" (PAYG) options. Furthermore, the Government has amended the CBILS rules to allow lenders to extend loan terms from six to a maximum of ten years where they judge that this will help borrowers repay their loan, helping them to reduce their monthly repayments.

Banks are also providing a range of commercial support to their customers. Businesses struggling to repay any pre-existing loans should talk to their lender to discuss options.

■ Spirits: Excise Duties

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[139164\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Government has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a small distillers duty relief to help small spirits producers grow their businesses.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government held a call for evidence in 2020 on reforms to alcohol duty, which closed on 29 November. The Government is now analysing the responses, and will provide updates in due course. The Government is considering the role of small producer reliefs as part of this review.

■ Taxation: Self-assessment

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[138891\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of delaying the deadlines for (a) self-assessment and (b) business tax returns for (i) self-employed and (ii) businesses during the covid-19 pandemic.

Jesse Norman:

The Government encourages as many self-employed individuals and business partnerships as possible to file self assessment returns on time, even if they cannot pay their tax straight away. Any departure from this simple message increases the risk that taxpayers will miss both filing and payment deadlines unnecessarily or miss out on the simple arrangements HMRC have put in place for securing time to pay.

HMRC know some taxpayers and agents will struggle to meet the deadline, especially given the current public health situation and related restrictions. HMRC are carefully considering how to provide further easements, including options that would significantly simplify the handling of reasonable excuse appeals for HMRC, taxpayers and agents.

HMRC will keep the situation closely under review between now and the filing deadline.

Incorporated businesses should wherever possible file their corporation tax return by the relevant deadline. However, HMRC understand that some businesses may be unable to meet the CT filing deadline this year due to the impact of COVID-19. Where the filing date has not passed, and taxpayers are having filing difficulties, they can contact HMRC to see if it is possible to defer a late filing penalty. HMRC continue to allow this on a case-by-case basis and have recently refreshed internal guidance to ensure that advisers take account of the current circumstances and that a consistent response is provided to all taxpayers.

■ Travel: Allowances**Gavin Newlands:** [\[139044\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of scale rate expenses for accommodation and subsistence paid to cabin crew and other employees who travel outside of the UK.

Gavin Newlands: [\[139045\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of scale rate expenses for accommodation and subsistence paid to airline cabin crew and other employees who travel outside of the UK.

Jesse Norman:

The Overseas Scale Rates (OSR) guidance was last updated in February 2019 and applied from 6 April 2019.

The published rates are designed to reflect the average cost of subsistence, including local taxes and gratuities, when staying overseas. This will, of course, vary from case to case as well as city to city.

Employers can pay or reimburse employees' allowable travel expenses free of tax and National Insurance contributions in two ways. They can pay the actual expenses or use the scale rates HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) set. If they pay the actual expenses, they must check the employee's receipts, but do not have to do this if they use the scale rates.

If an employee spends more than the amount their employer pays, they can claim tax relief on the difference. Guidance on how to do this can be found at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-income-tax-relief-for-your-employment-expenses-p87.

■ UK Trade with EU: VAT**Dr Rupa Huq:** [\[139076\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will take steps to ensure that the Brexit business taskforce consults (a) retail businesses and (b) other stakeholders on the economic effect of the UK leaving the EU VAT area on businesses that import from outside the EU to export within it.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is continuing to work closely with business following the end of the transition period and has conducted hundreds of engagements since then, including ministerial calls and roundtables.

As with all new tax measures, the Government includes its assessment of the impacts of the changes in Tax Information and Impact Notes. Notes for measures recently legislated for in the Taxation (Post-transition Period) Act were published alongside that legislation.

■ Wholesale Trade: Non-domestic Rates

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[\[139029\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the potential merits of extending business rates relief to food service wholesalers.

Alexander Stafford:

[\[139178\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on extending Business Rates Relief to food service wholesalers.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors.

The Government understands the impact that COVID-19 has had on businesses, and has provided various schemes to support specific firms such as wholesalers, including Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans, Bounce Back Loans, grants and VAT deferrals.

In line with the practice of successive administrations, details of ministerial discussions are not normally disclosed.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Email

Afzal Khan:

[\[138508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to take steps to enable the public to communicate with her Department by email.

Guy Opperman:

Due to the risk of personal data being compromised through email, this service is restricted to general enquiries, however it is available as a reasonable adjustment on request.

For claimants with a disability or health condition who require email as they need information to be provided in an alternative format we can accept the security risk and allow use of email.

Afzal Khan:

[\[138509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent estimate she has made of the cost of setting up an email channel for the public to contact her Department in respect of personal independence payment appeals.

Justin Tomlinson:

Once a customer has submitted an appeal to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) the customer engages with HMCTS from this point to provide information and evidence relevant to their PIP appeal. In most PIP appeal cases, additional evidence provided is then digitally shared with DWP as a party to the appeal, therefore an email address is not necessary.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: ICT**Mary Glendon:**[\[138979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the deployment of IT equipment to allow more of her Department's staff to work from home during the covid-19 outbreak (a) how many pieces of IT equipment are currently on order and (b) when staff are planned to receive them.

Guy Opperman:

DWP does not currently have a need to procure additional IT equipment to enable more people to work from home. Over 74,000 colleagues are already able to work remotely and DWP are planning to roll out the remaining PCs to up to 28,000 members of staff by the end of March depending on demand. We are repurposing existing DWP devices to enable them for home working in order to fulfil demand.

Mary Glendon:[\[138981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether delays have occurred in the roll-out of IT equipment across her Department since the first covid-19 lockdown was announced in March 2020.

Guy Opperman:

Since March 2020 the Department has increased the number of colleagues with IT which enables them to work more flexibly, including from home, by over 50,000. This means almost 74,000 people in total now have kit to enable them to work this way, which is approximately 81 per cent of our workforce.

The Department continues the roll-out of IT kit as quickly as it can, delivering over 2,500 pieces of IT equipment a week to ensure that everyone in DWP is enabled to work flexibly by the end of March.

The roll out has been delivered according to a carefully planned set of priorities in order to keep our colleagues safe whilst keeping our services running and has been delivered to plan.

Some job roles can only be done in the office or individuals' personal circumstances mean they do not wish to work from home - these colleagues will continue to use their existing desk-based IT. Where colleagues are required to work in an office, please be assured that measures are in place which follow all Government guidance on social distancing to ensure the safety of colleagues.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Offices

Mary Glendon:

[\[138980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff in her Department are working in an office setting, and what the roles are of those staff.

Guy Opperman:

Since March 2020 we have increased the number of colleagues with the IT to enable them to work more flexibly by over 50,000, meaning almost 74,000 people in total have equipment to enable them to work from home. This is approximately 81% of our workforce. Every day more colleagues are able to work from home as we continue to roll out more IT equipment to ensure that everyone in DWP is enabled to work from home where appropriate by the end of March 2021.

We are limiting how many colleagues remain working in an office setting in order to balance the need to provide essential public facing services for citizens, whilst maintaining safe social distancing in line with Government guidelines. Examples of such roles are some of our Jobcentre services (which provide vital face to face support for our most vulnerable citizens), and clerical processes such as Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit applications.

Currently, around 31,000 DWP employees are consistently working from an office, with approximately a further 5,000 working from a combination of home and a DWP office location. Combined, this accounts for around 42% of the DWP employees who currently attend an office during the working week.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Telephone Services

Afzal Khan:

[\[138510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of allowing claimants to contact her Department with general queries relating to their claims.

Guy Opperman:

Claimants can contact DWP with general enquiries through various routes, including by phone or by email via GOV.UK.

We also have an alternative option for British Sign Language users who can use the Video Relay Service to communicate with DWP.

In addition, there is an online Journal for Universal Credit claimants and a self-service portal for Child Maintenance Service clients.

■ Forests: Working Conditions

Olivia Blake:

[\[139173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a statutory number of Forestry England

site visits to (a) publicly managed and (b) privately managed UK forests to monitor workers' conditions and ensure sites are PPE-compliant.

Mims Davies:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has responsibility for the regulation of health and safety law for forestry work in Great Britain (GB). HSE achieves this through a blend of activities, including work with stakeholders, targeted communications, specific guidance and, where appropriate, site visits to maximise impact.

Key to HSE's influence with forestry stakeholders is work with and support for the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA). FISA is an organisation comprised of leading organisations within the forestry industry who have made a commitment to raise the standard of health safety and welfare in the forestry workplace[1]. Forestry England are a member of FISA. The work by FISA and HSE covers the provision and use of the correct equipment for workers, including PPE.

Throughout 2020, HSE continued to work with stakeholders within the forestry industry to ensure health and safety standards were met on site.

HSE is not aware of any assessments about introducing statutory Forestry England visits to forestry worksites to monitor conditions for workers. Forestry England do not have a statutory role to monitor compliance but will visit sites in their control as part of their normal site management arrangements.

[1] <https://ukfisa.com>

■ **National Insurance: Coronavirus**

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[139101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the extent of the backlog of National Insurance the covid-19 outbreak.

Guy Opperman:

Due to Covid 19 restrictions, the Department are not conducting Face to Face National Insurance Number (NINo) interviews at present. Applicants who have verified their identity via a Visa application are able to apply for a NINo using a postal route.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[139103]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effect on (a) tax and (b) national insurance payments of her Department not issuing national insurance numbers to many applicants during the covid-19 outbreak.

Guy Opperman:

The Department and HMRC have assessed the effects on customers paying tax and National Insurance Contributions without a National Insurance Number (NINo).

The collection of tax and National Insurance is a matter for HMRC. HMRCs [employer checklist](#) provides advice to employers on what information is required when submitting payroll returns for those employees who do not have a NINo.

HMRC have measures in place to ensure customers pay the right amount of tax and National Insurance contributions at the right time.

■ **National Insurance: EU Nationals**

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[139104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason her Department has not been able to use pre-settled status and settled status as the required evidence in issuing new national insurance numbers to UK arrivals since March 2020.

Guy Opperman:

As part of DWP's digital programme to improve access to National Insurance services, particularly through the Covid-19 pandemic, the department has explored how it can use the data provided by EU/EEA citizens as part of their Settled/Pre-settled status applications to remove the need for a face to face identity check. This process is currently in the testing phase.

■ **National Insurance: Visas**

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[139102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what equality impact assessment her Department has made in relation to its policy not to issue national insurance numbers to applicants without a visa during the covid-19 outbreak.

Guy Opperman:

In order to allocate a National Insurance number, the Department must validate each applicant's identity. This was predominantly done through a face to face identity check. As part of the Department's assessment to meet government guidelines to limit the spread of COVID-19 virus, all non-essential face to face activity was suspended.

For those customer groups, where a face to face identity check is required, we are developing and testing alternative identity verification solutions.

We recently included EU/EEA and Swiss nationals, who have been granted settled or pre-settled status as part of their EU Settlement Scheme, into the test, as their identity will have been verified, through this process, by the Home Office.

■ **Pension Credit**

Ruth Jones:

[\[138074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to increase Pension Credit uptake through public awareness campaigns.

Guy Opperman:

In February last year we launched a national campaign to raise awareness of Pension Credit and help dispel some of the misconceptions that people might have about Pension Credit eligibility.

DWP have reviewed both internal guidance for customer-facing colleagues and external communications products across a wide range of DWP benefits and services for citizens at or approaching Pension Credit age. We have identified changes that could be made subject to user research and testing. Further work is also under way that aims to improve the cross-promotion of benefits over the longer term.

DWP also continues to work closely with stakeholders such as Age Concern, the CAB, Independent Age, Money Saving Expert and the Money and Pension Service, as this is the most effect way to reach likely Pension Credit claimants. We would encourage anyone who thinks they might be eligible for Pension Credit to visit gov.uk.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Stephen Morgan: [138019]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to speed up the processing of personal independence payment applications.

Justin Tomlinson:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 January 2020 to Question [UIN 133744](#)

Chris Stephens: [139051]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many personal independence payments claimants have had their award ended without an extension between 1 October 2020 and 18 January 2021.

Chris Stephens: [139054]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, claimants with personal independent payment claims in which period since March 2020 should have had their claim extended.

Justin Tomlinson:

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

Chris Stephens: [139052]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether it is her Department's policy that all personal independence payments claims due to end between March 2020 and January 2021 should have been extended.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department has been automatically applying extension of awards of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for all claims due to end between March 2020 and January 2021, except those where a new decision has been made since review and reassessment activity resumed in July. Additionally, a small number of awards have not been extended where action on their case is pending. These are not included in Covid-19 easements and will not be extended as part of this exercise.

Chris Stephens:

[\[139053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many new personal independence payments claims are open and awaiting an assessment prior to a final decision on award as at 18 January 2021.

Justin Tomlinson:

On 31st October 2020, the latest date for which data is available, there were 95,930 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) Normal Rules new claims that had been referred to the Assessment Provider but were yet to be returned to DWP following an assessment.

Notes

Source: PIP ADS

- PIP analytical data held by the Department does not contain the date the assessment takes place. As a proxy, we use the date an assessment was returned from the Assessment Providers to the Department. This is usually a few days following the assessment.
- The answer includes Normal Rules new claims only
- This is unpublished data. It may be subject to future revision.
- Figures are for Great Britain only.
- The status of claims as 'normal rules' and 'new claim/reassessment' is the status at the point of referral to the Assessment Provider. It is possible for claims to transition between normal/special rules and new claims/reassessments during the course of the claimant journey.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Coronavirus

Chris Stephens:

[\[139055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether personal independence payments (PIP) claimants will have their PIP awards extended on more than one occasion if the extension date ends during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department has been automatically applying extension of awards of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for all claims due to end during the Covid-19 outbreak, except those where a new decision has been made since review and reassessment activity resumed in July. Further extensions are being applied where a decision on their new award could not be made before they reach their end of award date.

Emma Hardy:

[\[139117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to temporarily suspend personal independent payment reviews as a result of the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Justin Tomlinson:

Throughout the pandemic the department has ensured that claimants continue to receive the benefits that they are entitled to. In March last year, we suspended face to face assessments following public health guidelines and introduced a telephony assessment service to ensure claimants and staff were safe. This service currently covers all claims types including award reviews. There is no plan to suspend assessments for award reviews as a result of this lockdown.

■ **Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations**

Mohammad Yasin:[\[137277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what timescales her Department has set for private contracted firms to complete assessments of personal independence payments.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department has three Personal Independence Payment (PIP) contracts for Assessment Provider Services.

Atos IT Services UK Ltd (T/A Independent Assessment Services) are contracted to deliver PIP assessments in Lot 1 (North West England / North East England / Scotland / Isle of Man) and Lot 3 (London / Southern England.)

Capita Business Services Ltd are contracted to deliver PIP assessments in Lot 2 (Central England / Wales).

Service Level requirements for the delivery of assessments are consistent across all PIP contracts. These are detailed below.

SERVICE LEVEL REQUIREMENT	SERVICE LEVEL
PIP Assessment end to end assessment process (excluding Terminally Ill cases).	All cleared within an Average Actual Clearance Time of 35 Working Days
Terminally Ill (TI) cases end to end assessment process.	All TI cases cleared within an average period of two (2) Working Days
Terminally Ill (TI) cases end to end assessment process.	100% to be cleared within five (5) Working Days.

Munira Wilson:[\[139146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what training is provided to assessors of personal independence payment assessments on rare health conditions.

Munira Wilson:[\[139147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what training is provided to assessors of personal independence payments assessments on cavernoma.

Justin Tomlinson:

All health professionals carrying out assessments on behalf of the department are clinically qualified and registered practitioners in their own field. Health professionals are required to have a broad training in disability analysis as well as awareness training in specific conditions ranging from common to rare.

At present there is no specific clinical training relating to cavernoma. However, training and resources for the symptoms related to cavernoma (e.g. seizures and headaches) is available to all health professionals. While preparing to undertake an assessment, health professionals have access to this range of resources as well as experienced clinicians to support them in assessing individuals with conditions that they may not be familiar with. Additionally, assessment providers engage with medical experts, charities and relevant stakeholders to strengthen their training programmes.

Severe Disability Premium: Coronavirus**Stephen Morgan:**[\[137294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent estimate she has made of the number of people eligible for the Severe Disability Premium Gateway that have been unable to claim as their redundancy fell outside of the one month qualification period in (a) the UK (b) Hampshire and (c) Portsmouth South constituency.

Justin Tomlinson:

The data requested is not available. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to parliamentary question [134540](#) on 13 January 2020.

Social Security Benefits: Veterans**Sarah Atherton:**[\[138107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on identifying people who are veterans in an application for claiming benefits.

Will Quince:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: With Universal Credit claimants will have an initial interview with their Work Coach as part of the application process. This discussion will cover their career history and skills and qualifications etc, which identifies veterans.

The Department is also continuing to look at what other opportunities might be available to better identify and record data on veterans on the Universal Credit system and has regular conversations with the Ministry of Defence (MOD). This is part of a much wider piece of work involving a number of Departments, including the MOD and the Office for Veterans' Affairs, to improve the collection and use of data relating to veterans.

DWP is proud to provide vital and significant support to veterans which recognises their particular needs and circumstances, including through Armed Forces

Champions in each Jobcentre Plus District. For example, early voluntary entry to the Work and Health Programme, and using Service Medical Board evidence where we can so a severely disabled person does not have to undergo additional examinations for Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit purposes. We are also able to signpost veterans to other organisations for further support where appropriate.

The department is a supporter of the Armed Forces Covenant which helps ensure members of the armed forces community have access to government support in a number of areas, including:

- Starting a new career
- Access to healthcare
- Education and family well-being
- Having a home
- Financial assistance
- Discounted services, including travel

■ Universal Credit: Hendon

Dr Matthew Offord:

[138935]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in Hendon received a Universal Credit payment (a) at the most recent assessment and (b) in each of the twelve months prior to that date.

Will Quince:

The latest available monthly statistics on the number of households on Universal Credit by payment indicator and Westminster Parliamentary Constituency 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>

■ Universal Credit: Impact Assessments

Sarah Owen:

[139151]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish her Department's impact assessment on ending the universal credit uplift.

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.

■ Universal Credit: Part-time Employment

Patrick Grady:

[\[139046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of universal credit claimants in part-time employment who are required by her Department to find alternative full-time work.

Will Quince:

We do not require claimants who are in work with earnings above the Administrative Earnings Threshold to undertake any mandatory activity in Universal Credit.

Claimants who work and earn below the Administrative Earnings Threshold may be required to participate in mandatory work-related activity. This depends on their personal circumstances, which vary from one claimant to another. For this reason, we are unable to make any such estimate of claimant numbers.

■ Universal Credit: Veterans

John Healey:

[\[137879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of trends in the number of veterans claiming universal credit in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Will Quince:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: Currently we do not record as part of our official statistic the number of Universal Credit claimants who are veterans. With Universal Credit, claimants will have an initial interview with their Work Coach as part of the application process. This discussion will cover their career history and skills and qualifications etc, which identifies those claimants who are veterans and ensures appropriate support is offered.

The Department is also continuing to look at what other opportunities might be available to better identify and record data on veterans on the Universal Credit system and has regular conversations with the Ministry of Defence (MOD). This is part of a much wider piece of work involving a number of Departments, including the MOD and the Office for Veterans' Affairs, to improve the collection and use of data relating to veterans.

DWP is proud to provide vital and significant support to veterans which recognises their particular needs and circumstances, including through Armed Forces Champions in each Jobcentre Plus District. For example, early voluntary entry to the Work and Health Programme, and using Service Medical Board evidence where we can so a severely disabled person does not have to undergo additional examinations for Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit purposes. We are also able to signpost veterans to other organisations for further support where appropriate.

The department is a supporter of the Armed Forces Covenant which helps ensure members of the armed forces community have access to government support in a number of areas, including:

- Starting a new career
- Access to healthcare
- Education and family well-being
- Having a home
- Financial assistance
- Discounted services, including travel

■ Work Capability Assessment: Coronavirus

Dave Doogan:

[\[139137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what guidance she has issued for people who cannot (a) access a face to face assessment due to covid-19 restrictions and (b) conduct a phone consultation due to the nature of their disability.

Dave Doogan:

[\[139138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support people with a recently diagnosed condition who as a result of their condition cannot undertake a telephone consultation.

Justin Tomlinson:

The health and safety of our claimants and staff is our key priority. As a result, all face to face assessments for sickness and disability benefits have remained suspended since March 2020.

We are assessing as many people as we are able to on paper evidence or via telephone assessments. Individuals invited for a telephone assessment are encouraged to inform their assessment provider of any additional requirements they may have, and the provider will endeavour to meet any reasonable requests. This is explained to the individual in the initial invitation letter for all telephone assessments. For example, companions are able to join a telephone assessment, as they could for a face to face assessment.

There will be some claimants for whom unfortunately there is insufficient evidence to make a decision on paper and who are unable to undertake a telephone assessment because of their health condition. We continue to develop and implement ways in which we can safely assess these individuals. For example, we are currently testing ways of supporting claimants with speech and hearing difficulties to safely participate in telephone assessments and continue to test video assessments. Claimants who we are unable to assess by telephone or video because of their health condition, in particular those not entitled to UC, will be prioritised when we are able to safely resume face to face assessments.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Update on the European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020**

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office

(Michael Gove):

[\[HCWS730\]](#)

The European Union (Future Relationship) Act received Royal Assent on 31 December 2020 and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement is now enshrined in UK law, a historic moment in our nation's journey following the 2016 referendum.

The government sought, in line with the Sewel Convention, legislative consent from the devolved legislatures of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for the Future Relationship Bill. The Scottish Parliament voted to withhold consent for the Bill. The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Welsh Parliament did not hold a vote on a legislative consent motion for the Bill. The Northern Ireland Assembly voted for a motion, with an Social Democratic Labour Party amendment, that called for the Assembly to decline legislative consent. The Welsh Parliament voted in favour of a motion to 'note' the Bill, regretting that it was not in a position to determine legislative consent.

The Government respects the devolution settlements and the Sewel Convention, and is committed to working with the devolved administrations on the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The Convention holds that the UK Government will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the devolved legislatures, but the circumstances were not normal. The UK and EU needed to exchange notification of completion of procedures and complete other legal necessities, such as the UK's passing of legislation, early on Thursday 31 December to enable provisional application. If the Bill had not received Royal Assent in time, we would have been unable to exchange our notification by the morning of 31 December, the Agreement could not have been provisionally applied, and the transition period would therefore have ended without a future UK-EU agreement in force.

We recognise that the expedited timescale was challenging, although the Bill was debated and voted on in Parliament by elected Members from across the UK. Taking the Bill to Royal Assent without the consent of the devolved legislatures was a significant decision. It is not one that was taken lightly. The circumstances of EU exit and the imperative of implementing the 2016 referendum constituted circumstances that were not normal.

While negotiations with the EU are a reserved matter, the UK Government is committed to continue working closely with the devolved administrations to ensure that our future relationship with the EU works in the interests of citizens and businesses across the whole of the UK – something we demonstrated when engaging with the devolved administrations in good faith throughout the negotiations.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ Decriminalisation of TV licence evasion consultation response**

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden):

[\[HCWS732\]](#)

Today, the government published its response to the consultation on decriminalising TV licence evasion.

The consultation invited views on whether the government should proceed with the decriminalisation of TV licence evasion by replacing the criminal sanction with an alternative civil enforcement scheme. It set out four criteria against which the issue of decriminalisation would be considered:

- whether an alternative enforcement scheme is fairer and more proportionate;
- the cost and difficulty to implement any alternative scheme;
- the potential impact on licence fee payers, particularly the most vulnerable and those with protected characteristics; and
- the overall impact on licence fee collection.

The consultation closed on 1 April 2020 after receiving 154,737 responses from individuals, campaign organisations and other stakeholders. A summary of the responses is included in today's publication.

After carefully considering the responses received, the government remains concerned that a criminal sanction for TV licence evasion is increasingly disproportionate and unfair in a modern public service broadcasting system. The consultation responses showed that a significant number of people oppose the criminal sanction with some highlighting the considerable stress and anxiety it can cause for individuals, including for the most vulnerable in society, such as older people.

However, the government recognises that changing the sanction for TV licence evasion would have wide-ranging impacts for licence fee payers, including the potential for significantly higher fines and costs for individuals who evade the licence fee requirement under a civil regime. The consultation also highlighted significant impacts in terms of both the cost and implementation - particularly as the current system is very efficiently handled in the Magistrates Court - and challenges posed to the ongoing collection of the licence fee. The government remains determined that any future change to the TV licence sanction or enforcement scheme should not be seen as an invitation to evade the TV licence requirement, nor should it privilege the rule-breaking minority over the rule-abiding majority.

The government's consultation response, which we publish today, therefore sets out that the issue of decriminalisation will remain under active consideration while more work is undertaken to understand the impact of alternative enforcement schemes.

In particular, a future decision on decriminalising TV licence evasion would benefit from consideration in the context of wider reform to the BBC. The Secretary of State for Digital,

Culture, Media and Sport has a roadmap for reform of the BBC and this provides critical context for any future decision on decriminalisation.

The government will therefore take forward these considerations in the broader context of the next licence fee settlement, which will set the level of the Licence Fee for a period of at least five years from 2022, and where negotiations have recently formally begun.

A copy of the consultation response will be placed in the House Libraries.

Attachments:

1. Decriminalisation of TV licence evasion report [Government response to the decriminalisation consultation - 21 January 2021.pdf]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Independent Inquiry into mental health inpatient deaths in Essex

Minister of State (Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health)
(Ms Nadine Dorries): [\[HCWS729\]](#)

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) published his report *Missed opportunities: What lessons can be learned from failings at the North Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust* on 11 June 2019 which found that there were a series of significant failings in the care and treatment of two vulnerable young men who died shortly after being admitted to North Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. I have previously announced my commitment to an inquiry into these tragic events.

Today, I am announcing the establishment of a Non-Statutory, Independent Inquiry into the circumstances of mental health inpatient deaths at the former North Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, the former South Essex Partnership University Trust and the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust which took over responsibility for mental health services in Essex from 2017. This will cover the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020.

In announcing this Inquiry, I am mindful of the current, extraordinary demands on the NHS as it responds to the worst pandemic in living memory. The Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust was one of the first to declare a major incident and the Inquiry will schedule its work in a way that is sensitive to these pressures.

I have also listened carefully to the arguments proposing a more formal, statutory inquiry into these events. I share the desire for a robust and independent process that will get to the truth and deliver the necessary learning. I remain convinced that a non-statutory, independent inquiry is the best way to do this and identify the necessary improvements in the timeliest way.

I have asked the distinguished psychiatrist Dr Geraldine Strathdee CBE to chair the Inquiry and am delighted that she has agreed to take on this important role. Dr Strathdee worked for many years as a consultant psychiatrist in the NHS. She brings a wealth of experience in mental health policy, regulation and clinical management and is a co-founder of the Zero Suicides Alliance. Dr Strathdee is a person of the utmost integrity and

I will expect her to conduct this inquiry without fear or favour. In order to ensure her independence, she will step down from her current role as a National Professional Adviser at the Care Quality Commission when her term ends in March of this year.

The Chair will be supported by expert advisers, including a legal adviser.

The Inquiry will consider issues including:

- the key factors that led to the deaths of individual patients, whether issues of omission or commission;
- aspects of culture and governance that inhibited the Trust(s) ability to learn and take action following any breaches of safety;
- the quality of any previous investigations by the Trust(s), the conclusions and recommendations of those investigations and the subsequent actions;
- the response of the wider system to these events and the actions taken by the Trust(s) in response to investigations or reviews conducted by any other body; and
- the further lessons for the Essex Partnership University Foundation NHS Trust and what actions are necessary for the new Trust Chief Executive and its Board to ensure that current and future patients receive sustainable safe care; and
- further lessons arising for the mental health services, the NHS and the wider system.

The Inquiry will not reopen the investigation of fixed potential ligature points that has given rise to the prosecution of Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust by the Health and Safety Executive but may consider the evidence in this area.

The Inquiry will be able to interview witnesses to determine if there were failures in care, safety, governance or professional standards and will examine all relevant records to get to the truth. We owe the families nothing less.

My Department will co-operate fully with the Inquiry's investigation, including provision of any documents it might hold that are relevant to these issues and are requested by the Inquiry. Similarly, all NHS employees will be expected to give the inquiry their full cooperation.

I am moving forward with this important inquiry in order to shine a clear light on what happened at the Trusts so that lessons can be learnt by the current Trust and the NHS more widely. These lessons must be applied to the Trust and the NHS to ensure that the provision of mental health services is improved and, critically, that lives are saved. This will require the investigation of some, possibly all, mental health inpatient deaths that occurred across the county between 2000 and 2020. Our focus must be on how we learn the lessons to improve services and prevent inpatient deaths in the future. The Chair will want to consider what level of scrutiny of individual deaths is necessary to do this. However, there may be limits on the scrutiny that is possible of the earlier deaths that occurred during this period.

The Chair will recommend a final Terms of Reference following consultation with the families and others affected by these events which I will communicate to Parliament in due course.

The Inquiry will be formally established from April 2021 and will aim to report in the Spring of 2023.

HOME OFFICE

■ **Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority – Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20**

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Safeguarding (Victoria Atkins):
[\[HCWS731\]](#)

The 2019/20 Annual Report and Accounts for the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) is being laid before the House today and published on www.gov.uk. Copies will be available in the Vote Office. I am pleased to note that the GLAA continued to make progress with its important work in 2019/20 with a 26% increase in GLAA led investigations and nearly 1,000 gangmasters licensed.

TRANSPORT

■ **HS2 East Leg Spot Safeguarding**

Minister of State for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): [\[HCWS727\]](#)

I am today publishing additional Safeguarding Directions for the High Speed Two (HS2) railway for the West Midlands to Leeds (known as the Phase 2b Eastern Leg) section of the HS2 route to reflect the latest design of the HS2 railway. Please note that the final design of the HS2 Phase 2b Eastern Leg and its integration with Northern Powerhouse Rail will be determined by the Government's Integrated Rail Plan, that I aim to publish early this year.

The latest Safeguarding update includes a site east of Leeds. The site required by the HS2 rail project would support the potential integration between HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The developer of the site has been made aware of the Safeguarding Directions prior to their publication as has the local planning authority, Leeds City Council. By protecting the site now, the Government guards against potentially conflicting development, which could otherwise disrupt the construction of HS2, as well as the risk of increased costs of building the new railway. This protects the public's interest in spending taxpayer money in a proportionate fashion.

The Government periodically reviews land requirements needed for the project and updates the extent of Safeguarding accordingly. It is anticipated that the land requirements for Phase 2b of HS2 for the Crewe to Manchester (known as the Phase 2b Western Leg) section of the route will be updated prior to the deposit of the relevant hybrid Bill.

A copy of the Safeguarding Directions will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses for record, and are publicly accessible online.

■ **Publication of 2019-20 Annual Accounts for the Dartford - Thurrock Crossing**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean):

[\[HCWS728\]](#)

My Noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) has made the following Ministerial Statement.

Under regulation 3 (1) (d) of the Trunk Road Charging Schemes (Bridges and Tunnels) (Keeping of Accounts) (England) Regulations 2003, annual accounts for the Dartford – Thurrock Crossing Charging Scheme are published today. The accounts relate to financial year 2019-20 and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ **Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme Levy 2020-21**

Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):

[\[HCWS726\]](#)

The Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme (Levy) Regulations 2014 require active employers' liability insurers to pay an annual levy, based on their relative market share, for the purpose of meeting the costs of the Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme (DMPS). This is in line with the insurance industry's commitment to fund a scheme of last resort for sufferers of diffuse mesothelioma who have been unable to trace their employer or their employer's insurer.

Today I can announce that the total amount of the levy to be charged for 2020-21, the seventh year of the DMPS, is £28.9 million. The amount will be payable by active insurers by the end of March 2021.

Individual active insurers will be notified in writing of their share of the levy, together with how the amount was calculated and the payment arrangements. Insurers should be aware that it is a legal requirement to pay the levy within the set timescales.

I am pleased that the DMPS has seen six successful years of operation, assisting many hundreds of sufferers of Diffuse Mesothelioma. The sixth Annual Report for the scheme, along with the annual statistics were published on 26 November 2020 and is available on the gov.uk website. I hope that members of both Houses will welcome this announcement and give the DMPS their continued support.