



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 12 February 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:35 P.M., 12 February 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

■ **Bounce Back Loan Scheme and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme****Esther McVey:**[\[149235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of (a) Coronavirus Interruption Business Loan applications and (b) Bounce Back Loan applications have been declined.

Paul Scully:

A breakdown on the number of loans provided through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, as of 24 January 2021, are provided in the table below.

SCHEME	NUMBER OF FACILITIES APPROVED	VALUE OF FACILITIES APPROVED	TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS
Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme	87,529	£20.84 billion	201,343
Bounce Back Loan Scheme	1,471,001	£44.74 billion	1,953,564

The applications figure include: approved applications; applications that are still to be processed; applications that have been declined; and applications that may turn out not to be eligible or cases where customers will decide not to proceed.

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

■ **Coronavirus: Research****Chi Onwurah:**[\[148784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to support long term studies into (a) covid-19 immunity and (b) new SARS-CoV-2 variants.

Nadhim Zahawi:

I refer the hon Member to the answers given in my response of 5 February 2021 to Questions [144844](#) and Question [145176](#).

■ Global Challenges Research Fund

Sarah Champion: [\[149241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department plans to maintain the current level of funding for the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Amanda Solloway:

The challenging financial situation we face due to the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a temporary reduction in the UK's aid spending target from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5%. This means making difficult decisions when it comes to prioritising how we spend aid money to deliver the most impactful outcomes.

On Tuesday 26th January, my Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs, having concluded the ODA allocations of the Spending Review, issued a statement outlining each Department's total ODA settlement. At present, I am working with officials to determine how best to allocate BEIS's allocation on a fund-by-fund basis, in line with the Strategic Framework for UK ODA.

■ Hospitality Industry: Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment

Steve Double: [\[148833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much has been paid out to hospitality businesses by local authorities under the Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment scheme since 5 January 2021.

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 Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment (CBLP) which was established in response to the national restrictions that began on 5 January. Through the CBLP, businesses that have been mandated to close by Government, such as non-essential retail, leisure and hospitality businesses, can receive a one-off cash grant of up to £9,000 to support them through to spring.

We are working closely with all Local Authorities in England to deliver funding to businesses that are in scope of this scheme as quickly as possible, while safeguarding public funds.

■ Hospitality Industry: Coronavirus

Steve Double: [\[148835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to ensure local authorities are able to effectively pay coronavirus support grants to hospitality businesses under existing schemes.

Paul Scully:

Hospitality businesses are currently required to close due to the legal restrictions that have been put in place to tackle Covid-19 and save lives. Closed businesses will be eligible for grants of up to £4,500 per 6-week period of closure plus an additional one-off payment of up to £9,000 via local authorities.

In addition to these mandatory grants for closed businesses, £1.6bn has been allocated to local authorities in discretionary funding allowing them to provide grants to businesses that are not required to close but which are severely impacted.

There has been close engagement with the local government sector throughout the design and implementation of grant support for businesses during the local and national Covid-19 restrictions.

Full guidance to local authorities has been published in respect of all grant schemes, as have several iterations of FAQs picking up on issues raised by local authorities.

The Government is committed to meeting the additional New Burdens costs to local authorities. Financial support has started to be provided through some of the grant schemes. A further New Burdens assessment is currently underway and we will provide the additional funding to local authorities at the earliest opportunity.

Steve Double:**[148836]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what data his Department is (a) collecting and (b) making available on the issuing of coronavirus support grants to the hospitality sector.

Paul Scully:

Between March and September last year, over £11.68 billion was paid out to over a million business premises under the Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF), the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund (RHLGF) and the Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund (LADGF). A full breakdown of grant funding allocated to and distributed by each local authority is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-grant-funding-local-authority-payments-to-small-and-medium-businesses>.

We have since made further grant support available via Local Authorities to help businesses that have had to close due to national and localised restrictions, as well as funding for businesses severely impacted by restrictions even if not required to close. This includes the Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment (CBLP), the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), and the different Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) schemes. More details are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19#support-for-businesses-affected-by-coronavirus-restrictions>.

We are not able to share a full breakdown of the funding allocated and distributed by each Local Authority under these new schemes at this stage.

Steve Double:

[\[148837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to his department's guidance, Check if your business is eligible for a coronavirus grant due to national restrictions (for closed businesses), updated on 21 January 2021, when he plans to publish further guidance on subsidy rules which may affect hospitality businesses.

Paul Scully:

The EU State Aid rules and limits no longer apply in the UK, except in respect of aid in scope of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Subsidies must instead meet the terms of the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement as well as the other Free Trade Agreements we have reached with the rest of the world and our WTO commitments.

Existing guidance for Covid-19 Business Support grants which references pre-existing EU State Aid limits have been rolled forward until such point as a new domestic subsidy approach is agreed. The government is currently consulting on its proposed approach for establishing a bespoke UK-wide subsidy control regime.

The government is keeping under close review the impact of subsidy control rules on the ability of businesses in the hospitality sector to access grants, and will publish new guidance as and when circumstances require it.

■ **Hospitality Industry: Local Restrictions Support Grant**

Steve Double:

[\[148834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to updated coronavirus restrictions from 1 October 2020, what proportion of grants have been paid out by local authorities to hospitality businesses under the (a) Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) and (b) Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed).

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 includes extensive grant funding for businesses that have had to close due to national and localised restrictions, as well as funding for businesses severely impacted by restrictions even if not required to close. The Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed and Open), which applies to businesses mandated by Government to close alongside businesses that can open during periods of localised restrictions, is incorporated within this funding.

The LRSG (Open) grant programme does not apply during the national restrictions that began on 5 January. The relevant businesses will instead receive grant support through the LRSG (Closed) Addendum: 5 January onwards. The LRSG (Closed) is also superseded by the LRSG (Closed) Addendum: 5 January onwards. We are working closely with Local Authorities to ensure that funding is delivered to businesses that are in scope of these schemes as quickly as possible, while safeguarding public funds.

Local Growth Deals

Steve Reed:

[\[149243\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much funding has been allocated to each Local Enterprise Partnership through the Local Growth Fund in each of the last four years.

Paul Scully:

£4.3 billion has been paid to Local Enterprise Partnership through the Local Growth Fund over the course of the last four years, to unlock local economic growth through investment in infrastructure across England. A breakdown is provided in the table below.

LEP	17-18 PAYMENT	18-19 PAYMENT	19-20 PAYMENT	20-21 PAYMENT	TOTAL PAYMENTS 2017-21
Greater Birmingham & Solihull	£25,699,444	£19,303,020	£12,716,498	£31,847,061	£89,566,023
Greater Cambridge	£12,346,916	£16,705,458	£15,875,346	£35,737,637	£80,665,357
Greater Peterborough					
Greater Manchester	£127,373,045	£78,046,764	£47,904,463	£77,808,212	£331,132,484
Liverpool City Region	£53,563,639	£40,908,525	£27,084,532	£87,797,976	£209,354,672
London	£41,627,017	£35,379,854	£29,213,502	£83,631,227	£189,851,600
Sheffield City Region	£86,850,906	£42,471,649	£29,867,716	£43,238,940	£202,429,211
Tees Valley	£27,989,035	£13,708,247	£9,416,075	£14,216,773	£65,330,130
West of England	£49,831,528	£45,370,085	£13,575,065	£34,312,381	£143,089,059
North East	£42,505,549	£51,706,129	£28,063,127	£14,550,627	£136,825,432
Black Country	£31,264,295	£19,527,429	£19,044,119	£32,948,081	£102,783,924
Buckinghamshire and the Thames Valley	£10,873,571	£11,878,931	£3,050,399	£5,749,716	£31,552,617
Cheshire and Warrington	£18,269,116	£16,015,902	£8,234,770	£24,905,206	£67,424,994

LEP	17-18 PAYMENT	18-19 PAYMENT	19-20 PAYMENT	20-21 PAYMENT	TOTAL PAYMENTS 2017-21
Coast to Capital	£51,406,700	£45,815,341	£35,757,082	£47,281,837	£180,260,960
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	£16,731,067	£6,434,534	£4,772,967	£11,717,698	£39,656,266
Coventry & Warwickshire	£23,122,974	£14,858,866	£8,214,575	£24,561,463	£70,757,878
Cumbria	£7,123,593	£6,057,068	£6,818,265	£11,694,598	£31,693,524
Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire	£66,388,375	£32,359,889	£17,424,093	£40,086,356	£156,258,713
Dorset	£15,859,638	£19,368,567	£14,045,722	£12,741,255	£62,015,182
Enterprise M3	£45,663,923	£36,807,289	£17,491,536	£42,685,284	£142,648,032
Gloucestershire	£9,254,854	£8,499,446	£20,482,684	£14,856,992	£53,093,976
Greater Lincolnshire	£12,687,335	£8,733,858	£6,809,606	£18,153,052	£46,383,851
Heart of the South West	£36,132,181	£9,985,696	£13,146,492	£38,458,629	£97,722,998
Hertfordshire	£33,455,875	£42,585,327	£29,765,956	£27,274,460	£133,081,618
Humber	£27,269,412	£12,721,021	£11,050,217	£22,232,046	£73,272,696
Lancashire	£44,719,382	£34,856,510	£31,960,020	£38,640,069	£150,175,981
Leeds City Region	£72,228,329	£74,349,287	£73,510,320	£100,338,062	£320,425,998
Leicester & Leicestershire	£23,968,028	£15,694,684	£12,932,202	£17,896,716	£70,491,630
New Anglia	£41,334,111	£34,659,957	£24,661,848	£47,412,132	£148,068,048
Oxfordshire	£14,015,357	£11,813,194	£24,304,685	£14,290,548	£64,423,784
Solent	£24,302,028	£10,817,860	£9,252,686	£9,252,686	£53,625,260
South East	£92,088,396	£91,738,956	£54,914,715	£77,873,075	£316,615,142

LEP	17-18 PAYMENT	18-19 PAYMENT	19-20 PAYMENT	20-21 PAYMENT	TOTAL PAYMENTS 2017-21
South East Midlands	£23,738,436	£18,334,147	£28,912,343	£49,938,631	£120,923,557
Stoke and Staffordshire	£17,518,643	£11,283,922	£6,370,448	£15,345,059	£50,518,072
Swindon and Wiltshire	£19,279,293	£20,870,160	£16,117,812	£16,627,417	£72,894,682
Thames Valley Berkshire	£26,442,132	£29,417,022	£6,177,667	£19,874,541	£81,911,362
The Marches	£9,647,163	£8,187,720	£4,602,978	£12,626,193	£35,064,054
Worcestershire	£15,325,957	£4,853,087	£3,624,437	£10,368,876	£34,172,357
York, North Yorkshire, East Riding	£10,195,309	£23,651,587	£6,511,540	£14,632,518	£54,990,954
Total	£1,308,092,552	£1,025,776,988	£733,678,508	£1,243,604,030	£4,311,152,078

Steve Reed:[\[149244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many projects have been delivered in each Local Enterprise Partnership through Local Growth Deals in each round of the Growth Deal programme.

Paul Scully:

All payments from the 3 rounds of Growth Deals have been issued to Local Enterprise partnerships (LEPs) as of last year. LEPs are continuing to deliver the projects funded under these deals and currently there are 2109 Local Growth Fund (LGF) projects across all 38 LEPs as shown in the table.

LEP	TOTAL PROJECTS
Black County	64
Buckinghamshire Thames Valley	34
Cheshire and Warrington	59
Coast to Capital	88
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	27

LEP	TOTAL PROJECTS
Coventry and Warwickshire	35
Cumbria	34
Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire	55
Dorset	39
Enterprise M3	88
Greater Lincolnshire	36
Gloucestershire	28
Greater Manchester	69
Greater Cambridge and Peterborough	51
Heart of the South West	53
Hertfordshire	67
Humber	51
Lancashire	52
London	143
Leeds City Region	160
Leicester	20
Liverpool City Region	138
New Anglia	48
North East	63
Oxfordshire	31
Sheffield City Region	80
Solent	38
South East	94
South East Midlands	58
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire	32
Swindon and Wiltshire	24

LEP	TOTAL PROJECTS
Tees Valley	48
Thames Valley Berkshire	43
The Marches	21
West of England	50
Worcestershire	24
York, North Yorkshire and East Riding	64
Total Projects	2109

Steve Reed:[\[149245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department has calculated an estimate of the return on investment from projects delivered by Local Growth Deals funding for each of those deals agreed with Local Enterprise Partnerships; and if he will publish that calculation.

Paul Scully:

The Local Growth Fund has invested in high value projects in England to boost local economic growth, including transport, skill, business support and housing projects to name but a few. This has empowered local areas to identify and bring forward genuine local priorities.

Local Enterprise Partnerships have reported that, to date over £15 billion of public and private sector investment has been leveraged through Local Growth Fund investment.

■ **Medicine: Research****Sir Charles Walker:**[\[149175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans his Department has to support and invest in medical research charities, as part of the Government's ambition for the UK to be a global science superpower; and if he will make a statement.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government is aware of the challenges, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, that medical research charities are currently facing. We appreciate the globally recognised expertise of these charities, and the substantial contributions they make to our world-leading life sciences sector.

BEIS and the Department of Health and Social Care regularly discuss the impacts of Covid-19 on charity-funded research with the Association of Medical Research

Charities. We are continuing to engage with them and receive intelligence on the impacts facing the sector, such as the challenges facing fundraising activities.

The Government already provides significant funding to charities' research, for example through Research England's Quality Related (QR) charity support funding. This year charity QR will amount to £204m, to support charity funded research in universities in England and equivalent support is provided in Scotland through devolved funding arrangements. Government has demonstrated its ambitions for research by committing £14.6bn to R&D next year. This funding will support the life sciences sector within which Medical Research Charities operate alongside other research areas.

■ Parental Leave

Chris Stephens:

[\[149262\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he has taken to (a) identify the main challenges that new parents face during parental leave and (b) make an assessment of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on parental leave.

Paul Scully:

In 2019 we consulted on high-level options for reforming parental leave and pay. We are also conducting a formal evaluation of the Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme, including large-scale, representative surveys of employers and parents. Together, these will give us a fuller picture of how well the current system of parental leave and pay is working for parents and employers.

We are currently processing and analysing the data from the research and analysing the information that we have collected through the consultation. We intend to publish our findings later this year.

The Government has also remained in close contact with stakeholders and charities supporting parents throughout the pandemic.

We have taken steps to support new parents by passing emergency legislation which ensures that parents who are furloughed during the period that is used to determine entitlement to Maternity, Adoption and other family-related statutory pay do not lose out. This legislation ensures that entitlement to pay and the rate of pay that parents receive is based on their normal earnings, not their furlough pay.

■ Postgraduate Education: Finance

Chi Onwurah:

[\[148772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the requests made by the NINE DTP postgraduate students in their letter of 15 January 2021 to UKRI on PHD funding extensions.

Amanda Solloway:

UKRI has made over £62 million of financial support available to students most impacted by the pandemic. It is estimated that this funding is available for up to 12,000 students. This is part of a wider package of support where UKRI has already taken significant measures through £180m in costed extensions for research grants, and £334m support for innovative businesses that help support others in the system and their careers, which benefits doctoral students through.

On the requests for additional funding support beyond this, we consider that any additional support to postgraduate researchers must be balanced with the need to support wider research and development funding, including existing commitments. UKRI have recently provided a update on its decision-making in providing support for the research system ([Supporting students through the pandemic – UKRI](#)).

I regularly meet with the Minister of State for Universities and with the CEO of UKRI, Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, to monitor how the pandemic is affecting UKRI-funded PhD students and the wider research system. We will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 and UKRI continues to listen and respond carefully.

■ Vaccines: Manufacturing Industries**Chi Onwurah:****[148771]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to increase the UK's long-term vaccine manufacturing capacity.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Government has invested over £300 million to secure and scale up the UK's manufacturing capabilities to be able to respond to the pandemic. This includes:

a) Facilities that have come online:

- £4.7 million for skills training through the Advanced Therapies Skills Training Network, which will be delivered through both virtual and physical centres;
- £8.75 million for the set-up of the rapid deployment facility at Oxford Biomedica in Oxfordshire;
- £65.5 million for the early manufacture of the University of Oxford / AstraZeneca vaccine; and
- Funding for fill and finish through a contract with Wockhardt in Wrexham, North Wales which is currently providing fill and finish capabilities to the University of Oxford / AstraZeneca vaccine.

b) Facilities that will come online later this year, to help provide longer term UK capacity:

- £93 million to accelerate the completion and expanded role of the Vaccine Manufacturing Innovation Centre in Oxfordshire; and
- £127 million for the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult in Braintree, Essex.

In addition to the above, we have also funded the expansion of the Valneva factory in Livingston, Scotland.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Funerals

Sir John Hayes:

[\[148683\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if the Government will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a cross-Departmental lead group to assess the issues affecting the funeral and death care sector.

Penny Mordaunt:

The pan-UK and cross-departmental C19 Death Management programme provides strategic and operational support to those looking after the deceased and supporting the bereaved. This programme is led by the Cabinet Office working closely with the relevant sector, local responders and government departments to ensure the deceased are treated with dignity and respect.

The Government is considering, as part of its response to the Competition and Markets Authority's 'Funeral Markets Investigation' into the operation of the funeral sector, the enduring requirement for such structures once the immediate pressures from the pandemic have eased. The Government response is being led by the Ministry of Justice.

■ Local Government: Elections

Cat Smith:

[\[143819\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate his Department has made of the number of postal votes which will be used by voters in the upcoming May 2021 local elections.

Julia Lopez:

Any elector is able to register to vote by post on demand, if they wish. We understand that the pandemic may change voters' needs and preferences, and encourage anyone who is shielding, or who does not wish to visit a polling station, to apply for a postal or proxy vote and to do so early. We are working with postal vote suppliers, electoral sector partners and election teams.

DEFENCE

■ AWACS

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[148730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the UK currently has adequate depth maintenance facilities to undertake maintenance on the UK's E-7 Wedgetail fleet.

Jeremy Quin:

Work is currently underway to define the support arrangements for the RAF E-7 Wedgetail fleet with a range of options being considered. While it is too early to give any precise detail, it is likely that the maintenance regime will be similar to that for the P-8A Poseidon fleet including a mixture of military and industry support at RAF Lossiemouth and elsewhere. We are confident that UK industry will be able to provide the required facilities and skills to undertake this work.

■ Military Aircraft: Procurement**Mr Kevan Jones:**[\[148726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 2 February 2021 to Question 142813 on Military Aircraft: Procurement, what percentage of that figure relates to (a) procurement and (b) support.

Jeremy Quin:

As referenced in the answer to Question 142813, this figure is based exclusively on the procurement of planned equipment projects in the Air Support, Combat Air and Helicopters sectors, it therefore does not include support costs.

Attachments:

1. 142813 - Military Aircraft; Procurement [Hansard Extract 142813.docx]

■ Veterans: Hemsworth**Jon Trickett:**[\[148697\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many ex-military personnel are registered as living in Hemsworth Constituency.

Johnny Mercer:

The number of veterans living in the Hemsworth constituency is not held.

However, the number of veterans in receipt of UK Armed Forces compensation or pensions by location can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/location-of-armed-forces-pension-and-compensation-recipients>

Please note, individuals may be in receipt of more than one compensation and/or pension scheme. Therefore, subtotals cannot be summed.

In July 2020, Parliament approved the inclusion of a veteran question in the England and Wales 2021 census which, for the first time, will enable Government to identify the number of veterans by location.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ Clothing: Overseas Trade****Rachel Reeves:**[\[150780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions the Government has had with representatives of the fashion industry on tackling the issues that sector has been experiencing at UK borders since 1 January 2021.

Caroline Dinenge:

The government recognises the significant contribution of the UK's world-leading fashion and textiles sector to the UK economy, and is committed to supporting it. The sector delivered £35bn in GVA and 890,000 jobs in 2019, and is an important contributor to the UK's soft power via events such as London Fashion Week.

We are aware of the challenges the fashion and textiles industry has raised around specific aspects of our new trading relationship with the EU, and we are working closely with the sector to ensure businesses get the support they need.

Officials in my department recently hosted a webinar with the fashion industry to provide guidance and clarity on the new rules for trading with the EU. In addition, my colleague the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has created a DCMS-led working group, which brings together creative sectors' representatives, including the British Fashion Council, and other key government departments, to look at the issues facing the creative and cultural sectors when working and touring the EU. It will provide clarity regarding the practical steps that need to be taken and will seek to ease movement and facilitate touring as far as circumstances allow.

■ Community Development and Voluntary Organisations: Coronavirus**Rachael Maskell:**[\[150839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 5 February 2021 to Question 145062, for what reason data is not available on levels of employment in the voluntary and community sector.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Employment data for the voluntary and community sector is currently collected and published quarterly. Due to existing survey and reporting requirements, there is currently a 3 month lag between publication and the reference period. VCSE organisations are not easily identifiable in other, more timely data sources such as ONS BICS due to the way industries are categorised under the current Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes. The most recent employment estimates for the sector cover the period October 2019 - September 2020 and was published in January 2021. Existing official estimates for the sector also do not specifically cover jobs lost due to COVID and instead are intended to provide an overall stock figure for employment within the sector.

■ Domestic Appliances: Sales**Jonathan Edwards:** [\[150754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether he plans to include the sale of unsafe electrical goods on online marketplaces within the proposed online safety Bill.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government is committed to tackling the sale of unsafe consumer products online, including unsafe electrical goods.

The new online safety legislation will focus on ensuring that people are protected from harmful content and behaviour online, with a particular emphasis on protecting children and on tackling the most serious illegal content.

It will not have a focus on product safety as it is important not to duplicate other work across government. As the country's national product safety regulator, the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) has a clear remit to lead the Government's efforts to tackle the sale of unsafe goods online.

■ Internet: Harassment and Safety**Stuart Anderson:** [\[149334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to ensure that companies and regulators work more closely together to tackle online abuse and enhance online safety.

Caroline Dinenage:

Online abuse of any kind is unacceptable. In December we published the full government response to the Online Harms White Paper, which set out the new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. Under the new laws, all companies will need to take swift and effective action against criminal online abuse.

My department is also working closely with the Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum established by the CMA, ICO and Ofcom to ensure effective coordination between regulators on cross-cutting digital issues.

■ Mass Media: Antisemitism**Catherine West:** [\[150892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking with (a) the press and (b) media industries to tackle discriminatory speech towards the Haredi Jewish Community.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The government is committed to a free and independent press, and does not intervene in what the press can and cannot publish. We are clear, however, that with this freedom, comes responsibility, which media organisations must take seriously. It is important that there exists an independent self regulatory regime to ensure that the

press adheres to a wide set of clear and appropriate standards, and to offer individuals a means of redress where these are not met.

The majority of traditional publishers—including 95% of national newspapers by circulation—are members of The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). A small number of publishers have joined The Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS). These regulators issue codes of conduct which provide guidelines on a range of areas including discrimination, and set out the rules that members have agreed to follow.

Ofcom, the UK's independent broadcast regulator, sets clear rules in its Broadcasting Code for licensed broadcasters to meet to ensure UK audiences are adequately protected from harmful material.

In addition, the government has been clear that more needs to be done to ensure safety online. Therefore this government is introducing new Online Harms legislation. This will require companies to tackle abuse on their services and take reasonable steps to protect users' safety online. Users will be better able to report abuse, and should expect to receive appropriate support from the relevant platform if they do so.

■ **Music: Freight**

Gareth Thomas:

[\[150663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of recent trends in the number of hauliers based in the UK on the UK music event supply sector; and if he will make a statement.

Caroline Dinenge:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sports recognises the leading position of the UK concert hauliers sector and its importance for the UK music sector.

We are aware that the new provisions in the TCA will require the sector to adapt to new requirements and ways of working with the EU now we are no longer a Member State.

Under the TCA, UK operators will be able to undertake up to two additional movements within the EU, with a maximum of 1 cabotage movement. We understand the impact these new arrangements will have on concert hauliers when seeking to tour in the EU.

We are committed to continuing to help the sectors understand and adapt to these changes. This issue is being looked at as part of the DCMS-led working group on creative and cultural touring, which involves sector representatives and other key government departments, including the Department for Transport.

■ Musicians: Visas

Gareth Thomas: [\[150660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to support recorded and live music exports to the EU for DJs and other artists in the future; and if he will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[150661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK's electronic scene and music venues are able to bring in EU talent at short notice for events and gigs; and if he will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[150662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of new carnet requirements for DJs and musicians taking their equipment to the EU on the number of European gigs that will be played by up-and-coming UK talent; and if he will make a statement.

Gareth Thomas: [\[150664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment the Government has made of the effect of changes in the visa regime for UK nationals seeking to play paid music engagements in the EU from December 2020 to January 2021 will have on (a) the number of gigs played by UK musicians in the EU, (b) the ability of up and coming UK talent to play in EU and (c) the prevalence of UK music in the EU music landscape in the future; and if he will make a statement.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government recognises the world-leading position of the UK music sector and the rich breadth of musical talent across the UK. According to UK Music's 2020 report, the sector contributed £5.8bn GVA to the UK economy in 2019 and generated £2.9bn in export revenue.

The Government is committed to supporting the sector to maintain its world-leading position, and to help it recover from the impact of the Covid pandemic. We recognise that the new provisions in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) will require the sector to adapt to new requirements and ways of working with the EU now we are no longer a Member State. UK cultural professionals seeking to tour within the EU will be required to check domestic immigration and visitor rules for each Member State in which they intend to tour.

When travelling for tours, cultural professionals will need to take goods in and out of the EU, including musical instruments, technical equipment and merchandise. This is likely to involve additional import/export customs documentation, including ATA carnets.

For EU talent seeking to perform in the UK, our offer is more generous than many EU Member States, as UK domestic rules allow musicians, entertainers and artists (and

their technical staff) from non-visa national countries, such as EU Member States and the US, to perform visa-free in the UK.

We are committed to continuing to help the music sector understand and adapt to these changes. These issues are being looked at as part of the DCMS-led working group on creative and cultural touring, which involves sector representatives and other key government departments, to ensure the sector gets the clarity and support it needs.

■ **Television Licences: Sheltered Housing**

Mr Laurence Robertson:

[\[150681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether people living in sheltered accommodation are entitled to television licence fee concessions in the event that there are (a) one and (b) two rooms within their building which are used for overnight accommodation lasting for no more than 28 days; and if he will make a statement.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The concession available for a TV Licence for those in eligible residential care - known as the 'accommodation for residential care concession' - is set out in the Communications (Television Licensing) Regulations 2004.

Paragraph 3(5)(g) of Part 2 of Schedule 4 to the Regulations provides that a group of specially provided dwellings which is eligible for the concession will remain eligible even if one of the dwellings within the group is used for overnight accommodation, for no longer than 28 nights in any consecutive period, for any member of the family of any eligible person who lives in that group of dwellings.

There is no provision in the Regulations for a situation in which two of the dwellings within the group are used for overnight accommodation.

EDUCATION

■ **Carbon Emissions: Standards**

Dr Rupa Huq:

[\[148857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of retrofitting schools, colleges and universities to net-zero emission standards by 2030.

Nick Gibb:

Reduction in energy use in new and existing buildings to meet the legislative zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050 is a priority for the Government.

Schools can use their condition funding to invest in improving energy efficiency. Since 2015, the Department has allocated £9.5 billion to maintain and improve school buildings, including an additional £560 million in financial year 2020-21. The latest Spending Review committed a further £1.8 billion in financial year 2021-22 for maintaining and improving the school estate.

The Further Education (FE) Capital Transformation Fund delivers the Government's £1.5 billion commitment to upgrade the FE college and designated institutions' estate in England. This will target colleges in the worst condition and promote efficient use of space and support the government's objectives on achieving net zero carbon.

In 2020, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy set up the £1 billion Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which provided grants for eligible public sector bodies, including schools and FE colleges to fund energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation measures. Higher education (HE) institutions were also eligible for these grants.

Whilst this scheme has now ended, schools, FE and HE institutions can apply for interest free loans through the government's Salix scheme for public sector projects that improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

■ Foreign Students: EU Countries

Paul Blomfield:

[\[145784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to support UK students wishing to study in the EU with visa fees.

Michelle Donelan:

It is, and has always been, a matter for individual governments to decide on the level of visa fees that they charge and to whom the fees apply.

UK nationals who are studying in the EU in any capacity should consult their higher education (HE) provider to establish whether any support is available, noting that UK nationals who are on placements or exchanges as part of a UK course may be eligible for maintenance support if enrolled at a UK HE provider.

Cultural exchanges help to build important business, political and diplomatic bridges around the world. The Turing Scheme is the UK government's global programme to study and work abroad, providing funding for students at UK institutions to travel abroad.

Disadvantaged participants on the Turing Scheme placements will be eligible to receive actual costs for additional travel expenses, including costs of visas, as well as passports, and health insurance.

Information on entry requirements and visas is available on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice pages. Additional information about moving to EU Member States can be found in the FCDO's 'Living in country guides'.

■ Funerals: Apprentices

Sir John Hayes:

[\[148682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase the number of apprenticeships offered in the funeral and death care sector.

Gillian Keegan:

Apprenticeships are jobs with high-quality training, created by employers, and we encourage businesses in all sectors, including the funeral and death care sector, to use apprenticeships to recruit the right people and develop the skills they need.

There are two high-quality, employer-designed, apprenticeship standards in the funeral and death care sector available for employers to use; the level 3 funeral director standard and the level 2 funeral team member standard. In 2019-20 academic year, there were 50 starts on the funeral director standard and 140 starts on the funeral team member standard. A level 3 mortuary technician standard and a level 5 embalmer standard are currently in development.

To help employers in all sectors offer new apprenticeships, they are now able to claim £2,000 for every new apprentice they hire under the age of 25, and £1,500 for new apprentices aged 25 and over. These incentive payments were announced as part of the government's Plan for Jobs in July 2020 and the extension of the scheme (to the end of March 2021) was announced in the November Spending Review.

We are committed to supporting employers of all sizes to offer apprenticeships. In the 2021-22 financial year, we are making available £2.5 billion to support apprenticeships in all employers, irrespective of their size.

We continue to work with smaller employers to give them the confidence and support to take on new apprentices. We are reforming the system so that unspent levy funds can be used more easily not just in big companies, but in the small and medium enterprises too.

■ Remote Education: Computer Software

Christian Wakeford: [\[149362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department conducted that resulted in the inclusion of (a) Microsoft and (b) Google and not other commonly used platforms in the Constituency framework: education and childcare setting (excluding universities) guidance.

Christian Wakeford: [\[149363\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what criteria his Department used in making its policy to include (a) Microsoft and (b) Google but not other commonly used platforms in its list of suggested providers in the Constituency framework: education and childcare setting (excluding universities) guidance.

Christian Wakeford: [\[149364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what framework he used to determine which digital platforms are included in the Department's Constituency framework: education and childcare setting (excluding universities) guidance.

Christian Wakeford:[\[149365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase the funding available for technical support on accessing remote education platforms.

Nick Gibb:

The Government is investing over £400 million to support remote education, including by providing laptops and tablets and internet access for those who need it most, ensuring every school has access to free, expert technical support to get set up on Google for Education or Microsoft's Office 365 Education, and offering peer training and support from schools and colleges leading the way with the use of technology.

There is budget remaining to continue to provide technical support to help schools set up accounts for Google and Microsoft to access remote education during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Microsoft and Google platforms were chosen as they are free to use to the education sector and had the unified technology and support to set up and deliver effective remote education provision.

Google and Microsoft are not only free to use but offer a number of features and functionalities that are suitable for school needs.

We want to ensure all schools are set up with a remote learning platform and are keeping this under constant review.

Remote Education: ICT**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[148881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what representations he has received on incidences of computers allocated to support online learning during the covid-19 outbreak being infected with malware.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[148882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many laptops to support online learning during the covid-19 outbreak have been provided to school pupils in Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[148883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that children and young people in education have access to (a) a laptop and (b) broadband and WiFi in (i) Slough and (ii) England.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:[\[148884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to support children and young people who are home-schooled to access (a) a laptop and (b) broadband and WiFi in (i) Slough and (ii) England.

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. This significant injection of laptops and tablets is on top of an estimated 2.9 million already owned by schools before the start of the outbreak.

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

The Department has 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 to support online learning.

As of Monday 8 February 2021, over 986,000 laptops and tablets have been delivered to schools, trusts, local authorities and further education providers.

More information on the number of devices delivered to schools, trusts and local authorities, can be viewed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data>.

The Department has been investigating an issue with malware that was found on a small number of the laptops provided to schools. In all known cases, the malware was detected and removed at the point schools first turned the devices on.

The Department takes online safety and security extremely seriously and any schools that have concerns about devices should contact the support desk at <https://get-help-with-tech.education.gov.uk>.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[149320]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to implement the recommendations from the January 2021 briefing by the Child Poverty Action Group on Digital exclusion during the covid-19 pandemic.

Nick Gibb:

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

As of Monday 8 February 2021, over 986,000 laptops and tablets have been delivered to schools, academy trusts, local authorities and further education providers.

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

We have 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, Lycamobile, O2, Sky Mobile, Smarty, Tesco Mobile, Three, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile and Vodafone for supporting the mobile data offer. We are currently engaged with additional mobile network operators and continue to invite a range of mobile network providers to support the offer.

Stephen Morgan:

[\[149322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure infant school children have the devices and internet connectivity they need for home schooling.

Nick Gibb:

Given the extremely challenging global supply context for devices, the Department has had to make difficult decisions about where provision is needed most. In Autumn 2020, following conversations with school leaders, the decision was taken to allocate devices to children in Key Stage 2 and above on the basis that children in younger years would be unlikely to be working on a laptop or tablet independently.

The Department's guidance on remote education acknowledges that younger children 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.

We continue to review the eligibility criteria for the Get Help with Technology Scheme to ensure we meet the needs of disadvantaged children and young people.

■ Schools: Sports

Stuart Anderson:

[\[148915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of (a) extending the PE and sport premium and (b) making available equivalent funding to all school age groups.

Nick Gibb:

Physical education (PE) and school sport plays an important role in supporting children and young people to be physically active during the current COVID-19 restrictions. That is why the Department confirmed that the primary PE and sport premium would continue at £320 million for the 2020/21 academic year. The premium can be used to support remote teaching of PE as well as teaching in school.

To support sport and physical activities to resume, the Department has additionally announced £10.1 million of funding for the 2020/21 academic year to help school sports and swimming facilities to open outside of school hours.

The Department is considering arrangements for the primary PE and sport premium for the 2021/22 academic year and will confirm the position as soon as possible. The

Department is working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Health and Social Care on how to support better PE, sport and physical activity provision for all children and young people, including in secondary schools, as part of the continuing work to deliver our joint schools sport and activity action plan, published in 2019.

■ Teachers: Pay

Stephen Morgan: [\[149321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of teacher's pay.

Nick Gibb:

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) provides independent advice to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, on school teachers' pay and conditions in England.

The STRB's 30th report analysed the evidence given by the Department and relevant organisations and made recommendations for teachers' and school leaders' pay. The Government responded to the report in Parliament and accepted the recommendations in full for the September 2020 pay award. As a result, teachers received an average pay award of 3.1% this year.

We are currently developing our written evidence to support the STRB's consideration of the 2021 pay award for teachers. Her Majesty's Treasury has already published evidence that sets out the rationale for the pause on pay for the majority of public sector workers, including teachers.

The Government will reassess the pay policy ahead of issuing the remit for the 2022-23 pay award, once the economic recovery is established and the impact of COVID-19 on the wider labour market is clearer.

■ Video Games: Qualifications

Jonathan Gullis: [\[148943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of removing funding for Applied General Qualifications on the UK video games industry.

Jonathan Gullis: [\[148944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of removing funding for Applied General Qualifications on the number of people studying for degrees in gaming.

Gillian Keegan:

The department has consulted widely on proposals for reforming post-16 qualifications at level 3. The second stage of consultation ran from 23 October 2020 to 31 January 2021, and asked for views on the range of qualifications that will sit alongside A levels and T Levels in future. These include qualifications designed to

support progression to higher education. No decisions have been made about individual subjects or the potential removal of funding for existing qualifications.

The impact assessment published alongside the consultation looked at the potential impact of the review on employers and the economy, but it did not look specifically at the games industry or student progression to games degrees. We are analysing responses to the consultation and will publish a final impact assessment as part of the response to the consultation.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Dogs: Smuggling

Andrea Jenkyns:

[\[149285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to tackle puppy smuggling.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra takes the issue of puppy smuggling and other illegal importation of pets seriously. It is an abhorrent trade which causes suffering to puppies and puts the health of pets and people in the UK at risk. We have legislation in place to ensure those guilty of offences are duly punished.

The end of the transition period has opened up new opportunities for managing our own pet travel arrangements and we are listening to the concerns of stakeholders around future requirements. The Government is developing a range of options to strengthen our efforts to tackle puppy smuggling, taking into consideration the recommendations of stakeholders and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee.

■ Flood Control: West Yorkshire

Andrea Jenkyns:

[\[149282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to improve flood defences in West Yorkshire.

Rebecca Pow:

Starting in April 2021, the Government will invest a record £5.2 billion in a six-year capital investment programme for flood defences. This investment will deliver around 2,000 flood schemes, benefiting every region of the country, and will better protect 336,000 properties from flooding.

In July 2020 we committed funding of up to £170 million to accelerate work on shovel-ready flood defence schemes that will begin construction before the end 2021/2022. This funding will provide an immediate boost to jobs supporting the local economy as communities recover from the impact of coronavirus. The Hebden Bridge Flood Alleviation Scheme has been awarded £12 million to contribute to this ambitious plan by better protecting approximately 4500 jobs and 1000 businesses.

In Leeds, the Government will provide up to £21 million for the Leeds Phase 2 Flood Alleviation Scheme which will protect more than 370 businesses and 3,300 jobs. This is subject to a satisfactory business case approved by Defra and HMT. The Government will also provide £1,320,000 for the Leeds Natural Flood Management Scheme. This brings the Government's total investment in Leeds to more than £100 million to help prevent a repeat of the 2015 Boxing Day floods.

Since 2015/16, there has been £158 million of investment in West Yorkshire better protecting homes, business and critical infrastructure against flooding. This includes areas in West Yorkshire that have suffered severe flooding in recent years, such as Mytholmroyd on the River Calder, where over 400 homes have been better protected, and Leeds on the River Aire, where over 3,000 homes and 500 businesses have been better protected. This investment has been made up of £107 million government funding and £51 million of other external contributions.

For the next 6 years, there is planned investment of £255 million. This is made up of £146 million government funding with £109 million of external contributions required. Some of this additional funding has already been secured or identified and the Environment Agency will continue to work with partners to secure the remaining funding. This programme aims to better protect almost 7,000 more homes across West Yorkshire and deliver wider economic benefits of over £2.5 billion.

■ Floods: Grants

Daniel Kawczynski: [\[148748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to allocate grant funding to those who have been affected the most by flooding.

Daniel Kawczynski: [\[148749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to fairly assess people who have been affected by flooding on an individual basis for grant funding.

Rebecca Pow:

Flooding has a devastating impact on communities, businesses and individuals.

With localised flooding incidents, local authorities are expected to have well established contingency arrangements in place and to be able to respond and support their local communities from within existing budgets.

The decision to trigger financial support from Government is taken collectively by Ministers in the event of a severe weather events with significant wide area impacts. In reaching a decision, Ministers consider factors such as severity, duration and extent of the impacts. The reported impacts from Storm Christoph up until now have been lower than would justify activation of the Flood Recovery Framework of support schemes. We continue to monitor the impact on affected areas and will assess whether further support is needed.

During the unprecedented flooding in November 2019 and the storms which followed in winter 2019/2020, the Government announced Property Flooding Resilience (PFR) repair grants of up to £5,000 to help eligible properties affected by floods (homes, charities and businesses) become more flood resilient. The repair grants apply to those affected in district or unitary authorities that have 25 or more severely flooded properties. The grants are administered by eligible local authorities, with Defra reimbursing local authorities for grants paid for eligible properties. Local authorities are responsible for assessing eligibility of applications. The most recent figures show that 47 district or unitary councils with over 7000 properties are eligible in England for the November 2019 and February 2020 PFR repair schemes. This includes 458 properties in the county of Shropshire.

The Government has doubled the amount it invests in the flood and coastal defence programme in England to £5.2 billion over six years. This will better protect a further 336,000 properties including homes and non-residential properties such as schools and hospitals. On 1 February 2021, Defra published a Call for Evidence to explore whether any specific changes should be made to strengthen the assessment of local circumstances in this programme. This includes looking at potential changes to the funding formula to provide further benefit to frequently flooded communities. It will also explore further ways to increase the uptake of property flood resilience measures to enable householders and businesses to better prepare for flooding. The Call for Evidence closes on 29 March 2021.

■ Gun Sports: Coronavirus

Luke Pollard:

[148902]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the basis is for his categorisation of rough shooting as a form of exercise in the context of covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Rebecca Pow:

Under the National Lockdown: Stay at Home, individuals must only leave their homes where they have a reasonable excuse. A reasonable excuse includes where reasonably necessary for exercise. This should be limited to once a day. This includes but is not limited to running, cycling, walking, and swimming. When deciding how to exercise, individuals should consider if their chosen activity and location will enable them to stay local and minimise their time away from home and risk of interacting with others. Individuals should only leave their homes to go shooting or partake in other outdoor licensed physical activity where they are confident that the activity they are engaging in can count as exercise and meets social contact rules (set out [here](#) in the [gov.uk](#) guidance). Individuals must also ensure that relevant regulatory and licensing requirements are met, and permission has been given by the landowner or manager. Organised shoots and other forms of organised sport or outdoor licensed physical activity are not permitted, save for disabled sport.

■ Livestock: Exports

Andrea Jenkyns: [\[149284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to ban the export of live animals for slaughter and fattening, since the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Victoria Prentis:

Leaving the EU has enabled us to take a major step forward in delivering on our commitment to end excessively long journeys for animals going for slaughter or fattening.

We are currently consulting in England and Wales on proposals to end the unnecessary practice. This is a key priority for the Government, and we hope to have legislation in place by the end of the year.

The consultation period closes on 25 February 2021. Further details can be found at: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/improvements-to-animal-welfare-in-transport/>

■ Pesticides: Environment Protection

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will be expanded to include a commitment to focus innovation and research and development on nature-based solutions and agroecological innovation in addition to its current focus on new technologies.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will ensure that farmers are able to access agronomic advice which is delinked from the agrochemical industry.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of relying on voluntary codes, industry self-regulation and industry bodies such as the Voluntary Initiative and Amenity Forum as a means of reducing pesticide use in the draft Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides; and whether that approach will be replaced with mandatory measures in the final draft National Action Plan.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will include stronger measures for improving the uptake of Integrated Pest Management by farmers by (a) guaranteeing payments for nature-based Integrated Pest Management and pesticide

reduction under the Environmental Land Management Scheme and (b) committing to introduce crop or area specific groups to bring farmers together to discuss common obstacles and solutions for reducing pesticide use.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will be expanded to include stronger measures designed to protect pollinators.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will be expanded to increase the transparency on pesticides by including (a) mandatory spray notifications for both rural and urban residents and (b) public access to spray records.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148810\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will be updated to include a commitment to develop a human biomonitoring programme designed to monitor exposure within the UK population to pesticides.

Daniel Zeichner: [\[148811\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the final Revised National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides will include provisions for involving the Department of Health (a) in decisions related to the approval of pesticides with known human health implications and (b) to help develop a reporting and monitoring system for pesticide exposure incidents in the UK.

Victoria Prentis:

We are currently consulting the public on the draft Revised National Action Plan for Sustainable Use of Pesticides (NAP) and will be receiving responses until 26 February 2021. The draft NAP outlines how we plan to improve regulation, support the uptake of Integrated Pest Management, improve safe use, improve metrics, and review the governance and implementation of UK pesticides policy.

The consultation is an opportunity for all interested parties to voice their opinion. We will finalise the NAP once we have analysed all the responses.

The Government's first priority with regard to pesticides is to ensure that they will not harm people or pose unacceptable risks to the environment. We operate a strict system for regulating pesticides where a pesticide can only be placed on the market if the product has been authorised following a thorough risk assessment by our expert regulator, the Health and Safety Executive.

■ Pesticides: Schools**Daniel Zeichner:** [\[148812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what restrictions are in place on the use of pesticides close to schools; and whether he plans to update those restrictions.

Victoria Prentis:

Current regulations only authorise the use of pesticides where that will not harm people. Decisions are based on comprehensive scientific assessment covering all situations where people may be exposed to pesticides. This assessment specifically addresses the situation of people, including children, who may find themselves near to where pesticides are used. Authorisations are frequently refused and, if granted, are regularly reviewed. Conditions may be attached to an authorisation if that is necessary to ensure that people are protected.

Anyone using an authorised pesticide is legally required to ensure that all reasonable precautions are taken to protect human health and the environment, and that the pesticide is confined to the area to be treated.

■ Tourist Attractions: Government Assistance**Luke Pollard:** [\[148905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has for supporting (a) zoos, (b) aquariums and (c) safari parks in the 2021-22 financial year.

Luke Pollard: [\[148907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has for remaining £95 million funds in the Zoo Animals Fund.

Luke Pollard: [\[148909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on zoos and aquaria in the event that those venues are not open to visitors over Easter 2021 as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

I am aware of the pressure that the current coronavirus restrictions are placing on the zoo sector and I know that Easter is a key time of year for zoos and aquaria to welcome visitors. The Government has not yet announced how and when the current coronavirus restrictions applying to zoos and aquaria will be eased. We keep the Zoo Animals Fund constantly under review to ensure that it is meeting its aims. We have recently extended the application deadline for the Zoo Animals Fund to 26 February 2021 and urge any zoos in need of support to put in an application.

In addition to the Zoo Animals Fund, the Government has provided a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support businesses, including zoos and aquaria, through this period. Zoos are eligible to apply for a range of support

schemes including the Job Retention Scheme, VAT deferral, Business Rates Relief, the Business Interruption Loan, the option to reclaim the costs of Statutory Sick Pay and grant funding.

■ Zoo Animals Fund

Luke Pollard: [\[148906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for what reasons some zoos and aquaria have not been able to access funding from the Zoo Animals Fund.

Luke Pollard: [\[148908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to recent reports by 24 zoos to the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums that they were at high or medium risk of closure in 2021, what support his Department plans to provide to those zoos.

Luke Pollard: [\[148910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many zoo licence holders his department planned to support through the creation of the £100 million Zoo Animals Fund.

Victoria Prentis:

The fund has been a lifeline for many zoos and has been accessible to all zoos and aquaria which need funds to care for their animals, as evidenced by the success of small, medium and large zoos in securing grant funding. Only one application to the Zoo Animals Fund has been rejected on the basis that the business in question was ineligible as it did not have the necessary licence or exemption. The Zoo Animals Fund has been created to provide for zoos which, due to a coronavirus-related drop in income are experiencing severe financial difficulties and need support in caring for their animals. The fund's purpose is to ensure that animals' needs continue to be met, and if zoos are closing, downsizing or rehoming their collection the fund can also provide support in these circumstances. We have extended the application deadline for the Zoo Animals Fund to 26 February 2021 and urge any zoos in need of support to put in an application.

Beyond the Zoo Animals Fund, the Government has provided a package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support businesses, including zoos and aquaria, through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19. Zoos and aquaria are eligible to apply for a range of support schemes including the Job Retention Scheme, VAT deferral, Business Rates Relief, the Business Interruption Loan, the option to reclaim the costs of Statutory Sick Pay and grant funding.

■ Zoos: Finance**Luke Pollard:**[\[148911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many meetings his Department has held with HM Treasury regarding funding for zoo licence holders in 2021.

Victoria Prentis:

We have ongoing communication with HM Treasury about the funding being provided for zoo licence holders.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Coronavirus: Vaccination****Clive Lewis:**[\[149803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the Government will take steps to use its Presidency of the G7 to propose support for (a) the WHO COVID-19 Technology Access Pool and (b) increasing Official Development Assistance funding to scale-up vaccine manufacturing capacity in low and middle income countries.

Wendy Morton:

The UK will champion rapid equitable access to safe and effective vaccines throughout our G7 Presidency.

Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) provided initial details on the COVID-19 technology access pool (C-TAP) in October, the UK has led the way in bringing industry and the research community to the table. During our G7 presidency, we will continue this work with stakeholders and the WHO as it establishes the governance structures and refines the operating model for C-TAP.

The FCDO is working closely with key development partners in vaccines, such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance, WHO and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), along with development finance institutions and the private sector to catalyse investments for vaccine manufacturing in Africa.

■ Lebanon: Hezbollah**Chris Loder:**[\[148920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) size and (b) capability of Hezbollah's weapons arsenal in southern Lebanon.

James Cleverly:

The UK is aware of reports that Hizballah continues to amass an arsenal of weapons within Lebanon, in direct contravention of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions

(UNSCRs). The UK Government regularly raises this at the UN Security Council, and we call on the Lebanese authorities to abide by provisions of the relevant UNSCRs. Hizballah's destabilising influence threatens regional stability and endangers Lebanon and its people.

■ Sultana Khaya

Alan Brown: [\[149267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Moroccan counterpart on the continued house arrest of Saharawi human rights defender Sultana Khaya.

Alan Brown: [\[149268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will instruct HM Ambassador to Morocco to investigate and raise with the Moroccan authorities the treatment of the Saharawi prisoner Mohamed Lamin Haddi who has been on hunger strike since 12 January 2021 in protest of his prison conditions.

James Cleverly:

Support for human rights is a priority around the world, and we raise human rights issues with the Moroccan Government accordingly, including prison conditions. We are monitoring these cases.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Cannabis: Medical Treatments

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[130805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of children who currently have their UK prescriptions for medical cannabis dispensed in the Netherlands; and if he will make a statement.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[130806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that children who currently have their UK prescriptions for medical cannabis dispensed in the Netherlands will still be able to receive their medicine at the end of the transition period; and if he will make a statement.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[130807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions (a) he and (b) his officials have had with (i) patients, (ii) patient groups, (iii) special import pharmacies and (iv) prescribing clinicians on the ability to switch at short notice between different medical cannabis products; and if he will make a statement.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[130808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that children who have their UK prescriptions for medical cannabis dispensed in

the Netherlands will continue to receive their medicine after the transition period; and if he will make a statement.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[130809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether children in Northern Ireland will be able to have their UK prescriptions for medical cannabis dispensed in the Netherlands after the transition period; and if he will make a statement.

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[130810\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Dutch Government on lifting their ban on the export of finished medical cannabis oils; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 11 January 2021]: From 1 January, United Kingdom prescriptions, including those in Northern Ireland, will no longer be valid in the Netherlands. There are a small number of patients who rely on certain unlicensed cannabis-based medicines that are supplied in the Netherlands against UK prescriptions, almost all of which are private prescriptions.

The Department, supported by the British Embassy to The Hague, has reached an agreement with the Dutch Government to allow the continued supply of Bedrocan oils, a form of unlicensed medicinal cannabis, against United Kingdom prescriptions for existing patients until 1 July 2021. The medicines supply chain has ensured that there continues to be good supply of licensed and unlicensed cannabis-based medicines after the transition period.

The Written Ministerial Statement of 26 January ([HCWS734](#)) provided an update on action taken by the Government on supply from the Netherlands and next steps to establish a more permanent solution.

Tony Lloyd: [\[136452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his policy is on access to medical cannabis following disruption of supplies after the end of the transition period.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 19 January 2021]: The Department, supported by the British Embassy to The Hague, has reached an agreement with the Dutch Government to allow the continued supply of Bedrocan oils, a form of unlicensed medicinal cannabis, against United Kingdom prescriptions for existing patients until 1 July 2021. The medicines supply chain has ensured that there continues to be good supply of licensed and unlicensed cannabis-based medicines after the transition period.

The Written Ministerial Statement of 26 January ([HCWS734](#)) provided an update on action taken by the Government on supply from the Netherlands and next steps to establish a more permanent solution.

■ Vitamin D: Bread**Luke Pollard:**[\[133169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what representations he has received on fortifying bread in England with Vitamin D to help tackle the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

A rapid evidence review was published in June 2020, concluding that there is currently no evidence to support the use of vitamin D supplements to reduce the risk or severity of COVID-19. This review was followed by a second review in December 2020 which concluded that the evidence does not support vitamin D supplementation to prevent acute respiratory tract infections.

Following these reviews there is currently no evidence to suggest that supplementing vitamin D through fortified bread would reduce the risk or severity of COVID-19. However, companies are free to fortify certain products with vitamin D and already do so for several foods including many fats and spread, breakfast cereals, and some powdered milk.

Public Health England (PHE) have re-issued advice on vitamin D supplementation, advising that people who do not go outdoors often should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D to prevent deficiency. The Government has also announced that over two and a half million vulnerable people across England will be offered free vitamin D supplements for the winter. However, this advice is not about reducing the risk of COVID-19 or mitigating its effects; vitamin D is needed to keep bones and muscles healthy.

PHE is monitoring any new, high quality evidence on nutrition and COVID-19 and is seeking further advice from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition as appropriate.

HOME OFFICE**■ Immigrants: Tuberculosis****Stephen Farry:**[\[148967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking with stakeholders to approve a tuberculosis testing clinic in Northern Ireland; and what provisions are currently in place for Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa applicants in Northern Ireland in the context of those people not being able to access approved clinics in Great Britain.

Kevin Foster:

On 31 January 2021 the UK Government launched a new immigration route for British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders, providing the opportunity for them and their eligible family members to live, work and study in the UK.

Having a valid TB test certificate is an essential requirement for the BN(O) route. All those who have been in the UK for less than six months and who have previously travelled from a country with a high incidence of TB will need a certificate confirming they are free of the disease. This is a matter of public health.

There are already eight approved TB test clinics across the UK and we are working hard to get more clinics accredited. In particular, the Home Office is working closely with clinics across Northern Ireland to ensure a clinic can be accredited soon and available for appointments.

TB test clinics are open across the UK. We understand restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic may impact on an applicant's ability to travel and we would urge applicants to assess the risk and only travel to a TB test appointment where necessary. Where an applicant's leave is about to expire and they cannot travel to an approved clinic, we will consider these applications on a case-by-case basis.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[\[148814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of her Department's efficiency in responding to Members of Parliament correspondence in relation to immigration casework.

Kevin Foster:

The Department works to a target of responding to 95% of MPs written correspondence within 20 working days. Performance has been impacted by a very significant increase in the volume of correspondence received, alongside the need for Ministers and officials to instigate a remote process for drafting and signing correspondence during the period of COVID-19 restrictions.

The Department recognises it has not been able to meet the service standard in some cases but has implemented an action plan to clear backlogs and drive up performance.

Staff unable to perform front facing roles in the Department have been redeployed to assist in clearing MPs correspondence backlogs. The Department are also contacting MPs offices by telephone to offer to close urgent cases by telephone, whilst continuing to work through the backlog and to offer regular engagement surgeries to discuss and resolve some of the enquiries they have made.

The Department uses a workflow tool which records all Operational MPs correspondence. The Department runs reports each day which summarise the daily situation in relation to intake and output and the age of each piece of MPs correspondence. The report also monitors the daily progress of output towards the weekly 95% target.

Presently different areas of the Department work on different IT systems for Correspondence, but the Department is undergoing a transfer so all Correspondence is on one system to help improve efficiency. This should be completed in 2021.

The latest published data on UKVI performance against the service standard, which includes data up to and including the end of quarter 3-2020/21, is held at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/customer-service-operations-data-november-2020>.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Building Safety Fund

Mike Amesbury: **[148900]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many of the buildings where an application for funding from the Building Safety Fund has proceeded have already completed remediation.

Christopher Pincher:

The Department is continuing to work with building owners so that we can advance eligible Fund applicants to the next stage and begin the remediation process as quickly as possible. The Department published registration statistics for the Building Safety Fund on 21 January, which can be found at:

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

■ Leasehold: Ground Rent

Daniel Kawczynski: **[148750]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what his policy is on ground rent for leasehold properties for people who will be ineligible for proposed zero ground rent reforms.

Eddie Hughes:

The Government has set out a package of measures to tackle unfair practices in the leasehold market and promote transparency and fairness for both leaseholders and freeholders. We will bring forward legislation in the upcoming session to set future ground rents to zero.

We set out the detailed proposals for this policy in our response to the technical consultation *Implementing reforms to the leasehold system in England* (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/implementing-reforms-to-the-leasehold-system>). The measure will also apply to retirement properties. There will be exemptions for community-led development, equity release products known as 'Home Reversion Plans' and Shariah Finance compliant 'Home Purchase Plans'.

We understand the difficulties and frustrations for existing leaseholders who are unhappy with the ground rent they are required to pay and feel their leases should be changed. We are pleased that the CMA is taking enforcement action in relation to two key issues; first, to tackle certain instances of mis-selling of leasehold property and second, to address the problems faced by homeowners from high and increasing

ground rents. The Government is keeping a close eye on this issue and will consider any next steps once the CMA have progressed their enforcement action.

■ Levelling Up Fund

Lee Anderson:

[\[148916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how his Department plans to allocate funding from the £4 million Levelling Up Fund to (a) local authorities in Ashfield constituency and (b) other local authorities; and what the timescale is for allocating that funding.

Eddie Hughes:

The Levelling Up Fund will be open to all local areas and allocated competitively. In order to level up places across the country, we will prioritise bids to drive growth and regeneration in places in need, those facing particular local challenges, and areas that have received less Government investment in recent years. We will publish a prospectus for the fund and launch early this year.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Trade Agreements: USA

Andrea Jenkyns:

[\[149286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent steps she has taken to secure a free trade deal with the US.

Greg Hands:

The fifth UK-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiating round took place from 19 to 30 October 2020. Almost all chapter areas are now in the advanced stages of talks, and a significant proportion of legal text has been agreed across multiple chapters. UK and US negotiators have also continued to hold working level technical sessions since the end of Round 5 of negotiations, and we believe there is a compelling case to build on the significant progress already made.

The Biden administration is currently in the process of seeking Senate confirmation for the appointment of senior staff, including in the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

The Department for International Trade (DIT) works closely with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and British Embassy Washington in advancing UK national objectives with the US, including on trade. DIT Ministers continue to engage senior US political figures on a bipartisan basis.

JUSTICE**■ Courts: Coronavirus****Rachel Hopkins:**[\[148977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the (a) social distancing, (b) cleaning, (c) workplace incident control, (d) ventilation arrangements and (e) other safety arrangements in Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service in keeping staff and court users safe; and if he will make a statement.

Chris Philp:

Maintaining access to justice while keeping people safe is HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) top priority. As an essential public service, courts and tribunals have remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We have invested an additional £110m so all of our buildings are COVID-secure and can continue to operate safely.

We closely follow all Public Health and government advice on COVID-secure arrangements and update our policies to meet any new guidelines. Our approach to risk assessment is set out in our Organisational Risk Assessment (ORA) published at the start of the pandemic. It's implemented on the ground by site-specific local risk assessments which are carried out and reviewed at least weekly, to review the measures in place and make sure they continue to meet the safety controls to the standard required.

Our range of control measures include:

- social distancing floor markings and signage
- regular touchpoint cleaning of high-traffic areas, including doors, lift buttons and handrails
- supplies of soap and hand sanitiser
- ventilation through natural or mechanical ventilation at all times
- rearranged courtroom layouts
- plexiglass screens in over 450 courtrooms and jury deliberation rooms
- limitations on the number of people allowed in our buildings
- maximum occupancy levels for consultation and courtrooms
- one-way or one in, one out systems
- a requirement for face coverings to be worn in public and communal areas of our buildings.

Public health experts have confirmed these are sufficient, including to deal with the new variant of the virus. We're confident these measures meet COVID-secure guidelines through:

- regular local risk assessments

- on site marshalling to monitor social distancing
- internal management checks
- spot checks performed by our national Assurance team
- a contracted external partner to conduct inspections
- external public health and regulatory visits.

We also have an internal HMCTS Workplace Standards Group which continues to oversee our practice and methodology for maintaining hygienic, safe buildings in line with government guidance.

All suspected incidents and/or confirmed cases of COVID-19 within our court and tribunal buildings in England and Wales, and tribunals in Scotland, are reported to HMCTS. Where there are two or more confirmed cases or an increase in suspected incidents within 14 days linked to a single site, a national team provides additional support and guidance to local court and tribunals in managing the response, and early identification of close contacts so they can be informed to self-isolate in support of NHS Test and Trace.

In line with public health guidance, where there are five or more confirmed cases (for England) or two or more confirmed cases (for Wales and Scotland) within a 14-day period we will refer them to local health protection teams who will assess the individual circumstances and provide any further advice and guidance. COVID-19 cases in HMCTS are in line with national trends and transmission within the estate is limited due to the mitigations in place.

Hilary Benn:

[149166]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what his policy is on the number of visitors allowed into court buildings in the context of the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

Regulating the footfall within our physical buildings has been central to ensuring that our courts and tribunals remain safe for the people who need to use them.

We have significantly changed our ways of working since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure our buildings are Covid-secure. Given the need for social distancing, there has been a focus on regulating and reducing footfall. For example, we have drastically increased capacity for remote (e.g. video) hearings; and have worked closely with the judiciary in scheduling court and tribunal lists in innovative ways, to spread cases throughout the day. We have also made sure that all staff who can work from home are able to do so, thereby further reducing the number of people in our buildings and we ask parties coming into court or tribunal for a hearing, where they need support, to limit that support to only one person (for example a friend or family member). Our approach to managing and maintaining safety across our courts and tribunals estate is set out in detail for all our users via our Gov.UK pages:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation#assessing-and-managing-coronavirus-risk>

■ HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Coronavirus

Rachel Hopkins:

[\[148976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what discussions he has had with trade unions representing Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service staff on risk assessments and safety measures implemented in Government buildings.

Chris Philp:

HMCTS is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all staff, members of the judiciary and visitors to its sites, as far as it is reasonably practical whilst they are on the premises. From the outset of this public health crisis, HMCTS officials have engaged at a national level with the Departmental Trade Union Side, consulting on policies and processes necessary to make the court and tribunal estate safe, and so to maintain access to justice. This collaboration, alongside that with Public Health agencies, representatives of those using the system and others, has helped HMCTS to ensure its ways of working are as effective as they can be.

The Corporate HMCTS H&S statement of intent confirms that 'There will be active communication and consultation between employees, Trade Union Side (TUS), judiciary, contractors and other stakeholders in respect of security, health and safety procedures and responsibilities.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, HMCTS officials have maintained regular meetings and consultation with Departmental Trade Union Side in specific business areas including Human Resources, Operations, Health & Safety and Security, in addition to bespoke or specific consultation such as the Risk assessment tools.

The HMCTS risk assessment tools were developed and reviewed by HMCTS officials in consultation with Departmental Trade Union Side, following a workshop style approach over a period of 4 months from May 2020 to September 2020. The tool is issued to each HMCTS site with instruction that it should be, wherever possible, completed in conjunction and consultation with a Trade Union health and safety representative. I understand that wherever possible our officials did conduct those assessments with trade union colleagues and continue to do so as the assessment tools are reviewed regularly.

In addition to this, HMCTS regional Delivery Directors hold regular meetings with regional TU reps, where safety and security matters are raised and discussed.

■ HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Remote Working

Rachel Hopkins:

[\[148975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether his Department plans to on increase the IT equipment and connectivity available to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service to support increased remote working.

Chris Philp:

HMCTS has increased IT equipment and connectivity to support increased remote working. It has deployed 11,000 laptops since the beginning of the pandemic to assist

with flexible working arrangements and has, so far, installed new video hardware to 482 court rooms. This is to increase the number of courtrooms capable of holding video-enabled hearings by installing video technology intended for use with strategic video platforms.

■ Prison Officers

Rachel Hopkins: [\[148973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the net change in the number of prison officers in England was in (a) 2018, (b) 2019 and (c) 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

Prison officers play an essential role in keeping the public safe and protecting those in our care. The Staff in Post and net change in number of Band 3 to 5 prison officers in England only is given in the following tables.

As part of Prison Safety and Reform White Paper published in November 2016, the Prison Officer Recruitment Programme was tasked with delivering a net increase of 2500 prison officers by the end of the 2018 which accounts for the significant staffing increase at end September 2018. This recruitment target was achieved in early 2018 ahead of schedule.

We have continued to deliver recruitment campaigns to fill existing posts and vacancies arising due to attrition however, the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on social distancing and non-essential travel impacted on our ability to recruit and train new officers during 2020.

We have taken a range of measures to mitigate against further delays, including introducing a new online recruitment assessment centre and a targeted project to accelerate recruitment activity. In addition, HMPPS has also invited former prison officers to return to the service temporarily.

TABLE 1 - NET CHANGE IN NUMBER OF BAND 3-5 PRISON OFFICERS ¹ IN ENGLAND ² ONLY

Dates	Net change in headcount	Net change in Full Time Equivalent
12 months to 30 September 2018	3,062	3,034
12 months to 30 September 2019	234	186
12 months to 30 September 2020	-680	-733

Table 2 – Number of Staff in Post of Band 3-5 prison officers ¹ in England ² only

DATES	HEADCOUNT	FULL TIME EQUIVALENT
Staff in post as at 30 September 2018	22,193	21,420
Staff in post as at 30 September 2019	22,427	21,606
Staff in post as at 30 September 2020	21,747	20,873

Notes to tables:

1. Band 3-5 Officers includes Band 3-4 / Prison Officers (incl. specialists), Band 4 / Supervising Officers, and Band 5 / Custodial Managers.
2. Excludes Wales, which is usually included in published statistics.

■ Prisons

Rachel Hopkins:

[\[148974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average amount of time per day prisoners in England were confined to their cells was in (a) 2018, (b) 2019 and (c) 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

It has not been possible to provide the information requested as it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services, sets out how we will operate whilst responding to COVID-19. Supporting this, there is more detailed guidance about the nature of regime activity expected at each stage.

There is no central mandate which governs the amount of time that prisoners should spend out of their cells. The decisive action we have taken during the pandemic has meant tens of thousands of officers and prisoners have been kept safe in the face of perhaps the greatest challenge ever to face the service. We introduced a number of necessary restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19, however, we have continued to offer as much time out of cells as possible, with necessary adaptations to manage infection. Governors are afforded the flexibility to deliver balanced regimes that maintain an appropriate level of time out of cell on a range of activities, including association, which meet the needs of the establishment's population, whilst taking into account available resources.

Specifically, we have maintained a requirement in all prisons to provide prisoners with time in the open air. All sites have also set out how they will provide prisoners with

time out of cell, and the safe equivalent of association time. Since the beginning of the pandemic, prisons were authorised to use external exercise yards for access to the open air.

The safety, mental health and wellbeing of prisoners has remained a priority. A range of products have been made available to support Governors in devising and implementing local safety and welfare plans designed to mitigate any risks. The increased restrictions have undoubtedly saved lives but we know they are extremely tough on prisoners - and we quickly rolled out video calls, in-cell education and extra support in response.

TRANSPORT

■ Travel: Quarantine

Stephen Doughty:

[\[150821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what criteria the Government used to determine why (a) Ethiopia, (b) Kenya, and (c) Nigeria are not included in the red list for travel for hotel quarantine.

Robert Courts:

The criteria used to place travel bans on particular countries is based on the latest scientific and medical data, which show an increased risk to UK public health and an increased risk of community transmission of new COVID-19 variants identified. These are temporary measures and the government keeps data for countries and territories under constant review.

The government has made it consistently clear that it will take decisive action if the public health risk of people returning from a particular country without self-isolating becomes too high.

This list of countries with a travel ban remains under review, and the government will not hesitate to impose additional restrictions if the scientific and medical data from countries and territories change.

TREASURY

■ Business: Government Assistance

Helen Hayes:

[\[151775\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on reducing the (a) number and (b) complexity of business support grants currently administered by local authorities; and if he will ensure that future support for businesses at Budget 2021 is channelled through existing support schemes.

Kemi Badenoch:

Several of the current business grant schemes are tied to specific COVID-19 restrictions, such as business closures. The number of business grant schemes currently in operation reflects the changes in restrictions in different parts of England since the schemes were announced last autumn, demonstrating that the Government's approach to supporting the economy evolves as the public health response does.

It should be noted that where there are multiple versions of guidance in circulation for the same scheme, with different versions covering different time periods, the eligibility criteria for that scheme does not vary between guidance. Local authorities should therefore not see multiple versions of guidance as an obstacle to paying out grants. BEIS officials and ministers are also working closely with local authorities to ensure they have the support and guidance they need to deliver grants to businesses as quickly as possible.

The current business grant schemes reflect the latest national lockdown as announced by the Prime Minister in January, which is necessary to save lives and protect the NHS. In recognition of the fact that these necessary restrictions would lead to further challenges for businesses, we announced an additional £4.6 billion of business grant support. The Government is keeping the business support package under review as the epidemiological situation evolves.

■ Carbon Emissions: Economic Situation**Caroline Lucas:**[\[149192\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of 26 January 2021, Official report, column 261, what (a) criteria and (b) process the Government uses to assess the extent to which its economic objectives and decision-making processes are already aligned with ambitious commitments to net zero and to improving the natural environment within a generation; what plans the Government has to make an assessment of the (i) covid-19 recovery plan and (ii) Budget 2021 against those criteria; and if he will make a statement.

Caroline Lucas:[\[149193\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to oral contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of 26 January 2021, Official report, column 261, what assessment his Department has made of the alignment of the Government's (a) economic objectives and (b) decision-making processes with the UK's commitments on (i) net zero and (ii) improving the natural environment within a generation.

Kemi Badenoch:

To ensure Government policy considers Net Zero and environmental targets, Green Book guidance on appraisal and evaluation mandates us to consider the climate and environmental impacts of all our spending. The Green Book guidance provides

detailed advice for valuing the costs and benefits of interventions in terms of climate change mitigation and other environmental impacts.

The Government also remains committed to pursuing a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, to help improve the natural environment, the £80m Green Recovery Challenge Fund will provide funding for projects across England to restore nature while creating and safeguarding jobs.

■ **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme**

Jon Trickett:

[\[148704\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether employers including employment agencies are permitted to backdate payments to 4 January 2021 as part of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

For claims from 1 November 2020, an employer can claim before, during or after they process their payroll as long as their claim is submitted by the relevant deadline.

Claims can be backdated where employees have already been furloughed from that date. A claim cannot start any earlier than the date the employee was furloughed. Employers must have confirmed in writing to their employee that they had been furloughed.

Claims for furlough days in January 2021 must be submitted by 15 February 2021.

■ **Hospitality Industry and Tourism: VAT**

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[149353\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to maintain VAT at 5 per cent for supplies of hospitality, hotel and holiday accommodation and admissions to certain attractions in Budget 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary reduced rate of VAT was introduced on 15 July to support the cash flow and viability of over 150,000 businesses and protect 2.4 million jobs in the hospitality and tourism sectors, and will run until 31 March 2021.

The Government keeps all taxes under review, and any future decisions on tax policy will be made at Budget.

The Government has announced a significant support package to help businesses from a whole range of sectors through the winter months, which includes an extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, an extension of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant, and an extension of the application window for the Government-backed loan schemes.

■ Hospitality Industry: Non-Domestic Rates

Steve Double: [\[148838\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the re-introduction of business rates from 1 April 2021 on hospitality businesses.

Steve Double: [\[148839\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the valuation list of non-domestic business rates for hospitality businesses in view of the effect of the January 2021 covid-19 lockdown restrictions on that 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 has provided various schemes to support firms, including wholesalers, including Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans, Bounce Back Loans, grants and VAT deferrals.

The Budget will set out the next phase of the Government's plans to tackle the virus, protect jobs and support business.

■ Hospitality Industry: VAT

Mark Menzies: [\[149211\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the economic effect on the hospitality sector of the reduced rate of VAT for customers and businesses in that sector.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary reduced rate of VAT (five per cent) was introduced to support the cash flow and viability of over 150,000 businesses and protect 2.4 million jobs in the hospitality and tourism sectors. This relief comes at an estimated cost to Government of over £2 billion and is therefore expected to have benefited the sector by reducing its VAT liabilities by this amount.

The Government keeps all taxes under review, and any future decisions on tax policy will be made at Budget.

■ National Infrastructure Bank: Development Bank of Wales

Dr James Davies: [\[149275\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he plans to take to ensure co-operation between the UK Infrastructure Bank and the Development Bank of Wales.

Jesse Norman:

The new national infrastructure bank will help to support infrastructure projects across the whole of the UK, including Wales. The new bank is primarily aimed at increasing investment in infrastructure, whereas the Development Bank of Wales focuses on business support. Where their interests are aligned on specific projects, the two institutions will be able to work collaboratively.

■ National Infrastructure Bank: Location**Dr James Davies:**[\[149274\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what his criteria are for determining the location of the UK Infrastructure Bank; whether local authorities have been invited to submit bids to host the bank; and when he plans to announce a decision on the location of the bank.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is considering a wide range of relevant factors, in order to ensure that it chooses a location in the North of England that meets the bank's needs while supporting the Government's wider levelling up agenda. At Budget, the Chancellor will set out comprehensive details regarding the operations, mandate and scale of the bank.

■ National Infrastructure Bank: Union Connectivity Review**Dr James Davies:**[\[149276\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he has taken to ensure that the UK Infrastructure Bank makes an assessment of the implications for its policies of the recommendations of the Union Connectivity Review.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is committed to levelling up all regions of the country and unleashing the power of the union. Both the infrastructure bank and the Union Connectivity Review are part of the strategic vision set out in the National Infrastructure Strategy to transform the nation's infrastructure. The new bank will help to support infrastructure projects across the whole of the UK. Further details will be announced at Budget. The Union Connectivity Review will look at options to improve transport connectivity between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The interim report is due to be published shortly, with the full report expected in Summer 2021.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme**Apsana Begum:**[\[149351\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect of excluding from the self employment income support scheme people who have less than 50 per cent of their income coming from self-employment on levels of financial adversity in that group.

Jesse Norman:

The design of the SEISS, including the eligibility requirement that an individual's trading profits must be at least equal to their non-trading income, is intended to target support at those who most need it, and who are most reliant on their self-employment income.

The Government does recognise that some of the rules, criteria and conditions necessary to ensure that the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) worked for the vast majority of people have meant that some did not qualify.

Those who are ineligible for the SEISS may still be eligible for other elements of the substantial package of support available. The Universal Credit standard allowance has been temporarily increased for 2020-21 and the Minimum Income Floor relaxed for the duration of the crisis, so that where self-employed claimants' earnings have fallen significantly, their Universal Credit award will have increased to reflect their lower earnings. In addition to this, they may also have access to other elements of the package, including Bounce Back loans, tax deferrals, rental support, mortgage holidays, self-isolation support payments and other business support grants.

■ Self-employment Income Support Scheme: Disclosure of Information**Caroline Lucas:**[\[149191\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect of his decision not to release details of the fourth Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) grant covering February to April 2021 until the Budget on 3 March 2020 on the ability of eligible self-employed people to pay their personal and business bills and expenses in February 2021; and for what reason he did not make those details available at the same time as he announced the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to April 2021.

Jesse Norman:

The Government is committed to supporting the self-employed population during the COVID-19 pandemic through a substantial package of support.

The three Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) grants combined provided up to £21,570 of support for each individual, placing the SEISS among the most generous schemes for the self-employed in the world. As of 31 December, about 2.7 million individuals have made claims totalling over £18.9 billion so far across all three grants.

The claims window for the third grant closed on 29 January 2021. The Government confirmed in January that further details of the fourth grant, which will cover February to the end of April, will be announced alongside other economic updates at Budget in March.

The SEISS is 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: Harlow

Robert Halfon:

[\[151671\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what fiscal support he has made available to help small businesses in Harlow in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout this crisis, the Government has sought to support businesses, jobs and public services up and down the UK. That is why it has spent over £280 billion to make a package of support available for businesses which has included billions in wage support, loans, tax deferrals, Business Rate reliefs and sector-specific grants.

Following the implementation of the latest national lockdown in January, the Government announced additional funding for businesses worth £4.6 billion across the UK. This includes a £500m payment to local authorities, to top up their allocation from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), which has already provided local authorities with £1.1 billion.

This funding will ensure that local authorities can provide discretionary grants to businesses which are not eligible for the Local Restrictions Support Grants, but which are nonetheless experiencing a severe impact on their business due to the national lockdown. These businesses may also be eligible for further aspects of our generous support package outlined above.

We remain committed to ensuring we take the right action at the right time to support individuals and businesses in every region and nation of the United Kingdom.

■ Social Enterprises: Tax Allowances

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[148734\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the evidence from HMRC that a rise in the number of Social Investment Tax Relief investments during 2018-19 may be due to increased awareness of SITR resulting from the Government's consultation on the scheme in summer 2018.

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 in 2019 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.

Simon Jupp:[\[148968\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to extend Social Investment Tax Relief beyond April 2021.

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 in 2019 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.

Stamp Duties: First Time Buyers**Mick Whitley:**[\[149336\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect on levels of first-time home ownership of extending the stamp duty holiday.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary SDLT relief was designed to stimulate immediate momentum in a property market where property transactions fell by as much as 50 per cent during the COVID-19 lockdown in March. This has also supported the jobs of people whose employment relies on custom from the property industry, such as retailers and tradespeople. First time buyers will benefit from the increase in available properties and save up to an additional £10,000 in SDLT, on top of the £5,000 they could already save under First Time Buyers relief.

The Government will continue to monitor the market. However, as the relief was designed to provide an immediate stimulus to the property market, the Government does not plan to extend this relief.

Tax Avoidance: Netherlands**John Spellar:**[\[149161\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to prevent companies funnelling profits into low tax subsidiaries in the Netherlands.

Jesse Norman:

The UK has led international efforts to tackle avoidance by multinationals, including through the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting ("BEPS") Project which looks at aggressive tax planning strategies that exploit tax rules to artificially shift profits to low tax jurisdictions where there is little or no economic activity.

This international collaboration has led to the introduction of hybrid mismatch rules that prevent multinationals exploiting differences in the tax systems of different countries, a requirement for UK headed large businesses to provide HMRC with a country-by-country report, detailing their global profits, tax and assets to ensure they are paying the correct tax on all their UK activity, and a Corporate Interest Restriction that protects against companies using intra-group loans to shift profits overseas.

Alongside these multilateral efforts are UK domestic rules that have complemented these changes.

In April 2015, the UK Government introduced the Diverted Profits Tax ('DPT'). DPT was designed to counter contrived arrangements used by multinational corporations to shift their profits offshore and avoid paying tax in the UK on their economic activities here.

In January 2019 HMRC launched a new Profit Diversion Compliance Facility ('PDCF') to encourage businesses to stop diverting profits and pay what is due. About two-thirds of the large businesses targeted so far have decided to use the facility to bring their tax affairs up to date quickly and efficiently, enabling HMRC to focus even more resources on investigating businesses which continue to divert profits.

Multinationals can often have complicated tax affairs and HMRC are determined to ensure that their profits are correctly attributed, and they are paying all the tax they owe.

Additional information about HMRC's work to tackle profit diversion by multinational companies is available on GOV.UK along with the most recent Transfer Pricing and Diverted Profits Tax statistics:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transfer-pricing-and-diverted-profits-tax-statistics-2019-to-2020/tackling-profit-diversion-by-multi-national-companies>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transfer-pricing-and-diverted-profits-tax-statistics-2019-to-2020>

■ Undertakers: Protective Clothing

Sir John Hayes:

[148684]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reinstating the VAT exemption on personal protective equipment for funeral sector workers for the duration of the covid-19 lockdown.

Jesse Norman:

The temporary zero rate was an extraordinary measure introduced to help affected sectors (such as hospitals and care homes) during the initial acute period of the COVID-19 crisis, when global supply of PPE did not meet demand and PPE was procured directly from the open market.

The funeral sector source their own PPE through their normal supply routes. In extreme circumstances, there is provision for them to approach their Local Resilience Forum (LRF) or local authority, where the LRF has stood down, to discuss access to

an emergency supply. Given this, there are no plans to review the VAT treatment of PPE.

■ Wines: Imports

Chris Elmore:

[\[148861\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Customs Handling of Import and Export Freight system on wine importers; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional support to wine importers to help tackle issues relating to that system.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recognises that businesses must get to grips with new customs procedures and is providing support.

The Customs Handling of Import and Export Freight (CHIEF) system continues to work well. In practice, most businesses do not connect to CHIEF, using the services of a customs intermediary instead or, if they do their own customs administration, commercial software that interacts with CHIEF.

HMRC have engaged extensively with excise trade associations through the Joint Alcohol and Tobacco Consultation Group (JATCG) which has included regular meetings with the Wines and Spirits Trade Association (WSTA). HMRC will continue that support and help to trade associations and individual businesses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme: Applications

Richard Burgon:

[\[150872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what targets her Department has in place for processing an Access to Work application for each stage of that process; whether her Department keeps a record of such targets that have not been met; and what steps her Department takes to inform disabled workers of the status of their application in the event that the processing their application has been delayed.

Justin Tomlinson:

Access to Work does not have any formal targets for elements of the journey as it offers a personalised service which involves regular contact with customers at the appropriate points throughout their application. Customers are provided with updates on the progress of their case, via their agreed method (letter, e-mail, text or phone). If there is any delay to their case customers will be updated via their communications with the nominated adviser, or through accessing information available on the inbound telephony line.

■ Coronavirus: Remote Working

Sir Mark Hendrick:

[\[149726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of people's (a) mental health and (b) wellbeing with respect to remote working during the covid-19 outbreak.

Justin Tomlinson:

This Government recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic, whether directly or indirectly, is having an impact on the mental health of individuals, including those working remotely.

The determinants of mental health and wellbeing are numerous and their relationships to one another other complex. Therefore, the impact of working from home on mental health and wellbeing is likely to vary considerably across individuals depending on wider circumstances.

There is some evidence suggesting that mental health and wellbeing have improved for some homeworkers but worsened for others, and that this impact is influenced by the degree of organisational support among wider, social, factors.

Emerging evidence from the early stages of the pandemic suggests that the negative impacts of homeworking are likely to disproportionately affect women (particularly mothers), young people and those from lower socioeconomic groups.

We will continue to monitor outcomes from the range of data sources that become available.

■ Disability

Richard Burgon:

[\[150873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what her planned timescale is for the consultation on the National Strategy for Disabled People; and when her Department plans to begin consultation with (a) disabled people's organisations, (b) representatives of disabled workers and (c) trade unions as part of that process.

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 the 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 and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[150714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many claimants have had their employment and support allowance payments stopped because of the temporary suspension of face-to-face assessments for health and disability-related benefits.

Justin Tomlinson:

New claimants will receive the assessment rate of benefit, and existing claimants will remain on their current award, until we are able to gather the evidence needed for a decision to be made (or until their benefit is due to end in contributory ESA). Where an individual's contributory ESA ends, if they require further financial support, they may be able to claim Universal Credit, depending on their personal circumstances.

If, following their assessment, and the subsequent decision, an ESA claimant is entitled to a higher rate of benefit, payments are backdated where appropriate, so that they do not lose out.

We are committed to doing everything we can to ensure that people get the support they are entitled to as quickly as possible by continuing to assess people on paper evidence, as usual, where we can, using this route as often as we are able to. We have also introduced telephone assessments and we are currently in the early stages of testing WCA video assessments.

■ Food Banks

Neil Coyle: [\[149249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 9 June 2020 to Question 57261, when she plans to place a copy in the Library of her Department's internal review of the drivers of food bank usage.

Will Quince:

The Department reallocated resources to prioritise work to help the COVID-19 effort.

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.

■ Local Housing Allowance

Afzal Khan: [\[150929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of increasing the Local Housing Allowance to cover median market rents.

Afzal Khan:

[\[150930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential economic effect on renters of increasing the Local Housing allowance in line with median market rents.

Will Quince:

There has been no such assessment.

In April 2020 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates were increased to the 30th percentile of local market rents. This significant investment of almost £1 billion has provided 1.5 million claimants with around £600 more housing support per year than they would otherwise have received. In 2021/22 all LHA rates will be maintained at their increased level, meaning claimants renting in the private rented sector will continue to benefit from the significant increase in the rates applied this year.

For those who require additional support with housing costs Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are available. Since 2011 we have provided over £1 billion in DHP funding.

■ **Motability Scheme: Terminal Illnesses**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[150927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of extending eligibility to the Motability scheme for people in receipt of attendance allowance who have also been diagnosed with a terminal illness after state pension age.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Motability Scheme was designed to provide people entitled to mobility welfare payments with access to a vehicle. The Scheme is open to anyone who qualifies for the higher rate mobility component for Disability Living Allowance, the enhanced rate of the mobility component for Personal Independence Payment, the Armed Forces Independence Payment or War Pensioners Mobility Supplement.

Attendance Allowance is intended to help those with a severe disability who have long term care or supervision needs which arise after reaching State Pension age. It has never included a mobility component, and so cannot be used in payment for a leased Motability scheme vehicle. Government mobility support is focused on people who are disabled earlier in life; developing mobility needs in older life is a normal consequence of ageing, which non-disabled younger people have had opportunity to plan and save for.

Special rules apply to people considered to be terminally ill when applying for AA, DLA or PIP. However, there is no automatic entitlement to a mobility component of either DLA or PIP, and, while there would be no qualifying period, an eligible claimant would need to satisfy conditions for this entitlement.

Benefits such as DLA or PIP can continue beyond State Pension age for as long as the individual remains entitled. This would allow an individual with existing entitlement to retain their Motability vehicle.

■ Social Security Benefits: Cancer

Mike Amesbury: [\[150926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of welfare support available to people receiving a cancer diagnosis after reaching state pension age.

Guy Opperman:

Welfare support for pensioners, including those with cancer, could include Attendance Allowance which is intended to help those who have long term care or supervision needs. Pension Credit is also available to help those pensioners on low incomes, and as we set out in our Manifesto, this Government remains committed to a range of other pensioner benefits including the Winter Fuel Payment and free prescriptions, ensuring that older people have the security and dignity they deserve.

■ Social Security Benefits: Coronavirus

Julian Sturdy: [\[150792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of extending the one calendar month deadline to request a mandatory reconsideration to allow claimants sufficient time to compile necessary information in the context of delays caused by the covid-19 (a) outbreak and (b) lockdown announced in January 2021.

Justin Tomlinson:

The law provides that if an application is made outside the one month time limit but within 13 months of the decision being disputed, the application will be admitted as in time where the claimant can show there were special circumstances for the late application.

Claimants do not have to submit all of the supporting information within one month. When they apply for a Mandatory Reconsideration, they can inform the Decision Maker they intend to provide further information. In these cases, more time will be allowed for this to be provided and no decision will be made until it is received.

■ Support for Mortgage Interest

Afzal Khan: [\[150931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent representations he has received on reducing the waiting period to receive support for mortgage interest payments.

Guy Opperman:

A number of organisations have made public recommendations for government to reduce the qualifying period including Centre for Policy Studies, Joseph Roundtree Foundation, Affordable Housing Commission, The Resolution Foundation, UK Finance and the Building Societies Association.

The Department currently has no plans to amend the qualifying period for Support for Mortgage Interest.

■ Universal Credit: Work Capability Assessment**Vicky Foxcroft:**[\[149290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps are taken to inform a universal credit claimant who is vulnerable and unable to access their journal of the outcome of their Work Capability Assessment.

Vicky Foxcroft:[\[149291\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the (a) former Chair of the Work and Pensions committee's letter of 29 July 2019 on information posted on universal credit claimants' journals as fit for work notifications and (b) Minister of State's response of 22 August 2019, what assessment she has made of whether pro forma statements give adequate information for disabled and seriously unwell people to decide whether to request a Mandatory Reconsideration of her Department's decision.

Justin Tomlinson:

Since March 2020, in all cases where a claimant is found fit for work the claimant will receive a call to talk through the Work Capability Assessment outcome and to ask about any changes since the assessment.

There are currently no home visits, and the COVID easements in place do not allow for the claimant to have a face to face assessment, so full importance is put on the conversation the Decision Makers have with the claimant.

If the Decision Maker is not able to speak with the claimant a case conference is held, before the decision is uploaded, and in conversation with the Health Care Professional Advice line. If there is any doubt of risk with the claimant the case will be referred back for a face to face assessment when the easements are lifted.

If during the course of the decision making process a safeguarding issue is identified the Decision Maker will make a referral to a Senior Safeguarding Lead who will engage with other agencies to support the customer.

The decision outcome notifications provide adequate information for disabled and seriously unwell people to decide whether to request a Mandatory Reconsideration of the Department's decision.

The notification clearly explains what information has been taken into account to decide whether the claimant would have difficulty in carrying out work related activities.

It explains that the claimant can ask for a more detailed written explanation either via the Journal or by Telephone. It also advises that this needs to be done within one month of the date of the letter, and that the claimant can ask someone who has authority to act for them.

It advises that if the claimant has further information or if they think the department has overlooked something they can ask the Department to reconsider the Decision. This has to be done within one month of the letter. Following this it explains they will receive a letter called a Mandatory Reconsideration Notice and if they disagree with the Mandatory Reconsideration they can appeal to the tribunal.

■ Work Capability Assessment

Martyn Day:

[149798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many work capability assessment cases were overturned as a result of incorrect decisions made by outsourced assessment centres in the last six months.

Justin Tomlinson:

Healthcare Professionals (HCP), who work in the assessment centres, produce reports on which Work Capability Assessments (WCAs) decisions, both for ESA and UC, are based. The decision itself is made by DWP staff not the HCP. Those decisions can be changed at both Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) and appeal.

Statistics on Employment and Support Allowance Work Capability Assessment (WCA) outcomes are published quarterly. The latest figures covering the outcome of completed initial and repeat WCAs, including appeals decisions and mandatory reconsiderations, can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/employment-and-support-allowance-outcomes-of-work-capability-assessment>

Additional breakdowns of the ESA WCA figures can be found at:

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

Guidance for users is available at:

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/Getting-Started.html>

Statistics on Work Capability Assessments for Universal Credit, including the outcome of MRs and appeals, are currently under development for future publication and have not previously been published as official statistics. We will issue them in due course as an official statistics release in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics