



Daily Report

Monday, 25 January 2021

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 25 January 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:39 P.M., 25 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

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Additional Restrictions Grant

Lucy Powell:

[140099]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of businesses that are eligible for the Additional Restrictions Grant (a) nationally, (b) regionally and (c) in each local authority area.

Paul Scully:

Local Authorities have discretion to use the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) to support businesses in the way that best fits their local area. Eligibility for the ARG is set locally and guidance makes clear that Local Authorities may use this funding for grants or for other related business support as they see fit. The number of businesses that are eligible in each area is determined by individual Local Authorities.

Lucy Powell:

[140100]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much funding each local authority has received through the Additional Restrictions Grant; and how much funding has been disbursed.

Paul Scully:

The Government has put forward an unprecedented package of support to help businesses which are severely affected by restrictions put in place to tackle Covid-19 and save lives. This package of support includes the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) which was announced in November 2020 to provide discretionary business grants and wider business support in England. An initial £1.1 billion was allocated to Local Authorities under this scheme in November, and a further £500 million of top-up ARG funding was announced at the start of the third lockdown period in January.

This funding is shared between all Local Authorities in England and they have the discretion to use the ARG scheme to help businesses in the way they see fit. We are working closely with Local Authorities to ensure that support is delivered to businesses that are in scope as quickly as possible.

■ Arts: Work Permits

Alison McGovern:

[R] [140800]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if the Government will publish the official text that was included in the proposed measure to allow creative professionals to travel and perform in both the UK and EU without work permits.

Paul Scully:

This Government recognises the importance of the UK's thriving cultural industries, and that is why it pushed for ambitious arrangements to make it easier for performers and artists to perform across Europe as part of the negotiations on our future relationship with the EU.

This Government proposed to the EU that musicians, and their technical staff, be added to the list of permitted activities for short-term business visitors in the entry and temporary stay chapter of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. This would have allowed musicians and their staff to travel and perform in the EU more easily, without needing work-permits.

The UK's legal texts reflected this position, as the EU has now acknowledged. These texts are confidential negotiating documents and it is not appropriate for them to be published.

■ Business: Coronavirus**Mr John Baron:**[\[140752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, further to the Government's announcement on 5 January 2021 of extra support for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, when the one-off grants of up to £9,000 will be made available to eligible businesses.

Paul Scully:

Local authorities were informed of their allocations for this grant on 14th January and funding was transferred on 15th January. The Department is working closely with local authorities to ensure that grants may now be made as quickly as is practicable.

Alex Norris:[\[140923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what guidance he plans to publish to raise awareness that essential businesses affected by covid-19 restrictions are eligible for the lockdown discretionary grant fund announced on 5 January 2021.

Paul Scully:

Guidance for the January Business Support Package was published on 13th January. The discretionary funding announced on 5th January provides further resource to the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). The ARG is a discretionary fund which is managed by local authorities. As such, schemes vary between areas and are managed and advertised locally.

■ Cosmetics: Northern Ireland**Colum Eastwood:**[\[140975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 14 January 2021 to Question 136096, what financial support the

Government plans to provide to importers that will become responsible persons for the purpose of cosmetic imports in the event they are subject to associated additional costs.

Paul Scully:

Under the terms of the Protocol, the EU's Cosmetics Regulations apply in Northern Ireland and set out the requirements that must be met before cosmetic products are placed on the market in Northern Ireland and the EU. The Office for Product Safety and Standards has provided detailed guidance for cosmetics businesses on Gov.uk that sets out the obligations under the relevant cosmetic legislation that applies in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland.

In addition, the UK has put in place arrangements for Northern Ireland businesses to have unfettered access to the rest of the UK market, and this means that the same safe cosmetic products that can be sold in Northern Ireland can also be sold in Great Britain regardless of future changes to the rules in GB. It is essential that a Responsible Person within the UK is identified for all cosmetic products to maintain consumer protection and confidence.

We recognise that some businesses may incur some additional costs and Government has worked closely with the business community to reduce any additional costs by making the notifications process by Responsible Persons for the market in Great Britain as simple as possible, allowing an additional 90 days to notify a product onto the UK database if it had been previously notified, and allowing for an additional two years from 1 January 2021 for businesses to update labelling on cosmetic products to reflect the new Responsible Person.

■ **Energy: Industrial Health and Safety**

Sarah Owen:

[R] [\[140944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the need for people that work as gas and electricity meter readers to be working in other people's homes during January covid-19 lockdown.

Paul Scully:

As visiting peoples' homes is an essential part of a meter readers job, they need to ensure they follow the Safer Working [guidance](#).

When meter readers need to enter other peoples' homes, they should take appropriate Covid-19 secure precautions such as socially distancing wherever possible, wearing a face covering or making sure there is appropriate ventilation.

■ **Entertainments: Coronavirus**

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[139989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether companies which lease children's party equipment through delivery of that equipment to customers are permitted to continue to operate during the period of the national covid-19 lockdown that has been in place since January 2021.

Paul Scully:

Any business or venue that provides goods for sale or hire that are not considered essential must close. Businesses may continue offering delivery and click-and-collect services (where items are pre-ordered and collected without entering the premises). People can also leave home to collect or return orders from these businesses.

Green Homes Grant Scheme**Sarah Owen:**[\[140285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many and what proportion of applications to the Green Homes Grant Scheme were rejected in 2020.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

In 2020, the Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme received 58,138 applications. As of 18 January 2021, 9,054 vouchers have been rejected as they did not meet the scheme criteria.

Hospitality Industry: Government Assistance**Daisy Cooper:**[\[140282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of the letter dated 17 December 2020 from the hon Member for St Albans on (a) grant funding for hospitality businesses that is commensurate with their fixed costs, (b) an extension to the reduced 5 per cent rate of VAT for drinks sales in hospitality businesses, (c) the extension of the business rates holiday beyond April 2021 and (d) a cut to excise duty on draught beers to support the hospitality industry.

Paul Scully:

I replied to the Hon. Member on 21 January outlining the package of support measures that are available to hospitality businesses.

Industrial Health and Safety: Coronavirus**Sarah Owen:**[\[R\] \[140945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of his Department's guidance on working safely during the covid-19 outbreak for (a) people that work as meter readers in other people's homes and (b) other workers.

Paul Scully:

As visiting peoples' homes is an essential part of a meter readers job, they need to ensure they follow the Safer Working [guidance](#).

When meter readers or other workers need to enter other peoples' homes, they should take appropriate Covid-19 secure precautions such as socially distancing

wherever possible, wearing a face covering or making sure there is appropriate ventilation.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Daisy Cooper:

[\[140281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, when he plans to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for St Albans of (a) 28 September 2020, (b) 4 November 2020 and (c) 30 November on calls for (i) grant funding for hospitality businesses that is commensurate with their fixed costs, (ii) an extension to the reduced 5 per cent rate of VAT for drinks sales in hospitality businesses, (iii) the extension of the business rates holiday beyond April 2021 and (iv) a cut to excise duty on draught beers to protect the hospitality industry.

Paul Scully:

The Hon. Member's letter of 28 September was transferred to HM Treasury and I understand a reply was sent from there on 3 November. I replied to the Hon. Member's letters of 4 and 30 November on 21 January, outlining the package of support measures that are available to hospitality businesses.

■ **Overseas Trade: USA**

Emily Thornberry:

[\[140005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with his US counterpart on that country's recently increased self-determined postage rates for UK exporters.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[140006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate his Department has made of the effect of the increased postal rates to the US on the profitability of UK SME exporters.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[140007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate his Department has made of the effect of the proposed five-year increase in postal rates to the US on the profitability of UK SME exporters.

Emily Thornberry:

[\[140008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans he has to discuss the US's self-determined postage rates with the new US administration.

Paul Scully:

International postage rates are agreed through the Universal Postal Union (UPU), a specialised body of the United Nations. The postal operator that sends an item to another country remunerates the destination postal operator for processing and delivering the item. The costs the receiving postal operator can claim are agreed on a multilateral basis.

In September 2019, the UPU agreed to reform the remuneration rates to reflect the true cost of delivery. Member countries unanimously agreed on a proposal that committed most members to pay the same rates for bulky letters and small packets, effective from January 2020. In addition, countries meeting certain conditions, would be able to self-declare their rates from 1 July 2020. The US is the only country that currently meets these conditions.

In the negotiations on the reforms to the remuneration rates, the UK sought to minimise the impact on our citizens and businesses, ensure the continued flow of trade and maintain the integrity of the international postal system.

■ Public Houses: Finance

Lucy Powell:

[140820]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much funding has been allocated to each local authority area for the £1,000 wet-led pubs grant for December 2020.

Paul Scully:

The Government has put forward an unprecedented package of support for businesses in recognition of the disruption caused by Covid-19. This support includes the Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs who missed out on much needed business during the busy festive period. Pubs in scope of this scheme will need to provide evidence that they derive more than 50% of their income from drink sales. Grants were made available to eligible pubs upon entry to Tier 2 or Tier 3 restrictions following the scheduled Tier review dates of 2 December and 16 December, and to those that entered Tier 4 between 2 and 29 December if they had not already qualified for the grant.

We worked closely with Local Authorities to calculate the amount of funding required for this scheme, using business rates data and local business information. We continue to work closely with Local Authorities to ensure that funding is delivered to pubs that are in scope of this scheme as quickly as possible.

■ Remote Working

Charlotte Nichols:

[138525]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will have discussions with those employers who continue to have large numbers of employees in their workplaces, to encourage them to send home employees who are able to work remotely.

Paul Scully:

The current Covid restrictions guidance states that you can only leave home for work purposes where you cannot reasonably work from home. It is important that people stay at home wherever possible to minimise the risk of transmission and I and those in my department will continue to reinforce this message when engaging with businesses and representative organisations across a range of sectors.

However, we must also recognise that those who cannot reasonably work from home should continue to travel to their workplace.

■ **Retail Trade: Insolvency**

Jessica Morden:

[140014]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 19 January 2021 to Question 137894 on Retail Trade: Insolvency, if his Department will provide the timescales for its development of proposals on sector specific legislation on pre-payments to enable action on Christmas savings clubs.

Paul Scully:

Enactment of this measure as proposed by the Law Commission will require new primary and secondary legislation and the Government will confirm its plans as part of the wider legislative programme as soon as parliamentary time allows.

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

Lucy Powell:

[140101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much funding each local authority has received under the latest one-off business grants announcement for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses; and how much each local authority area has disbursed.

Paul Scully:

On 5 January 2021, my Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer announced one-off top-up grants, worth up to £9,000 per property, to help retail, hospitality and leisure businesses affected by the new closures through to Spring.

We have worked with Local Authorities to best calculate the amount of funding required, using business rates data and local business information. We are working with places to ensure that funding reaches businesses that are in scope as quickly as possible.

■ **Vaccination: Nasal Sprays**

Sir Charles Walker:

[140000]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what support the Government is providing to the development of nasal spray vaccines such as (a) the Open Orphan and Codagenix collaboration and (b) SaNOTize; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Charles Walker:

[140001]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if his Department will make an assessment of whether covid-19 vaccine nasal sprays would be easier to (a) store, (b) distribute and (c) administer compared to such needle-based vaccines; and in the event that such a nasal spray passes its trial stages, if the

Government will support it going forward for regulatory approval for use in all four nations of the UK; and if he will make a statement.

Nadhim Zahawi:

There are over 300 COVID-19 vaccines in development around the world, in addition to the 7 vaccine candidates already secured for the UK. The Vaccine Taskforce is continuing to monitor vaccines in development globally.

Innovate UK is funding a number of COVID-19 vaccine projects with the aim to identify vaccines with alternative mechanisms of action and delivery, improved utility in low and middle-income countries, and greater scalability for mass manufacture.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Diseases: Mortality Rates

Sir John Hayes:

[\[138377\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the average of mortality is for (a) covid-19, (b) cancer, (c) brain tumours and (d) heart disease.

Chloe Smith:

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

Attachments:

1. Response to PQ138377 [PQ138377.pdf]

■ Veterans: Luton North

Sarah Owen:

[\[140283\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps the Government is taking to support veterans in the Luton North constituency.

Johnny Mercer:

This Government is committed to realising the ambition set out in the Strategy for our Veterans of making the United Kingdom the best country in the world to be a veteran. There is a wide range of support available to veterans from central and local Government, the NHS and the third sector covering physical and mental health, housing, employment and finance, all underpinned by the Armed Forces Covenant. The Government is committed to continuing to improve this support and the [2020 Armed Forces Covenant Report](#) sets out the progress we have made in doing so including the introduction of improved mental health services, a Veterans Railcard, a forthcoming national insurance break for employers and by making it easier for veterans to join the Civil Service. In addition over the last 12 months the Government has provided additional support through an additional £10m in the Budget and nearly £6m for the COVID 19 Impact Fund. Veterans in Luton North and across the country will benefit from this.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

■ Clergy: Discipline

Rachael Maskell:

[\[140865\]](#)

To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what progress has been made on the review of the Clergy Discipline Measure.

Andrew Selous:

The review group at Lambeth Palace is working to bring forward proposals to the General Synod for the replacement of the Clergy Discipline Measure. Sadly, because of the pandemic, the public consultations that were planned to take place at the end of 2020 have only just happened. A wide range of individuals and groups have responded to the interim proposals that the Working Group has put forward. The review group are now collating those responses and intend to formulate their proposals into a new piece of legislation. This new Measure will include an early triaging process, an alternative route for mediation, and ensure that adequate resources are made available to make the administration of discipline more efficient and transparent for all involved.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Coronavirus

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[140323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of regularly testing members of the Armed Forces for covid-19 to support them returning to their families between deployments.

James Heappey:

We take the wellbeing of our personnel and their families extremely seriously, and have put in place enhanced COVID-19 secure measures in our establishments to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission. In addition, we are looking at what further testing could be implemented following the UK Government's recent announcement to roll out asymptomatic testing for key workers and those unable to work from home.

■ Armoured Fighting Vehicles: Procurement

Richard Fuller:

[\[138429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of whether changes are required for the armoured fighting vehicle capability in order to maintain the UK's contribution to NATO's conventional deterrence tasks.

Jeremy Quin:

A variety of measures to modernise our armoured vehicle capabilities are being considered through the Integrated Review, which will enable the UK to continue to

deliver a credible and highly effective armoured capability to NATO's conventional deterrence tasks over the coming decades.

Richard Fuller: [\[138431\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans his Department has for a Land Industrial Strategy, including the role of armoured vehicle and turret manufacturing and production in that strategy.

Jeremy Quin:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is leading a cross-Government review into the UK's defence and security industrial sectors which seeks to identify how we can enhance our strategic approach to ensure we have competitive, innovative and world-class defence and security industries.

As part of this review, the MOD is considering its approach to the land sector including armoured vehicles and sub-systems. The review is ongoing, and its findings are being used to inform the Government's broader Integrated Review, the conclusions of which will be announced in the coming months.

■ Defence: Expenditure

Owen Thompson: [\[140200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to paragraph 2 of the Written Statement of 12 January 2021 on Equipment plan, HCWS700, what the timeframe is in years of the once in a generation modernisation of the armed forces; and what assessment he has made of the implications for defence spending of that timeframe.

Jeremy Quin:

This is the largest investment into the UK's Armed Forces since the end of the Cold War some thirty years ago. This record multi-year settlement provides an additional investment of £16.5 billion over four years. Combined with the manifesto commitment of a 0.5% uplift, the total increase for Defence is over £24 billion. The Defence Secretary will set out further details of Defence's programme in the coming months.

■ Iraq: Kurds

Jack Lopresti: [\[138927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Peshmerga programme.

James Heappey:

The support to Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI) Security Sector Reform (SSR) has been very important. Indeed, when visiting the KRG myself in December 2020 I was able to see how it contributes to our overarching support to the Iraqi state towards the enduring defeat of Daesh. So far, the UK has trained over 120,000 Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish Security Forces in Infantry skills, counter-IED, engineering, and medical expertise. As a result, their capabilities have increased considerably, and they are able to contribute to the success of the counter-Daesh campaign.

■ Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft: Procurement

Mr Kevan Jones:

[139983]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January to Question 135841 on USA: Defence Equipment, what proportion of the 15 per cent of F-35b value attributed to British companies is conducted by overseas subsidiaries of UK owned or listed companies.

Jeremy Quin:

The figure of 15% by value of the F-35 Lightning production programme attributed to UK industry, refers to activity carried out within the UK based supply chain. It does not include activity undertaken overseas by UK owned or listed companies.

■ Military Aid: Coronavirus

Stephen Morgan:

[140928]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether armed forces personnel deployed to support front line work as part of the covid-19 response are receiving regular covid-19 testing.

James Heappey:

Many of our Armed Forces Personnel deployed in direct support of the COVID-19 response have received regular COVID-19 testing. For example, NHS COVID-19 control measures include twice weekly testing to support front line work as part of the COVID-19 response. In addition, we are looking at what further testing could be put in place for Defence following the UK Government's recent announcement to roll out asymptomatic testing for key workers and those unable to work from home.

■ Military Exercises

Owen Thompson:

[139065]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 13 January 2021 to Question 133982, if he will publish the full decision-taking framework used to assess the potential impact of international defence engagement on risks relating to human rights and international humanitarian law and consideration of what measures might be necessary to mitigate such risks.

James Heappey:

Guidance on the Overseas Security and Justice Assessment process by which such risks are assessed, published by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, is available in the public domain and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-security-and-justice-assistance-osja-guidance>

Warrior Armoured Vehicle: Procurement**Richard Fuller:**[\[138430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has made an assessment of the design maturity of the Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme; and what the planned timescale is for providing design acceptance.

Jeremy Quin:

A comprehensive suite of rigorous tests continues, with Design Acceptance due in autumn 2021. Design Acceptance consists of Reliability Growth Trials, which are 75% complete, and Qualification and Verification trials. The Qualification and Verification trials, designed to test the system requirements, have allowed the Army customer to accept 52% of the design to date, with 95% of the requirements due to be submitted and accepted by summer 2021.

HM Government is undertaking the deepest and most radical Review of Britain's foreign, security, defence, and development policy since the end of the Cold War. Final decisions on Warrior, along with all Defence Capabilities will be subject to this Review. This will include prioritising the capabilities most suited to the evolving character of conflict and to our future defence and security requirements. We do not expect to conclude these deliberations until the spring.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**Arts: Coronavirus****Bridget Phillipson:**[\[140792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what fiscal steps the Government plans to take to ensure that the creative industries can start growing again as the economy recovers from the covid-19 outbreak.

Caroline Dinanage:

The Government is committed to working with the creative industries to support their recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government's response to Covid-19 has been one of the most generous and comprehensive in the world. This includes the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, both of which have been extended until April 2021. The Chancellor has announced a further £4.6 billion in new lockdown grants to support businesses and protect jobs through the current national lockdown.

In addition to an extensive package of economy-wide support, last year the Government announced the unprecedented £1.57 billion support package for the culture sector and, as of 11 December 2020, over £1 billion has been allocated across all four nations of the UK. This funding is supporting the arts and culture sector to survive the pandemic.

In July 2020, the Government announced a UK-wide £500 million Restart scheme to support film and TV production companies that have been unable to film due to the lack of insurance covering Covid-related risks. As of 20 January, the scheme is supporting over 16,000 jobs and over £470 million of production spend across the UK.

Alison McGovern:

[R] [\[140802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what (a) working groups, (b) committees and (c) other forums there are in his Department for sector representatives of the creative industries to raise their representations on the Government's response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Caroline Dinéage:

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) engages regularly with representatives of the creative industries on the Covid-19 response, including on economic support and public health policy and guidance. This includes engagement through the working groups on Entertainment and Events and on Broadcasting, Film and Production, which were established with the DCMS Secretary of State's Cultural Renewal Taskforce.

In addition, DCMS engages with creative industries stakeholders through roundtables and other meetings chaired by ministers, and ongoing, frequent engagement by DCMS officials. DCMS will continue to collaborate with creative industries organisations on the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ Arts: Job Creation

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[140790\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what the Government's policy position is on supporting job creation in the creative industries as part of its covid-19 recovery plan.

Caroline Dinéage:

The Government's response to Covid-19 impacts on workers has been one of the most generous and comprehensive in the world. This includes the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, both of which have been extended until April 2021. The £2 billion Kickstart Scheme is creating job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit.

In addition, the £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund is providing further targeted support to critical cultural, arts and heritage organisations to help them, and the skilled workers that work in them, survive and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. As of 11 December 2020, over £1 billion of the fund has been allocated across all four nations of the UK.

In July 2020, the Government also announced a UK-wide £500 million Restart scheme to support film and TV production companies and their workforce. As of 20

January, the scheme is supporting over 16,000 jobs and over £470 million of production spend across the UK.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control

Jamie Stone:

[139099]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what criterion must be met for his Department to accept market failure in DCMS sectors.

Mr John Whittingdale:

When appraising proposals for policies, programmes, and projects, DCMS relies on central government guidance on appraisal and evaluation, from the Treasury's [Green Book](#).

The Green Book is based upon the ideas of welfare economics and concerns the optimisation of social welfare. Much of its subject matter therefore concerns estimation of public, that is social, welfare values. These are values that economic markets are either unable to fully capture, or are unable to register at all. The various forms of shortfall in market welfare optimisation are characterised as "market failures."

There is no single form of criterion to accept or address market failure. This will depend on the type of market failure, the evidence around its existence or severity, and the results of the Social Cost Benefit Analysis for potential interventions.

■ Culture Recovery Fund

Andrew Rosindell:

[137153]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether (a) zoos, (b) aquariums, (c) safari parks and (d) other organisations that manage or preserve natural habitats and species are eligible for funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund.

Caroline Dinanage:

Under the Culture Recovery Fund, organisations which manage or preserve natural habitats and species as the main focus of their activity are ineligible.

Full eligibility can be found on the website of the relevant delivery body (in this case [National Lottery Heritage Fund/Historic England](#) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-zoos-and-aquariums#eligibility>), and queries concerning eligibility can be directed to them. Funding may be available to organisations that manage listed buildings to support reopening and preservation.

Organisations which manage or preserve natural habitats or species may be eligible for the Zoo Animals Fund, managed through the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. Applications are open until 26 February 2021, and eligibility criteria [can be accessed here https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-zoos-and-aquariums#eligibility](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-zoos-and-aquariums#eligibility).

■ Data Protection: EU Law

Chi Onwurah:

[138961]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the viability of obtaining a data adequacy decision from the European Commission before the end of the specified period covering the interim provision for transmission of personal data to the UK agreed under the terms of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Mr John Whittingdale:

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

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

Chi Onwurah:

[138962]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what involvement the Information Commissioner's Office will have in the EU's General Data Protection Regulations' One Stop Shop mechanism during the interim provision for transmission of personal data agreed under the terms of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement; and if he will publish guidance on that matter for UK (a) citizens and (b) businesses.

Mr John Whittingdale:

At the end of the transition period EU data protection legislation generally ceased to apply in the UK and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is no longer part of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) One Stop Shop (OSS) mechanism. The ICO will continue to cooperate and collaborate with European supervisory authorities regarding any breaches of GDPR that affect individuals in the UK and other EU and EEA states.

It is in our mutual interests to establish a shared approach for regulatory cooperation on data protection issues with the EU. Having secured a commitment to regulatory cooperation on data protection in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), we are working to further develop and implement these arrangements.

Guidance is available on the ICO website.

■ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: Databases**Chi Onwurah:****[138967]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how many information gateways there are in operation in his Department; and how those gateways are managed and monitored.

Mr John Whittingdale:

DCMS is able to share information with third parties including government departments, public bodies, agencies, devolved nations or local authorities using statutory information gateways. DCMS does not hold a central list of all information sharing gateways available to it.

Each information gateway will have its own management and governance requirements depending on the type of information being shared, and will have to comply with the Data Protection Legislation. In addition, any data sharing will be managed in accordance with the department's data and information policies and standards and our compliance and commitment to protecting citizens' data.

■ Disinformation: Radicalism**Chi Onwurah:****[140077]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the correlation between misinformation and radicalisation; and whether the Misinformation Unit reports radicalisation to the Home Office.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government takes the issue of misinformation and disinformation very seriously. That is why we stood up the Counter Disinformation Unit up in March 2020 to bring together cross-Government monitoring and analysis capabilities. The Unit's primary function is to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent, scope and impact of misinformation and disinformation regarding Covid-19 and to work with partners, including the Home Office, to ensure appropriate action is taken.

There is no single pathway to radicalisation but we are aware that misinformation is one tool amongst many used by radicalisers to recruit and influence vulnerable people. Since the pandemic, we have also observed extremist influencers exploiting Covid-19 to spread conspiracy theories and false narratives to promote their own agenda.

We are absolutely clear that online content which makes dangerous or incorrect claims about the virus, or propels extreme views must be tackled. In addition to our work with the social media platforms to address misinformation and disinformation and our work to build audience resilience to disinformation online through the SHARE checklist, we also work closely with the Home Office, whose existing programmes such as Prevent play a key role in tackling the issue of radicalisation in all its forms.

■ Football: Coronavirus

Alex Davies-Jones:

[\[140318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021 on women's elite level football.

Nigel Huddleston:

I have regular discussions with the Football Association about the impact of COVID-19 on elite level football, including on women's elite football. Last year we also put in place an exemption for elite sport to continue behind closed doors has allowed elite level women's football competitions like the Women's Super League to continue.

Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many women's sport clubs have benefited from. The £300m Sports Winter Survival Package also aims to protect the immediate futures of major spectator sports in England over the winter period, including women's football.

■ Gambling: Advertising

Sir Mike Penning:

[\[140004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will hold discussions with the Betting and Gaming Council to encourage gambling firms to cease TV and radio advertising during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021 to protect people who are affected by gambling disorders at a time when they may be more susceptible to out-of-control gambling.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government and the Gambling Commission continue to be clear that gambling operators must act responsibly during the Covid-19 period, and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has warned operators that they must not look to exploit the situation in their adverts or marketing. In June 2020 members of the Betting and Gaming Council committed to ensure at least 20% of broadcast advertising is given over to safer gambling messaging.

The Gambling Commission has monitored gambling behaviour during the Covid-19 period and will continue to do so. Survey data published by the Commission this month indicated that 86% of those who gamble did so the same amount or less during the pandemic than they had previously. The Commission recently wrote to operators to remind them of its expectations under guidance issued in May 2020 to increase protections for those who may be at heightened risk of gambling harm. That guidance directed operators to monitor customer behaviour more closely to identify signs of potential harm, and banned mechanisms by which customers could cancel requests to withdraw money from their account.

The government launched its Review of the Gambling Act 2005 on 8th December with the publication of a Call for Evidence. As part of the wide scope of that Review,

we have called for evidence on the benefits or harms of allowing gambling operators to advertise. In addition, the ASA is currently consulting on proposals to further strengthen the advertising codes, including new rules to minimise the potential for gambling adverts to appeal to vulnerable people, or adversely impact them.

■ **Golf: Coronavirus**

Wera Hobhouse:

[141577]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether he plans to review the decision to close golf courses during the covid-19 lockdown period announced in January 2021.

Nigel Huddleston:

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

On Monday 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown and instructed people to stay at home to control the virus, protect the NHS and save lives. The National Restrictions are designed to get the R rate under control through limiting social contact and reducing transmissions. Therefore indoor and outdoor sports facilities must close.

Government decisions on reducing the current restrictions will be based on scientific evidence. We are continuing discussions with representatives from the sport and physical activity sector about the steps required to reopen indoor and outdoor sports facilities as soon as it is safe to do so and will update the public when possible.

■ **Gyms and Leisure: Coronavirus**

Dr Dan Poulter:

[140031]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a scheme to incentivise gym and leisure club membership following the current lockdown similar to the Eat Out To Help Out scheme made available to the hospitality industry over summer 2020.

Nigel Huddleston:

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are a vital weapon against coronavirus. That's why we have made sure that people can exercise throughout the national and local tiered restrictions. We will continue to promote exercise throughout the pandemic and encourage the usage of sports facilities including gyms when they are able to open again.

Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many sport clubs have benefited from. On top of wider economic support, the Government has announced a £100m support fund for local authority leisure centres to ensure these important facilities remain available once public health restrictions are lifted.

■ Ice Skating: Coronavirus

Brendan Clarke-Smith:

[\[133211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of changing the designation of ice rinks to sporting facilities for purposes of the application of covid-19 restrictions.

Nigel Huddleston:

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are a vital weapon against coronavirus. The Prime Minister announced a national lockdown on Monday 4 January meaning that indoor facilities including ice rinks must close.

Previously, ice rinks were closed in tier 3 and 4 as they are primarily used for the purpose of entertainment. This is consistent with other venues used for entertainment purposes across the economy which were also closed. To allow those who need to access ice rinks, in tier three, exemptions were made for sport for educational purposes, people with disabilities, supervised activity for under-18s and elite athletes.

Alex Cunningham:

[\[140810\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will allow competitive ice skaters who are over 18 and who are not elite athletes to access ice rinks to train when the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021 ends.

Nigel Huddleston:

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

On Monday 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown and instructed people to stay at home to control the virus, protect the NHS and save lives. The National Restrictions are designed to get the R rate under control through limiting social contact and reducing transmissions. Therefore, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, including ice rinks, must close.

Previously, outdoor skating rinks could stay open across all tiers and indoor skating rinks could open in Tiers 1 and 2. Ice rinks were closed in tier 3 and 4 as they are primarily used for the purpose of entertainment. This is consistent with other venues used for entertainment purposes across the economy which were also closed. To allow those who need to access ice rinks, in tier three, exemptions were made for sport for educational purposes, people with disabilities, supervised activity for under-18s and elite athletes.

■ Internet: Disinformation

Alex Davies-Jones:

[\[140321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent steps he has taken to tackle the effect of misinformation online on disordered eating.

Caroline Dinéage:

The government is committed to making the UK the safest place to be online.

The Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, published in December 2020, sets out the government's plans to introduce a new statutory duty of care. Tech companies will have new responsibilities to protect their users, particularly children, from harmful content, which could include eating disorder content. The Online Safety Bill, which will give effect to the regulatory framework outlined in the full government response, will be ready this year.

We have asked the Law Commission to review the current legislation on harmful online communications. As part of this review the Government has also asked the Law Commission to examine how the criminal law will address the encouragement or assistance of self harm. The Law Commission has made provisional recommendations and has consulted on these proposed reforms. They will provide final recommendations in summer 2021.

Online media and digital literacy can equip users with the skills they need to spot dangers online, critically appraise information and take steps to keep themselves and others safe online. The Online Harms White Paper, set out the government's intention to develop an online media literacy strategy. The strategy will ensure a coordinated and strategic approach to online media literacy education and awareness for children, young people and adults.

Internet: Safety**Peter Kyle:**[\[140879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what proposals he plans to include in the forthcoming Online Harms Bill to support women aged over 18 who are experiencing sexual exploitation.

Peter Kyle:[\[140880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the level of accountability of (a) subscription-based adult websites and (b) free community selling pages to prevent online abuse and exploitation.

Caroline Dinéage:

The Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, published in December 2020, sets out expectations on companies to keep their users safe online, including measures to tackle online abuse and exploitation. The Online Safety Bill, which will give effect to the Full Government Response, will be ready this year.

Under our proposals, websites, apps and other services which host user-generated content or allow people to talk to others online will need to remove and limit the spread of illegal content. This includes social media, online marketplaces and community forums. Where pornography sites host user generated content or facilitate online user interaction, that content will be subject to the new legal duty of care. The

largest social media companies will be held to account for what they say they are doing to tackle activity and content that is harmful to adults using their services.

The non-consensual disclosure of private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress, is already a criminal offence under section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015. This is often referred to as the “revenge porn” offence. Under the new online safety laws, all companies will need to tackle illegal content, including “revenge porn” and illegal online abuse on their services, by making sure it is taken down quickly and using tools to minimise the risk of similar material appearing. Failure to do so could result in enforcement action by the regulator.

The Government is also working with the Law Commission to review the criminal law related to non-consensual image sharing. This includes the creation and sharing of ‘deep-fake’ pornography, upskirting and revenge porn. This review is considering existing offences, including the current “revenge porn” offence, and will identify where there are any gaps in protection already offered to victims. The Law Commission will publish its consultation paper shortly.

■ Ofcom: Termination of Employment

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[138886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, how many jobs have been lost from Ofcom since 2010.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Below is headcount data from Ofcom’s Annual Reports since 2010, figures which are in the public domain:

YEAR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Average FTE	865	832	735	781	785	787	795	828	868	902	937

The reduction between 2010 and 2012 reflects headcount reductions in the wider public sector at the time. Since then, Ofcom has had a number of new duties conferred on them which account for subsequent headcount rises.

■ Performing Arts: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes:

[\[140886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps is he taking to ensure that (a) performance venues, (b) performers and (c) technicians are supported through the third covid-19 lockdown.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government’s unprecedented £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund has now surpassed the £1 billion milestone.

Over £500 million in recovery grants have been made to over 3000 arts, culture and heritage organisations in England helping to support 75,000 jobs. This is in addition to over £160m in repayable finance; almost £100m in capital grants; £188m in support for the Devolved Administrations and £100m in direct support to the national cultural institutions. This funding is supporting the arts and culture sector to survive the pandemic and continue operating.

£400 million was held back as a contingency, and is being used for a second round of grants and repayable finance funding, to support cultural organisations facing financial distress as a result of closure, as well as helping them transition back to fuller opening during 2021. It will support organisations to transition from the challenging months of lockdowns and social distancing to welcoming audiences and visitors back to the country's theatres, museums, cinemas, music venues and heritage sites.

This investment is part of a wider package of help from the UK Government. The Chancellor Rishi Sunak has provided unprecedented financial assistance which many cultural organisations have taken advantage of.

On 5 November, the Chancellor announced that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will be extended until April 2021. Businesses can continue to apply for government-backed loans, and self-employed individuals can access the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS), which has also been extended until April 2021. The CJRS and SEISS support has been made more generous, with individuals able to receive 80% of their current salary for hours not worked/average trading profits respectively.

Within the current national restrictions, performing arts venues can continue to operate under Stages 1 and 2 of the performing arts roadmap. This means that performing arts professionals including technicians may continue to rehearse and train, and perform for broadcast and recording purposes.

■ Scout Association: Coronavirus

Gareth Thomas:

[138850]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on financial support for the Scouts through the covid-19 outbreak to ensure that they can continue providing (a) young people with life skills and (b) support to communities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Government recognises the important role that uniformed youth groups play in communities, which is why we recently announced the £16.5 million Youth Covid-19 Support Fund (YCSF) that will protect the immediate future of grassroots and national youth organisations across the country. The YCSF opened on Friday 15 January 2021 and will remain open until 12 February. It will help to mitigate the impact of lost income during the winter period due to the coronavirus pandemic, and ensure services providing vital support can remain viable.

The Scout Association has also received £1 million through the £85 million Community Match Challenge, which is benefiting a number of youth organisations - including UK Youth and Girlguiding UK - heavily affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

■ Social Media

Gill Furniss:

[\[140225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has for social media reform.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government is firmly committed to making the UK the safest place to be online.

The Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, published in December 2020, sets out expectations on tech companies, including social media providers, to keep their users safe online. This includes a proposed legal duty of care on companies and the appointment of a new communications regulator, Ofcom, to ensure that new laws are enforced. The Full Government Response will be followed by legislation, which will be ready later this year.

■ Social Media: Disinformation

Gill Furniss:

[\[140228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effect on public health of misinformation and conspiracy theories on covid-19 on social media platforms.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government takes the issue of disinformation very seriously. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it continues to be vitally important that the public has accurate information about the virus, and DCMS is leading work across Government to tackle disinformation.

That is why we stood up the Counter Disinformation Unit up in March 2020 to bring together cross-Government monitoring and analysis capabilities. The Unit's primary function is to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent, scope and impact of disinformation and misinformation regarding Covid-19 and to work with partners to ensure appropriate action is taken.

Throughout the pandemic, we have been working closely with social media platforms to help them to quickly identify and respond to potentially harmful content on their platforms, including unfounded conspiracy theories, in line with their terms and conditions, and to promote Government and NHS messaging.

■ Social Media: Disinformation and Radicalism**Gill Furniss:** [140226]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions he has had with social media companies on the prevalence of misinformation, conspiracy theories and extremist material on their platforms.

Caroline Dinenage:

Ministers and officials have regular meetings with social media platforms on a range of topics, including misinformation, conspiracy theories and extremist material.

Information about Ministerial meetings are published quarterly on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

■ Social Media: Radicalism**Gill Furniss:** [140227]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to limit or stop the spreading of extremist materials on social media.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, published in December 2020, sets out expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. This includes a proposed statutory duty of care on companies and the appointment of Ofcom as the regulator to ensure that new laws are enforced.

Under the new framework, all companies in scope will need to tackle the spread of illegal content and protect children. In addition, high risk and high reach social media platforms will need to set clear terms and conditions about content that is legal but harmful to adults, such as extremist materials, and enforce those terms consistently, transparently and effectively.

■ Sports: Coronavirus**Charlotte Nichols:** [140293]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will publish data on the rates of covid-19 infection in (a) professional and (b) grassroots sport in the period prior to the January 2021 national covid-19 lockdown.

Nigel Huddleston:

We do not hold data on the rates of COVID-19 infection in professional and grassroots sport.

Government has published overarching guidance for grassroots sport but does not publish guidance for individual sports. It is for the National Governing Body of the sport to consider the steps that would need to be taken, and the conditions that would need to be met, for their activity to resume. The National Governing Body should also publish relevant guidance.

Professional sports have put in place sport specific protocols in line with our guidance for covid secure return of training and competition. Where appropriate to those

protocols, this includes regular testing, such as in Premier League football. Many have chosen to publish their testing info for transparency, and, where appropriate, results are reported locally.

Alex Davies-Jones:

[140319]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent steps he has taken to support women's sport through the covid-19 outbreak.

Nigel Huddleston:

I am committed to helping women's sport come out of the current crisis stronger than ever and I am continuing to work closely with the sector to ensure that happens. Over the last year I have met with a range of sports organisations to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on women's sport and how together we can address these challenges going forward. I have made clear in these discussions that I expect women's sport to be protected through the pandemic and prioritised as we emerge on the other side.

Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many women's sport clubs have benefited from. For example, Sport England's Community Emergency Fund has provided £220m directly to support community sport clubs and exercise centres through this pandemic. Women's spectator sports severely impacted by the restrictions around fans over the winter are also being supported through the £300m Sports Winter Survival Package, which aims to protect the immediate futures of major spectator sports in England over the winter period.

Helen Hayes:

[140885]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he is having with Cabinet colleagues on supporting (a) tennis outdoor courts, (b) running tracks, (c) golf courses and (d) other outdoor sports facilities through the covid-19 outbreak; and what his timescale is for enabling those facilities to safely reopen.

Nigel Huddleston:

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

On Monday 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown and instructed people to stay at home to control the virus, protect the NHS and save lives. The National Restrictions are designed to get the R rate under control through limiting social contact and reducing transmissions. Therefore indoor and outdoor sports facilities must close.

Government decisions on reducing the current restrictions will be based on scientific evidence. We are continuing discussions with representatives from the sport and physical activity sector about the steps required to reopen indoor and outdoor sports facilities as soon as it is safe to do so and will update the public when possible.

Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many sports clubs have benefited from.

■ Swimming Pools: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes:

[140884]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he is having with (a) Swim England and (b) Cabinet colleagues on supporting (i) Brockwell lido and (ii) other outdoor swimming facilities during the covid-19 outbreak; and what his timescale is for enabling those facilities to safely reopen.

Nigel Huddleston:

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

On Monday 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown and instructed people to stay at home to control the virus, protect the NHS and save lives. The National Restrictions are designed to get the R rate under control through limiting social contact and reducing transmissions. Therefore indoor and outdoor sports facilities must close.

Government decisions on reducing the current restrictions will be based on scientific evidence. Swim England are invited to regular meetings of the Sport Working Group which I chair. Through these meetings we are continuing discussions with representatives from the sport and physical activity sector about the steps required to reopen indoor and outdoor sports facilities as soon as it is safe to do so and will update the public when possible.

Government has provided unprecedented support to businesses through tax reliefs, cash grants and employee wage support, which many sports clubs have benefited from.

■ Tech Nation: Equality

Chi Onwurah:

[138965]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what progress Tech Nation has made in improving diversity within (a) within the tech sector and (b) its own organisation.

Caroline Dinenage:

Tech Nation is committed to improving diversity and inclusion within the tech sector. Within their growth programmes, the percentage of non-London companies they support has risen from 32% to 68% since 2018 and they have been collecting ethnicity data from applicants since 2020.

They have also taken a proactive stance on improving representation in the sector through a number of initiatives such as the successful 'female founder hours', improving inclusivity of online resources and developing a diverse speaker database.

Their annual Tech Nation Report has included detailed diversity statistics on the UK tech sector since the organisation was established in 2018 and they released their Diversity & Inclusion Report in 2019 which delved deeper into this topic.

For the past two years, they have collaborated with the TechTalent Charter on the data collection which supports their work driving inclusion and diversity in tech recruitment. They have partnered with Extend Ventures in a research capacity for their in-depth report, Diversity Beyond Gender. They have also acted as a delivery partner with OneTech - an organisation dedicated to challenging inequity in the digital sector.

Tech Nation are committed to fostering a culture of inclusivity within their organisation and to implementing diverse hiring practices, including using job boards such as Black Young Professionals Network and Disabilities Jobsite UK. They are also currently collecting thorough diversity data internally. This uses a newly-developed framework which they then plan to extend to cohort companies and the wider industry, via an external toolkit.

Chi Onwurah:

[\[140074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what proportion of Tech Nation's (a) grants and (b) programme support have been awarded to (i) women, (ii) ethnic minorities and (iii) people with disabilities; and for what reason the impact evaluation did not include an equalities impact assessment.

Caroline Dinenage:

The average number of companies with at least one female founder on Tech Nation's programmes is 25%, meaning that one quarter of the grant money received from DCMS has directly supported female founders in their scaling journey. Tech Nation does not issue any grants itself.

Tech Nation has recently commenced data capture on ethnic background and disabilities of applicants to its programmes. This is subject to a self-identification process by participants.

It is also developing a diversity data capture framework to be expanded to cohort companies and the wider industry, via an external toolkit.

The objective of the Frontier Economics study was to evaluate Tech Nation's impact in accordance with its original grant agreement.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices: Coronavirus

Jake Berry:

[\[138436\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to support apprentices to catch up on the training and learning that they have missed during the covid-19 to ensure that they can finish their apprenticeship fully qualified.

Gillian Keegan:

The department is committed to supporting apprentices and employers to safely continue with, and complete, their apprenticeship programmes. We have introduced

flexibilities to ensure that apprenticeship training and assessments can continue during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Where it is not possible and practicable for the apprentice to continue training, a break in learning can be used to allow the apprentice to return to learning at a future date. It is our goal that apprentices are able to promptly resume their apprenticeship and continue to successful completion of end-point assessment. For apprentices who have taken a formal break in learning, this will result in the planned end-date for their apprenticeship being replanned upon returning to learning to take into consideration the duration in line with the length of their break.

We continue to review the flexibilities in place to ensure high-quality training can continue allowing apprentices to undertake their learning and assessments despite current operating constraints. Our guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response>.

■ Children's Rights: Coronavirus

Tulip Siddiq:

[134025]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to bring forward legislative proposals on the rights of (a) children in care and (b) children with special educational needs and disabilities during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Vicky Ford:

The duties to our most vulnerable children that are set out in primary legislation (such as in section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 and section 1 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002) remain in place but we recognise that we are operating in a challenging context. To ensure services are maintained during the COVID-19 outbreak and to ensure that support remains in place, following a public consultation over summer 2020, a small number of amendments to secondary legislation came into force on 25 September 2020 (Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020). These amendments are in place until 31 March 2021. We will continue to keep the situation under review, including through discussion with interested parties including children's rights groups. Separately, there are some relevant exceptions to national restrictions, for example, continuing to allow contact between children and parents who do not live together.

At this stage, we do not intend to issue further notices to modify the duty on local authorities and health commissioning bodies under section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014 to secure or arrange the provision specified in an Education Health Care Plan. However, we will keep this position under review based on the evidence.

■ Coventry College: Buildings

Colleen Fletcher:

[140139]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions (a) his Department and (b) agencies of his Department have had with the Coventry College Board on the

availability of capital funding to refurbish or rebuild its Henley Campus; and what the outcome was of those discussions.

Colleen Fletcher:

[140141]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has made an assessment of the effect of the closure of Coventry College's Henley Campus on (a) further education provision and (b) social mobility in Coventry North East constituency.

Colleen Fletcher:

[140142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether it is his Department's policy to take steps to fill gaps in further education provision as a result of the closure of a further education (a) college and (b) campus.

Colleen Fletcher:

[140143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of further education (a) colleges and (b) campuses that (i) have closed in the last ten years and (ii) are currently proposed to close in (A) Coventry, (B) the West Midlands and (C) England.

Gillian Keegan:

Coventry College has two campuses, City and Henley, located less than two miles apart. The further education commissioner and the team have undertaken two visits to Coventry College in 2020, on the 9 and 10 March and 22 September. Space utilisation at both sites is below 30%, with Henley requiring significant capital investment to bring it up to a good standard. Travel to learn patterns indicate that learners travel from across the city to access provision at Henley and as such will not be adversely affected by the move to City.

Local authorities have a critical role to play in ensuring adequacy of provision and support for young people to access and participate in education and training. Their responsibilities and duties relating to participation are set out in the published statutory guidance for local authorities. This includes securing sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in their area who are over compulsory school age, but under 19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an education, health and care plan is maintained. This is a duty under the Education Act 1996. To fulfil this, local authorities need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision. More information on provision and support for young people in education and training can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561546/Participation-of-young-people-in-education-employment-or-training.pdf.

Where local authorities feel that there is a specific gap in provision that cannot be addressed by existing providers, there is a process by which this can be brought to the attention of the Education and Skills Funding Agency for consideration and action as appropriate.

No colleges have closed in Coventry in the past ten years. In 2017 City College Coventry merged with Henley College to form Coventry College. No campuses have closed in Coventry in the past ten years. Three college sites have closed across the West Midlands in the past ten years.

In recent years capital funding has been managed by the local enterprise partnerships via the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. However, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, announced in June 2020 that an initial £200 million of the £1.5 billion capital funding to upgrade the further education estate was to be brought forward to this financial year (2020-21). This was paid to all eligible further education colleges and designated institutions in September 2020. Coventry College received £1.044 million. The Further Education Capital Transformation Fund, which will invest the remaining £1.3 billion over the coming 5 years, to upgrade the further education estate, opened for bids from colleges on 21 January 2021.

As part of the review, undertaken by the further education commissioner, and during recent engagement with Coventry College the availability of this capital funding has been discussed. Given the poor space utilisation at both Henley and City sites (less than 30% at each), the board agreed to close the Henley site and focus capital investment on creating enhanced facilities on the City site.

■ Education: Coronavirus

Ian Mearns:

[140051]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to amend the guidance on face coverings in educational settings to include the use of transparent face coverings where possible, to assist with learners who rely on lip reading to learn.

Nick Gibb:

During the national lockdown, in education settings where Year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults (staff and visitors) and pupils when moving around indoors outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

Face coverings can make it more difficult to communicate with children with additional needs or children who may rely on lip reading or facial expressions for understanding. The Department expects staff to be sensitive to these needs when teaching and interacting with children.

As the Department's guidance outlines, some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. This includes people who cannot put on, wear, or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness, impairment, or disability, or if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound, or facial expressions to communicate. The same legal exemptions that apply to the wearing of face coverings in shops and on public transport also apply in schools, nurseries and colleges.

Based on current evidence and the measures that schools are already putting in place, such as the system of controls and consistent bubbles, face coverings will not generally be necessary in the classroom.

Children in primary schools do not need to wear a face covering, and older children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities may be exempt from wearing them, depending on their need.

The Department's guidance on face coverings can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>.

■ Erasmus+ Programme: Wales

Ben Lake: **[140235]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding (a) projects and (b) institutions in Wales have received through Erasmus+ in each year since 2015.

Ben Lake: **[140236]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of the £100 million allocated to the Turing scheme will be spent on the administration costs of facilitating that scheme.

Michelle Donelan:

The National Agency collect and publish data on projects funded as part of Erasmus+ by devolved administration, which can be found here:

<https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/statistics>.

The table below shows the value of Erasmus+ projects funded in Wales from call year 2015 to 2017. This is the latest data available and can be found in table 14 here:

<https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/file/14125/download>.

Value of Erasmus+ projects funded in Wales (in euros)

	2015 CALL	2016 CALL	2017 CALL
Total value of projects funded	€6,847,551	€8,513,375	€8,821,941

The Turing scheme will be backed by at least £100 million, providing funding for around 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on placements and exchanges overseas, starting in September 2021 and across the UK. Successful applications will receive funding for administering the scheme and students taking part will receive grants to help them with the costs of their international experience.

We are also pleased to confirm that the new scheme will be administered by the same consortium of British Council and Ecorys which have been delivering Erasmus+ in the UK for a number of years, drawing on their experience of working with education providers across the UK, and ensuring continuity.

We will be making further information available very shortly to enable providers to prepare to bid for funding when applications open in the coming weeks.

■ Free School Meals

Liam Byrne:

[\[137134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he plans to have with Chartwells UK on the adequacy of food parcels supplied to families eligible for free school meals.

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.

The government does not hold any direct contracts with school catering companies. School catering contracts are agreed locally, and are held at school, academy trust, or local authority level. 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 re-opened on Monday 18 January 2021.

The images circulating of poor-quality food parcels are unacceptable. On 13 January 2021, both my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, and I 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 contact suppliers where concerns are escalated, to ensure they are working to a high standard. We will also alert the school to confirm appropriate contract management arrangements are in place, so that immediate improvements are made.

■ Free School Meals: Voucher Schemes

Layla Moran:

[\[134092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the free school meals voucher scheme will continue to be available to eligible children during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Vicky Ford:

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

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

Steve McCabe:

[135795]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when the centrally administered Free School Meal Voucher Scheme will be reopened for schools to access.

Vicky Ford:

The national voucher scheme was reopened from the week commencing 18 January and over 15,000 schools have already registered. Schools are responsible for providing free schools meals support to eligible pupils during term time and should order vouchers on their pupils' behalf. Before ordering vouchers, parents or guardians can check which pupils are eligible and would be receiving benefits-related free school meals. Further information on this is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>.

Dr Rupa Huq:

[140213]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing independent supermarkets and cafés to participate in the National Free School Meals Voucher scheme.

Vicky Ford:

Aldi, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Iceland, the Company Shop Group, Waitrose, McColls and M&S are signed up to the national voucher scheme. We are keen to work with a wide range of supermarkets and encourage others to join – this involves them having the right infrastructure to deliver e-gift cards.

However, we recognise that other independent stores are also well placed to provide this support. Schools are free to decide the best approach for their free school meal pupils. They can provide lunch parcels, locally arranged vouchers, or they can use the national voucher scheme. If a school arranges a local voucher, they will be able to claim the costs back from the department. For more information, please see our guidance on free school meals: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>.

■ Further Education: Coventry

Colleen Fletcher:

[140140]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much capital funding his Department has provided to further education colleges in (a) Coventry North East constituency and (b) Coventry in each of the last ten years.

Gillian Keegan:

The department has provided the following capital funding to further education colleges that fall under (a) and (b) in the 2020-21 financial year. This was provided under the Further Education Capital Allocation.

2020-21 FINANCIAL YEAR

(a) Coventry College is the only college in the North East constituency. Prior to 2017 it was Henley College £1,044,481

(b) Coventry as a whole: Coventry College £1,131,010
(prior to 2017- City College Coventry & Henley College and Hereward College)

Between financial year 2015-16 and the present, Local Economic Partnerships have had devolved responsibility for allocating skills capital funding via the Local Growth Fund.

Between financial year 2010-11 and financial year 2014-15, capital funding for colleges was the responsibility of the Skills Funding Agency. It awarded the following funding to Coventry College's predecessor colleges:

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
(c) Coventry College is the only college in the North East constituency. Prior to 2017 it was Henley College	£2,000,000	£120,000	£310,000	£82,945
(d) Coventry as a whole: Coventry College (prior to 2017- City College Coventry & Henley College and Hereward College)	£2,100,000	£120,000	£310,000	£82,945

■ GCE A-level and GCSE: Assessments

Sir Charles Walker:

[139999]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will take into account the effect of covid-19 absences on each school teaching faculty when assessing GCSE and A-Level grades for school exam cohorts, in the context of varying regional rates of covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, the Government considers that exams cannot be held in a way which is fair. The Department has therefore announced that GCSE, AS and A level exams will not go ahead this summer as planned. To provide further clarity to the sector as soon as possible, Ofqual and the Department have launched a two week consultation on how to fairly ensure all young people are supported to progress to the next stage of their lives.

The Department has confirmed our proposal that, in summer 2021, pupils taking GCSE, AS and A levels regulated by Ofqual should be awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers. To ensure that grades this year remain meaningful, we propose that they should be based on teachers' assessments of the evidence of the standard at which their pupils are performing. Grades should indicate pupils' demonstrated knowledge, understanding and skills.

The Department knows that there has been learning loss, and that some pupils have suffered more disruption to their learning than others. The Department wants pupils to be assessed on the content they have covered and to recognise loss of learning. We propose that there will be flexibility for teachers in what they assess students on. If externally set papers are used, we propose that teachers should also have some choice of the topics on which their students could answer questions. The same principle could apply in assessments conducted by the school or college, while ensuring sufficient breadth of content coverage so as not to limit progression.

In December 2020, the Department confirmed the launch of an expert advisory group to consider the differential impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on pupils and recommend mitigations for these impacts. In light of the decision to cancel exams, the Department is refocusing this group and is working to finalise the terms of reference and membership. We will ensure that membership is representative of the sector and is geographically diverse. Further details on membership and priorities of the group will be provided in due course.

■ Higher Education: Admissions

Jon Trickett:

[138390]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of people (a) applying for and (b) securing places at higher education institutions were from (i) working class and (ii) disadvantaged backgrounds for the academic year 2019-20.

Jon Trickett:

[138391]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to increase the number of people from (a) working class and (b) disadvantaged backgrounds (i) applying for and (ii) securing places at higher education institutions.

Michelle Donelan:

It is more crucial than ever before that we tap into the brilliant talent that our country has to offer, and make sure that university places are available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.

In the 2019/20 applications cycle, 11.4% of English 18 year olds applying for higher education were from disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR4 Q1), and 11.3% of English 18 year olds accepted onto higher education places, were from disadvantaged backgrounds. This compares to 10.4% of English 18 year old applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds, and 9.7% of accepted English 18 year old applicants, in the 2011/12 applications cycle.

It is vital that students applying to university in 2021 have extra time to carefully consider their applications and make the best choices for their future. As such, for students applying to enter university in 2021, the UCAS deadline for most courses has been pushed back to 29 January 2021. We are encouraging universities to be flexible when making offers to individual students whose education has been disproportionately and adversely impacted from the COVID-19 outbreak, to ensure that these students are able to receive fair offers for 2021.

All higher education providers wanting to charge higher level fees must also have an Access and Participation Plan agreed by the Office for Students in which they set out the measures they intend to take to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups can access and succeed in higher education.

We have just launched a consultation on options for reforming the higher education admissions system in favour of post-qualification admissions. We are asking respondents to work with us to identify ways in which the system can be made to work better for disadvantaged students, particularly in terms of being able to access the most selective universities.

■ Home Education

Daniel Zeichner:

[133887]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will provide urgent guidance on how home-educated students who cannot access teacher assessments will receive A-level and GCSE qualifications.

Nick Gibb:

Although exams are the fairest way we have of assessing what a student knows, we cannot guarantee all students will be in a position to fairly sit their exams this

summer. In line with other UK nations, the Department has taken the decision to cancel this year's GCSEs, A and AS level exams.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, confirmed in his statement on 6 January 2021 that the grades awarded to pupils will be based on a form of teacher assessment. The department and Ofqual 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, including consulting specifically on four different approaches for private candidates to receive a grade. The consultation can be accessed from the Ofqual website and will be open until 29 January.

■ Nurseries: Coronavirus

Steve McCabe:

[138857]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what financial support is available to (a) maintained and (b) private nurseries in response to the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Vicky Ford:

The early years sector has benefitted from the continuation of early years entitlement funding during the summer and autumn terms in 2020, and providers have been able to furlough their staff via the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme. As long as the staff meet the other criteria for the scheme, schools and early years providers are able to furlough their staff if they have experienced a drop in either their income from parents or government. Eligible nurseries can also benefit from a business rates holiday and can access the business loans as set out by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On 17 December 2020, the government announced a return to funding early years settings on the basis of attendance, as measured by the January 2021 census.

The early years and schools census are statutory data collections and are combined to produce a national statistics release. The statutory guidance underpinning these censuses has not changed, but the Department for Education issued supportive documentation to help guide local authorities and providers with completing the census during the COVID-19 outbreak. This supporting documentation was issued to all local authorities on 14 January 2021 and has not changed. The 2021 census guidance for early years can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-census-2021-guide>.

We will fund local authorities in the 2021 spring term based on their January 2021 census. If attendance rises after the census is taken, we will top-up councils to up to 85% of their January 2020 census level, where a local authority can provide evidence for increased attendance during the spring term. This will give local authorities additional financial confidence to pay providers for increasing attendance later in the spring term.

We stay in regular contact with the early years sector, including on this subject. We will be closely monitoring both parental take-up of places and the capacity and responses of providers.

Steve McCabe: [138858]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support his Department is providing nurseries to ensure they have access to adequate personal protective equipment.

Steve McCabe: [138859]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether nurseries are able to reclaim the costs of personal protective equipment during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Vicky Ford:

COVID-19-related PPE use will be very limited for staff in education and childcare settings and, as set out in the department's guidance, relates only to (i) when caring for a child or individual who develops symptoms while attending their setting (and only then if a distance of two metres cannot be maintained), and (ii) when a child or individual already has routine intimate care needs that involve the use of PPE, for example when undertaking aerosol generating procedures (AGPs).

Many education and childcare settings will be able to access PPE for their COVID-19 needs via their local authority or local resilience forum. Further information on local arrangements is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>.

Sir Desmond Swayne: [140731]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make it his policy to extend lateral flow covid-19 testing to privately run nurseries.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is continuing to work closely with colleagues across government and local authorities to secure the most effective approach to asymptomatic testing for the whole of the early years sector.

We are rolling out our asymptomatic testing programme to primary schools with deliveries of test kits starting from week commencing 18 January 2021.

The asymptomatic testing programme will offer all primary school, schools based nursery and maintained nursery school staff home Lateral Flow Device test kits for twice weekly testing. This will help to break the chains of transmission of COVID-19 in primary schools and nurseries by identifying asymptomatic positive cases. Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus.

Community Testing programmes are currently being rolled out across the country. Local authorities will be encouraged to target testing to people who cannot work from home during lockdown. Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-testing-explainer/community-testing-a-guide-for-local-delivery>.

Early years staff, as critical workers, continue to have priority access to DHSC-led symptomatic PCR testing via the online portal:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>.

■ **Photography: Coronavirus**

Emma Hardy:

[138490]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether students completing a Photography degree are permitted to complete practical work independently outside of their household during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown period.

Michelle Donelan:

We know that higher education (HE) providers are working hard to review their arrangements to reflect the situation facing students during this period of national lockdown. We expect providers to ensure that continuing and prospective students receive the clear, accurate and timely information needed to make informed decisions. This includes making students aware of any potential for changes to arrangements for assessment at the earliest opportunity. Providers will make their own judgements based on the latest national and local public health guidance, taking account of the need to minimise risk to staff and students.

On 7 January, the department published updated guidance on the plans for students returning to higher education for the spring term. This guidance is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>. There is also general guidance on national lockdown, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#when-you-can-leave-home>.

As stated in the national guidance, everyone must stay at home wherever possible. It is permissible to leave the house for work and education where it cannot reasonably be done at home. However, we strongly encourage students to remain at home, and work with their providers to make plans that enable students to continue to stay at home in line with guidance wherever possible. For any academic work that takes place outside of the house, risk assessments should take place to ensure work can be conducted in a COVID-secure way and comply with social distancing guidelines. This exemption only applies if it is an essential part of the course and no alternative is available. During the period of lockdown, everyone should avoid all but essential contact and travel outside their household.

■ **Pre-school Education: Coronavirus**

Wera Hobhouse:

[138010]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on ensuring that (a) nurseries, (b) pre-schools and (c) other early years settings have access to covid-19 testing for staff.

Nick Gibb:

We are continuing to work closely with other Government Departments and local authorities to secure the most effective approach to asymptomatic testing for the whole of the early year's sector.

This includes ongoing discussions about providing testing via the education testing programme as well as encouraging local authorities to consider prioritising appropriate testing for PVI and childminders via the Community Testing Programme, which is being rolled out to all local authorities. Many local authorities' community testing programmes are already underway for early years staff to access asymptomatic testing where appropriate.

We are rolling out our asymptomatic testing programme to primary schools, schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools who will receive testing kits for staff from 18 January. The asymptomatic testing programme will offer all primary school, schools-based nursery and maintained nursery school staff home Lateral Flow Device test kits for twice-weekly testing. This will help to break the chains of transmission of COVID-19 in schools and nurseries by identifying asymptomatic positive cases. Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

Steve McCabe:**[140743]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what progress his Department has made on introducing regular rapid covid-19 testing for (a) nursery workers, (b) childminders and (c) other early years professionals.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is continuing to work closely with colleagues across government and local authorities to secure the most effective approach to asymptomatic testing for the whole of the early years sector.

We are rolling out our asymptomatic testing programme to primary schools with deliveries of test kits starting from week commencing 18 January 2021.

The asymptomatic testing programme will offer all primary school, schools based nursery and maintained nursery school staff home Lateral Flow Device test kits for twice weekly testing. This will help to break the chains of transmission of COVID-19 in schools and nurseries by identifying asymptomatic positive cases. Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus.

Community Testing programmes are currently being rolled out across the country. Local authorities will be encouraged to target testing to people who cannot work from home during lockdown. Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-testing-explainer/community-testing-a-guide-for-local-delivery>.

Early years staff, as critical workers, continue to have priority access to the Department of Health and Social Care led symptomatic PCR testing via the online portal: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>.

■ Primary Education: Remote Education

Seema Malhotra:

[140094]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional steps his Department plans to take to support remote learning in primary schools during the covid-19 outbreak.

Nick Gibb:

Given the critical importance of ensuring that all children and young people continue to learn during the national lockdown, the Department has updated the expectations for schools to clarify and strengthen what is expected during the period of restricted attendance and draws on our evolving understanding of best practice in remote education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak#section-5-contingency-planning-for-outbreaks>.

With most pupils now having to learn remotely, and schools and colleges having made huge progress in developing their remote education provision, it is right that we increase the expectations on what remote education they receive. Schools are now expected to provide remote education that includes either recorded or live direct teaching alongside time for pupils to work independently to complete assignments that have been set. Online video lessons do not necessarily need to be recorded by teaching staff at the school. Oak National Academy lessons, for example, can be provided in lieu of school led video content.

The number of hours expected for different age groups has also changed. Hours include both direct teaching and time for pupils to complete tasks or assignments independently. Primary schools are now expected to provide, as a minimum:

- 3 hours a day for Key Stage 1, on average across the cohort with less for younger children.
- 4 hours a day for Key Stage 2

Primary schools are also expected to have a system in place for checking on a daily basis whether pupils are engaging actively with their work, and learning. Primary schools will need to work with families to identify swiftly where pupil engagement is a concern and find effective solutions.

The Department recognises that different expectations are appropriate for younger and older age groups when learning remotely. We expect schools to consider the remote education expectations in relation to pupils' age, stage of development or special educational needs. The number of hours of remote education we expect schools to deliver also varies according to pupil stage.

We also recognise 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 do not expect that solely digital means will be used to teach these pupils remotely.

There is a wide range of resources available to support schools to meet the expectations we have set.

Get Help with Remote Education provides a one stop shop for teachers, signposting the support package available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-remote-education>. This includes helping primary schools to access technology that supports remote education, as well as peer to peer training and guidance on how to use technology effectively. It also includes practical tools, a good practice guide and school led webinars to support effective delivery of the curriculum. Information is also available on issues such as safeguarding, statutory duties and expectations, supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and recovery and catch up to stop pupils falling behind. We worked with some of the demonstrator schools and colleges to help develop a self-assessment framework, to help schools review and improve their approach to remote education through technology. This has now been launched as the Review your Remote Education Provision framework: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-your-remote-education-provision>.

The Government is investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care, 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. All schools, trusts and local authorities have now been given the opportunity to order their full current allocation of devices.

The Department has also made £4.84 million available for Oak National Academy 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 SEND is also available. Since the start of the spring term 2021, 4.1 million users have visited the Oak National Academy platform and 28 million lessons have been viewed, as of 17 January 2021. Oak National Academy will remain a free optional resource for 2020-21.

The BBC has adapted their education support for the spring term 2021 and will be making educational content available on the television. This will help to ensure all children and young people can access curriculum based learning from home. Starting on Monday 11 January, each week day on CBBC will see a three hour block of primary school programming from 9am. Bitesize Daily primary and secondary will also air every day on BBC Red Button as well as episodes being available on demand on BBC iPlayer. This TV offer is in addition to the BBC's online offer, which parents, children and teachers can access when and where they need it.

■ Pupils: Coronavirus

Sarah Owen:

[140941]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many school pupils were absent from school in (a) Luton and (b) England during the autumn term 2020 due to covid-19 infection.

Nick Gibb:

The Department collects daily data from schools and colleges via the educational setting status form, which was set up to help the Government monitor the impact of COVID-19 on schools and colleges. The form was expanded to collect detailed data on the reasons for pupil absence from 12 October 2020. This data has been published at national level on a weekly basis since 20 October 2020 and was published at local authority level on 15 December 2020.

The Department has published the number and proportion of pupils absent due to a confirmed case of COVID-19, a suspected case of COVID-19 or self-isolation in state funded schools in England on each Thursday between 15 October and 17 December 2020, excluding the October half term period. These estimates are summarised in table 1^{1,2,3}.

Table 1: Estimates of the number of pupils absent in state-funded schools in England due to a confirmed case of COVID-19, suspected case of COVID-19 and self-isolation

	NUMBER OF PUPILS ABSENT IN STATE- FUNDED SCHOOLS ABSENT DUE TO CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19	NUMBER OF PUPILS ABSENT IN STATE- FUNDED SCHOOLS ABSENT DUE TO SUSPECTED CASE OF COVID-19	NUMBER OF PUPILS ABSENT IN STATE- FUNDED SCHOOLS ABSENT DUE TO SELF- ISOLATION
15-Oct	8,000	37,000	up to 355,000
05-Nov	12,000	22,000	up to 301,000
12-Nov	14,000	28,000	up to 552,000
19-Nov	18,000	31,000	up to 761,000
26-Nov	18,000	29,000	up to 688,000
03-Dec	16,000	28,000	up to 569,000
10-Dec	17,000	30,000	up to 594,000
16-Dec ¹	18,000	38,000	up to 679,000

The Department has also published this data for all local authorities in England, including Luton. This data is based on responding schools only and no adjustments have been made for non-response. This data is available for each Thursday between 15 October and 17 December 2020. Data for Luton is summarised at the following link^{1,2,3,4} <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/e284e1f4-5a40-4348-9f16-5b3376e7f6f9>.

¹ Data is given for Wednesday 16 December instead of Thursday 17 December due to a decrease in response rates on Thursday 17 December which make estimates for this date less reliable. Data is not given for Thursdays 22 and 29 October as this data is affected by half term.

² This data is as reported directly by schools via the Department for Education's daily education settings survey. It is not the primary source of data on infection, incidence and COVID-19 cases overall.

³ Pupils self-isolating because of COVID-19 is reported as a range to account for possible double counting.

⁴ Local authority level figures are based on responding schools only.

■ Pupils: Mental Health Services

Dawn Butler:

[138404]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional mental health support the Government is providing to pupils during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Vicky Ford:

The government has made children's wellbeing and mental health a central part of our response to the COVID-19 outbreak, and the support we have already put in place for children and young people will be critical during this time. The department has issued guidance for schools which includes information and sources of further advice on supporting mental health and wellbeing, available here:

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

We have ensured that schools have the flexibility to offer a place in school as a vulnerable child to any pupils for whom being in school will help them manage their wellbeing and mental health, or to access support more easily. Decisions will be informed by the school's experience of how pupils have been affected so far.

Schools will continue to offer pastoral support to pupils working remotely at home, informed and supported by training and expert advice that we have made available, including through the £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return scheme and through local links with mental health providers. This information and support is relevant to remote provision as well as to those attending school. Schools should make sure that parents and pupils know who to contact if they have new concerns about mental health and wellbeing.

A £1 billion COVID "catch-up" package with £650 million shared across early years, schools and 16-19 providers over the 2020/21 academic year is also supporting education settings to put the right catch-up and pastoral support in place. The Education Endowment Foundation have published a COVID-19 support guide to support schools to direct this funding, which includes further information about interventions to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

The department will also be convening a task force to look at the effects on children, young people and staff in the education system and we will confirm the next steps as soon as possible.

Public Health England has produced guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. For those who need specialist support or help, all NHS Mental Health Trusts are providing 24/7 open access telephone lines to support people of all ages and continue to deliver mental health support to children and young people.

The government continues to invest in and prioritise mental health. The NHS will receive around an additional £500 million this year, to address waiting times for mental health services, give more people the mental health support they need, and invest in the NHS workforce.

In the long term, we remain committed to our joint green paper delivery programme with the Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England, including introducing new mental health support teams for all schools and colleges, providing training for senior mental health leads in schools and colleges, and testing approaches to faster access to NHS specialist support.

■ Remote Education: Computers

Jon Trickett:

[138389]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many laptops have been (a) requested by schools for home learning and (b) delivered as of 14 January 2021.

Nick Gibb:

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. As of Monday 18 January, over 800,000 laptops and tablets had been delivered to schools, trusts and local authorities.

The number of devices available for each school, trust or local authority is based on children eligible for free school meals and takes into account existing devices available in schools. Schools, 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.

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, we announced that we will be providing a further 300,000 devices over the course of this term.

Figures on the number of devices delivered, including by local authority, are available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data/2021-week-3>. These figures are broken down by local authority and academy trust.

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.

Stella Creasy:

[140063]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish the number of laptops (a) allocated and (b) delivered to pupils to support remote education by constituency in each week of the last six months; and if he will publish the number of children in receipt of free school meals by constituency in each of the last six months.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, by securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people. As of Monday 18 January, over 800,000 laptops and tablets had been delivered to schools, academy trusts and local authorities.

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.

The number of devices available to each school, academy trust and local authority is determined by the number of children eligible for free school meals. All schools, academy trusts and local authorities have now been given the opportunity to order their full current allocation of devices.

Figures on the number of devices delivered is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data/2021-week-3>.

These figures are broken down by local authority and academy trust. Figures on delivery by constituency are not available.

Data related to the number of pupils claiming free school meals is collected in the termly school census. We routinely publish the statistics from the spring (January) school census in the schools, pupils and their characteristics statistical release. The most recent published figures, from the January 2020 school census, are available at the following link, including data for each school and the constituency they are in:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, a summer census did not take place in the 2019/20 academic year. The Department plans to publish the information relating to October 2020 in due course.

■ Remote Education: Enfield North

Feryal Clark:

[138529]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) schools and (b) pupils in Enfield North have requested but not received (i) laptops and (ii) other technology required for remote learning during the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care services, by securing 1.3 million laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children and young people. As of Monday 18 January, over 800,000 laptops and tablets had been delivered to schools, trusts and local authorities.

The number of devices available to each school, trust and local authority is determined by their number of children eligible for free school meals. All schools, trusts and local authorities have now been given the opportunity to order their full current allocation of devices.

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, we announced that we will be providing a further 300,000 devices over the course of this term.

Figures on the number of devices delivered is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data/2021-week-3>. These figures are broken down by local authority and academy trust. Figures on delivery by constituency are not available.

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. Routers have been distributed to schools, trusts and local authorities, who are responsible for allocating them to the families that need them most.

■ Remote Education: Feltham and Heston

Seema Malhotra:

[140095]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many requests for (a) laptops and (b) broadband access he has received from each school in Feltham and Heston constituency; and how many (i) laptops and (ii) connectivity solutions he has provided to each of those schools.

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.

As of Monday 18 January, over 800,000 laptops and tablets had been delivered to state schools, academy trusts and local authorities.

Figures on requests for, and delivery of, devices by constituency are not available.

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-progress-data>. We will be publishing updated data on a weekly basis.

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

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.

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.

We are grateful to EE, O2, Sky Mobile, Smarty, Tesco Mobile, Three, Virgin Mobile, and Vodafone for their collaboration. We continue to invite a range of mobile network providers to support the offer.

All four major mobile network operators - Vodafone, O2, Three and EE - have also committed to working together to make access to Oak National Academy free for school children. Additionally, BT and EE are making access to BBC Bitesize resources free from the end of January 2021.

■ Remote Education: ICT

Mr Toby Perkins: [140036]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of (a) laptops and (b) wireless dongles that have been provided by his Department to further education colleges in England.

Mr Toby Perkins: [140037]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of further education students without an appropriate digital device to allow them to study remotely.

Mr Toby Perkins: [140038]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many digital devices his Department plans to supply to further education colleges in England; and when the full allocation will be supplied by.

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.

This includes over 800,000 laptops and tablets that were delivered to schools, academy trusts and local authorities by 17 January.

The department has already provided 4G wireless routers, with free data for the academic year, to schools, trusts and local authorities and continue to provide 4G wireless routers where children need to access remote education.

Disadvantaged learners aged 16-19 in schools and further education colleges are supported through the 16-19 bursary fund. During the 2020 summer term, we enabled schools and further education colleges to boost their bursary fund to meet any extra costs for student technology needs.

We have now extended the Get Help with Technology scheme to provide disadvantaged 16 to 19 year olds with technological support.

We expect to be able to invite most eligible further education providers, including colleges, sixth form colleges and school sixth forms, to order devices before the end of January. Other further education providers, such as independent training providers and special post-16 institutions, will also be in the frame if they have learners receiving free school meals.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Jon Trickett:

[\[138392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of pupils were attending (a) primary and (b) secondary schools in person on (a) 5 January 2021 and (b) 12 January 2021.

Nick Gibb:

The requested data is presented in the table below. Please note that schools were not asked to complete the educational settings survey from 5 January while the survey was changed to reflect the changes in the national lockdown, Therefore, we present figures for 4 January instead.

	4 JANUARY 2021		12 JANUARY 2021	
	Response rate[1] (%)	Overall attendance[2] (%)	Response rate (%)	Overall attendance (%)
State-funded Primary[3]	45	65	86	21
State-funded Secondary[4]	47	5	85	5

On Monday 4 January, many schools were expected to still be on Christmas break or have planned inset days[5]. The response rate to the survey of educational settings on 4 January was low and nearly half of responding schools reported an inset day or non-COVID related closure (47%). Therefore, figures for 4 January 2021 exclude

schools in areas expected to still be on Christmas break and those that reported inset days or non-COVID related closures.

Figures have not been adjusted for non-response and are therefore may not be nationally representative.

[1] Response rates are included for context.

[2] Attendance figures are for in person attendance.

[3] Includes 'middle deemed primary' schools.

[4] Includes 'middle deemed secondary' and 'all-through schools'.

[5] The vast majority of schools in the following local authorities were expected to still be on Christmas break on 4 January: Suffolk, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Rutland, Bury, Stockport, Wigan, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Central Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, West Berkshire, North Yorkshire. Some schools in other local authorities were also still on Christmas break or had inset days - academies are not required to follow local authority term dates and schools can set their own inset days.

Sir Charles Walker:

[139998]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking during the covid-19 outbreak to (a) help schools cover the additional costs incurred and (b) provide additional emergency funding to help meet exceptional costs that would otherwise have been met from schools' reserves where these have been exhausted during the covid-2019 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

The Department has provided a range of additional support to schools, on top of existing budgets, in relation the COVID-19 outbreak.

To cover unavoidable costs incurred between March and July 2020, schools have been eligible to claim for funding for three specific categories of spend:

- Increased premises related costs associated with keeping schools open over the Easter and summer half term holidays;
- Support for free school meals for eligible children who were not in school, where schools were not using the national voucher scheme; and
- Additional cleaning costs required due to confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases, over and above the cost of existing cleaning arrangements.

The Department has paid schools £102 million for all claims in the first claims window within the published scope of the fund, and we will shortly process claims made in the second window that was open in December.

In addition, last term the Department announced a COVID-19 Workforce Fund for schools and colleges, to help those with high staff absences and facing significant financial pressures to stay open. This has funded the costs of teacher absences over

a threshold between 1 November 2020 until the end of the autumn term. We expect the schools claims form to be launched in spring 2021.

The Department will fund school and colleges which have remained open for costs relating to testing. We will publish a replacement workforce planning tool which will illustrate the levels of funding available.

In addition, the Department has provided schools with extensive support for online education during the COVID-19 outbreak, and will spend £1 billion over the 2020/21 academic year so that schools can support pupils to catch up.

Schools have continued to receive their core funding throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, regardless of any periods of full or partial closure, with this year marking the first year of a three-year increase to core funding - the biggest in a decade. This will ensure they can continue to pay their staff and meet other regular financial commitments. Schools should use these existing resources when making arrangements for this academic year.

Ministers and officials continue to engage regularly with school leaders and their representatives on a wide range of issues around COVID-19, including discussions in relation to costs faced by schools at this time.

Florence Eshalomi:

[140333]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether scientists researching covid-19 are considered critical workers for the purposes of allowing children to attend school during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will update the Government's guidance to reflect the Government's position on that matter.

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. We have 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 outbreak and EU transition response can send their children to school if required. The guidance for 'Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings' sets out who is able to attend school to receive face-to-face education. 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 is considered critical to the nation's COVID-19 response. The guidance 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 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.

Sarah Owen:

[140942]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish data on staff absence in schools due to covid-19 infection in (a) Luton and (b) England during the 2020 autumn term.

Nick Gibb:

The Department collects daily data from schools and colleges via the educational setting status form, which was set up to help the Government monitor the impact of COVID-19 on schools and colleges. The form was expanded to collect detailed data on reasons for staff absence from 12 October 2020 and this data was published on 19 January 2021.

The Department has published the number and proportion of i) teachers and head teachers and ii) teaching assistants and other staff absent due to a confirmed case of COVID-19, a suspected case of COVID-19 or self-isolation in state funded schools in England on each day between 12 October and 17 December 2020, excluding the October half term period. This is summarised, for each Thursday where data is available, at the following link ^{1,2} : <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/2d95b3a7-77f8-4901-aade-9fa56ce88481>.

The Department has also published this data for all local authorities in England, including Luton. This data is based on responding schools only and no adjustments have been made for non-response. This data is available for each Thursday between 15 October and 17 December 2020. Data for Luton is summarised at the following link ^{1,2,3} <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/3bb923b9-1cc4-4635-8514-5f4773c249a7>.

¹ Data is given for Wednesday 16 December instead of Thursday 17 December due to a decrease in response rates on Thursday 17 December which make estimates for this date less reliable. Data is not given for Thursdays 22 and 29 October as this data is affected by half term.

² This data is as reported directly by schools via the Department for Education's daily education settings survey. It is not the primary source of data on infection, incidence and COVID-19 cases overall.

³ Local authority level figures are based on responding schools only.

■ Schools: Discipline

Richard Fuller:

[138427]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to his Department's press release, Experts to help tackle poor behaviour in schools, published on 28 February 2020, when he plans to rollout behaviour hubs; and what criteria will be used for assessing the effectiveness of those hubs.

Nick Gibb:

Behaviour hubs will see schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs) with exemplary behaviour working closely with other schools and MATs that need and want to improve their school behaviour. Support and resources will be available to schools more widely. The programme is overseen by a taskforce of expert advisers. Schools will begin working together in Spring 2021, so that schools can launch their new behaviour approaches in September 2021.

We are in the process of procuring an independent evaluator to assess the effectiveness of the programme. Key measures of success are likely to include an improved whole school behaviour culture, fewer incidents of disruption, truancy and bullying and, in the longer term, improved pupil attainment and outcomes, pupil and staff wellbeing, staff recruitment and retention.

Supply Teachers: Coronavirus**Daisy Cooper:****[140280]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to recent reports of supply teachers in England being ineligible to access financial support through the Government schemes set up in response to the covid-19 outbreak, if he will review the employment practices applying to supply teachers to help resolve those eligibility issues.

Nick Gibb:

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.

If supply staff employed via employment agencies are unable to work due to COVID-19, their employment agency can place them on furlough and use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to claim for 80% of their wages, including during school holiday periods, provided that the eligibility criteria are met. Further information on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>. The eligibility criteria is available to view here:

<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. 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. Information on this is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme#flexible-furlough-agreements>.

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.

Further guidance on workforce planning can be found here:

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

■ Universities: Admissions

Emma Hardy:

[134079]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of gathering (a) data on pupil absence due to the covid-19 outbreak and (b) other data on pupils to assist universities with the entrance selection for 2021.

Michelle Donelan:

We recognise that students applying to university in 2021 have experienced unprecedented disruption to their education as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Universities have an important role to play in ensuring that this is a country where everyone can reach their potential, regardless of their background or ethnicity.

Universities are independent and autonomous institutions. As such, how to use data in their admissions decisions is a matter for each individual higher education provider.

However, we would encourage universities to be flexible when making offers to individual students whose education has been disproportionately and adversely impacted from the COVID-19 outbreak, to ensure that these students are able to receive fair offers for 2021. We will give further and higher education providers the earliest possible indication of the process and timescale for how grades will be awarded this year, so they can plan accordingly.

The department continues to regularly publish statistics on pupil attendance and COVID-related absence in schools.

■ Universities: Social Mobility

Karin Smyth:

[134491]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2020 to Question 122780 on Uni Connect Programme: Finance, what assessment he has made of the effect of the timetable for a funding decision for Uni Connect on (a) staff delivering and (b) the continuity of that programme.

Karin Smyth:

[134492]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a long-term approach to funding (a) Uni Connect and (b) other social mobility projects to enable them to establish themselves and demonstrate their effect.

Karin Smyth:

[134493]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect (a) Uni Connect and (b) other outreach projects on people from disadvantaged young people during the covid-19 outbreak.

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 higher education outreach to complement the funding already spent by HE 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, so it 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, particularly in light of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The OfS is currently consulting on the future of Uni Connect and will want to consider all aspects of the programme including the impact of any changes on staff and the continuity of the programme. The OfS has provided partnerships with programme-wide updates at regular meetings with Programme Leads and Chairs, regarding the next phase of funding for Uni Connect. These updates have been clear that decisions about future funding for academic year 2021/2022 will be subject to decision making from spring 2021 by the OfS, in light of the teaching grant available and having regard to general duties, public sector equality duty and statutory guidance.

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

■ Animal Experiments

Dr Philippa Whitford:

[140144]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to ensure that the use of animal testing is (a) minimised and (b) not duplicated following the UK's departure from membership of the European Chemical Agency.

Rebecca Pow:

We will recognise the validity of any animal tests on products that have already been undertaken and so avoid the need for further testing.

The grandfathering of all existing GB-held REACH registrations into the domestic system will further avoid the need to duplicate animal testing associated with re-registration.

The UK has been at the forefront of opposing animal tests where alternative approaches could be used. This is known as the "last-resort principle", which we will retain and enshrine in legislation through our landmark Environment Bill

We are determined that there should be no need for any additional animal testing for a chemical that has already been registered, unless it is subject to further evaluation that shows the registration dossier is inadequate or there are still concerns about the hazards and risks of the chemical, especially to human health.

■ Animal Products: UK Trade with EU**Dave Doogan:****[140263]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 137309 on Animal Products: UK Trade with EU, what new markets the Government has opened for processed animal proteins; what the barriers to access to those markets were prior to the end of the transition period; and what the estimated gross value is of those new markets.

Victoria Prentis:

Over the past two years, Defra has put in place new veterinary export health certificates to facilitate the export of processed animal proteins from terrestrial animals to Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria and Pakistan. We do not currently know the value of these new markets but the gross value of the annual trade to all non-EU markets is approximately £40million. There are now 23 veterinary export health certificates available to support this trade to countries outside the EU.

Defra is aware that UK renderers wish to export even further afield and that many of the authorities in those destination countries require consignments to be accompanied by a veterinary export health certificate and meet stringent import conditions. Defra continues to work with UK rendering companies to maintain and expand its range of veterinary export health certificates supporting the export of processed animal protein to their priority destination countries.

■ Assistance Animals: Pet Travel Scheme**Alex Sobel:****[138498]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress has been made on developing a permanent solution for assistance dogs to obtain part one listed status under the Pet Passport Scheme to (a) allow travel to the EU on the same basis as before the end of the transition period and (b) remove the new internal border for assistance dog owners between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Victoria Prentis:

The health and documentary requirements for pet travel to the EU are set out under the EU Pet Travel Regulations. Under the Northern Ireland Protocol, EU rules also apply to the non-commercial movements of pets into Northern Ireland from Great Britain. There are no derogations for assistance dogs under the legal framework of the EU Pet Travel Regulations.

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 pet owners and 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 permanent 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.

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 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.

■ European Chemicals Agency: Membership**Dr Philippa Whitford:****[139026]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has plans to create a separate UK chemical database as a result of the UK's departure from the membership of the European Chemical Agency.

Rebecca Pow:

On the 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.

■ Fisheries: Compensation

Luke Pollard: [\[138059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the compensation for the fishing sector announced by the Prime Minister on 13 January 2021 will be part of the £100 million funding package for fishing.

Luke Pollard: [\[138065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much funding has been set aside to pay compensation to fish exporters due to difficulties in exporting shellfish since 1 January 2021.

Luke Pollard: [\[138066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on what date his Department agreed to establish a compensation scheme for exporters of shellfish.

Victoria Prentis:

The UK seafood sector, already adversely affected by the impacts of Covid-19, will receive Government funding of up to £23 million for businesses adjusting to new requirements where they have experienced a verifiable loss due to failures in the EU export processes.

The funding is in addition to the £100 million investment the Prime Minister announced on 24 December to rejuvenate the industry and coastal communities across the UK, and on top of the £32 million that will replace EU funding this year.

Tim Loughton: [\[140733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether companies with a record of criminal activity will be eligible to receive compensation under a future funding package for the fishing industry.

Victoria Prentis:

Details of eligibility criteria for the fisheries support scheme will be announced in the coming weeks. Defra will ensure that necessary checks and procedures are in place to minimise the risk of fraud. Seafood firms and individuals convicted of fraud in the context of fisheries funding schemes have previously been ineligible to access other financial support made available to the sector.

■ Fisheries: Telephone Services

Luke Pollard: [\[138514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the (a) number, (b) geographical breakdown of callers and (c) issues of concern relating to calls made to his Department's Brexit helplines on (i) fishing, (ii) Catch App and (iii) export certificates.

Victoria Prentis:

To support industry with the new requirements introduced following the end of the Transition Period, Defra has introduced contact centres to directly support businesses. The two main services managed by the department are Export Health Certificates, led by the Animal Plant and Health Agency (APHA), and Catch Certificates, led by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

APHA does not hold a breakdown of calls received relating to queries about seafood exports specifically. The information requested is therefore not available.

For Catch Certificates, a 24/7 helpline has been introduced to support exporters in obtaining a digital catch certificate. There have been 273 calls to this helpline since 1 January 2021 and no geographical location of the caller is recorded. 204 of these calls relate to the categories requested:

1. 201 were recorded as calls relating to the fishing industry
2. No calls recorded the MMO "Catch App" as the reason for the call
3. 3 calls were identified as being in relation to export health certificates

179 of the calls received were to assist users in applying for digital catch certificates. The reason for the calls are set out below:

TOPIC	VOLUME
Queries about the Catch Certificate service	99
Catch Certificate system registration or account management issue	16
Queries relating to failed validation checks on the Catch Certificate online system	15
Assisted digital support for the Catch Certificate online system	8
Other Catch Certificate queries	41

■ Fishing Catches**Sir John Hayes:****[138381]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what proportion of fish caught in UK waters were caught by supertrawlers in each of the last five years.

Victoria Prentis:

Information on the landings for the 11 non-UK registered vessels over 100 metres in overall length, that have fished in UK waters in the last 5 years, is held by their flag State. We cannot provide the information in relation to the UK's only registered vessel

that is over 100 metres in overall length as this would breach data protection legislation.

■ Flood Control

Stephanie Peacock:

[140233]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to convene an emergency flood summit before a major flood event to ensure that adequate resources are available to (a) local authorities and (b) the Environment Agency in order to protect communities.

Rebecca Pow:

There are currently no plans to convene an emergency flood summit before a major flood event. As part of our ongoing preparedness work for flooding, the department engages across Government to understand and mitigate risks that flooding may pose.

In anticipation of a major flood event, Defra facilitates continuous cross-Government situational awareness and rapid coordination of the central Government response. This aids effective decision making in a significant flooding emergency.

To ensure adequate resources are available, we have committed to review local government funding for local statutory flood and coastal erosion risk management functions to ensure it is fair and matches the needs and resources of local areas. We want to make the funding framework for local government funding simpler, more up to date and more transparent.

Flood funding is part of the overall local government settlement and 2020-21 saw the biggest year-on-year increase in the overall settlement for over ten years, an average 4.4% real terms increase. As set out at the Spending Review, we will be making an additional £2.2 billion available to local government to deliver local services.

The Environment Agency (EA) is prepared to take action this winter wherever it is needed. The EA has 40 kilometres of metal frame temporary barriers, which can be delivered anywhere in the country within 12 hours, providing additional protection to locations where there are no permanent defences or where forecast river levels could overtop existing defences. The EA also has 250 high volume pumps available and 6,500 trained staff across the country, including 314 trained flood support officers. In addition, the EA has trained its contractors to be on hand to support local incident teams preparing for and responding to flooding across England. The EA routinely trains the Army civil contingency battalions as they rotate to ensure additional trained support is available to help deploy barriers should a major incident occur.

Through its communications, including social media, the EA has been encouraging residents and business to sign up to its free flood alert service so they can Prepare, Act and Survive. As of 8 January 2021, there were over 1.52 million properties in England signed up to the EA's free flood warning service, which sends a message directly by voice message, text or email when a flood warning is issued.

■ Marine Environment: Fisheries

Sir John Hayes:

[\[138378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on marine life of sea scraping by industrial trawlers.

Victoria Prentis:

The impacts of all fishing activities are taken into account when we assess the status of UK seas and set targets to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) under the UK Marine Strategy. Our last assessment, carried out in 2019 under Part One of the Strategy, showed that commercial fishing is one of the predominant pressures preventing GES of UK seas, in particular some seabed habitats, from being achieved. To help address this we committed to assessing the feasibility of setting up a partnership working group with key stakeholders to identify solutions for potential fishing impacts on seabed integrity.

Work is also currently underway to update Part Three of the Strategy, which sets out the programmes and measures we are taking in our waters to help us move towards or maintain GES. Included as part of these measures will be the new Fisheries Act which now allows UK Authorities to manage fishing activity in our waters and will help to achieve the UK's vision of a clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse ocean and seas. In addition, the Act will allow fisheries management measures in our offshore Marine Protected Areas to be taken forward.

■ Marine Protected Areas: Fisheries

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[139997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the environmental effect of bottom trawling in UK Marine Protected Areas.

Rebecca Pow:

Marine protection is a devolved matter and the information provided relates to England only.

We have made good progress in implementing management measures within our inshore Marine Protected Areas. Following assessments of the impact of fishing activity, vulnerable species and habitats in over 90 Marine Protected Areas are now protected from bottom towed fishing gear.

Until recently, the Common Fisheries Policy had restricted our ability to implement fisheries management measures within offshore Marine Protected Areas. The Fisheries Act 2020 includes a new power to allow the introduction of byelaws for conservation purposes in offshore waters and we will make rapid progress this year in protecting more sites.

In October, the Marine Management Organisation launched a call for evidence to inform the management decisions for four offshore Marine Protected Areas. The

evidence provided during this process will help shape and inform options ahead of formal consultation on byelaws early in 2021.

■ Marine Protected Areas: Territorial Waters

Sir John Hayes:

[\[138379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating protected spaces in UK waters in which fishing is prohibited.

Rebecca Pow:

Marine protection is a devolved matter and the information below relates to England only.

Last year the Government commissioned an independent review (the Benyon Review) of whether Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) should be introduced into Secretary of State waters. The Government welcomes the report and recognises the potential role of HPMAs in securing our vision to leave the environment in a better state than which we found it. On 20th July 2020 the Secretary of State gave a speech on environmental recovery and stated his intention to pilot HPMAs. The Government will soon be publishing its response to the Review.

Whilst the Government is considering HPMAs, we have an existing network of Marine Protected Areas already in place covering 40% of English waters. We are focused on ensuring that these sites are protected properly from fishing activity, with over 90 inshore sites protected from bottom towed fishing gear. Whilst our ability to manage fishing within our offshore sites was restricted under the Common Fisheries Policy, we aim to make rapid progress this year using a new byelaw power in the Fisheries Act 2020. The Marine Management Organisation will soon be consulting on byelaws to manage fishing within four offshore Marine Protected Areas.

■ Members: Correspondence

Matthew Pennycook:

[\[137988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich of 12 October 2020, originally addressed to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on the approach of property insurers to mature trees in close proximity to homes that require underpinning to prevent or correct subsidence, ref 9602865.

Rebecca Pow:

Defra declined the transfer of this correspondence. It is currently with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to respond.

■ Pesticides: Rivers

Sarah Olney:

[140231]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the report entitled Potential role of veterinary flea products in widespread pesticide contamination of English rivers, published in the Science of the Total Environment Journal in January 2021, what steps he is taking to prevent toxic insecticides contaminating rivers across England.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and the Environment Agency (EA) are working closely together to improve our understanding of the risks posed by chemicals in the water environment and to respond appropriately. This includes EA monitoring of rivers for insecticides and other pesticides to enable us to identify and act upon any emerging issues associated with their use and occurrence in the environment.

Parasiticides are used in veterinary medicines for the treatment of fleas and ticks on cats and dogs. It is possible that following their use, some parasiticides may reach the aquatic environment. However, the environmental exposure assessments conducted for such flea products consider the exposure of the aquatic environment to be acceptably low. Recent research has estimated that the contribution of veterinary medicine parasiticides to the levels of these chemicals of concern in UK waterways to be less than 3% of the total. Such products are accompanied by advice, to users, to keep treated animals out of watercourses for 2 to 4 days after treatment and to avoid washing products off into the sewage system. Therefore, existing steps are taken to reduce the exposure of the environment from parasiticides used to treated animals. We urge people to continue to follow the manufacturer's instructions on the safe use and disposal of all veterinary products, including flea treatment products, and their packaging.

Due to concerns and uncertainties raised by previous research and monitoring data, the VMD commissioned research in 2019 to investigate the potential environmental exposure pathways for flea and tick products. This work aims to assess the significance of their use as veterinary medicines on the aquatic environment. This research is due to be completed in March 2023. In addition, parasiticides may also enter the environment from several other sources such as ant/cockroach/fly bait products, products used in greenhouses, and possibly from products used to protect wool, cotton and synthetic materials. The relevance of these exposure routes is yet to be elucidated.

Pending the findings from this commissioned research, and other available evidence, currently the VMD does not intend to change the existing regulatory controls on veterinary medicines, including the use of flea treatments for pets and the existing risk mitigation warnings, which protect animal health, human health and the environment.

Defra will continue to consider the scientific evidence to inform any policy decisions or other interventions.

■ **Plastics: Waste**

Helen Hayes: **[137254]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the amount of plastic waste (a) exported to non-OECD countries by the UK in each year since 2016 and (b) that will be exported to non-OECD countries by the UK in 2021.

Rebecca Pow:

The UK Government has pledged to ban the export of all plastic waste to non-OECD countries and to introduce tougher controls on waste exports, including mandatory electronic waste tracking which will make it harder for criminals to obtain and export waste illegally.

Defra has commissioned research to determine the environmental, economic and social impacts of the ban on exports of plastic waste to non-OECD countries and analyse policy options around implementation of the ban. This research project will commence shortly and will examine plastic waste recycling capacity in the UK and OECD, it will also assess future UK plastic waste arisings and the impact of national, regional and international policies on UK plastic waste shipments.

The UK exports of plastic waste to non-OECD countries from 2016 onwards are illustrated in the table below:

(Source: HMRC)

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Quantity Exported (tonnes)	52,080	171,480	356,412	479,748	635,908

Information on exports of all wastes are gathered and published by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and can be accessed here:

<https://www.uktradeinfo.com/trade-data/ots-custom-table/>

■ **Primary Education: Air Pollution**

Mr Barry Sheerman: **[137123]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on providing support to primary schools for air quality level monitoring.

Rebecca Pow:

In delivering against our ambitious air quality commitments, Defra regularly holds discussions with Ministers and officials across Government departments.

Local authorities have statutory duties to review and assess local air quality and, where appropriate, declare Air Quality Management Areas and put in place action plans to address local pollution issues. Defra provides guidance and support to local authorities on local monitoring.

Positioning of local monitors is determined by local authorities and expected to be in line with national and local priorities, which may include schools and other locations where there is high risk of public exposure to air pollutants.

Local authorities are expected to cover the costs of their monitoring through their Grant in Aid funding allocation. In addition, over £1 million of Defra's 2018/19 Air Quality Grant was reserved for local authorities to pilot and evaluate low cost sensors, including £180,000 which was awarded to Islington Borough Council, Slough Borough Council and Wakefield Metropolitan District Council to undertake projects focused on monitoring air quality in and around schools.

■ Roads: Litter**Lee Rowley:****[137293]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to help reduce and discourage littering on roads and major highways.

Rebecca Pow:

In the 2017 Litter Strategy, the Government set out a number of commitments to tackle roadside litter through education, improved infrastructure and enforcement.

We have already given councils new powers to hold the keeper of a vehicle responsible for litter thrown from it by issuing a civil penalty, carried out a pilot survey of roadside cleanliness on those parts of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) which are litter-picked by local authorities and engaged over 100 of those authorities in research to explore associated issues, challenges and good practice.

We expect to publish a report on our findings later this year. This work is ongoing and will also support future updates to the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse.

On other parts of the SRN the responsibility for cleansing lies with Highways England, who have committed to their vision of a network predominantly free from litter, without compromising safety and delivered affordably, in their own Litter Strategy, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/highways-england-litter-strategy>

We will continue to promote anti-littering messages where possible, as we have done recently via social media and dedicated campaigns such as 'Respect the Outdoors'.

On behalf of Defra and MHCLG, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) have recently published guidance for local authorities and Business Improvement Districts in England on the provision of litter bins, which includes a

section on 'Highways, laybys and rest stops'. We are also making £2 million available in the form of grants to local authorities to improve the provision of litter bins.

The Right Bin in the Right Place guidance is available at <https://wrap.org.uk/content/bininfrastructure-right-bin-right-place>.

■ Waste Disposal: Air Pollution

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[137124]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to provide support to local authorities for ensuring that air quality on the routes of refuse collectors across local authorities is monitored; and what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on further support for local authorities with refuse fleets with air quality monitors.

Rebecca Pow:

The Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) regime requires that local authorities assess air quality in their area and take appropriate steps when an issue is identified.

The siting of air quality monitors is determined by local authorities in light of local conditions and in line with our statutory guidance. Defra provides guidance and support to local authorities to assist them in meeting these LAQM responsibilities. In addition, Defra has a national network of air quality monitors, the 'Automatic Urban and Rural Network' (AURN), currently comprising 270 sites across the UK. The number and positioning of AURN monitoring sites is in accordance with criteria set out in Air Quality Standards Regulation 2010.

Local authorities receive grant in aid to cover their local air quality management duties. Defra's air quality grant programme provides additional funding to local authorities for projects in local communities to tackle air pollution.

In delivering against our ambitious air quality commitments, we regularly hold discussions with Ministers and officials across Government departments, including the Department for Transport.

■ Wholesale Trade: Coronavirus

Carolyn Harris:

[138473]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the level of excess stock accumulated by wholesalers as a result of (a) covid-19 restrictions, (b) the UK leaving the EU and (c) the changes to Christmas 2020 covid-19 lockdown restrictions; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Prentis:

We are aware of the challenges faced by the wholesale sector, and the foodservice wholesale sector in particular, due to Covid-19 restrictions, including the closure of hospitality venues and schools. Officials in Defra have been working closely with the wholesale sector to understand the scale of the challenge and to ensure the Government is aware of the impact, including the implication of excess stock. We will

continue to assess the support needs of the food industry to inform policy, both in response to the increased spread of Covid-19 and the beginning of our new trading relationship with the EU.

The Government has made a range of support available to wholesalers including (but not limited to) the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, and eligibility to apply for support from the Additional Restrictions Grant. In addition, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme enables wholesalers to furlough staff, and this scheme will now remain open until the end of April 2021.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **Alexei Navalny**

Dr Julian Lewis:

[140729]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for UK relations with Russia of the recording of alleged dialogue between Alexei Navalny and Konstantin Kudryavtsev on a failed assassination attempt, published by Bellingcat on 21 December 2020.

Wendy Morton:

The recording of an alleged dialogue between Alexei Navalny and Konstantin Kudryavtsev, published by Bellingcat on 21 December 2020, underlines the need for the Russian authorities to undertake a thorough and transparent investigation into Mr Navalny's poisoning with a banned chemical weapon. The UK has been clear that Russia has a case to answer and that there is currently no other plausible explanation for Mr Navalny's poisoning other than Russian involvement and responsibility.

Any use of a chemical weapon is unacceptable. All States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), including Russia, are obliged to observe the Convention's complete prohibition of development, possession and use of chemical weapons as set out in the CWC. We have worked with international partners at the OPCW to call on Russia to investigate and credibly explain the use of a chemical weapon on its territory in line with its commitments under the CWC. So far, Russia has failed to do so. We will continue to work with international partners on our response to this attack.

The confirmed use of a chemical weapon against Mr Navalny and his latest detention further undermine democracy and political plurality in Russia.

We urge Russia to fulfil its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and all other relevant instruments of the Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and to guarantee these rights, including the right to freedom of expression, to its citizens.

The current relationship with Russia is not the one we want. But there can be no normalisation in our bilateral relationship until Russia stops its irresponsible and destabilising activity that threatens the UK and its allies.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Travel Restrictions**

Sarah Olney:

[\[140232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with his European counterparts on amending covid-19 travel restrictions to allow UK citizens to travel to continue courses of IVF already begun overseas.

Wendy Morton:

Covid-19 border restrictions continue to be in force across Europe. Under an EU Recommendation on travel restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, only essential travel may take place from the UK to EU Member States. British Citizens looking to travel should consult the relevant Member State authorities for information on the rules that will apply to them, including entry requirements. We are in regular touch with our European counterparts on public health measures at the border. Current guidance in the UK is for people not to travel abroad unless you have a legally permitted reason to do so.

■ **British Virgin Islands: Companies**

Stephen Doughty:

[\[140104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether registers of beneficial ownership will form part of the investigations of his Department's Commission of Inquiry into governance in the British Virgin Islands.

Nigel Adams:

The Commission of Inquiry has been established by the Governor of the British Virgin Islands rather than the UK Government. The Governor's decision has the full support of UK Ministers.

The Governor has established the Commission's Terms of Reference as:

- to establish whether there is information that corruption, abuse of office or other serious dishonesty in relation to officials, whether statutory, elected or public may have taken place in recent years;
- if there is such information, to consider the conditions which allowed that corruption, abuse of office or other serious dishonesty to take place and whether they may still exist;
- if appropriate, to make independent recommendations with a view to improving the standards of governance, to give the people of the Virgin Islands confidence that government is working in a fair, transparent and proper manner;
- if appropriate, to make independent recommendations with a view to improving the operation of the agencies of law enforcement and justice;

- should the Commissioner at any time consider that a change to these terms of reference would be beneficial to public welfare in achieving the objectives of the Inquiry, to inform the then Governor of the Virgin Islands at the first opportunity; and
- to prepare and submit a written report to the then Governor of the Virgin Islands within six (6) months from the commencement of the Inquiry, making all such recommendations as seem fit provided that the Governor may extend the period for submission of the report to a period no longer than 9 months from the date of the Inquiry.

It will be for the Commissioner, Sir Gary Hickinbottom, to determine how best to carry out these Terms.

■ **Coronavirus: Disease Control**

Stephen Doughty:

[140102]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what (a) logistical and (b) financial support the Government is providing to medical research programmes to enable the surveillance of covid-19 variants in (i) Sub-Saharan Africa and (ii) globally.

Wendy Morton:

The UK Government takes the global emergence of new variants of Sars-COV-2, the virus causing COVID-19, extremely seriously. While the FCDO is not funding stand-alone surveillance programmes on the new variants, our core support to existing research programmes is helping to provide critical new knowledge on the new variants. This includes additional funding of £23 million, right from the start of the pandemic, to the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) which included work on the development of a sequencing assay for surveillance. FIND are also testing whether new mutations are of concern for routine diagnostics.

Through our support to the Joint Initiative on Research for Epidemic Preparedness of up to £30 million, in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust, the FCDO is supporting the Africa Centre for Disease Control for diagnostics support and training for countries, which includes sequencing. The FCDO is also providing up to £20 million to the African Union COVID-19 response through the Tackling Deadly Diseases in Africa Programme, which includes support to genomic surveillance, including sequencing reagents, and machines. The FCDO also provides core support of £8.3 million to the World Health Organisation (WHO) R&D Blueprint Programme which recently convened an international meeting of scientists around the globe to discuss critical knowledge gaps related to the new variants.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[139105]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department is holding with stakeholders to help ensure equality of global access to covid-19 vaccines.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is committed to rapid equitable access to safe and effective vaccines, and has committed £548 million to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), an international initiative managed by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to support global equitable access to vaccines. This puts the UK among the COVAX AMC's largest bilateral donors. Our commitment will contribute to the supply of 1 billion doses to COVID-19 vaccines in up to 92 developing countries in 2021, vaccinating up to 500 million people. The AMC aims to start deliveries in the first quarter of 2021. The UK regularly engages with stakeholders on COVAX through its governance mechanisms, including the UK's seat on the Gavi Board.

The UK is also a founding member of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, a coalition of leading international organisations and partners, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), to drive accelerated development and access to new COVID-19 vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics. COVAX is the vaccine pillar of the ACT-Accelerator. The UK is represented on the ACT-Accelerator Facilitation Council, and regularly engages with partners and stakeholders on strategic direction, resource mobilisation, and implementation. The UK has committed up to £813 million to ACT-Accelerator partners, including the COVAX AMC.

■ Cuba: USA

Grahame Morris:

[140774]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to his US counterpart to encourage the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba.

Wendy Morton:

We regularly discuss a range of issues of mutual interest, including Cuba, with our US counterparts, and this will continue with the new US administration. The United Kingdom has repeatedly made clear that it opposes the US embargo against Cuba, which we see as counterproductive. The UK considers the extraterritorial effects of the embargo, in particular those stemming from the activation of Titles III and IV of the Helms Burton Act, to be illegal under international law. We look forward to discussing the situation in Cuba with the new US Administration, and sharing thoughts on the positive developments in the UK's relationship with Cuba in recent years.

■ Diplomatic Service: Brussels

Catherine West:

[\[140896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many British diplomatic staff were based in Brussels on (a) 1 January 2019 and (b) 20 January 2021.

Nigel Adams:

For security reasons, the FCDO provides headcount detail in bands using available data from the last calendar day of the month.

As at 31st December 2018, the UK based Diplomatic headcount in Brussels was 140-159.

As at 31st December 2020, the UK based Diplomatic headcount in Brussels was 120-139.

Data includes headcount for the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office only in Brussels Embassy, Corporate Services Benelux, UK Joint Delegation to NATO & UK Mission to the European Union

■ Disease Control: Overseas Aid

Stephen Doughty:

[\[139006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much support the UK provided to global disease surveillance in each of the last five years, (a) bilaterally and (b) multilaterally.

Stephen Doughty:

[\[139007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much support the UK provided to disease surveillance in sub-Saharan Africa in each of the last five years (a) bilaterally and (b) multilaterally.

Wendy Morton:

Infectious disease surveillance is critical for global health security. The UK supports global efforts to strengthen surveillance through multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

At the country and regional levels, our country-based health system strengthening programmes, the International Health Regulations Strengthening Project, the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team and the Tackling Deadly Diseases in Africa Programme, support improvements in surveillance capacity in the Africa region. This includes working with the African Union's Centres for Disease Control and WHO's Africa Regional Office. The UK also supports low and middle-income countries through the Fleming Fund to improve surveillance of antimicrobial resistance.

The UK reports Official Development Assistance (ODA) spend using standard OECD Development Assistance Committee codes, which do not track how much ODA is spent on disease surveillance specifically.

■ Greenland: Overseas Trade

Angus Brendan MacNeil:

[\[140760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment has made of the implications for diplomatic relations with Greenland of products of Greenlandic origin no longer being eligible for tariff-free access for import to the UK.

Wendy Morton:

The UK-Greenland bilateral relationship is important and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office continues to work across Whitehall and with Greenlandic counterparts to ensure it continues to flourish and supports our mutual interests. The UK-Greenland Trade relationship is a key part of that and one on which businesses in the seafood industry in both countries depend. We welcome continued engagement with Greenland and are considering options to ensure a prosperous trading relationship in the future.

■ Health: Overseas Aid

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[139098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much Official Development Assistance his Department plans to allocate to global health projects in 2021.

Wendy Morton:

The impact of COVID-19 on the UK economy has required us to take the difficult but necessary decision to reduce the overall amount we spend on Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, global health remains one of the UK's ODA priorities, focusing on overcoming COVID-19 and supporting healthier and more resilient populations in developing countries.

The Foreign Secretary is currently leading a review of cross-government ODA spend for 21/22, the outcome of which will be announced in due course.

■ Iran: Politics and Government

Ruth Jones:

[\[140262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he last had discussions with his Iranian counterpart; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly:

The Foreign Secretary speaks regularly with Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif. He and his officials take every opportunity to discuss with Iran a wide range of issues, including nuclear non-compliance, regional stability and security, the release of our dual-nationals and Iranian human rights violations. The Foreign Secretary participated in a JCPoA ministerial meeting alongside the Iranian Foreign Minister,

and other JCPoA participants on 21 December. The Joint Ministerial Statement following that meeting has been published on the Government's website.

■ **Iraq: Kurds**

Robert Halfon:

[\[140046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential role of the UN in assisting the federal and regional governments of Iraq to support (a) resolution of the status of disputed territories in Iraq and (b) a budget deal and a revenue-sharing agreement between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal government.

James Cleverly:

We work closely with the UN and international partners to encourage the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to resolve their issues, including on a sustainable budget and disputed internal boundaries. The recent agreement on Sinjar, which the UN supported, is a positive step in this regard. I discussed these issues with the Governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq during my visit in December 2020.

■ **Jonathan Taylor**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[140871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to reports that the arrest warrant has been withdrawn in relation to whistleblower Jonathan Taylor, whether he has had discussions with the Monegasque Authorities on the status of relevant extradition proceedings.

Wendy Morton:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office were informed on 23 December 2020 that Monaco has not withdrawn its extradition request for Jonathan Taylor. I raised Mr Taylor's case in a call with the Monegasque Foreign Minister and sought assurances that they are giving full consideration to what protections Mr Taylor should be provided with as a whistle-blower and the need for a fair trial. Our Embassy in Paris has also raised Mr Taylor's case on with the Monegasque embassy in Paris.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[140872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to the Monegasque Authorities to encourage their withdrawal of the extradition request in relation to UK whistleblower Jonathan Taylor.

Wendy Morton:

As set out in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, we cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, or bypass their laws, just as we would not accept similar interference here. As part of our consular assistance to British nationals overseas we can raise concerns about individuals on diplomatic channels. I raised Mr

Taylor's case with the Foreign Ministers of Croatia and Monaco to seek assurances that he would be treated fairly.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[140873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support his Department and the UK consulate in Croatia are providing to whistleblower Jonathan Taylor in response to the Croatian courts' upholding of the extradition request of which he is the subject.

Wendy Morton:

I raised Mr Taylor's case with the Foreign Ministers of Croatia and Monaco to seek assurances that he would be treated fairly. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) officials are providing ongoing consular support to Mr Taylor and his family. Consular staff have been in regular contact with Mr Taylor. The British Ambassador in Zagreb has also met Mr Taylor and his wife to discuss with them their concerns and explain the FCDO's consular functions.

■ **Kurds: Diplomatic Service**

Robert Halfon:

[\[140045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many (a) Departmental staff and (b) local staff are employed in the UK Consulate-General for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and northern Iraq.

James Cleverly:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has fewer than 10 UK Based Staff and fewer than 10 Country Based Staff working in the UK Consulate-General for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Northern Iraq.

■ **Kurds: Embassies**

Robert Halfon:

[\[140044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the suitability of the existing premises for the UK Consulate-General for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and northern Iraq.

James Cleverly:

The Consulate-General Erbil provides an effective platform for delivering our objectives in conjunction with the Embassy in Baghdad. The FCDO regularly reviews whether the existing premises meet HMG needs and provide value for money. Our physical footprint has remained in one location since 2015 throughout periods of regional instability and provides a fit for purpose and secure diplomatic presence.

■ Kurds: Foreign Relations

Robert Halfon:

[\[140043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the policy priorities are of the UK Consulate-General for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and northern Iraq.

James Cleverly:

The UK supports a strong and successful Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) within a thriving Iraq. During my December visit to Erbil, I discussed the mutual desire to deepen the UK-KRI partnership with the leadership of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The UK looks forward to continued close engagement with the KRG as a critical and valued partner in the region; progressing security cooperation, increasing our business links, and supporting sustainable economic reform that delivers for all Iraqis.

■ Overseas Aid

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[\[140169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what financial impact assessment his Department has made for each country of the Government decision to reduce the aid budget announced in the Spending Review 2020.

James Cleverly:

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 ODA spend next year, notwithstanding the difficult financial pressures faced.

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

■ Russia: Sanctions

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[\[140170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to impose sanctions as a result of the Russian Federation's (a) alleged poisoning and (b) imprisoning of opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

Wendy Morton:

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned by the politically motivated detention of Alexei Navalny and calls for a full and transparent criminal investigation into Mr Navalny's poisoning, and for his immediate and unconditional release.

On 15 October 2020 the UK enforced asset freezes and travel bans against six individuals and an entity involved in the poisoning and attempted murder of Mr Navalny under the EU's chemical weapons sanctions regime. These listings included senior representatives of the Russian government and the Director of the FSB.

Following the end of the Transition Period, these individuals and entity are now designated under the UK autonomous Chemical Weapons regime.

The UK continues to work to protect and promote human rights and support civil society in Russia. We are considering all options for further action. We will continue to work with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and all of our international partners to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention and to hold Russia to account.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[\[140171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to introduce sanctions in relation to Nordstream 2.

Wendy Morton:

The UK remains concerned about the impact Nord Stream 2 will have on European energy security and particularly on the interests of Ukraine. Our focus continues to be supporting resilient European energy markets, including measures that strengthen and diversify gas supply and competition. There are currently no autonomous UK sanctions being imposed with respect to Nord Stream 2. We do not speculate on future designations.

The UK has played a leading role in international sanctions against Russia since 2014 following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and continued destabilisation of Ukraine.

■ Saudi Arabia: Detainees

Afzal Khan:

[\[140929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2020 to Question 91984 on Saudi Arabia: Detainees, what recent steps he has taken to secure the release of human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia.

James Cleverly:

FCDO Ministers, our Ambassador and Embassy officials in Riyadh frequently raise concerns over the continued detention of human rights defenders, at senior levels with the Saudi authorities. We press for due process, and raise concerns about the use of solitary confinement, lack of family contact and allegations of torture.

The UK, along with other Embassies in Saudi Arabia, consistently attempts to attend the trials of political detainees. On 29 November, the UK Ambassador for Human Rights and six European counterparts released a joint statement reiterating our call for the release of all political detainees. The UK has consistently called for the release of women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, and we will continue to do so. We hope to see Loujain Al Hathloul reunited with her family as soon as possible.

■ Sri Lanka: Water

Afzal Khan:

[140930]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the water quality in the Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka and its effect on the Tamil community.

Nigel Adams:

The UK government is aware of the challenges Sri Lanka faces around water management and quality and the unique challenges faced by communities in Northern Sri Lanka. Staff at the British High Commission in Colombo raised the issue of water quality during a visit to the North in July 2020. The Minister of State for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, also discussed this issue with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to the UK in December.

A number of public bodies in Sri Lanka, including the national water supply and drainage board, have conducted tests and compensation has been offered to those affected by water pollution caused by the Chunnakam Power plant. We will continue to engage with the authorities in support of clean water provision.

■ Sub-saharan Africa: Drugs

Stephen Doughty:

[139008]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the provision of pharmaceutical cold-chain capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

James Duddridge:

The UK is committed to improving access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and other essential health commodities in low- and lower-middle income countries. This includes both strengthening country health systems, and ensuring that new vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics are appropriate for settings such as rural areas, with limited health services and infrastructure. The UK's £1.65 billion commitment to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance over five years includes support to strengthen vaccine supply chains and improve cold chain technologies. Our support to public-private partnerships such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) includes developing stable vaccines that can be distributed through immunisation cold chains or without refrigeration.

■ Tanzania: Overseas Aid

Stephen Doughty:

[140105]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the response of the Government of Tanzania to the covid-19 pandemic; and what support the Government is providing to that country.

James Duddridge:

We are concerned that the Government of Tanzania has not released any information on the numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths since 29 April 2020. The British High Commission in Dar es Salaam continues to engage with the Government of Tanzania to encourage greater transparency. We are supporting measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to protect those living in and visiting Tanzania. This has included using radio stations to put out messages on hand-washing and social distancing, through our sanitation and hygiene campaign managed by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

The FCDO continues to advise against non-essential travel to Tanzania as part of our global travel advisory during the pandemic. All travel advice is under constant review, in consultation with Public Health England, the National Travel Health Network and Centre and our overseas Posts.

■ Uganda: Overseas Aid**Alex Davies-Jones:**[\[140322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on Uganda of the decision to reduce the funding allocated to the Official Development Assistance budget.

James Duddridge:

The seismic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the UK economy has forced us to take tough but necessary decisions, including temporarily reducing the overall amount we spend on ODA.

ODA allocations for the 2021-22 financial year have not yet been made. These will be decided through a rigorous business planning and budget allocation process in early 2021.

■ West Bank: Demolition**Dr Philippa Whitford:**[\[140823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to make representations to the Government of Israel on the demolition or seizure of at least 114 EU-funded structures provided as humanitarian assistance to Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

Dr Philippa Whitford:[\[140824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he plans to take to tackle the (a) increase in the demolition of Palestinian property and (b) subsequent displacement of 524 Palestinian children in 2020.

James Cleverly:

The UK is concerned by the continued demolitions of Palestinian property and infrastructure by Israeli authorities. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances

demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and is harmful to the peace process.

The UK regularly raises demolitions with the Government of Israel. I raised my concerns about demolitions of Palestinian and humanitarian structures with the Israeli Ambassador on 29 October 2020, and the UK Ambassador to Israel outlined the UK's position to the Israeli Authorities in Jerusalem on the same day. UK senior officials raised demolitions with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 10 November 2020. The UK also urged the Government of Israel to end demolitions of property in the West Bank at the UN Security Council on 21 December 2020. UK officials from the British Consulate in Jerusalem have made regular visits to areas at risk of demolition and eviction to reiterate UK support for those communities, including to Khan al Ahmar on 20 November, Givat Hamatos on 22 October, the South Hebron Hills on 19 October, and Ras al Tin on 16 October. We are focused on preventing demolitions from happening in the first place through our legal aid programme, which supports Bedouin communities and Palestinians facing demolition or home eviction in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We continue to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and permitting in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such processes.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Antenatal Care: Standards

Tulip Siddiq:

[\[140891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of antenatal care specifically in relation to the event of a miscarriage.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

In the event of a miscarriage, we expect clinicians to follow the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on Ectopic pregnancy and miscarriage: diagnosis and initial management NG126 to ensure women are supported sensitively, taking into account their individual circumstances and emotional response to limit the psychological impact of their loss.

■ Care Homes: Coronavirus

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[115505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to encourage care homes to ease covid-19 restrictions on family visitation over Christmas where possible to do so safely.

Helen Whately:

Over the Christmas period, visitors in tiers 1-3 were able to continue with indoor visits to their loved ones in care homes, facilitated by the provision of lateral flow testing

and continued PPE use. In tier 4, while regular indoor visits were not possible, visits were able to continue in both outdoor settings and indoor where substantial screens were in place.

■ Care Homes: Disease Control

Rachael Maskell:

[\[133951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make additional funding available for infection prevention control for care homes.

Helen Whately:

Through the Infection Control Fund the Government has provided over £1.1 billion of ring-fenced adult social care funding for infection prevention and control during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in addition to the £4.6 billion that the Government has made available to local authorities to address pressures on local services caused by the pandemic, including in adult social care. Additionally, on 23 December, the Government announced an additional £149 million to fund costs associated with increased testing, to help ensure the safety of staff and residents.

The Government will continue to monitor pressures on the sector and will keep future funding under review.

■ Care Homes: Insurance

Richard Fuller:

[\[137902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect on care homes of insurance companies refusing to provide insurance cover in relation to visits to care homes; and whether he has plans to publish an assessment on the effect of decisions made by insurance companies not to grant indemnity on care homes during the covid-19 pandemic.

Helen Whately:

We are aware that the adult social care insurance market is changing in response to the pandemic and recognise that some care providers may encounter difficulties as their policies come up for renewal. We are introducing temporary and targeted state-backed indemnity arrangements which will help fill gaps in commercial insurance cover and support care homes registered, or intending to register, as Designated Settings. These are care homes designated and assured by CQC for the discharge of COVID-19 positive individuals from hospitals.

■ Care Homes: Palliative Care

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[90026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the accuracy of reports by the Queen's Nursing Institute that one in ten care home staff were instructed to change resuscitation orders for patients without discussion with family members, nursing staff or patients; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

The Department is aware of the Queen's Nursing Institute report. There were 163 responses to the survey with 16 reporting some changes to standard Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) practice. The responses are anonymous and the Department is unable to comment on individual cases.

The Department asked the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to review how DNACPR decisions were used during the COVID-19 pandemic, building on concerns reported earlier in the year. The review will take a national view of how these decisions were made in and across different types of services including hospitals, primary care and care homes. The CQC is working closely with stakeholders, users of services and providers. Interim findings were published on 3 December, with a final report due in early 2021.

Coronavirus: Children**Andrew Gwynne:**[\[138895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to put support in place for people under the age of 18 with long covid.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 21 January 2021]: NHS England and NHS Improvement have provided a £10 million investment package to support people, including children and young people, with 'long' COVID-19. As part of the investment, 69 post-COVID-19 assessment service centres are operational across England. A further 12 assessment centres are expected to be available shortly. These clinics will be crucial in helping medical experts to assess, diagnose and treat thousands of people suffering the debilitating long-term consequences of the virus.

Coronavirus: Death**Steve Brine:**[\[133819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people under the age of 70 died from covid-19 within 28 days of a positive test in 2020.

Jo Churchill:

For the period 29 June 2020 to 4 January 2021, 4,618 people under the age of 70 years old died within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test in England.

The data prior to 29 June is not available in format requested.

Coronavirus: Disease Control**Ian Mearns:**[\[140049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the covid-19 lockdown restrictions announced in January 2021 permit travel from a person's main property to a second home or caravan, within a similar locality, where their home or caravan is suitably

distanced from other caravans and they would not require contact with anyone outside of their household while they were there.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Our guidance states that people cannot leave their home or the place where they are living for holidays or overnight stays without a reasonable excuse for doing so.

Holidays in the United Kingdom and abroad are not permitted. This includes staying in a second home or caravan, if that is not the primary residence.

■ **Coronavirus: Hospitals**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[138374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the total cost was of constructing the Nightingale hospitals.

Edward Argar:

NHS England and NHS Improvement are in the process of reviewing all spending incurred for each individual site. Until that work has concluded, estimates previously provided to the Department indicate that the set-up cost for the Nightingale hospitals would be approximately £220 million.

■ **Coronavirus: Ivermectin**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[135832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of prescribing ivermectin for reducing the (a) transmission or (b) severity of covid-19.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 14 January 2021]: The Therapeutics Taskforce is continuing to monitor any new, high quality evidence on COVID-19 therapeutics and has been following recent findings on ivermectin.

The Department has monitored a collection of small studies which have now completed and provided some positive signals on the use of ivermectin as a treatment for COVID-19. This is a promising step. However, larger-scale studies are still needed to confirm the effectiveness and safety of this treatment. The Therapeutics Taskforce is aware that several more studies into ivermectin are set to conclude in the next few months and will continue to monitor these ongoing trials to assess the evidence available on whether ivermectin reduces transmission and/or severity of COVID-19. The Department and its arm's length bodies are prepared to act rapidly should any trial readouts prove positive at a greater scale.

■ Coronavirus: Local Government

Kate Hollern:

[137945]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the (a) potential effect of long covid on the delivery of local authority services and (b) cost of that disease to local authorities.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: The Government has made no specific assessment. 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. The Government will continue to monitor pressures in the National Health Service and local government and will keep future funding under review.

■ Coronavirus: Mortality Rates

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[133907]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment the Government has made of the potential effect of poor nutritional status on mortality rates for covid-19.

Jo Churchill:

In 2020, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) conducted a rapid scoping exercise on nutrition and immune function in relation to COVID-19 and found a lack of robust evidence at this current time to suggest that specific nutrients or supplements can prevent individuals from catching COVID-19 or mitigate its effects. Their report is available at the following link:

<https://app.box.com/s/36j0gn01npxfjigimzogyomysd17l3hq>

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Public Health England and the SACN are continuing to monitor evidence as it is published.

■ Coronavirus: Nurseries

Jon Trickett:

[138384]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the (a) advice and (b) guidance provided by the (i) Chief Medical Officer and (ii) Public Health England on the decision to keep nurseries open during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Jon Trickett:

[138385]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the (a) advice and (b) guidance provided by the (i) Chief Medical Officer and (ii) Public Health England on the decision to allow house viewings to continue during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Chief Medical Officer and Public Health England have not provided specific advice with regards to nurseries remaining open or allowing house viewings in the current lockdown.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Paul Blomfield:**[\[137915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to produce and publish additional evidence on assessing the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca and Moderna covid-19 vaccines for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: There are currently no plans to produce and publish additional evidence regarding the use of COVID-19 vaccines on pregnant or breastfeeding women. It is recommended to that women affected should discuss whether to receive the vaccine with their doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Thangam Debbonaire:[\[138463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when social care providers will receive access to the £149 million grant to support the roll out of rapid lateral flow testing for covid-19 for residential care workers; and how that funding can be accessed.

Helen Whately:

On 23 December we announced £149 million to support the rollout of lateral flow testing in care homes. On 15 January, we announced the details of how this additional grant can be used to cover expenditure from 2 December 2020 to 31 March 2021. The grant will be paid to local authorities in a single instalment in January 2021.

Local authorities should pass 80% of this funding to care homes within their geographical area on a 'per beds' basis. The remaining 20% can be allocated at the local authority's discretion to support the care sector to implement increased lateral flow testing.

Simon Hoare:[\[139067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether Public Health England's findings that people with learning disabilities were three to six times more likely to die from covid-19 than the general population during the first wave of covid-19 was taken into account when developing the vaccine prioritisation policy.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is the independent expert advisory committee which advises the Government on vaccination. The JCVI reviewed data on COVID-19 mortality from OpenSAFELY, QCOVID and Public Health England (PHE). This included the PHE report on mortality in people with learning disabilities. After consideration of the evidence, the JCVI advised that people

with severe and profound learning disabilities and Down's syndrome should be offered vaccination in the first phase of the programme.

Ben Lake:

[\[140913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent progress he has made on monitoring the effectiveness of the (a) Pfizer/BioNTech and (b) Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccines on people who are immunocompromised.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Public Health England is monitoring the impact of COVID-19 vaccines on a broad range of outcomes including symptomatic disease, infection and hospitalisations as set out in the COVID-19 vaccine surveillance strategy

Vaccine effectiveness assessments are reported regularly to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to inform vaccine policy recommendations. This will include assessment of vaccine effectiveness in immunocompromised individuals using general practice's electronic health record data. Once sufficient evidence becomes available the JCVI will consider options for a protection strategy for immunosuppressed individuals, including whether any specific vaccine is preferred in this population.

■ **Disease Control: Protective Clothing**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[135859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the earliest date by which face coverings will no longer be (a) advised or (b) required to be worn in indoor public spaces by his Department.

Jo Churchill:

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place) (England) Regulations 2020 are set to remain in force until 24 July 2021 and these are kept under constant review. The Regulations also contain a review clause which means they must be reviewed before the end of six months from the date they came into force. This review is due to take place in advance of 24 January and will consider whether the requirements remain necessary and proportionate to protect public health and minimise the spread of COVID-19.

■ **Influenza: Protective Clothing**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[135857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the number of reported cases of flu in 2020 of the wearing of face coverings.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England has made no such assessment.

■ Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong**Sarah Owen:**[\[140286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will meet with the family of Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Due to significant diary pressures, we are unable to meet with the family of Mary Agyeiwaa Agyapong at this time.

The Government takes this issue seriously and is committed to ensuring the safety of pregnant women during the pandemic.

■ Maternity Services: Coronavirus**Justin Madders:**[\[140832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of women who (a) presented in labour, (b) attended an antenatal appointment and (c) were admitted to a postnatal ward (i) had already been confirmed as positive for covid-19 or (ii) received a positive result for a covid-19 test carried out as a part of their care in each region of England in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

This information is not held centrally.

■ Meat: Standards**Jonathan Edwards:**[\[135890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the value of the Food Standards Authority contract for veterinary controls of meat establishments in each of the last ten years.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 14 January 2021]: The following table shows the value of each contract for veterinary official controls in meat plants since 2012. Contract periods were tendered with slightly differing geographic and technical requirements and therefore a difference in costs is realised.

YEARS	CONTRACT VALUE	NOTES
2020-2023	£83,700,000	Includes sustainable profit margin, inflationary increase in charge rates for each of the three years of the fixed contract term, includes other activities such as FBO audits, dairy inspections and unannounced inspections. Contracts only cover England and Wales.
2017-2020	£69,000,000	Including additional funding, audits were not included in this contract. Contract only covered England and Wales.
2012-2017	£73,932,444	Fixed hours contracts. Audits were part of this contract until 2015. Contracts covered Scotland, England and Wales.

■ Members: Correspondence

Maria Eagle:

[\[139981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood dated 8 September 2020.

Edward Argar:

We replied to the hon. Member's letter on 20 January 2021.

■ Physiotherapy

Fleur Anderson:

[\[136075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the delivery of increased numbers of physiotherapists as set out in the NHS Long Term Plan.

Fleur Anderson:

[\[136076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help retain physiotherapists who have entered NHS employment temporarily from the private health sector during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 14 January 2021]: As part of the new funding package for healthcare students non-repayable, training grants of at least £5,000 per academic year are available to eligible new and continuing pre-registration physiotherapy students, studying at English universities. The indications are that the new financial support package has been a significant driver of demand and this year acceptances on physiotherapy courses have increased by 27% compared to the same time last year.

Health Education England is undertaking extensive allied health profession health careers work and is working with various stakeholders including the Office for Students and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy to raise the profile of physiotherapy careers. A survey of former healthcare professionals who have joined the Health and Care Professions Council temporary registers, including physiotherapists, indicated that around 50% across were interested in continuing to work in the health and social care system.

There are existing return to practice schemes designed to support physiotherapists who have been out of the workforce for a number of years to safely re-start their careers.

NHS England is working with the Department and other local employing organisations to consider a range of flexible options to make it easier for professionals, including physiotherapists, who are interested in re-joining the NHS workforce to do so. Since 2017, NHS England and NHS Improvement have supported trusts with an intensive retention support programme, which is reducing retention by working with trusts to help them address the reasons that staff have left.

■ Physiotherapy: Finance**Fleur Anderson:**[\[136645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what Government funding is available to physiotherapists who wish to train as first contact practitioners in general practice.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 18 January 2021]: Whilst the Government does not provide direct funding to allied health professionals to become first-contact practitioners, Health Education England is investing in the development of capability frameworks and credentials to support advanced practice across nursing, midwifery and allied health professions including physiotherapy.

In particular, it is supporting experienced physiotherapists to reach the capabilities necessary to practice as a first contact practitioner through education and training programmes and the offer of high-quality supervision.

HOME OFFICE

■ Arts: Work Permits

Conor McGinn:

[140843]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on work permits for creative workers since 24 December 2020.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport hold regular bilateral discussions on a range of policy issues at official and Ministerial level.

■ Assisted Voluntary Return Schemes

Jess Phillips:

[140129]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people have used the Assisted Voluntary Return service since it re-opened in July 2020.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office publishes data on returns in the '[Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'.

Data on the number of 'Voluntary returns' including 'Assisted returns' from the UK are published in Table Ret_01 of the [Returns summary tables](#). More detailed breakdowns of the data are available in the [Returns detailed datasets](#).

'Assisted returns' relate to those where people liable to removal from the UK, who wish to leave voluntarily, make an application to the Assisted Voluntary Returns Service.

The published statistics relate to the number of returns from the UK, and may not include all those who have used the voluntary return service (such as those who are awaiting a return, or who did not qualify for the service).

The latest data on returns relates to the year ending June 2020. The 'contents' sheet contains an overview of all available data on returns.

Figures on the number of people returned in the year ending September 2020 will be published on 25 February 2021.

Information on future Home Office statistical release dates can be found in the '[Research and statistics calendar](#)'.

■ Asylum

Caroline Lucas:

[140020]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are awaiting (a) an initial decision and (b) a further review of their claim for asylum; and what steps she is taking to ensure claims are assessed (i) fairly and (ii) within an appropriate timeframe.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office publishes data on the number asylum applications awaiting an initial decision or further review and can be found at Asy_04 of the published Immigration Statistics, Asylum applications awaiting a decision, by duration:

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

There are a number of factors that contribute to the length of time to process asylum claims but we are determined to clear the outstanding cases, speed up decisions and prevent people becoming stuck in the system for long periods of time.

We are working to streamline cases and have already made significant progress in prioritising cases with acute vulnerability, those in receipt of the greatest level of support including, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, and those that require a reconsideration.

Asylum Operations has developed a recovery plan focused on returning interviews and decisions back to pre-COVID-19 levels as soon as possible. We are also seeking to secure temporary resources to assist from within the Home Office and other government departments, along with other potential options. We are also progressing transformation plans and looks at ways to reform a broken system.

Caroline Lucas:**[140021]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has (a) identified and (b) made an assessment of asylum claimants from certain nationalities or groups who could be offered protection without the need for a lengthy interview process; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office carefully considers all asylum claims on a case by case basis, irrespective of their nationality or group, based on their individual merits, against a background of relevant case law and up to date country information.

In most asylum cases we will ask the claimant to complete a Preliminary Information Questionnaire (PIQ). Children who claim asylum are asked to complete a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF). The information contained in the PIQ (or SEF) will be used alongside all of the other evidence already held about the claim to help determine whether or not it is appropriate to omit an asylum interview.

The criteria for when a substantive asylum interview can be omitted are contained in Paragraph 339NA of the Immigration Rules and include cases where we are able to take a positive decision on the basis of evidence available, or if the claimant is unfit or unable to be interviewed owing to enduring circumstances beyond their control. It would be inappropriate to adopt a blanket approach to certain nationalities or groups because of the differing circumstances of each claim.

■ Asylum: Employment

Caroline Lucas: [140023]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether stakeholder views have been included in her Department's review of its policy on asylum-seekers' right to work; and when she plans to publish that review.

Caroline Lucas: [140025]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the potential additional tax revenues that would result from abolishing the restriction requiring asylum-seekers to only enter employment which is on the Shortage Occupation List.

Chris Philp:

Asylum seeker right to work is a complex issue. A review of the policy is ongoing, and we are considering the evidence put forward on the issue. The findings of the review will be announced once the work has been completed

Caroline Lucas: [140024]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people awaiting a decision on their asylum application have the right to work.

Chris Philp:

Asylum seekers can work in the UK if their claim has been outstanding for 12 months or more, through no fault of their own. Those allowed to work are restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List, which is published by the Home Office and based on expert advice from the Migration Advisory Committee.

The Home Office are unable to state how many people awaiting a decision on their asylum application have the right to work as this information is not held in a reportable format and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

The Home Office do publish data on the number asylum applications awaiting an initial decision or further review and can be found at Asy_04 of the published Immigration Statistics, Asylum applications awaiting a decision, by duration:

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

■ Asylum: Homelessness

Jess Phillips: [140128]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what safeguards are in place to ensure that people who have been refused asylum will not become homeless 21 days after receiving their cessation letter.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office took the decision to pause cessations of asylum support on 27 March 2020, so that asylum seekers whose cases were resolved and who would no

longer normally be eligible for asylum support would be able to remain in their accommodation and follow the public health guidance in place at that time.

Some “negative cessations” (where the person has been refused asylum and exhausted their appeal rights) resumed from September but were paused again in November following the imposition of stronger lockdown measures. These decisions currently remain paused pending consideration of the impact of the current coronavirus restrictions.

Failed asylum seekers have no basis of stay in the UK and are encouraged and supported to return to their countries of origin where appropriate. The Home Office will pay for the cost of their return home and provides generous reintegration assistance. Where there is a legitimate reason why a person who has been refused asylum cannot return to their country of origin, they can apply for further support from the Home Office under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Before taking any decision to resume negative cessations we will continue to work with and share our approach with Public Health authorities and will work within public health guidelines and legal advice.

■ Asylum: LGBT People

Caroline Lucas:

[140022]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the effect on the mental health of LGBT+ asylum applicants of (a) delays to asylum interviews and (b) the asylum interview process.

Chris Philp:

In respect to the time taken from registering a protection claim to the point of asylum interview, no assessment of the effect on the mental health of LGBT+ asylum applicants has been made.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the length of time to process asylum claims but we are determined to clear the backlog, speed up decisions and prevent people becoming stuck in the system for long periods of time. We have already made significant progress in prioritising cases with acute vulnerability.

Our published policy guidance on both the asylum interview process for all claimants and our policy guidance products specifically in respect to LGBT+ claims are currently being updated. Both policies have been considered in line with our Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in respect to LGBT+ individuals.

Our policy recognises that for applicants affirming an LGBT+ identity, they may not have spoken about intimate personal issues before and may have experienced hostile cultural, societal, familial and religious norms concerning the expression of LGBT+ identities in their home countries. This means it may be difficult for them to be open about their feelings, experiences and their fears of persecution during the interview process. Our policy, therefore, requires that account is taken of all relevant

factors when establishing the applicants claim including any health issues that may be raised.

We provide extensive training to our caseworkers to ensure they can sensitively explore an individual's sexual and/or gender identity and in considering how sexuality or a transgender identity can give rise to persecutory harm.

As part of our improvements to customer service, asylum interviews have been conducted via video conference (VC) from regional interview hubs since 2015. The suitability of a VC interview will be assessed using evidence submitted by the claimant or their legal representative prior to the interview, along with any ongoing or identified safeguarding concerns. Where a claimant is identified as being unsuitable for a VC interview because there are safeguarding concerns or factors that may prevent them from disclosing sensitive information, an in-person interview will be arranged.

Our interview process, irrespective of whether it is conducted by VC or face to face facilitates early signposting of safeguarding concerns to appropriate agencies who can support LGBT+ individuals and where medical evidence concerning an applicant's vulnerability is brought to our attention, any request to prioritise a case will be taken into account.

■ **Asylum: Military Bases**

Liz Saville Roberts:

[140892]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the covid-19 audit reports of the (a) Penally training camp, (b) Napier barracks and (c) hotels which are being used as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[140893]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the correspondence her Department has had with the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration regarding an inspection of (a) Penally training camp (b) Napier barracks.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[140894]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking in order to facilitate a comprehensive inspection of the temporary accommodation site for asylum seekers at the Penally training camp by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[140895]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what planning her Department has undertaken to provide contingency accommodation for asylum seekers beyond 2021.

Chris Philp:

As required by law, we provide asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute with accommodation, paid for by the taxpayer.

We welcome independent scrutiny and routinely facilitate inspections by the ICIBI or another relevant body.

The Department is responding to further preliminary enquiries made by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration but has not yet received a formal notice of inspection. Preliminary correspondence is not routinely published but the ICIBI may include relevant information in any final inspection report that is published on gov.uk.

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.

Our ambition is to house asylum seekers within the asylum estate without the need for contingency accommodation. We are working to address the issues putting pressure on our asylum accommodation.

■ Asylum: Napier Barracks

Holly Lynch: [\[140867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on how many calls have been made to Migrant Help from residents at Napier Barracks since it started being used as asylum accommodation.

Holly Lynch: [\[140868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the ratio is of bathrooms to residents at Napier Barracks.

Holly Lynch: [\[140869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers are currently being housed at Napier Barracks; and how many of those people have tested positive for covid-19 in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Chris Philp:

There are currently 381 asylum seekers accommodated at Napier Barracks, Kent.

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.

The accommodation at Napier has been arranged to allow for social distancing and Covid safety in line with public health advice. This includes limiting occupancy of

each dormitory to a maximum of 14 persons, with each dormitory effectively operating as a separate household on site.

There is a ratio of 1:5 showers, these are separate showers inside and in portable units. There is also a ratio of 1:5 toilets and additional urinals inside the blocks and separate toilet cubicles inside portable units.

The Home Office does not publish information on the number of telephone calls made to Migrant Help from asylum seekers. This not available in a reportable format and to provide the information could only be done at disproportionate cost.

■ **Borders: EU Countries**

Holly Lynch:

[139060]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the Government's planned timeframe is for the (a) consultation on and (b) publication of the proposed sovereign borders Bill.

Chris Philp:

The Home Secretary has set out the Government's ambition to overhaul our approach to asylum and illegal migration, delivering a firm but fair system, including bringing forward new legislation this year.

Any consultation that may take place will do so in line with established principles as well as taking into account any other relevant statutory duties.

■ **British Nationality**

Mr Alistair Carmichael:

[139994]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she has taken to open a review into citizenship-deprivation powers, as required by section 40B of the British Nationality Act 1981 and which her Department's 2018-19 report on Disruptive and Investigatory Powers described as anticipated to be conducted during 2019.

Chris Philp:

The first review of the power to deprive an individual of British citizenship under section 40(4A) of the British Nationality Act 1981, as provided for by section 40B of the Act, was conducted by David Anderson QC, Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation. His report was published in April 2016, (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/518120/David_Anderson_QC_-_CITIZENSHIP_REMOVAL_web_.pdf).

The next review of these powers will be commissioned once a suitable reviewer has been identified. To date the power in section 40(4A) has not been used.

■ Catalytic Converters: Theft**Sir Christopher Chope:****[139971]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many thefts of catalytic converters from hybrid vehicles have been reported in England in the last three month period for which information is available; and if she will make it the policy of the Government to restrict the ability of scrap dealers to trade in such converters.

Kit Malthouse:

Figures are not held on the number of thefts of catalytic converters from hybrid vehicles in England. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) collects data on incidents regarding theft from a vehicle, including details of the items stolen, such as car parts. From April 2019 to March 2020, an estimate of recorded household incidents from the CSEW shows that in 1.6% of incidents of theft from vehicles, a catalytic converter was stolen. The figures are published here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/adhocs/12496catalyticconvertersstoleninincidentsoftheftfromvehiclesyearendingmarch2015toyearendingmarch2020crimesurveyforenglandandwales>

The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 provides a regulatory regime for the scrap metal industry, including a requirement for scrap metal dealers to obtain a scrap metal licence from their local authority. The requirements of the Act apply to most types of metal and apply where someone is selling an item such as a catalytic converter to a scrap metal dealer.

■ Computer Misuse Act 1990**Catherine West:****[140222]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has plans to bring forward legislative proposals to update the provisions of the Computer Misuse Act 1990.

Kit Malthouse:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to PQ 111646 on 16 November 2020.

■ Criminal Records: South West**Luke Pollard:****[139135]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many of the criminal records that were deleted by her Department relate to people in (a) Plymouth, (b) Devon, (c) Cornwall and (d) the South West.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office is working closely with Policing/National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to assess the scale and impact of the incident. This includes undertaking a robust and detailed assessment and verification of all affected records. Once complete we will develop and implement a plan to recover as many lost records as is possible over the next few weeks.

■ Deportation

Holly Lynch:

[\[139063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many deportation flights have been carried out by her Department in the last twelve months; and what the departure and arrival locations were for these flights.

Chris Philp:

In the last twelve months, 49 charter deportation flights have left the UK to a range of destinations globally.

Every week we remove people who have no right to be here from the UK to different countries. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have continued to return and deport foreign national offenders and other immigration offenders where flight routes have been available to us, both on scheduled flights and charter flights.

This Government's priority is keeping the people of this country safe, and we make no apology for seeking to remove dangerous foreign criminals and other immigration offenders.

■ Domestic Abuse

Rachael Maskell:

[\[140857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to extend the Ask for Ani scheme to more venues.

Victoria Atkins:

There are currently more than 2,600 pharmacies participating in the Ask for ANI codeword scheme. We maintain an on-going sign-up process, which is open to all pharmacies so that more can join the scheme, and we are seeing more pharmacies sign-up each week.

We are evaluating the impact of this scheme and expect early findings in the Spring. Using the evidence collected we will explore options for further expansion of the scheme into other settings.

■ Domestic Abuse: Children

Laura Trott:

[\[138091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which police forces are yet to sign up to Operation Encompass.

Kit Malthouse:

Domestic abuse can lead to emotional, physical and psychological harm in victims including children. Operation Encompass aims to mitigate this harm by rapid provision of support within the school to safeguard children. Operation Encompass works by directly connecting the police with schools. When officers have attended a domestic abuse incident, police share the information with a school's trained

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) before the start of the next school day, so that appropriate support can be given at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Home Office has provided funding to rollout Operation Encompass nationally, and together with the Department for Education has provided £194,360 in funding for a specialist Teacher's Helpline during the pandemic. This helpline provides free access for teachers to confidential and immediate access to support and guidance from experienced clinical and educational psychologists

To date 41 forces have signed up to Operation Encompass, Bedfordshire and Avon & Somerset are yet to sign up.

■ Domestic Abuse: Wales

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[140221\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many of the 2,300 Boots pharmacies and 300 independent community pharmacies which are participating in the Ask for ANI codeword scheme will be in Wales.

Victoria Atkins:

There are currently 116 pharmacies (101 Boots pharmacies and 15 independent community pharmacies) participating in the Ask for ANI codeword scheme in Wales. There is an on-going sign-up process open to all pharmacies to join the scheme, so the total number of pharmacies involved in the scheme is increasing each week.

■ Human Trafficking: Children

Jess Phillips:

[\[140135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of children referred into the national referral mechanism have not received an independent child trafficking guardian direct worker or regional practice coordinator in all quarters for the period of Quarter 1 2017 to Quarter 3 2020 by local authority area.

Jess Phillips:

[\[140136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of Looked After Children have been not been allocated an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Direct Worker by (a) age, (b) gender and (c) nationality since October 2018.

Victoria Atkins:

The Home Office has rolled out Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs), an independent source of advice for trafficked children, in one-third of local authorities across England and Wales. ICTGs provide one-to-one support for children who have no one with parental responsibility for them in the UK via an ICTG Direct Worker. They also provide an expert ICTG Regional Practice Co-ordinator (RPC), first introduced in October 2018, for children where there is someone with parental responsibility for them in the UK.

A staggered approach has been adopted in the delivery of ICTGs, together with built-in evaluations to ensure the delivery of the correct ICTG model. Data tables

published in October 2020 as part of the Assessment of Independent Child Trafficking Guardians – Regional Practice Co-ordinators:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-analysis-of-independent-child-trafficking-guardians> show how ICTG referrals have increased since 2017, split by local authority area. This data covers the period from Q1 2017 – Q4 2019. The Home Office does not hold data on children not referred to the ICTG service by local authority area.

The Home Office publishes statistics on NRM referrals on a quarterly basis, reports from Q2 2019 – Q3 2020 can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-referral-mechanism-statistics>.

Reports from 2018 and 2017 can be found here respectively:

<https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications/282-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2018/file> and;

<https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications/159-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-annual-report-2017/file>.

The NRM and ICTG data is held separately; it is not one linked dataset.

The Home Office does not hold data on Looked After Children that do not receive support from the ICTG service. On this basis, we cannot provide any details on how many and what proportion of Looked After Children have been not been allocated an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Direct Worker.

■ Immigrants: Detainees

Holly Lynch:

[139064]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of people detained in immigration removal centres are women.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office publishes statistics on people in detention on the last day of each quarter in the '[Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on people in detention under immigration powers, are published in Table Det_03a of the '[Detention summary tables](#)'

The 'contents' sheet contains an overview of all available data on detention.

Further breakdowns by gender can be found in the [Immigration detention detailed datasets](#)

Figures on people in detention at the end of December 2020 will be published on 25 February 2021.

Information on future Home Office statistical release dates can be found in the '[Research and statistics calendar](#)'.

■ Immigrants: Sleeping Rough**Caroline Lucas:****[140028]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 12 January 2021 to Question 131225, if she will include in the guidance to be published on the Immigration Rule which makes provision for the discretionary refusal or cancellation of permission to stay in the UK on the grounds of rough sleeping, content stating that that Rule should only be used sparingly, and as a last resort where a person sleeping rough refuses offers of support and engages in persistent anti-social behaviour.

Caroline Lucas:**[140029]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 12 January 2021 to Question 131225, what discussions she has had with organisations seeking to help people who are sleeping rough on the effect of the Immigration Rule which makes provision for the discretionary refusal or cancellation of permission to stay in the UK on the grounds of rough sleeping; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

Guidance on the application of the new Immigration Rule relating to rough sleeping will be issued in due course and will make clear to decision-makers the circumstances in which permission to enter or stay in the UK may be cancelled on the basis of rough sleeping.

The Home Office and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government are working together to encourage local authorities and approved charities to resolve the immigration status of eligible rough sleepers and unlock access to any benefits and entitlements that rough sleepers may be eligible for.

■ Immigration: EU Nationals**Conor McGinn:****[140844]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what her Department's policy is on the use of Mode IV exemptions for mobility.

Kevin Foster:

It is common for free trade agreements to include Mode IV commitments on the temporary entry of businesspersons. These commitments do not exempt such persons from immigration control.

It is Home Office policy to ensure any such commitments are delivered through its domestic immigration requirements, in particular through the Intra-Company Transfer, Tier 5 International Agreement Worker and Visitor categories of the Immigration Rules.

■ Intelligence Services: Registration

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[\[140846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to introduce new measures requiring the registration of foreign agents.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office has considered like-minded international partners' legislation on tackling hostile activity by foreign states, in order to identify the benefits for adopting a similar approach in the UK. We intend to introduce our own registration scheme as part of forthcoming legislation.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald:

[\[140847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with his US counterpart on the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals similar to that country's Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Kit Malthouse:

As the Prime Minister outlined in his response to the ISC report on Russia, the Home Office has considered like-minded international partners' legislation to identify the benefits for adopting a similar approach in the UK. This includes the US's Foreign Agent Registration Act.

■ Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service

Sir Mark Hendrick:

[\[138881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Government plans to transfer control of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service from Lancashire County Council to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Kit Malthouse:

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 enables Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to take on fire and rescue governance where a local case is made. We are not currently aware of a proposal by the Lancashire PCC to take on governance of the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service.

This Government remains strongly committed to driving closer collaboration between our emergency services. The first part of a two-stage PCC Review launched in July 2020 considered options to strengthen the accountability of PCCs and expand their role. This included options to strengthen fire governance through the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) model. Part one of this Review's final set of recommendations will be announced in due course.

■ Members: Correspondence

Jeff Smith:

[\[138468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when the Minister for Immigration plans to reply to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Manchester

Withington of 4 September 2020 on an ongoing application for leave to remain in the UK, HO ref: K1248262.

Chris Philp:

I am sorry for the delay in responding. The Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts responded on 18 January 2021.

■ **Police**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[140858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will consult police forces on proposals to be introduced at the end of this lockdown prior to its easement to ensure that their views are taken on board.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government has been clear that it will provide police forces with the support they need to continue protecting the public and keeping communities safe through the coronavirus pandemic.

In October 2020 the Government announced an additional £30m funding for police forces in England and Wales to step up their enforcement of coronavirus rules.

In addition, we have provided the police the powers and guidance they need to support compliance with covid-19 social distancing and lockdown restrictions.

The Home Office continues to work closely with the policing sector to monitor and respond to their needs in these challenging circumstances.

■ **Police National Computer: Wales**

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[140220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many of the (a) 213,000 offence records, (b) 175,000 arrest records and (c) 15,000 person records deleted from the Police National Computer related to people in Wales.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office is working closely with Policing/National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to assess the scale and impact of the incident. This includes undertaking a robust and detailed assessment and verification of all affected records. Once complete we will develop and implement a plan to recover as many lost records as is possible over the next few weeks.

■ **Police: Coronavirus**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[140855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what support she has provided to the police to enforce the stay local principle in the context of covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government has worked closely with the police and enforcement bodies throughout the pandemic to ensure they have the powers and resources they need to enforce the necessary restrictions we have put in place.

In October, £30m surge funding was provided to police forces to enable them to increase patrols in areas of greater footfall and ensure people across England and Wales are complying with the restrictions. This funding has ensured additional resources have been deployed to help support enforcement efforts, and to help ease workforce related pressures directly related to increasing enforcement and compliance activity across England and Wales.

In addition, local authorities may choose to deploy marshals, stewards or ambassadors in their area to support with the first three stages of the 4 Es approach: engaging with members of the public and businesses, explaining COVID-19 Secure guidelines and restrictions and encouraging them to follow these. Forces will then use enforcement, as necessary.

■ Retail Trade: Protective Clothing**Bill Esterson:**[\[140795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to enforce covid-19 regulations and protect retail staff against infection from customers who refuse to wear a face covering in shops.

Kit Malthouse:

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has worked closely with retail representatives to ensure that regulations are understood and correctly implemented within their establishments. Shops have worked hard to adhere to Government guidance to ensure that their stores are as Covid secure as possible, protecting both customers and retail staff.

The Government introduced requirements to wear face coverings in relevant public settings including shops and supermarkets (24 July) in England. This requirement was later extended to include staff in all shops and supermarkets (24 September). The requirements apply unless an individual is exempt or has a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering.

Businesses are encouraged to take reasonable steps to encourage customers to follow the law, including through signs and providing other information in store. The police have been given formal powers to address non-compliance including directing individuals to wear a face covering, directing individuals to leave the relevant place, and issuing a fixed penalty notice of £200 doubling upon repeat offences up to a maximum of £6,400.

■ Travel: Coronavirus**Rachael Maskell:****[140192]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of unnecessary journeys on the level of covid-19 infections.

Kit Malthouse:

The Government has been clear that people must not leave home unless they have a relevant exemption (for example, for work or caring purposes), and that if people do have to travel, they should stay local – meaning avoiding travelling outside of your village, town or the part of a city where you live.

The Home Secretary maintains ongoing dialogue with Cabinet colleagues on Covid measures.

■ Visas: Coronavirus**Ian Murray:****[140040]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will extend Exceptional Assurance from four weeks to six months for people who are unable to travel to their home country due to the covid-19 pandemic.

Kevin Foster:

Each request for Exceptional Assurance is dealt with on its own merits and the end date is under constant review.

There is no condition in place limiting Exceptional Assurance to a maximum of four weeks.

Ian Murray:**[140041]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of an Exceptional Assurance visa extension of four weeks on a person's ability to remain in or secure rental accommodation.

Kevin Foster:

Each request for Exceptional Assurance is dealt with on its own merits. There is no condition in place limiting Exceptional Assurance to a maximum of four weeks.

Exceptional Assurance allows for the conditions of a previous grant of leave to continue until its expiration, including the right to rent. We have provided clear guidance on GOV.UK stipulating landlords must take extra care to ensure no one is discriminated against if they are struggling to evidence their right to rent during this pandemic.

The Landlord Checking Service is in place to verify the confirmation of Exceptional Assurance.

This service provides a response within two working days, from receipt of request, providing the landlord with a statutory excuse against liability for a civil penalty.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-landlord-right-to-rent-checks>

<https://eforms.homeoffice.gov.uk/outreach/lcs-application.ofml>

Ian Murray:

[140042]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effect of the need to reapply for an Exceptional Assurance visa every three to four weeks on a person's (a) mental health, (b) financial situation and (c) ability to maintain stable accommodation.

Kevin Foster:

There is no current condition in place limiting Exceptional Assurance to four weeks or requiring all covered by one to reply every three to four weeks, each request for Exceptional Assurance is dealt with on its own merits.

Exceptional Assurance allows for the conditions of a previous grant of leave to continue until its expiration, including the right to rent and the right to work where relevant.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Affordable Housing: Construction

Rachael Maskell:

[139057]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to encourage housing developers to build more affordable housing.

Christopher Pincher:

The Government is committed to increasing the supply of affordable housing and is investing over £12 billion in affordable housing over 5 years, the largest investment in affordable housing in a decade. This includes the new £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme, which will provide up to 180,000 new homes across the country, should economic conditions allow. Our £9 billion Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme, running to 2023, will deliver approximately 250,000 new affordable homes.

Our flagship new home ownership policy, First Homes, will transform the lives of hard-working people across the country; helping them to take their first step on to the property ladder in their local areas. The scheme will enable local first-time buyers to purchase homes at a discount of at least 30 per cent in their local communities, saving them around £100,000 on the price of an average newly built property in England.

The Government provides support to communities to prepare neighbourhood plans, which can be used to support the provision of affordable housing in local areas through site allocations and relevant planning policies.

The proposal to create a new Infrastructure Levy, as set out in the *Planning for the Future White Paper*, will support a more streamlined and accessible planning system.

The new Levy will be designed to deliver at least as much onsite affordable housing as at present and will continue to be collected and spent at the local level, on priorities including infrastructure and affordable housing.

Since 2010, we have delivered over 517,100 new affordable homes including over 365,800 affordable homes for rent, of which 148,000 homes for social rent.

■ **Asylum: Barton Stacey**

Caroline Nokes: [\[140054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 13 January 2021 to Question HL11693, whether development on Crown Land is exempt from (a) the Habitats Directive and (b) all planning regulations.

Christopher Pincher:

Since 2006, development by the Crown has been subject to planning permission under Part 13 of The Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This development is not exempt from the current habitats regulations.

■ **Building Safety Fund**

Hilary Benn: [\[139980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether a condition of receiving funding from the Building Safety Fund is that (a) leaseholders and (b) applicants to that Fund must not speak to the press about the project; and if he will make a statement.

Christopher Pincher:

The Building Safety Fund does not impose restrictions on leaseholders or residents in their private capacity as individual flat owners commenting on remediation projects or on Government policy. The Department has written to building owners who have signed agreements to make this clear. We intend to clarify the clause in future contracts to make it clearer that it does not apply to leaseholders and that they are free to speak freely to the media in a personal capacity.

Daisy Cooper: [\[140940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if his Department will publish the standard template documents for the (a) Short Form Funding Agreement for Pre-Tender Support and (b) Grant Funding Agreement that are required to be signed by (i) building owners and (ii) property management companies in order to access the Building Safety Fund.

Christopher Pincher:

Individual funding agreements reached with applicants are bespoke to the circumstances of each building through negotiations between the applicant and delivery partner, and are commercially sensitive and so cannot be published. However, the Government will publish a template funding agreement shortly.

The Building Safety Fund does not impose restrictions on leaseholders or residents in their private capacity as individual flat owners commenting on remediation projects or on Government policy. The Department has written to building owners who have signed agreements to make this clear. We intend to clarify in future contracts that leaseholders are free to speak freely to the media in a personal capacity.

■ **Coronavirus: Disease Control**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[140198\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans he has to allocate further funding to support the provision of Covid Marshals.

Luke Hall:

The Government provided £30 million for compliance and enforcement, including funding for COVID-19 Secure Marshals or their equivalents. On 8 October, my department published guidance on how the Grant could be spent, including the recruitment of COVID-19 Marshals. COVID-19 Marshals have played an important role in supporting local authorities, encouraging social distancing to keep everyone safe.

My department is examining the use of the Grant as part of the three-month review into its effectiveness. The Government has allocated over £7.9 billion directly to councils since the start of the pandemic alongside additional funding support to businesses as part of the move to national restrictions. This wider funding includes the Contain Outbreak Management Fund which can be used to fund compliance and enforcement activity.

■ **Domestic Abuse: Housing**

Jess Phillips:

[\[140132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of (a) risk assessment, (b) safeguarding and (c) support delivered by exempt accommodation providers which are housing victims of domestic abuse and their children.

Eddie Hughes:

We are aware of concerns about the quality of accommodation and levels of support provided in a small minority of supported exempt accommodation and are working to address this issue as a priority.

In October 2020, we published the National Statement of Expectation on accommodation standards and best practice in the sector. We also announced £3.1 million of funding to run pilots in five local authorities, to drive up the quality of accommodation, undertake enforcement action, and test interventions to improve the provision of support and safeguarding. This will inform future policy on supported exempt accommodation. My officials continue to work with local authorities and domestic abuse organisations on this issue.

MHCLG published priorities for Domestic Abuse in 2016 [updated in 2018] to support local authorities to ensure victims receive the quality of support they need when they need it.

Through the new duty in the Domestic Abuse Bill, Government will also make clear to local authorities in statutory guidance the need for all support provided in relevant safe accommodation, to meet the MHCLG Quality Standards, Women's Aid National Quality Standards and / or Imkaan's Accredited Quality Standards.

Jess Phillips:

[140133]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if the Government will take steps to ensure that the regulations and guidance underpinning the statutory duty in the Domestic Abuse Bill will require local authorities to fund support in safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse that meets quality standards.

Eddie Hughes:

Government will make clear in statutory guidance underpinning the duty, that all support provided under the duty must be provided to victims of domestic abuse and their children, who reside in relevant accommodation which should meet the MHCLG Quality Standards, Women's Aid National Quality Standards and / or Imkaan's Accredited Quality Standards.

The regulations will also make clear that accommodation such as generic Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not considered relevant safe accommodation for the purposes of this duty, as it does not provide a safe place to stay for victims of domestic abuse.

■ Elections: Coronavirus

Steve Reed:

[140821]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate his Department has made of the additional costs that will be incurred by local authorities as a result of having to take safety precautions in order to hold local elections during the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

The costs of delivering local elections are met by local authorities. We recognise that delivering local authority services, including elections, safely in the context of the pandemic, will increase costs. We have allocated to councils in England a further £1.55 billion non-ringfenced grant for Covid-19 expenditure pressures and made clear that priorities for use of that funding include additional local election costs as a result of Covid-19.

■ Evictions: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes:

[140208]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to ensure that live-in lodgers are protected from eviction during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

The provisions relating to extending notice periods under the Coronavirus Act only apply to statutory tenants and licensees who are covered by the Protection from Eviction Act. Some lodgers will be a statutory tenant or a licensee, others will fall outside of this legislation.

In these difficult times, we urge everyone to show compassion and exercise flexibility as far as possible. We encourage landlords to allow lodgers to remain in their homes if they want to stay.

Lodgers who can do so must continue to pay their rent. If they cannot they should speak to their landlord at the earliest opportunity. An early conversation between landlord and tenant can help both parties to agree a plan if tenants are struggling to pay their rent.

If a lodger is being forced out illegally, they should contact the police and their local authority.

Helen Hayes:

[140210]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate his Department has made of the number of lodgers who have been evicted or are at risk of eviction as a result of having no recourse to public funds status since March 2020.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department does not hold data on the number of lodgers evicted or the reason for the eviction.

The Government is committed to make sure the very vulnerable are protected and that is why, during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have made many protections available to migrants with no recourse to public funds, such as the Job Retention Scheme

Local authorities may also provide basic safety net support, regardless of immigration status, where there are community care needs, migrants with serious health problems or family cases where the wellbeing of a child is in question.

Helen Hayes:

[140211]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate his Department has made of the number of lodgers who have been evicted or at risk of eviction as a result of being unable to access universal credit since March 2020.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department does not hold data on the number of lodgers evicted or the reason for the eviction.

The Department for Work and Pensions provides a range of support to different vulnerable groups who may be at risk of homelessness: they help them to make Universal Credit claims, and provide tailored support through Jobcentre Plus and priority access to the Work and Health Programme.

■ Evictions: Greater London**Helen Hayes:**[\[140209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate his Department has made of the number of lodgers that have been evicted in (a) London, (b) Southwark and (c) Lambeth since March 2020.

Eddie Hughes:

The department does not hold data on the number of lodgers evicted or under threat of eviction.

■ Help to Buy Scheme**Rosie Cooper:**[\[138902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many homes reserved under the Help to Buy scheme will not be complete by (a) 31 March 2021 and (b) 30 June 2021.

Rosie Cooper:[\[138903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the options available to people who lose homes due to the closing of the Help to Buy Scheme.

Rosie Cooper:[\[138904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the Help to Buy Scheme in response to delays in construction during the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

Each year the Help to Buy scheme requires new homes to be built out by 31 December and legally complete by the end of the financial year (31 March). This is a contractual requirement that developers are obliged to meet and to only take reservations on that basis.

Following the initial effects of Covid-19 with the hiatus to construction during the first national lockdown, we announced changes to the contractual deadlines on 31 July, which provided developers using Help to Buy an extra two months' build time. This meant they had until 28 February 2021 to build out properties with the deadline for legal completion remaining at 31 March 2021. Additionally, where reservations were

agreed before 30 June 2020, they were granted some further flexibility allowing such reservations to practically complete by 30 April and legally complete by 31 May 2021.

Working in line with sector guidance, the construction industry has been allowed to continue during the subsequent Covid-19 restrictions. Reservations for the current scheme were closed on 15 December, providing builders sufficient time to complete their orders.

Meanwhile, to mitigate against the risk of outstanding reservations not completing in time, Homes England announced on 15 January that it will not enforce the practical completion deadline of 28 February 2021 for the current scheme, thereby maximising the remaining time available time for developers to build out.

These measures provide relief for developers to build out homes delayed by Covid-19. We nevertheless continue to monitor the situation closely.

■ **Help to Buy Scheme: Coronavirus**

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[140145]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to Homes England's press release of 8 December 2020 on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on housing starts, if his Department will ensure that buyers already in the process of purchasing properties will not lose access to Help to Buy scheme finance in the event of covid-related delays to the construction of their properties.

Christopher Pincher:

Following the initial effects of Covid-19 there was a hiatus to construction during the first national lockdown. That is why the Government working with Homes England on 31 July announced changes to the Help to Buy contractual deadlines, which provided developers an extra two months' build time. This gave developers using Help to Buy until 28 February 2021 to build out properties, with the deadline for legal completion remaining at 31 March 2021. However, additionally, where reservations were agreed before 30 June 2020, they were granted some further flexibility allowing such reservations to practically complete by 30 April and legally complete by 31 May 2021.

Working in line with sector guidance, the construction industry has been allowed to continue during the subsequent Covid-19 restrictions. Reservations for the current scheme were closed on 15 December, providing builders sufficient time to complete their orders.

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These measures provide relief for developers to build out homes delayed by Covid-19. We nevertheless continue to monitor the situation closely.

■ Hospital Beds: Domestic Abuse

Jess Phillips:

[140119]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many extra beds have been made available since 23 March 2020 specifically to victims of domestic abuse.

Eddie Hughes:

The MHCLG £10 million Domestic Abuse COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund was allocated to 147 successful charity bids. Grant recipients recently reported that, up to and including 30 September, they had created an additional 1046 bedspaces with a further 343 forecast to open through the winter.

In April 2020, my Department also released £16.6 million to 75 local authority-led projects across England for the delivery of support to victims of domestic abuse, and their children, within safe accommodation in 2020/21, helping up to 43,000 survivors.

Alongside these funds, MHCLG also put in place a system to enable local authorities who need additional accommodation to meet demand during the pandemic to book rooms for domestic abuse victims through Crown Commercial Services.

Jess Phillips:

[140120]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, of the £10 million made available by the Government for domestic abuse shelters' capacity (a) how many extra beds have been bought and (b) where those beds are located.

Eddie Hughes:

The MHCLG £10 million Domestic Abuse COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund was allocated to 147 successful charity bids. Grant recipients recently reported that, up to and including 30 September, they had created an additional 1046 bedspaces with a further 343 forecast to open through the winter.

The location of domestic abuse safe accommodation services are kept confidential to protect victim safety and MHCLG did not therefore require applicants to disclose information on where beds are located. However, I can confirm that funding was awarded to domestic abuse charitable organisations across all English regions.

■ Housing: Construction

Ian Mearns:

[140777]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment he has made of the (a) quality of new build housing, (b) ability of local authorities to take action in response to poor quality new build housing developments and (c) ability of buyers purchasing new build properties to seek adequate recourse for building defects.

Christopher Pincher:

It is a priority for this Government to build more high-quality, environmentally friendly homes and residents must feel confident that their property is safe, high-quality and

sustainable. Whilst we recognise the constraints developers have on site, we expect quality to be at the heart of the new homes they deliver. We recognise that the quality of new build homes still needs to improve and Government is taking steps to ensure that new homes are better designed, safer and sustainable.

The Government has given local authorities a wide range of enforcement powers with strong penalties to tackle poor quality. However, it is for them to decide what, if any, action to take, depending on the circumstances of each case.

The Government is committed to improving new homebuyers' recourse for building defects. We will ensure a New Homes Ombudsman is established and we will require developers to belong to it. We will include provision for the New Homes Ombudsman in the Building Safety Bill. New build homebuyers currently have access to recourse for building defects through their developers, new build warranty providers and industry-led Consumer Codes.

■ Landlords: Sexual Offences

Peter Kyle:

[\[140882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many landlords have received banning orders under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 for offering rent in exchange for sex.

Christopher Pincher:

There have been no banning orders for landlords offering rent in exchange for sex. Where a local housing authority becomes aware of a landlord receiving a conviction for a banning order offence, the local housing authority may apply to the first-tier tribunal for a banning order to be granted. The Government is unequivocal that so-called 'sex for rent' arrangements have no place in society.

Peter Kyle:

[\[140883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many landlords have been placed on the database of rogue landlords and property agents for offering rent in exchange for sex since the introduction of the Housing and Planning Act in 2016.

Christopher Pincher:

There have been no landlords placed on the database for offering rent in exchange for sex. Where a landlord receives a banning order the local housing authority must place the landlord on the database. Where a landlord receives two or more civil penalties for housing related offences or a becomes aware of a conviction for a banning order offence, the local housing authority has discretion to make an entry. The Government is unequivocal that so-called 'sex for rent' arrangements have no place in society.

Local Government: Coronavirus**Julian Sturdy:****[138948]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support his Department is providing to local authorities to help them encourage covid-19 vaccine take-up within their communities.

Luke Hall:

Local authorities and Directors of Public Health have an important role in the vaccine programme including working with the NHS to maximise uptake. MHCLG are supporting this in a number of ways: for example we are funding the £25 million Community Champions scheme in 60 local authorities, to encourage vaccine uptake and in reaching out to those communities who might be disproportionately impacted or hesitant about engaging, tackling disinformation, and supporting vulnerable people to meet appointments. The learning from these 60 will be shared across all local authorities. We have also hosted roundtables with faith leaders to understand barriers to access for faith groups. Recognising the importance and priority status of the care sector for this programme, we have worked closely with local authorities and the national programme on a protocol for social care to ensure responsibilities for maximising uptake are well understood across the system. Ensuring access and take up across all of our communities is critical to the success of the vaccination programme and we will continue to support local authorities and Directors of Public Health in their important role.

Conor McGinn:**[140168]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will issue guidance to local authorities on (a) administering scrutiny and monitoring requirements, (b) responding to freedom of information requests and (c) conducting non-essential business during the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

The local authority remote meetings regulations made under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 have enabled local authorities to continue to conduct essential business whilst protecting the health and safety of their members, officers and the public. All local authority meetings in England are in scope of the regulations. There is no barrier to Overview and Scrutiny meetings being held remotely. It is down to the local authority to decide what is appropriate in their specific circumstances.

With regards to responding to freedom of information requests and conducting non-essential business local authority staff are subject to the current "work from home" directive in national Covid-19 guidance and local authority offices are subject to the same workplace safety Covid-19 guidance as any other employer.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Databases**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[138975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many information gateways there are in operation in his Department; and how those gateways are managed and monitored.

Eddie Hughes:

The information requested is not held by the Department.

■ **Planning Permission**

Matthew Pennycook:

[\[140217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to extend unimplemented planning permissions with time limits for implementation which were due to lapse between 19 August 2020 and 31 March 2021 beyond 1 May 2021 with no requirement to obtain Additional Environmental Approval.

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.

These 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.

■ **Roads: Tewkesbury**

Mr Laurence Robertson:

[\[139975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to issue a decision on the bid by Tewkesbury Borough Council for £1.5m to assist with the business case work associated with the options for the off line transport/highway improvements to J9 M5/A46; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Laurence Robertson:

[\[139976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to issue a decision on the bid by Tewkesbury Borough Council for financial support to deliver the Garden Town as part of the Government's garden communities programme; and if he will make a statement.

Christopher Pincher:

Across England we are currently supporting 49 locally-led Garden Communities, to be exemplars of high quality, good design and best practice.

Locally-led garden communities are vital to delivering the transformational housing growth that we need, whilst ensuring surrounding existing communities can also benefit from growth through well-planned infrastructure and community amenities.

My Department has been considering the bids received for funding through the Government's Garden Communities programme and we hope to announce funding allocations in the coming weeks.

■ Shared Ownership: Insulation

Fleur Anderson:

[\[140289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what responsibilities housing associations have for shared ownership properties which have cladding and insulation non-compliant with regulatory requirements.

Christopher Pincher:

Existing shared owners have a full repairing lease and are financially responsible for all maintenance charges and outgoings, in the same way as any other homeowner. We have introduced a new model for Shared Ownership which will include a 10 year period during which the landlord will support with the cost of repairs in new build homes, and this will help to bridge the gap between renting and homeownership. Further, Government guidance is clear that building safety is the responsibility of building owners including housing associations. We recognise that there are many cases where leasehold agreements will allow building owners to pass remediation costs on to leaseholders, including those participating in shared ownership schemes. That is why the Government is accelerating work on a long-term solution which will help to protect leaseholders. We will update on this work as soon as we are in a position to do so.

■ Sleeping Rough: Coronavirus

Taiwo Owatemi:

[\[139152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason his Department has not reissued the guidance to local authorities that initiated the Everybody In scheme, including the sections that covered people who have No Recourse To Public Funds.

Eddie Hughes:

This Government has taken unprecedented steps 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.

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 written to all local authorities, to ensure that even more rough sleepers are safely accommodated, and to ask 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 vaccinations.

As we set out in that letter the law on eligibility relating to immigration status, including for those with No Recourse to Public Funds, remains in place. Local authorities must use their judgement in assessing what support they may lawfully give to those who might otherwise be ineligible for support as a result of immigration status. This should be carried out on an individual basis, considering that person's specific circumstances and support needs. Local authorities already make similar judgements on accommodating otherwise ineligible individuals during extreme weather, for example, where there is a risk to life.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Jon Trickett:

[\[138394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to launch the consultation on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Luke Hall:

The November 2020 Spending Review set out the main strategic elements of the UKSPF in the Heads of Terms. We will publish a UK-wide investment framework later this year and confirm multi-year funding profiles at the next Spending Review.

In addition, to help local areas prepare over 2021/22 for the introduction of the UKSPF, we will provide additional UK funding to support our communities to pilot programmes and new approaches. Further details will be published soon.

Government officials have been working closely with interested parties and will continue to do so as we develop the Fund.

Officials have held 26 engagement events in total, including 25 across the UK and one in Gibraltar. These were attended by over 500 representatives from a breadth of sectors and designed to aid the development of the Fund.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Pilot Schemes

Jon Trickett:

[\[138393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps communities need to take to access the pilot scheme of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Jon Trickett:

[\[138395\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when the prospectus for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be published.

Luke Hall:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) will help to level up and create opportunity across the UK for places most in need, such as ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and rural and coastal communities, and for people who face labour market barriers.

The November 2020 Spending Review set out the main strategic elements of the UKSPF in the Heads of Terms. We will publish a UK-wide investment framework later this year and confirm multi-year funding profiles at the next Spending Review.

In addition, to help local areas prepare over 2021/22 for the introduction of the UKSPF, we will provide additional UK funding to support our communities to pilot programmes and new approaches. Further details will be published soon.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Energy Charter

Gareth Thomas: [\[137869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what plans her Department has to expand the scope of investment protection in the Energy Charter Treaty to include hydrogen, biomass or other new technologies; what assessment she has made of the implications of such an expansion; and will she make a statement.

Graham Stuart:

Member States of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) are currently engaged in a process to modernise the Treaty. The UK will ensure that, as the modernisation process develops, the Treaty delivers for the Government's priorities and will consider, together with ECT members, the case for extending the scope of the ECT to include additional forms of energy and energy technologies.

We welcome the role of the ECT in ensuring consistent legal protection for UK investors operating abroad. This means that UK companies investing in other countries that have signed the Treaty have more protection for their assets, including renewable energy production.

■ Fossil Fuels: Pipelines

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[140906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, how many of UKEF's 17 fossil fuel pipeline projects will reach financial close in the next six months; and where those projects are located.

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[140907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what type of fossil fuel projects in UKEF's programme pipeline will reach financial close in the next six months.

Graham Stuart:

UK Export Finance (UKEF) is obliged to consider all requests for its support. Those requests can be made, and subsequently withdrawn, at any time.

UKEF is currently considering support for 10 projects involving fossil fuels which may be completed by the end of July 2021. Eight of these are requests for support through UKEF's Export Development Guarantee (EDG). The EDG provides general working

capital to support the operations of eligible exporters, and is not tied to specific contracts.

The two individual projects for which UKEF is considering support are in the following sectors and locations:

Brazil: Oil and gas Turkmenistan: Compressors for a gas pipeline to a power station

UKEF currently also has 12 applications for trade finance cover in the sector that may be completed by the end of July 2021. These are all related to oil and gas projects, and are located as follows:

Azerbaijan: 2 Belgium: 1 China: 2 Egypt :1 Malaysia: 3 Mozambique: 1 Oman: 1 Qatar: 1

However, the decision whether or not to provide support for any of these projects or applications will also have to take into account the implementation of the new policy announced by the Prime Minister on 12 December. The date of implementation of the new policy will be determined following the consultation that was launched on the same day.

■ UK Trade with EU

Angus Brendan MacNeil:

[\[140011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made of (a) the implications for her policies and (b) the effect on UK businesses of the EU trade remedies (i) AD653 and (ii) AS656 not being transitioned; and whether she has received representations from businesses on that matter.

Angus Brendan MacNeil:

[\[140012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, for what reason the EU trade remedies (a) AD653 and (b) AS656 were not transitioned; and what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the evidence collected to represent the UK manufacture of woven glass fibre in the context of that matter.

Angus Brendan MacNeil:

[\[140013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps she plans to take in response to EU trade remedies (a) AD653 and (b) AS656 not being transitioned.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

HM Government ran a Call for Evidence to determine which EU trade remedy measures should be transitioned to the United Kingdom's system after the transition period. As part of the consistent criteria applied, the evidence from respondents needed to demonstrate that transitioning a measure had support from British businesses that produce a sufficient proportion of those products.

The deadlines for the Call for Evidence were determined by legislative obligations and operational requirements to make sure that measures were successfully transitioned by 31st December 2020. While we received some evidence from British producers in support of transitioning measures AD653 and AS656, this did not meet

the criterion of demonstrating support from businesses producing a sufficient proportion of the products. Further evidence was not submitted in time for consideration and HM Government was, therefore, unable to transition these measures.

Businesses can raise trading issues and apply for a new trade remedy investigation. However, my Rt Hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade can only decide in favour of the imposition of new trade remedy measures following a full investigation and recommendation from the Trade Remedies Investigations Directorate (or its successor, in due course, the Trade Remedies Authority).

JUSTICE

■ Courts: Video Recordings

Peter Kyle:

[\[140878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many times the provisions of section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 have been used by (a) victims and (b) witnesses since the beginning of the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

HMCTS does not hold data on how many times the provisions of section 28 have been used by (a) victims and (b) witnesses. Special measures applications are recorded in part, but HMCTS management information systems do not hold the data needed to answer the question. The information requested is not held centrally and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

■ Debt Collection: Coronavirus

Conor McGinn:

[\[140166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, in addition to Government's guidance on work practices and social distancing, whether he has issued specific additional advice to bailiffs and debt collectors on undertaking their work during the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

The Government has published Covid-secure guidance for those using the taking control of goods procedure. The guidance is titled *Working safely during COVID-19: enforcement agents (bailiffs)* and is available on Gov.uk. It is kept under review to ensure it continues to reflect the latest public health advice.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Justice has advised that the enforcement trade associations inform their members that they should not enter residential properties in England and Wales for the purpose of enforcement by taking control of goods at this time. This advice is kept under review.

Conor McGinn:

[\[140167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking in relation to the work of the enforcement agency industry to protect people facing financial difficulties as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

The Government's guidance titled *Working safely during COVID-19: enforcement agents (bailiffs)* reiterates that enforcement agents should follow the guidance on vulnerability set out in the National Standards for Taking Control of Goods and ensure they act in accordance with all relevant legislation. This includes signposting individuals to debt advice organisations where appropriate and giving them an adequate opportunity to get assistance and advice.

The guidance also makes clear that enforcement agents should take into account impacts of Covid-19 when considering if an individual should be deemed vulnerable, including whether an individual is or has been symptomatic, self-isolating or shielding.

■ **Domestic Violence Protection Orders: Coronavirus**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[140856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure that protection orders hearings to protect people experiencing domestic violence are not delayed during the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

The Government recognises that the restrictions imposed during the pandemic have increased risk for many victims of domestic abuse and we are working across government and with the sector to do all we can to ensure they can access the support they need. Within our courts, domestic abuse cases are a top priority, with emergency protective orders having been placed in the highest category of work in the magistrates' and family courts since the start of the pandemic. HMCTS have also provided additional guidance to operational staff to ensure they continue to prioritise these urgent applications, with remote hearings being used where appropriate.

■ **Prisoners' Release: Coronavirus**

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[138418\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much of the £8.5 million fund for temporary accommodation of prison leavers during the covid-19 outbreak has been spent to date; and what additional funding has been allocated for the temporary accommodation scheme.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[138419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether the temporary accommodation scheme for prison leavers due to end in January 2021 will be extended.

Lucy Frazer:

The temporary accommodation scheme ran between 18 May and 31 August 2020 and provided up to 56 nights' accommodation for prison leavers. This was an exceptional measure reflecting the challenges presented by Covid-19. At the end of the first scheme, £4.7m had been spent. A further £2m has been committed as of the end of December 2020. It is expected that the full £8.5m will be spent for the current scheme if the current number of individuals supported utilises the full allocation of 56 nights.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, a further £3m funding has been allocated and the scheme will now be extended to 31 March 2021, subject to regular review. This means that individuals may receive support up to the 26 May 2021.

■ Prisons: Construction

Greg Smith: [\[140946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will list the Government-owned land that was considered for new prison buildings prior to the identification of the site of HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill for consultation on a new 1,400 capacity prison.

Greg Smith: [\[140947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department made of the potential merits of the land adjacent to HMP Bullingdon prior to selecting the land adjacent to HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill for consultation on a new 1,400 capacity prison.

Greg Smith: [\[140948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will publish the assessment his Department made which led to the consultation on a new 1,400 capacity prison on land adjacent to HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill.

Greg Smith: [\[140949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will list the brownfield sites that have been assessed for new prison development in the UK in the last three years.

Lucy Frazer:

The Ministry of Justice considered land that it owns and sought information from other major land-owning government departments for details on land potentially suitable for a new prison site. An external search of suitable privately-owned land was also conducted. Following this exercise, land that was suitable and available was considered by the MoJ for use. The land available adjacent to HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill meets the relevant criteria, and is already owned by the MoJ and therefore was shortlisted as potentially suitable for a new prison build. The remaining list of shortlisted sites cannot be published because this is commercially sensitive information which, if shared, may undermine our ability to deliver.

The land adjacent to HMP Bullingdon was not put forward by any other government department as a potential site that met our criteria and was available for use.

Surveys have been carried out to determine whether the construction of a new prison is practical at the Grendon and Springhill site and they concluded that it is. Should a planning application be pursued here, the details of these works will be submitted to the local planning authority for review. At this point they will also be made available to the public via the planning portal.

We considered brownfield sites in England and Wales as part of the site selection process, but are unable to disclose a list as this is commercially sensitive information and may hinder future development requirements, as we deliver on our commitment for 18,000 additional prison places.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ **Combat Stress: Northern Ireland**

Jack Lopresti:

[\[140047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that Combat Stress is adequately funded for its work in Northern Ireland.

Mr Robin Walker:

The Charity *Combat Stress* received one of 102 grants, totalling £6million, issued under the Covid Impact Fund. They received £250,000 to enable them to accelerate the UK-wide delivery of a digital veterans' mental health service.

The Government recognises the vital role charities play in supporting veterans' mental health. In the 2018 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer awarded £10 million to support projects that will improve the mental health and wellbeing of veterans.

TRANSPORT

■ **Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme**

Gavin Robinson:

[\[140112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme (a) applies to England only and (b) is funded through new resource; and what the value is of any Barnett consequential for each of the Devolved areas.

Robert Courts:

The Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme (AGOSS) will apply only to England. AGOSS constitutes new spend for the Department for Transport and Barnett consequentials will apply as standard.

■ Airports: Non-domestic Rates**Mike Kane:**[\[140110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to his Department's announcement on business rates for airports on 24 November 2020, if he will publish the amount of business rates relief granted to each airport in England in 2020.

Robert Courts:

No funding has yet been provided to airports through the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme (AGOSS) which was announced on 24 November 2020.

The Scheme will be launched shortly, with payments made to successful applicants this financial year.

■ Bus Services: Finance**Alexander Stafford:**[\[140326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing emergency bus funding directly to local transport authorities as opposed to bus operators.

Rachel Maclean:

To ensure consistency with Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG), the majority of Covid-19 Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) funding is paid directly to operators. Local Transport Authorities do also receive some CBSSG funding for tendered services. However, we do not believe that now is the right time to change our funding models.

We are also keen to avoid a situation where different funding models are operating in different parts of the country, which would cause additional challenges for cross-border services or operators whose businesses span multiple urban areas.

■ Driving Instruction: Finance**Mr Steve Baker:**[\[140061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what impact assessment the DVSA has undertaken on the financial effect on driving instructors in High Wycombe when considering the decision to close the driving test centre in High Wycombe.

Rachel Maclean:

The DVSA is communicating with a range of stakeholders, including instructors, to factor in all considerations as it develops its options for the provision of driving tests in High Wycombe.

Not all driving instructors operate in the direct vicinity of test centres.

■ Driving Tests

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[139978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the value of introducing priority driving tests for key workers, so that people entering frontline roles are not delayed by the existing DVSA backlog of assessments.

Rachel Maclean:

To help stop the spread of coronavirus, routine driving tests have been suspended in all areas of England, Scotland and Wales.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) will respond to requests for driving tests from organisations on behalf of frontline mobile emergency workers, who require a driving licence to carry out duties in their employment role. This is a limited service subject to examiner resource and is restricted to candidates working in health and social care, and public bodies providing a service in the national interest. The DVSA will contact eligible organisations to explain how to nominate candidates; candidates cannot apply themselves.

Approved driving instructors and trainers can return to work only for the purpose of supporting a mobile emergency worker with a booked test.

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[140827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many practical driving tests have been conducted since 14 September 2020; and what proportion of the additional 375,000 tests have been conducted as set out by the DVSA in a 9 September 2020 letter to the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire since 14 September 2020.

Rachel Maclean:

295,373 practical car driving tests were conducted between 14 September 2020 and 21 January 2021.

The practical driving test booking system does not identify how many of those test conducted were part of the additional 375,000 test slots allocated.

Kirsten Oswald:

[\[140828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to provide early access post-lockdown to (a) driving theory tests and (b) practical driving tests for (i) key workers including those who work in health or social care, (ii) essential workers including those in waste management, distribution and infrastructure, (iii) other workers for whom a driving licence is an essential requirement and (iv) people with disabilities and their carers; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is in discussions with Transport Scotland to provide driving theory tests and practical driving tests for frontline mobile emergency workers. Transport Scotland is working to ensure it has the relevant legislation in place before offering the service.

The DVSA is working with its theory test contract provider, Pearson VUE, to respond to requests for theory tests in England and Wales from organisations such as Ambulance Authorities on behalf of frontline mobile emergency workers who require a driving licence to carry out duties in their employment role. The DVSA will also respond to requests for practical driving tests in England and Wales from organisations on behalf of frontline mobile emergency workers, who require a driving licence to carry out duties in their employment role.

This is a limited service subject to examiner resource and is restricted to candidates working in health and social care, and other public bodies involved in work responding to 'threats to life' such as the Environment Agency's flood rescue staff, or local authority gritter truck drivers. The DVSA is contacting NHS Trusts to explain how to nominate candidates; candidates cannot apply themselves. Applications from other organisations will be considered if the mobile emergency worker criteria is met.

The DVSA is in the process of planning for the resumption of services and increasing test capacity when it is safe to do so. Arrangements will be announced in due course.

■ Driving Tests: Coronavirus

Chris Stephens:

[140172]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what (a) plans he has for and (b) discussions he has had with stakeholders on amending the law on driving theory test certificates as a result of the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

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

It is important that road safety knowledge and hazard perception skills are up to date at the critical point that they drive unsupervised for the first time. Those with theory test certificates expiring may have taken their test in early 2019. Since then, their lessons and practice sessions will have been significantly curtailed during recent lockdowns and it is likely that their knowledge base will have diminished. Research suggests that this would be particularly harmful for hazard perception skills, a key factor in road safety.

Ensuring new drivers have current relevant knowledge and skills is a vital part of the training of new drivers, who are disproportionately represented in casualty statistics. Taking all this into consideration, the decision has been made not to extend theory test certificates and learners will need to pass another theory test if their certificate expires.

■ Driving Tests: High Wycombe

Mr Steve Baker:

[140055]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the viability of alternative driving test centre premises proposed by local driving instructors to the DVSA in High Wycombe; and if he will make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has been working closely with local approved driving instructors and customers in High Wycombe to identify a possible alternative location for driving tests in the area.

It is currently assessing the proposed site at Cressex Business Park to determine its suitability. The DVSA is also reviewing other considerations such as the welfare of instructors and candidates, local planning and highways legislation.

Mr Steve Baker:

[140056]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing a mobile driving test site in High Wycombe.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) aim to is to provide a service that meets the needs of its customers in every area, whilst providing value for money. The DVSA has work underway to further modernise its services, which includes the driving test provision. Different options are under active consideration for the Hon Member's constituency.

Mr Steve Baker:

[140057]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish the evidential basis for his Department's claim on 1 December 2020, in relation to driving test centres, that Slough and Uxbridge are the nearest test centres to High Wycombe with a travel time of under 30 minutes for either test centre.

Rachel Maclean:

The information is taken from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's booking & customer mapping data.

The 2019/20 mapping data shows High Wycombe customers come from 164 different postcode areas, some of which are very close to Slough test centre and Uxbridge test centre.

Mr Steve Baker:

[140058]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department plans to take following the proposed closure of High Wycombe driving test centre to prevent excess travel by local driving instructors and students to test centres with round trip distances of over 30 miles.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has held virtual meetings with local approved driving instructors in the High Wycombe area regarding the site closure, the nearest test centres, and possible alternative test centre locations.

The DVSA continues to make enquiries to determine the suitability and viability of an alternative hub space option at Cressex Business Park to ensure it can accommodate operational suitability, instructor and candidate welfare, local planning and highways legislation.

Mr Steve Baker:[\[140059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, which other DVSA driving test centres are closing in England, further to the announced closure of the site in High Wycombe; and for what reasons those centres are closing.

Rachel Maclean:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) keeps its estate under review to ensure site locations are fit for purpose and provide customers with a value for money service.

All announcements about proposed site closures and relocations are communicated at the appropriate time to local stakeholders.

■ Driving Tests: Wycombe**Mr Steve Baker:**[\[140060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what impact assessment the DVSA has undertaken to ensure people living on a low income in Wycombe are not disadvantaged by having to travel to a test centre with a round trip distance of over 30 miles.

Rachel Maclean:

The DVSA is communicating with a range of stakeholders, including instructors, to factor in all considerations as it develops its options for the provision of driving tests in High Wycombe.

It is typical for a candidate to have a 1 hour driving lesson prior to their driving test, which can include the drive to the test centre.

■ Eurostar: Coronavirus**Rosie Duffield:**[\[140908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of the Government taking a financial stake in Eurostar, in response to the covid-19 pandemic.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

As is the case with businesses in other sectors, Ministers and officials have closely monitored the financial impact of Covid-19 on the international transport sector, including Eurostar, since the beginning of the pandemic.

The Department continues to work closely with Eurostar to consider all commercial financing options available to the company, which include drawing on existing support schemes where eligible and appropriate. We are also in discussions with the French Government regarding Eurostar's financial situation.

■ **Govia Thameslink Railway: Coronavirus**

Sarah Owen:

[\[140284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions his Department has had with Govia Thameslink on the safety of (a) train drivers and (b) railway staff during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Department for Transport officials liaise with Govia Thameslink Railway on a frequent and regular basis to understand the measures they are putting in place regarding the safety of their staff.

In line with the January COVID-19 lockdown announcement, and guidance from Public Health England, Govia Thameslink Railway has implemented COVID-secure arrangements at all work places across their network. Measures include:

- Additional mess room facilities to enable social distancing
- The application of a sanitising agent (Zoono virucide) within the cab and saloon areas of trains
- Regular testing for secure 'bubbles' is provided where training within a cab is required
- All Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) employees were immediately stood down from work
- Staff rosters have been amended to reduce the number of frontline workers at stations, in line with the reduction in passenger numbers

■ **Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: EU Countries**

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[140756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with his European Commission counterpart on securing mutual recognition of UK and EU Certificates of Professional Competence.

Rachel Maclean:

Recognition of Certificates of Professional Competence was discussed during negotiations between the UK and the EU, and they are subject to the provisions in the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA).

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[140757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on securing a cultural exemption to new cabotage rules for UK haulage drivers.

Rachel Maclean:

Market access arrangements for hauliers transporting equipment for cultural events was discussed regularly during negotiations between the UK and the EU, and the UK put forward proposals for an exemption for specialist hauliers carrying out tours for cultural events, but the EU did not agree to our asks. Arrangements are subject to the provisions in the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA).

Kerry McCarthy:[\[140758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect of new UK-EU cabotage rules on UK hauliers servicing European tours for the cultural and events industries.

Rachel Maclean:

The Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) between the UK and the EU allows UK hauliers to undertake up to 2 additional laden journeys within the EU after a laden international journey from the UK, with a maximum of 1 cabotage movement outside Ireland. These rules will also apply to specialist hauliers, such as hauliers who carry equipment for cultural events.

Our assessment is that the TCA ensures that more than 95% of all haulage journeys will continue as they did before the end of the transition period.

■ Motorcycles: Driving Instruction**James Wild:**[\[140288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many Compulsory Basic Training certificates for mopeds and motorcycles expire in January 2021.

Rachel Maclean:

Compulsory Basic Training certificates are issued by motorcycle Approved Training Bodies (ATB) to successful candidates and are valid for two years. There is no means of establishing how many certificates were issued in January 2019 and will therefore expire in January 2021.

■ Performing Arts and Sport: Transport**Gavin Newlands:**[\[140153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the transportation of equipment for (a) music, (b) entertainment and (c) sport into the EU under the terms of the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement.

Rachel Maclean:

Market access arrangements for hauliers transporting equipment for cultural events was discussed regularly during negotiations between the UK and the EU, and they are subject to the provisions in the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA). During UK-EU negotiations, the UK put forward proposals for an exemption for specialist hauliers carrying out tours for cultural events, but the EU did not agree to our ask.

■ Public Transport: Coronavirus

Alexander Stafford:

[\[140324\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to provide covid-19 funding support for (a) light rail, (b) buses and (c) active travel in response to the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Rachel Maclean:

To date the Government has announced over £1 billion in emergency grant funding to support the bus sector in England, alongside over £150 million to support light rail. This funding has helped keep services running throughout the pandemic

Over £200 million has been made available to authorities during the current financial year, via the Active Travel Fund, to support an active and green recovery from Covid-19. This will enable them to deliver safe and direct cycling and walking measures in their areas, such as protected cycle lanes, widened pavements, safer junctions and cycle and bus-only corridors

■ Shipping: EU Countries

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[140732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will take steps to prevent the exclusion of British flagged commercial vessels from operating in EU waters specifically but not limited to charter vessels under 24 meters; and if he will make a statement.

Robert Courts:

As part of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement we have agreed measures that will guarantee legal certainty to UK companies providing international maritime transport services, including both passenger and freight transport between Member States of the EU. UK vessels will continue to enjoy non-discriminatory access to ports, the use of port infrastructure and maritime auxiliary services.

In line with precedent in other UK and EU free trade agreements, the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement excludes maritime cabotage. This allows each country to decide who can provide cabotage services. Some countries in the EU and EEA do not restrict cabotage, and UK flagged commercial vessels will continue to have access to these markets.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has been engaging with EU Member States to remove technical barriers to enable provision of cabotage services by UK vessels in specific EU Member States. We will continue to engage with relevant countries to seek to unblock technical and regulatory restrictions to maritime cabotage, where they exist. However, companies that currently provide such services in the waters of EU Member States will need to be aware of the local rules that apply.

■ Taxis: Coronavirus**Rachael Maskell:** [\[140190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what research has been undertaken on the transmission rate of the new variant of covid-19 in taxis.

Rachel Maclean:

We continue to review the measures put in place to protect taxi and private hire vehicle drivers, taking into account emerging evidence, including that of the new Covid-19 variant.

■ Transport: Coronavirus**Alexander Stafford:** [\[140325\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Urban Transport Group and (b) city region transport authorities on Government funding in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

Government officials and Ministers are in regular conversation with members of the Urban Transport Group and local transport authorities to understand the challenges faced by city region transport authorities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This engagement informs a range of Departmental policies, including the development and administration of Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) funding and Light Rail support funding.

Alexander Stafford: [\[140327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to (a) provide longer term covid-19 financial support to and (b) extend the powers of city region transport authorities after the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government has committed up to £27.3 million per week to support the bus sector, through the Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) Restart scheme. This funding - some of which is allocated to Local Transport Authorities, for tendered services - has no pre-agreed end date. The Government will work with bus operators and local authorities to review when it is appropriate to end the funding. We are also providing up to £67.8 million of funding for light rail services in Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Sheffield, West Midlands, Nottingham and Blackpool for the period from 27 October to the end of the 20/21 financial year.

The Government is also investing in city regions for the longer term. As announced at Budget and confirmed in the Spending Review, the Government is investing £4.2 billion in the transport networks of eight city regions across England from 22/23. This funding will be delivered through multi-year, consolidated transport settlements agreed with central government and based on plans put forward by city regions. The Government is currently engaging with the eligible city regions to understand their ambitions for this fund.

TREASURY**■ Arts: Immigration Controls****Alison McGovern:****[R] [\[140803\]](#)**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment the Government has made of the economic effect of immigration restrictions on EU-based creative workers.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government recognises the importance of the UK's and EU's thriving cultural industries. This is why, during our recent negotiations with the EU, we pushed for ambitious arrangements for performers and artists to be able to travel without needing work-permits.

Our proposals were developed in consultation with the UK's creative industries and would have allowed musicians and performers to travel and perform more easily in the EU and vice versa, however, these proposals were rejected by the EU.

■ British Nationals Abroad: EU Countries**Caroline Lucas:****[\[140027\]](#)**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 134406 on British Nationals Abroad: EU Countries, if he will make it his policy to assess whether the tax that UK individuals residing in the EU who dispose of their sole residence in an EU country may be subject to in their country of residence has increased or decreased since the UK left the EU; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has no plans to begin assessing the tax owed by individuals in other jurisdictions. The level of tax paid in other countries by UK nationals on property they own there will depend on the individual's circumstances, and the tax rules applicable in that country.

Anyone selling an overseas property should continue, as before the UK left the EU, to consult the tax authority or advisers in that country for information on any tax due.

■ Business: Government Assistance**Andrew Griffith:****[\[138545\]](#)**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support his Department is providing to businesses required to close as a result of the covid-19 lockdown restrictions announced in January 2021.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout this crisis, the government has sought to protect people's jobs and livelihoods while also supporting businesses and public services across the UK. To do this, the government has put in place an economic package of support which will provide businesses and individuals with certainty over the coming months, even as

measures to prevent further spread of the virus change. The government has spent over £280 billion this year to provide this support.

Businesses forced to close can claim grants of up to £3,000 per month, based on their rateable value, through the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed). They can also claim a one-off grant of up to £9,000, in addition to the monthly grant. Local authorities will also be given an additional £500 million discretionary funding to support their local businesses. This builds on the £1.1 billion discretionary funding (worth £20 per head of population) which local authorities in England have already received to support their local economies and help businesses impacted.

Businesses are also able to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), which was introduced to help employers whose operations have been affected by COVID-19 retain their employees and protect the UK economy. All businesses across the UK can access the scheme, which will run until the end of April 2021, with employees receiving 80% of their usual salary for hours not worked, up to £2,500 per month.

Businesses have also received billions in loans, tax deferrals, Business Rates relief, and general and sector-specific grants. Individuals and families have benefited from increased welfare payments, enhanced Statutory Sick Pay, a stay on repossession proceedings and mortgage holidays.

■ Carbon Emissions

Andrew Griffith:

[\[138544\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what fiscal steps he is taking to support the UK's transition to a net-zero economy.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Government is committed to ending the UK's contribution to climate change by 2050. As a step towards this, the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution was announced alongside the 2020 Autumn Spending Review.

The Ten Point Plan will mobilise £12 billion of Government investment for the green industries of the future and accelerate the UK's path to Net Zero. This Government investment will spur over three times as much private sector investment by 2030.

■ Cash Dispensing

Ronnie Cowan:

[\[140177\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the Government's timeframe is for bringing forward legislative proposals on protecting access to cash; and whether he has made an assessment of how those potential proposals are planned to interrelate with the existing work of the FCA, his Department and industry to protect access to cash.

John Glen:

The Government recognises that cash remains important to millions of people across the UK and has committed to protecting access to cash for those that need it. The

Government published a Call for Evidence on 15 October 2020 seeking views on the key considerations associated with cash access, including deposit and withdrawal facilities, cash acceptance, and regulatory oversight of the cash system. The Call for Evidence closed on the 25 November 2020. The Government is considering responses and will set out next steps in due course.

The FCA and PSR have also been leading a programme of work with industry, including engaging with consumer groups, to reach agreement on sustainable long-term solutions for cash access. HM Treasury has been closely involved in this work; the findings from which are being used to inform the Government's approach on cash.

■ **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme**

Dan Jarvis:

[140813]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on providing additional financial support to supply staff ineligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

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.

Schools can continue to engage supply teachers and other supply staff during this lockdown period and schools may want to consider how supply teachers, and other temporary staff, can assist in delivering face to face education to pupils who continue to attend school, and in delivering remote education for those who are not attending.

The Department for Education is considering what further guidance may be helpful to schools in workforce planning, and schools should continue to check updates to the department's guidance on restricting attendance in the national lockdown.

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

Sarah Olney:

[140898]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information his Department holds in the number of people who were excluded from the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme because they became employed in mid-October 2020 and their employer did not submit their payroll details before midnight on 30 October 2020.

Jesse Norman:

It is not possible to provide an answer to the question in the time available.

Estimates of the number of employments eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) extension will be published as part of the next statistics release on

the CJRS on 28 January. This release will be available from the following GOV.UK page alongside previous releases: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics>.

The support schemes have been designed to protect taxpayer money against error, fraud, and abuse. Where support under the CJRS is made available, it is based on information HMRC already held on the date that the scheme was announced.

■ Cryptocurrencies: Banks

Mark Pritchard:

[140017]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to establish a crypto currency reserve bank in the UK.

John Glen:

The government has no plans to establish a crypto currency reserve bank.

The Treasury and the Bank of England are continuing analytical work to evaluate the possible opportunities and risks associated with a UK central bank digital currency, and of central bank digital currency initiatives being undertaken elsewhere. The Bank of England published a discussion paper on a possible UK central bank digital currency alongside the Budget in March 2020, which closed for responses on 12 June. The Treasury and Bank of England are considering next steps.

The government is also considering how it can support innovation and mitigate risks posed by cryptoassets. The Treasury recently launched a consultation looking at the broader regulatory approach to cryptoassets, including new challenges from so-called 'stablecoins'. It closes for responses on 21 March.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Dr Alan Whitehead:

[139965]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much of the £200m his Department allocated to the UK Charging Infrastructure Investment Fund remains to be disbursed.

Jesse Norman:

The UK Charging Infrastructure Investment Fund (CIIF) was launched in August 2019, and Zouk Capital LLP was appointed to manage £200m of Treasury funds and raise matching funds from private investors.

The CIIF has made two investments so far. The first investment was into Instavolt in August 2019. Instavolt is the UK's largest owner and operator of a nationally distributed rapid EV charging network. The second investment was into Liberty Charge which focuses on providing on-street charging facilities in large cities and towns where many residents have no access to off-street parking.

Zouk is working on a number of other investment opportunities and further capital injections will be made into Instavolt and Liberty Charge. The investment amounts are confidential.

■ Employment

Seema Malhotra:

[\[140097\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of jobs that will be created in the UK in 2021.

Kemi Badenoch:

In its November Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast employment to be 31.9 million in 2021. The OBR noted that the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), along with other new measures, was expected to reduce the level of unemployment by around 300,000 in the second quarter of this year, relative to what would have happened in their absence.

The Government's Plan for Jobs aims to both create and protect jobs, through packages such as, a £3 billion green investment package that could help support around 140,000 green jobs, a £1 billion public buildings programme, and £5.8 billion for shovel-ready construction projects.

The Government has also launched a £2 billion Kickstart Scheme, creating hundreds of thousands of new, fully subsidised jobs for young people at risk of long-term unemployment, as well as a guaranteed foundation of support for young people on Universal Credit.

The Budget on the 3 March will set out the next phase of the plan to tackle the virus and protect jobs.

■ Financial Conduct Authority: Cash Dispensing

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[140314\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of the Financial Conduct Authority becoming the single regulator tasked with protecting consumers' access to cash, including monitoring and publishing detail of acceptance levels.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[140315\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish the Government's timeframe for bringing forward legislative proposals for protecting people's ability to access cash following his commitment in the March 2020 Budget.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[140316\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will appoint the Financial Conduct Authority to track changes in cash acceptance by UK businesses in response to research from Which? that found one in three people have had their cash refused since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

The Government recognises that cash remains important to millions of people across the UK and has committed to protecting access to cash. The Government published

a Call for Evidence on 15 October 2020 seeking views on the key considerations associated with cash access, including deposit and withdrawal facilities, cash acceptance, and regulatory oversight of the cash system.

The Government will ensure that regulators have the right responsibilities and powers to oversee the cash system. As set out in the Call for Evidence, effective coordination between the financial authorities will continue to be critical, but the Government considers that there may also be benefit in giving a single authority overall responsibility for ensuring the retail cash system meets the needs of consumers and businesses. The Government's view is that the FCA may be well positioned to take on the function through legislation. The Call for Evidence closed on the 25 November 2020. The Government is considering responses and will set out next steps in due course.

The Government also remains closely engaged with the financial regulators, including through the Treasury-chaired Joint Authorities Cash Strategy Group, to monitor and assess risks around cash relating to COVID-19. In order to help control the virus, all businesses and individuals are encouraged to follow the latest Government advice. It is important to wash your hands regularly. To work safely, retailers have been recommended to minimise contact around transactions, for example, considering using contactless payments. It remains the individual retailer's choice as to whether to accept or decline any form of payment, including cash or card.

■ Food: Wholesale Trade

Carolyn Harris:

[138472]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will provide funding to food and drink wholesalers to account for excess stock accumulated by those businesses (a) in response to the end of the transition period and (b) as a result of hospitality and school closures during the covid-19 lockdown announced in January 2021.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, the Government has protected people's jobs and livelihoods while also supporting businesses and public services across the UK. Food and drink wholesalers have been eligible for a number of economic support schemes, including:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which has been extended until the end of April 2021 for all parts of the UK;
- The opportunity to defer VAT payments due between 20 March and 30 June 2020; and
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme for small businesses to borrow between £2,000 and £50,000, with no interest payments or fees for the first 12 months.

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement ensures UK businesses can continue to buy and sell goods from EU customers without tariffs or quotas.

■ Hospitality Industry: Non-domestic Rates

Dan Jarvis:

[\[140812\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans his Department has to extend the business rates holiday for the hospitality sector.

Jesse Norman:

This year the Government has provided an unprecedented business rates holiday for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties due to the direct adverse effects of COVID-19, worth about £10 billion, and has frozen the business rates multiplier for all businesses for 2021-22.

The Government 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.

■ Housing: Sales

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[140744\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will protect people purchasing houses from lost sales due to mortgages and other loans not being fulfilled due to the covid-19 outbreak.

John Glen:

The Government is committed to supporting homeowners and home buyers during COVID-19. This included making mortgage holidays available to all mortgage holders for up to 6 months support for consumers struggling with mortgage payments; consumers have until 31 March 2021 to apply and all holidays must be completed by 31 July. We also brought in a temporary Stamp Duty Land Tax cut in order to encourage and maintain confidence in the property market.

The Government does not seek to intervene in individual home purchases, but, we have worked with industry on a range of measures to make the process of buying and selling homes quicker, cheaper and less stressful. For example, we published "how to " guides to lead consumers through the process, ensured estate agent referral fees are transparent, set an 10 day turnaround for searches and started work to test reservation agreements which will increase commitment between buyers and sellers.

■ HSBC: Hong Kong

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[140754\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of reports that HSBC (a) expressed support for the National Security Law imposed by China upon Hong Kong and (b) froze bank accounts of pro-democracy campaigners in Hong Kong, in the context of the announcement of the

appointment on 18 January 2021 of HSBC's Group Chairman to the Prime Minister's Business Council to Build Back Better.

John Glen:

The Government engages in regular dialogue with businesses in Hong Kong and monitors the operation of the financial sector and its participants on an ongoing basis. Financial institutions operating in Hong Kong do so within a strict legal and regulatory framework.

The Build Back Better Council is being co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. It has 30 members, each appointed to draw together a wide range of leading business expertise from across the British economy, with the aim of working in partnership with government to unlock investment, boost job creation, and level up the whole of the UK.

■ **Import Duties: Turkey**

Mr William Wragg:

[140839]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will issue guidance on the duties importers and exporters are liable for on goods of Turkish origin exported to the EU via the UK.

Jesse Norman:

The UK has negotiated a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. This agreement maintains zero tariffs and zero quotas on trade in goods between the UK and EU, where goods meet the relevant rules of origin. Rules of origin specify the minimum amount of UK/EU content that is required for the good to be considered 'originating' in either market. A very small number of products that contain significant inputs from outside the UK and EU may face tariffs.

Guidance to check product-specific and country-specific information on tariffs and regulations that currently apply to UK trade in goods can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/get-rules-tariffs-trade-with-uk> and at <https://www.gov.uk/check-duties-customs-exporting>.

■ **Liverpool Victoria**

Gareth Thomas:

[139967]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with insurance regulators on the future of Liverpool Victoria; and if he will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas:

[139968]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect on the insurance market of the decision by Liverpool Victoria to seek demutualisation; and if he will make a statement.

John Glen:

Assessing the impact of the sale of LV= Life and Pensions business to Bain Capital is a matter for the financial services regulators.

The sale will be supervised by both the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA). As part of their work, the regulators will assess the overall suitability of Bain Capital to manage insurance business, including its financial position and the skills and experience of its workforce.

The proposed transaction also involves steps which require sanction by the Court. The Court processes involve a number of safeguards which are designed to ensure that policyholders are kept informed and their interests protected. These include appointment of an independent expert acting in the interests of policyholders and who will assess the impact on policyholders and report to them.

■ London Capital and Finance: Insolvency

Tulip Siddiq:

[140214]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to (a) compensate London Capital and Finance bondholders and (b) reform Financial Conduct Authority regulation to prevent future regulatory failure.

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 in due course.

As my statement also sets out, the Government welcomes the FCA's commitment to implement all of Dame Elizabeth Gloster's recommendations. The FCA's response to the report details the changes it has made over several years and commits to accelerating this ongoing programme of reform through its Transformation Programme.

The FCA will report publicly on the progress of its Transformation Programme until such time as the recommendations from both reviews have been substantially implemented, as set out in the FCA CEO's letter to me on 17 December 2020 which is available on gov.uk.

■ NHS: Tax Avoidance

Barbara Keeley:

[140763]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of NHS staff who (a) are subject to and (b) have settled their debt in relation to the Loan Charge.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC do not hold the requested estimates and do not routinely collect data on profession.

■ **Non-domestic Rates: Tax Allowances**

Dr Dan Poulter:

[\[140032\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the business rates relief scheme through the 2021-22 financial year.

Jesse Norman:

The full business rates holiday for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties for the financial year is worth about £10 billion to business in 2020-21. The Government will continue to look at how to adjust its support in a way that ensures people can get back to work, protecting both the UK economy and the livelihoods of people across the country. In order to ensure that any decisions best meet the evolving challenges presented by COVID-19, the Government will outline plans for future reliefs in due course.

Lucy Powell:

[\[140098\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate his Department has made of the number of firms eligible for the 2020-21 business rates holiday; and how much has been spent from the public purse on that policy.

Jesse Norman:

The business rates holiday for retail, hospitality and leisure is worth about £10 billion to businesses in this financial year. An estimated 350,000 retail, leisure and hospitality properties will pay no business rates in 2020-21.

■ **Remote Working: Non-domestic Rates**

Sarah Olney:

[\[140230\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the provision of a 12-month Business Rates holiday to businesses in the flexible workspace industry.

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 will outline plans for 2021-22 reliefs in due course. 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 measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for business rates relief such as flexible workspaces, has also been made available, including grant payments through local authorities, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme

Neale Hanvey:

[\[140287\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 January 2021 to Question 137329 on Self-employed: Coronavirus, what steps he is taking to include the newly self-employed in 2019-20 in the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises that taxpayers have faced immense challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and it has prioritised delivering support to as many people as possible while guarding against the risk of fraud or abuse.

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) is one of the most generous in the world and has received claims from almost 2.7 million people so far, totalling over £18.5 billion.

The practical issues that prevented the Government from being able to include the newly self-employed in 2019-20 in the SEISS, namely that HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) do not have access to the full set of 2019-20 self-assessment returns in order to verify their eligibility, still remain. The latest year for which HMRC have tax returns for all self-employed individuals is 2018-19.

The SEISS continues to be just one element of a substantial package of support for the self-employed which includes Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments and other business support grants.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[140791\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment the Government has made of the number of people able to access the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme as a proportion of the self-employed workforce.

Jesse Norman:

About 5 million individuals reported self-employment income for the tax year 2018/2019. Of those, 3.4 million met the criteria for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). However, some of these businesses will not have been adversely affected by coronavirus or will have ceased trading since the tax year 2018/2019 so will not in fact have been eligible.

The first SEISS grant supported 2.7 million individuals with claims totalling £7.8 billion. A further £5.9 billion has been claimed through the second and, as of 13 December, £4.8 billion through the third SEISS grant.

The SEISS official statistics are published on GOV.UK.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme: Taxation

Dr Andrew Murrison:

[\[139996\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he plans to use 2019-20 tax returns to determine eligibility for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises that taxpayers have faced immense challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and it has prioritised delivering support to as many people as possible while guarding against the risk of fraud or abuse.

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) is one of the most generous in the world and has received claims from almost 2.7 million people so far, totalling over £18.5 billion.

The practical issues that prevented the Government from being able to include the newly self-employed in 2019-20 in the SEISS, namely that HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) do not have access to the full set of 2019-20 self-assessment returns needed to verify their eligibility, still remain. The latest year for which HMRC have tax returns for all self-employed individuals is 2018-19.

The SEISS continues to be just one element of a substantial package of support for the self-employed which includes Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments and other business support grants.

■ Small Businesses: Coronavirus**Helen Hayes:****[140887]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support provided to the (a) self-employed, (b) freelancers and (c) the directors of small limited companies who are unable to trade during the third national lockdown.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has taken substantial steps to support the self-employed and freelancers during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) receiving claims from about 2.7 million people so far, totalling over £18.5 billion.

Company directors and other individuals who are not eligible for support under the SEISS may still be eligible for other elements of the wider £280bn support package available, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (in respect of their salary but not their dividends), Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, increased levels of Universal Credit and mortgage holidays.

The Government has also introduced the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) (Closed), giving businesses forced to close due to national or local restrictions up to £3,000 per month. This was worth over £1bn for the four weeks of national lockdown in November and will benefit over 600,000 business premises. In addition, these businesses will benefit from one-off grants of up to £9,000 as announced on 5 January.

Businesses which are not eligible for the grants for closed businesses may be able to benefit from funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant. The Government recently increased the funding available under this scheme to £1.6 billion across England. It is

up to each local authority to determine eligibility for this scheme based on their assessment of local economic need; the Government encourages local authorities to support businesses which have been affected by COVID-19 restrictions, but which are ineligible for the other grant schemes.

■ **Small Businesses: Non-domestic Rates**

Derek Twigg:

[\[140745\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what representations he has received from SMEs that have not received business rates support to help mitigate the effects of the covid-19 outbreak; and when he plans to make an announcement on future support for those businesses.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has put in place a substantial package of support for businesses worth over £280 billion, which includes loans, tax deferrals, and general and sector-specific grants. It continues to engage with businesses and representative groups, including SMEs, to ensure that the support provided is right for the affected areas and for the economy as a whole.

On 5 January the Government announced one-off grants for businesses of up to £9,000. The Government will continue to ensure businesses are supported in the coming months, as measures to control the virus change, and it will keep all impacts and policies under review. The Chancellor will consider any further decisions on taxation as part of the Budget process.

■ **Social Enterprises: Tax Allowances**

Gareth Thomas:

[\[139969\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend Social Investment Tax Relief for cooperatives and social enterprises beyond April 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) was introduced in 2014 to incentivise risk finance investments in qualifying social enterprises and charities. HMRC statistics show that up to 2018-19 about 110 enterprises have used the scheme to raise £11.2 million.

The Government keeps all taxes and reliefs under review in order to ensure they continue to meet policy objectives and represent value for money for taxpayers. The Government previously published a Call for Evidence on SITR's use to date. A response to the consultation will be published in due course and a decision on SITR's future will be announced at the Budget ahead of its sunset clause in April 2021.

■ Sovereign Wealth Funds

Mark Pritchard:

[140016]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund.

John Glen:

The immediate focus for the UK Government's economic and fiscal strategy is on ensuring that it continues to support workers and businesses as the UK recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Although both borrowing and debt will rise this year, the costs of servicing this debt are affordable and sustainable. The Government will set out further details on its plans for a sustainable and balanced fiscal policy as the economic and fiscal outlook becomes clearer.

In relation to establishing a sovereign wealth fund, the Government remains open to the introduction of new financing instruments but would need to be satisfied that they would meet value-for-money criteria and would be consistent with wider fiscal objectives. The Government continues to monitor the case for new financing instruments and will keep this under review.

■ Supply Teachers: Universal Credit

Dan Jarvis:

[140814]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect on the number of universal credit claimants of teaching staff agencies not using the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Steve Barclay:

The Department for Work and Pensions does not collect data on the number of supply teachers claiming Universal Credit.

If teaching staff employed via employment agencies are unable to work due to Covid-19, their employment agency can place them on furlough and use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to claim for 80% of their wages, including during school holiday periods, provided that the eligibility criteria are met.

However, schools can continue to engage temporary staff such as supply teachers during this lockdown period, and schools may want to consider how this staff can assist in delivering face to face education to pupils who continue to attend school, and to deliver remote education for those who are not attending.

Individuals who unfortunately lose their job or face a reduction in their earnings may become eligible for support through the welfare system, including Universal Credit or new style Jobseeker's Allowance. The Government has announced an extra £7.4 billion of support through the welfare system this year.

■ Tax Avoidance: Bankruptcy

Barbara Keeley:

[\[140764\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Loan Charge on levels of bankruptcy.

Jesse Norman:

No estimate of the number of individual bankruptcies has been made.

■ UK Trade with EU: Rules of Origin

Catherine West:

[\[140224\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans the Government has to support small businesses affected by the Rules of Origin provisions of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Kemi Badenoch:

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement includes modern and appropriate rules of origin which have been negotiated to reflect the interests of UK businesses and consumers. The Government continues to work closely with industry to support them to take advantage of the opportunities on offer and help them adapt to any new trading requirements including rules of origin now we have left the single market and customs union.

The Government has made comprehensive guidance available online, and departments are engaging directly with businesses, including small and large businesses as well as trade associations, to support on technical and administrative queries. Furthermore, the Government has put in place a number of administrative simplifications. For goods imported from the EU to the UK between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2021, the UK's unilateral staged import controls policy means UK importers will have up to six months to submit a full customs declaration and pay any necessary tariffs. This also includes declaring the origin of their goods. As part of the TCA, we also agreed with the EU that traders will not need supplier declarations from business suppliers to be in place until 1 January 2022.

■ Universal Credit

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[139165\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the temporary increase in universal credit; and whether he has made an assessment of the potential effect on (a) fuel duty and (b) income tax in the event that that increase was maintained by raising those taxes.

Steve Barclay:

As we have done throughout this crisis, the government is continuing to assess how best to support people and the economy, taking into account the health and economic context as it develops.

Extending the temporary £20 per week increase in Universal Credit and Tax Credits by a further 12 months would cost over £6 billion. To illustrate the scale of this cost, it would take a 1p increase to the basic rate of income tax and a 3p increase in fuel duty combined to raise £6 billion.

■ VAT

Dan Jarvis:

[140811]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend the 5 per cent VAT business relief to (a) the hospitality sector and (b) all other sectors.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary VAT reduced rate came into effect on 15 July 2020 and was initially scheduled to end on 12 January 2021.

In order to continue supporting the cash flow and viability of over 150,000 businesses and to protect 2.4 million jobs, the Government extended the temporary reduced rate of VAT (5 per cent) to goods and services supplied by the tourism and hospitality sectors until 31 March 2021.

While the Government keeps all taxes under review, this relief comes at a significant cost to the Exchequer, and there are currently no plans to extend the length or the scope of the reduced rate further.

■ VAT: Coronavirus

Stephen McPartland:

[140809]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to further extend deferral of VAT payments for businesses to help with their cashflow.

Jesse Norman:

The VAT payments deferral scheme ended on 30 June 2020, as planned. There are no current plans to launch another VAT deferral scheme.

As part of the Winter Economy Plan, the Government announced further support for those with deferred VAT. Instead of paying the full deferred VAT outstanding by 31 March 2021, businesses can spread what they owe over up to 11 smaller monthly payments.

More information is available at www.gov.uk/hmrc/vat-deferral.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ Females: Internet

Ruth Jones:

[133184]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on tackling online abuse targeted at women.

Kemi Badenoch:

Ministers and officials have regular meetings and discussions across government departments, on a variety of issues, including online abuse targeted at women. Details of Ministerial meetings are published quarterly on the gov.uk website. In line with the practice of successive administrations, details of internal discussions are not usually disclosed.

The full government response to the Online Harms White Paper sets out how the proposed legal duty of care on online companies will work in practice. Under the new laws, all companies will need to take swift and effective action against illegal online abuse. If any company fails to tackle illegal content, or if companies providing Category 1 services fail to enforce their terms and conditions, they could face an investigation and enforcement action.

Gender Recognition: Children**Ben Bradley:**[\[124307\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment her Department has made of the effect that the decision of the High Court on 1 December 2020, on requiring informed consent for giving puberty blockers and hormones to children aged under 16, will have on the safety and protection of children.

Kemi Badenoch:

The NHS has previously recognised the need for a review of how to best meet the needs of children and young people with gender incongruence, which is why in September 2020, Dr Hilary Cass was asked to carry out an independent review of the gender identity development service. The review will be wide-ranging in scope, with a focus on how care can be improved for children and young people. The Tavistock is also required to undertake a number of urgent actions in response to the CQC's recent finding that its child gender-identity service is 'inadequate'.

The Tavistock and Portman appeal is subject to ongoing legal proceedings, as such the Government is unable to comment on the specifics of the case at this time. However, we will follow the proceedings closely and continue to review its impact on policy related to this area.

WORK AND PENSIONS■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Hywel Williams:**[\[911294\]](#)

What assessment she has made of the adequacy of benefit rates for disabled people on legacy benefits.

Justin Tomlinson:

We will spend over £55 billion this year (2020/21) on benefits to support people with health conditions and disabilities. This will increase by £1.6 billion to £57 billion in 2021/22.

Jamie Stone:[\[911295\]](#)

What recent assessment she has made of the potential effect of removing the £20 uplift to universal credit on recipients in each (a) region and (b) population demographic.

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 pandemic, it will continue to assess how best to support low-income families, which is why we will look at the economic and health context before making any decisions.

■ **Access to Work Programme: Finance****Stephen Timms:**[\[140736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 7 December 2020 to Question 123507, how much funding was allocated to promote the Access to Work scheme in the last financial year; and what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of that promotion in relation to the uptake of that scheme.

Justin Tomlinson:

In the context of the current lockdown restrictions we are currently reviewing our messaging on Access to Work and the most appropriate time to launch paid advertising to ensure optimum value for money. We will continue the already extensive no cost and stakeholder promotion of Access to Work and look to supplement with paid advertising at the most appropriate point. Within this context, we are unable to provide a final spend estimate for the 20/21 financial year.

■ **Access to Work Programme: Musculoskeletal Disorders****Stephen Timms:**[\[140735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effect of modifications to Access to Work during the covid-19 outbreak on support for people with musculoskeletal conditions.

Justin Tomlinson:

Recognising the challenges Covid-19 has for employers and disabled people, Access to Work introduced a new more flexible offer to support disabled people to move into and retain employment. The new flexible offer complements support provided by employers and contains a combination of support that can be tailored to meet the needs of new Covid-19 working arrangements. The offer includes:

- support to work from more than one location,
- a package of home working support which can be blended with workplace support,
- mental health wellbeing support for people returning to work after a period of furlough or shielding,
- travel-to-work support for those who may no longer be able to safely travel by public transport due to the nature of their disability, and
- prioritising Access to Work applications from disabled people in the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Group.

Recognising the benefits equipment/support within the workplace provides, Access to Work can contribute towards the costs of transferring that equipment or where working from both the office and home occurs Access to Work can consider providing funding for additional equipment/support to enable the disabled person to retain their job.

Background

Access to Work (ATW) is a demand-led, discretionary grant to de-risk the recruitment and retention of disabled people for employers. The grant contributes to the disability related extra costs of working faced by disabled people and those with a health condition that are beyond reasonable adjustment, but it does not replace an employer's duty under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments. The grant provides personalised support and can provide workplace assessments, travel to/in work, support workers, specialist aids and equipment to enable disabled people and those with a health condition to move into or retain employment. And can fund up to £60,700 worth of flexible, personalised support per person per year.

We have not carried out a formal assessment of the new offer, but following its immediate introduction telephone call to Access to Work increased by approximately 40%.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Brook Street**Chris Stephens:****[140849]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much in addition to wages has been paid to Brook Street for the recruitment of staff to her Department since March 2020.

Guy Opperman:

The information requested is commercially sensitive and cannot be disclosed as it will impair the commercial interests of the Department and its ability to obtain goods and services on the best possible commercial terms.

Chris Stephens:[\[140850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of staff recruited to her Department by Brook Street becoming (a) fixed-term appointments and (b) permanent.

Guy Opperman:

Under 'Civil Service Recruitment Principles' for any agency workers to become either fixed term or permanent appointments there would need to be an externally advertised recruitment exercise where they could be assessed alongside other applicants.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Pay**Chris Stephens:**[\[140848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department's staff recruited through agencies are paid their full wage during covid-19 related absences.

Guy Opperman:

Temporary agency workers are brought into the department through the commercial arrangements under the Crown Commercial Service, Public Sector Resourcing framework, and are supplied by Brook Street.

Agency workers recruited by Brook Street to work in the department are currently receiving 80 per cent of their wage during Covid-19 related absences. This arrangement was implemented with the agreement of HM Treasury following the end of the central Government Contingent Labour Compensation Scheme on 31 October 2020.

The 80 per cent payment mirrors both the previous scheme referred to above and the arrangements in place under the government Job Retention Scheme.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Remote Working**Chris Stephens:**[\[140173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of staff in her Department are able to work from home during the covid-19 outbreak; and what steps she is taking to ensure that employees have access to the necessary equipment to permit home working.

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 per cent 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 / Devolved Administration 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.

Chris Stephens:

[140851]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff across her Department can currently work from home; and what steps she is taking to improve access to the necessary equipment to increase home working in her Department.

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 / Devolved Administration 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.

■ Disability

Stephen Timms:

[140734]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish the timetable for the National Disability Strategy, and whether that Strategy will be consulted on as a command paper.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Government is committed to transforming the lives of disabled people, and will publish the National Strategy for Disabled People this year.

It will be informed by insights from the lived experience of disabled people, and will focus on the issues that disabled people say are most important across all aspects of life, from transport to education, and housing to employment. On Friday 15th January, we launched the online UK Disability Survey, which complements a range of engagement already undertaken and ongoing, including lived experience research with disabled people, discussions with the Disabled Charities Consortium, the

Regional Stakeholder Networks and others. Contributions to the survey will feed not only into the development of the Strategy but also its delivery.

■ Employment

Emma Hardy: [\[911285\]](#)

What recent assessment she has made of trends in the level of employment.

Mims Davies:

The latest ONS statistics published on 15th December show UK employment is at 32.5 million, or 75.2 per cent. At every stage of this pandemic we have looked to provide support to those impacted, particularly the most vulnerable – this includes £280bn of interventions – such as the furlough scheme.

Updated statistics will be released tomorrow.

■ Employment: Coronavirus

Darren Henry: [\[911288\]](#)

What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting people who have lost their jobs as a result of the covid-19 outbreak back into employment.

Mims Davies:

I have regular discussions with my Cabinet colleagues to ensure that we provide appropriate support to individuals who have lost their jobs and are looking for employment.

The current package of measures includes Job Finding Support, Sector Based Work Academies, Job Entry Targeted Support and the Kickstart scheme.

■ Food: Coronavirus

Helen Hayes: [\[140888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment has she made of the implications for her policies of the increase in demand on food banks and charities providing emergency food during the third lockdown.

Will Quince:

No such assessment has been made. Throughout this pandemic, this Government has delivered an unprecedented package of support to protect jobs and businesses and, for those in most need, injected billions into the welfare system.

The new Covid Winter Grant Scheme builds on that support with an additional £170m for local authorities in England, to support families with children and other vulnerable people with the cost of food and essential utilities this winter. The funding is ring-fenced, with at least 80% earmarked to help with food and bills, and will cover the period to the end of March 2021.

DEFRA has made an additional grant of £16 million to FareShare to support local charities across England with the purchasing and distribution of food over a 12-week

period that began at the start of December. This follows the £16m of funding announced last May for the provision of meals through charities.

■ Industrial Diseases: Compensation

Jonathan Reynolds:

[140073]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that the amount awarded to claimants for the Pneumoconiosis Etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 lump sum payment is not affected by the delays in assessing claims.

Justin Tomlinson:

Due to COVID-19, since March face-to-face assessments for all disability benefits, including the Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) have been suspended.

Eligibility to the Pneumoconiosis Etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 ('1979 Act') is dependent on an individual having an IIDB assessment and their age at the time of this assessment. As such we are aware of the issues caused by the delays in assessing claims.

We have continued to process IIDB claims and lump sum payments for those individuals with terminal illnesses, and those for Fast Track prescribed diseases. These claims have continued to be assessed as usual without the need for a face to face assessment. Individuals can also then claim under the '1979 Act' if eligible. The IIDB Quarterly Statistics show that 1,100 sufferers and 120 dependents received payments totalling £19,235,287 between March and September 2020 under the '1979 Act'. The data can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/industrial-injuries-disablement-benefit-quarterly-statistics-data-to-march-2020>

We have now begun some paper based assessments for certain prescribed diseases. This allows a decision on such claims and will enable claimants to determine their eligibility to the '1979 Act'. At present the paper based approach includes claims for asbestosis (D1) and Pleural Thickening (D9), diseases which are potentially eligible for the '1979 Act'.

■ Kickstart Scheme

Alison McGovern:

[140062]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent estimate she has made of the number of (a) jobs created by, (b) placement started at and (c) applications made to the Kickstart scheme.

Mims Davies:

As of 19/01/2021, there have been (a) 120,548 job placements created, (b) 1,916 young people starting job placements and (c) 6,530 applications to, the Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme.

Cat Smith: [\[140159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many work placements have been created under the Kickstart scheme as of January 2021.

Mims Davies:

As of 19/01/2021 there have been 120,538 jobs approved by the Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme.

■ Kickstart Scheme: Hearing Impairment

Cat Smith: [\[140158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure young deaf people who are not eligible for universal credit can access the Kickstart Scheme.

Mims Davies:

A young person is eligible for a job on the Kickstart Scheme if they are aged 16-24, on Universal Credit (UC), and considered to be at risk of long term unemployment by their work coach. The Department of Work and Pensions has no current plans to extend the eligibility for the scheme beyond UC claimants, but we will keep that under review. If a young person is deaf or has hearing difficulties this would not prevent them from being referred to a Kickstart Scheme job as it is open to all young people who are on UC as long as they meet the eligibility/suitability criteria.

■ Local Housing Allowance

Chris Grayling: [\[911290\]](#)

What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of local housing allowance; and if she will make a statement.

Will Quince:

In April 2020 Local Housing Allowance rates were set at the 30th percentile of local rents, costing nearly £1 billion and providing - on average - 1.5 million households with an increase of £600 per year.

I can also confirm that the increase to Local Housing Allowance rates will be maintained in cash terms in the next financial year, to continue supporting our claimants to manage housing costs.

■ Pensions

Nigel Mills: [\[911286\]](#)

What steps her Department is taking to help protect pensions savers from disproportionate costs and charges.

Guy Opperman:

On 13 January DWP published its review of the default fund charge cap. This included a commitment to end flat fees on pension pots of £100 and under.

At present, price comparison of the costs of automatic enrolled pensions is not possible – and this needs to change.

Protecting savers and giving them value for their money is my priority. I will be looking into standardisation of charges so savers can better assess the value for money of their investment.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Stephen Timms:

[\[140737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what her Department's policy is on automatically extending personal independence payment awards.

Justin Tomlinson:

In normal circumstances, PIP awards are time-limited with regular review dates to ensure the benefit best meets claimants' needs and there are no automatic extensions to PIP awards. However, on the limited occasions when it is not possible to review claimants in a timely manner, we may extend a claimant's award until the point that we can complete the review.

As part of its response to the Covid-19 situation, in Spring 2020 the Department extended award dates for existing PIP claims. We restarted the PIP award review process in July. New decisions made since then will not have had their awards extended – reflecting these claims will on average not be subject to review until 2022 and beyond.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Terminal Illnesses

Dan Jarvis:

[\[140815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans her Department has to ensure that personal independence payment claimants with incurable illnesses are only reassessed when there is a change in their condition.

Justin Tomlinson:

Once someone has been awarded Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which can be paid at one of eight rates, that award will usually be reviewed. Regular reviews are a key feature of the benefit and ensure that payments accurately match the current needs of claimants. The length of an award is based on an individual's circumstances and can vary from nine months to an on-going award, with a light touch review after ten years.

In 2018 we introduced updated guidance for case managers and an updated PIP Assessment Guide in 2018 which ensures that those people who receive the highest level of support under PIP, and where their needs are unlikely to change or may get worse, will receive an ongoing award with a light touch review at the ten-year point. In line with PIP's aim to be needs-based rather than condition-based, the change to the guidance is not condition specific. However, we believe the changes will ensure that those with severe and/or progressive conditions receive the most appropriate award duration that reflects their condition and the needs arising.

■ Revenue and Customs

Chris Stephens:

[140852]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many service centres are being used to house HMRC staff at weekends for the purposes of overtime; and whether her Department is carrying out regular risk assessments on those service centre arrangements.

Guy Opperman:

We have no records of HMRC staff using DWP service centres to undertake overtime. HMRC staff are bound by their own policies in relation to both overtime and working outside of their normal office, including observing all health and safety policies.

All of our offices are COVID secure and are subject to risk assessments to ensure that occupancy levels are safe and that social distancing can be maintained.

■ Social Security Benefits

Seema Malhotra:

[140096]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the implications for her benefit cap policy of the findings of the Child Poverty Action Group in its report Capped in The New Year that an estimated 35,000 households will be capped at the start of 2021 as their grace period expired in December 2020 and a further 41,000 will be capped in the first few months of 2021, as their grace period expires from January to March 2021.

Mims Davies:

The information to undertake such an assessment is not currently available. The Benefit Cap quarterly statistics scheduled for publication later in the year will set out the volume of capped households for the periods in question. The relevant publication dates can be found here - https://www.gov.uk/search/research-and-statistics?keywords=benefit+AND+cap&content_store_document_type=upcoming_statistics&organisations%5B%5D=department-for-work-pensions&order=relevance

The benefit cap grace period is applied irrespective of whether or not the household has sufficient benefit income to be in scope for the cap. This ensures that a claimant will benefit from the grace period exemption should any change of circumstances bring them into the scope of the cap during that period. Many claimants who have the grace period applied will not be in scope of the cap when the grace period ends.

■ Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Seema Malhotra:

[140819]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many mandatory reconsideration applications her Department has received from claimants disputing the application of the benefit cap in each of the last 24 months; and in how many cases a decision has been (a) made and (b) overturned.

Justin Tomlinson:

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

■ Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus**Rebecca Long Bailey:**[\[138461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to Treasury's Answer on 18 December 2020 to Question 127577 on Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus, with reference to the recommendations on uplift of legacy benefits in the report published by Scope in May 2020, entitled Disabled People and the Coronavirus, and with reference to the scheduled cessation of the universal credit £20 uplift in April 2021, if she will (a) commission and (b) review research on the potential merits of extending the covid-19 universal credit uplift to recipients of legacy benefits; and if she will make a statement.

Will Quince:

There are no plans to extend the temporary £20 uplift to legacy benefits. Claimants on legacy benefits can make a claim for Universal Credit (UC) if they think they will be better off and should check carefully their eligibility and entitlements under UC before applying, as legacy benefits will end when claimants submit their UC claim and they will not be able to return to them in the future. For this reason, prospective claimants are signposted to independent benefits calculators on GOV.UK. Neither DWP nor HMRC can advise individual claimants whether they would be better off moving to UC or remaining on legacy benefits. There are special arrangements for those in receipt of the Severe Disability Premium, who will be able to make a new claim to Universal Credit from 27 January 2021.

■ Social Security Benefits: ICT**Seema Malhotra:**[\[140816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of benefits claimants who do not have access to a computer and the internet.

Mims Davies:

No estimate has been made.

■ Social Security Benefits: Terminal Illnesses**Jeff Smith:**[\[911289\]](#)

What progress her Department is making on the publication of its review into access to benefits for people with a terminal illness, announced in July 2019.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Department is working across Government on proposals, including potential legislative options, following the evaluation. I remain committed to implementing the key areas identified in the evaluation, changing the 6-month wait, improving awareness and consistency.

■ Unemployment: ICT**Seema Malhotra:****[140817]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support she is providing to unemployed people without access to a computer or the internet to help them find work.

Mims Davies:

Throughout the pandemic, jobcentres have remained open for anyone who needs face-to-face support and cannot be helped in any other way. To help keep customers and staff as safe as possible in the latest phase of the pandemic, jobcentre opening hours have changed to 10am to 2pm. This temporary change means we can continue providing safe, essential services for those who need to come into the Jobcentre and who are unable to interact with us on the phone or digitally. The opening hours of our phone lines remain as they were.

While face-to-face appointments and all face-to-face activity outside the Jobcentre have been suspended temporarily, Work Coaches continue to provide support and help to find work by phone, as well as through digital channels where available. All Jobcentre Plus offices across the country have Wi-Fi and computers available for claimants to access the internet.

■ Unemployment: Older People**Seema Malhotra:****[140818]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support her Department is providing to people aged over 50 to help them get back into work.

Mims Davies:

The department is supporting people of all ages back in to work. The Government's Plan for Jobs provides new funding to ensure more people, including those aged over 50, get tailored Jobcentre Plus support to help them find work and to build the skills they need to get into work. This includes £895m to double the number of Work Coaches in Jobcentre Plus by March 2021; a £150m increase in the Flexible Support Fund which will also boost the capacity of the Rapid Response Service to help those facing redundancy move into other jobs; and £10m for a new online support service that will provide tailored one-to-one job finding support to the recently unemployed.

The Government also aims to triple the number of sector-based work academy programme placements, supporting unemployed claimants of all ages through training and work experience to find a job. We are also investing £238m into Job Entry: Targeted Support (JETS) to offer new support to those who have been made unemployed for three months.

To support the long term unemployed, in the Spending Review 2020, Government has also announced the Restart programme that will provide intensive and tailored support to over one million people and help them find work.

The Department also has a network of Older Claimant Champions throughout all of the 34 Jobcentre Plus districts. These Jobcentre Plus staff work collaboratively with

Work Coaches to raise the profile of over 50s claimants, highlighting the benefits of employing them and sharing best practice.

Further, Government recognises the importance of planning effectively for the future and in encouraging productive workplace conversations. We therefore launched a webpage in 2019 to promote the mid-life MOT, which offers support from the National Careers Service, Public Health England and Money and Pensions Service to those considering a change in career by encouraging them to take stock across the key areas of skills, health and financial planning.

■ **Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit: Coronavirus**

Neil Gray:

[\[140114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the Resolution of the House of 18 January 2021 on universal credit and working tax credit; and if she will make a statement.

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.

■ **Work Capability Assessment**

Jonathan Reynolds:

[\[140071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the feasibility of restarting face-to-face work capability assessments.

Justin Tomlinson:

The health and safety of our claimants and staff is our key priority. We suspended all face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits in March. This temporary suspension, brought in to protect people from unnecessary risk of coronavirus at the outset of the pandemic, remains in place, and is being kept under review in line with the latest public health guidance. We are continuing to assess as many people as we are able to on paper evidence or via telephone assessments.

We have worked closely with our assessment providers to ensure appropriate arrangements will be in place for resuming face-to-face assessments as soon as it is possible to do so. We are working with Public Health England, the Health and Safety Executive, and the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure we have appropriate guidance in place, and that assessment centres are Covid-secure before reopening.

Jonathan Reynolds:

[140072]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that claimants whose work capability assessments have been delayed due to a need for a face-to-face assessment do not have their universal credit payment reduced or delayed while face-to-face assessments are suspended.

Justin Tomlinson:

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, claimants may experience a longer wait for their Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and may be asked to attend a telephone assessment while face-to-face assessments remain suspended.

Subject to meeting overall Universal Credit (UC) entitlement conditions, claimants will continue to receive UC whilst they await the outcome of their WCA. If the decision is that the claimant is entitled to extra benefit, we will pay any arrears that are due.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

HOME OFFICE

■ Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel):

[[HCWS733](#)]

Last week, on 22 January, the Government published the Tackling Child Sexual Abuse strategy. As the first strategy of its kind, it sets out an ambitious blueprint for preventing and tackling all forms of child sexual abuse – whether these crimes take place within the family, in the community or online. In the past, a culture of denial emboldened offenders committing these heinous crimes. This must never happen again.

The Strategy builds on previous work across Government to tackle child sexual abuse. It recognises the scale of the problem, its hidden nature, and the way it continues to evolve, outlining a fresh approach focused on the relentless pursuit of offenders and better protection for victims and survivors.

The recently published [paper on group-based child sexual exploitation](#) highlighted that the data collected on offender and victim characteristics is inadequate, and that there is a need to improve the quality and extent of data collected in relation to the modus operandi of offending. The Strategy therefore commits to working with local authorities to understand and respond to threats within their communities, and to collecting higher quality data on offenders so that the government can build a fuller picture on the characteristics of perpetrators and help tackle the abuse that has blighted many towns and cities in England.

In addition, the Strategy outlines the immediate steps we will take to tackle all forms of offending, including:

- Investing in the UK's world-leading Child Abuse Image Database to identify and catch more offenders quicker, including new tools to speed-up police investigations;
- Committing to a review of Sarah's Law to make it easier for parents and carers to ask the police if someone has a criminal record for child sexual offences;
- Supporting local areas to improve their response to exploitation through funding for the Home Office-funded Prevention Programme;
- Preventing abuse by raising awareness through communications and engagement with parents and the wider public, as well as providing professionals with skills and resources to intervene early;
- Providing victims and survivors with the support they need to rebuild their lives, ensuring their rights are protected in the criminal justice system and investing to improve support services and embed best practice;
- Working with partners overseas to strengthen child protection systems in countries where children are particularly at risk, and clamping down on individuals who travel abroad to rape and abuse children.

- Using new legislation and enhanced technology to stop offenders in their tracks, including introducing the ground-breaking Online Safety Bill and GCHQ collaborating with the tech industry to identify and develop solutions to crack down on large scale online child sexual abuse;

Protecting children and the most vulnerable in our society is one of the government's most fundamental and important roles. This Strategy underlines my unwavering determination to crack down on perpetrators, place victims and survivors at the heart of our approach and restore confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to tackle these repulsive crimes.

The Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). A copy of the Strategy will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.