



Daily Report

Tuesday, 23 February 2021

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 23 February 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:30 P.M., 23 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

COP26

■ Cabinet Office: UN Climate Conference 2021

Dr Matthew Offord: [\[140782\]](#)

To ask the President of COP26, how many departmental staff will be attending COP26 in an official capacity with their expenses covered.

Alok Sharma:

Numbers on departmental staff attending COP26 are to be determined in due course.

■ UN Climate Conference 2021

Harriett Baldwin: [\[140065\]](#)

To ask the President of COP26, what plans the Government has to involve parliamentarians from around the world in COP26.

Alok Sharma:

We are engaging globally with parliamentarians and civil society ahead of COP26, including during ministerial visits overseas. We are also engaging with groups, including the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to support their plans to involve parliamentarians from around the world at COP26.

DEFENCE

■ War Pensions: Complaints

Justin Madders: [\[155119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the complaints process for complaints relating to war pensions.

Justin Madders: [\[155120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing referral to the Independent Case Examiner as a stage in the complaints process for complaints relating to war pensions.

Johnny Mercer:

Defence Ministers are satisfied that the complaints process relating to War Pensions Scheme (WPS) claims is fit for purpose and operating effectively. There are no plans to change the review or appeals process at this time.

Case reviews can be carried out at the request of an individual who states that an existing decision should be reviewed. This will usually occur where an individual's claim for a War Disablement Pension (WDP) or a War Widow/ers Pension is refused

or, in the case of those already in receipt of a WDP, where the individual feels that their condition has worsened. If an end date has been imposed for payment of a condition, a review can also be carried out either by Defence Business Services (DBS) Veterans UK or imposed by a tribunal.

Although it is not a mandatory requirement to provide evidence, DBS Veterans UK will examine any evidence provided by an individual to support their request for review; this may include a letter from a general practitioner, hospital case notes or any other official record which confirms that an individual has sought medical treatment for the accepted disablement since they were last assessed. DBS Veterans UK may in addition gather further evidence such as a report from a general practitioner or consultant.

If an individual is unhappy with a decision made in relation to a claim under the WPS, in most cases they may appeal that decision to an independent tribunal. These tribunals deal solely with Armed Forces compensation cases and each consists of a legally qualified Chair, a medical member and an ex-Service member. In England and Wales, appeals are heard by the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal. Appeals from claimants living abroad are dealt with by the Tribunal covering England and Wales. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, appeals are heard by a Pensions Appeal Tribunal. The circumstances of each case will be different, and the individual will need to give the reasons why they disagree with the decision.

EDUCATION

■ Females: Education

Jim Shannon:

[\[152527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that successor funding to the European Social Fund enables women to access formal education.

Gillian Keegan:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is the domestic successor to the EU Structural Fund programme. It will maximise the benefits of leaving the EU through quicker delivery of funding, better targeting, better alignment with domestic priorities and by cutting burdensome EU bureaucracy.

The department is working closely with other government departments including the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions on the development of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. As set out in the heads of terms published at Spending Review 2020, a portion of the fund will be targeted to people most in need through bespoke employment and skills programmes that are tailored to local need. This will support improved employment outcomes for those in and out of work in specific cohorts of people who face labour market barriers.

The government will set out further details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in a UK-wide investment framework published in the spring.

■ Further Education: Coronavirus

Mr Toby Perkins: [\[153193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many further education colleges received additional funding as a result of significant funding difficulties in 2020.

Mr Toby Perkins: [\[153194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which further education colleges received additional funding as a result of significant financial difficulties in England in 2020.

Gillian Keegan:

The department has put in place the college oversight regime which aims to improve financial resilience and quality by incentivising and supporting college leaders to recognise issues and take action before matters become serious. Where colleges may get into serious financial difficulty, the Education and Skills Funding Agency may provide additional funding if a college might otherwise be likely to run out of money or provide funds to support an agreed restructuring solution.

The department is committed to annually publishing data on colleges that have received emergency funding or funding for a restructuring solution, including insolvency. Information published in December 2020 noted that in the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, 7 colleges were provided with emergency funding or insolvency financial support. All 7 of these colleges received emergency funding in 2020. Between 1 April to 31 December 2020 a further 3 colleges received funding, the total number of colleges provided with emergency funding in 2020 is therefore 10.

The department does not release details of the specific colleges that receive emergency funding as this information is commercially sensitive.

■ Pre-school Education: Finance

Tulip Siddiq: [\[153313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a long term funding settlement for maintained nursery schools in Budget 2021.

Vicky Ford:

Maintained nursery schools (MNS) are an important part of the early years sector and provide valuable services, especially in disadvantaged areas.

As part of the recent Spending Review, the government has confirmed a continuation of around £60 million of supplementary funding for MNS in the 2021/22 financial year. This includes £23 million of supplementary funding that the government confirmed in August 2020 will be provided to local authorities for the summer term in 2021.

The department continues to consider what is required to ensure a clear, long-term picture of funding for MNS. This government remains committed to the long-term funding of MNS, and any reform to the way they are funded will be accompanied by appropriate funding protections.

■ **Satellites: Manufacturing Industries**

Greg Smith:

[153391]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to provide (a) skills and (b) training to help support the UK manufacturing of small satellites; and if he will make a statement.

Gillian Keegan:

We recently published the White Paper, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth. This is focused on giving people the skills they need, in a way that suits them, so they can get great jobs in sectors the economy needs and boost this country's productivity.

A key focus of the White Paper is making the skills systems more responsive to employer skill needs both locally and nationally. Building on the success of our flagship apprenticeships programme, we are putting employers at the heart of the system so education and training meets their needs. Through employer engagement, we have transformed apprenticeships from a second-rate option to a prestigious opportunity to train with leading employers and get a well-paid job. Our new apprenticeships system includes a Space Engineering Technician apprenticeship that covers the design and manufacture of satellites and the components and subsystems they comprise, along with production, operation and maintenance of the highly specialised ground support equipment used to support development and testing of satellites before launch. It has been developed by employers including Airbus Defence & Space, BAE Systems, Thales Alenia Space UK Ltd, Nammo Westcott Ltd, Reaction Engines Ltd, Oxford Space Systems, Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd and several others.

Alongside apprenticeships, by 2030, almost all technical courses will be based on employer-led standards, ensuring that the education and training people receive are directly linked to the skills needed for jobs.

A key part of our plans is to provide the advanced technical and higher technical skills the nation needs including, for example, in satellite production. We are doing this by expanding our flagship Institutes of Technology programme to every part of the country by the end of this Parliament to spearhead the increase in higher-level technical skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. We will also continue to roll out T Levels, which prepare students for entry into skilled employment or higher levels of technical study, including apprenticeships. We are reforming higher technical education with a new approval system based on employer-led standards and are creating clear progression routes for students towards the higher-level technical qualifications that employers need.

We are also funding the High-Value Manufacturing Catapult's 'Skills Value Chain'. This process assesses future skills needs in advanced manufacturing, develops courses to meet these needs, and makes those courses widely available through high-quality providers such as Institutes of Technology. It will support Small and Medium Enterprises to work with emerging technologies in the manufacturing sector, such as electrification, additive manufacturing, and metrology. We will then explore whether this Skills Value Chain approach can be used in other emerging skills areas and to support government priorities such as net zero.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Navy

Lisa Nandy: [\[152516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 8 January to Question 148829 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Navy, whether the answer from the Ministry of Defence represents his Department's policy on the future sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: Yes. We have no doubt about our sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory, which has been continuous since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty over the Archipelago, and we do not recognise its claim.

We remain open to dialogue with Mauritius on matters of shared interest, including BIOT and its Marine Protected Area (MPA).

■ Developing Countries: Coronavirus

Clive Lewis: [\[152586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the Government's plan is for redistributing covid-19 vaccine doses to other countries; and what the timescale is for that redistribution.

Wendy Morton:

Ending the COVID-19 pandemic requires a global solution, which is why the UK is leading efforts for global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. This includes a £548 million contribution to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment to ensure that 92 low and middle income countries are able to access COVID-19 vaccines.

It is too early to determine if the UK will have excess vaccine supply. We continue to work with our international partners to drive the global response and save lives.

Clive Lewis:

[\[152587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the scale-up of covid-19 vaccine manufacturing capacity in Low and Middle Income countries.

Wendy Morton:

The UK is committed to rapid, equitable access to safe and effective vaccines. The UK has committed £548 million to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), which is an international initiative whose volume guarantees encourage manufacturing capacity to be scaled up to produce and deliver vaccines at the scale needed to support global equitable access to vaccines.

The FCDO is working closely with key development partners in vaccines, such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), along with development finance institutions, regional institutions, and the private sector to catalyse investments into vaccine manufacturing in low- and middle-income countries.

■ **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe**

Ben Lake:

[\[152618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to secure the return of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe from Iran to the UK.

James Cleverly:

We are using every tool in our diplomatic arsenal to secure the immediate and permanent release of arbitrarily detained dual British nationals in Iran. We raise Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case at the most senior levels in the Iranian Government: the Foreign Secretary continues to press Foreign Minister Zarif for her release, and the Prime Minister has raised her detention with President Rouhani. Our Ambassador in Tehran constantly raises dual British national detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The FCDO remains in regular contact with both Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family, and we continue to provide them with all support possible. We are doing everything we can to enable Nazanin to return home and to secure the release of all British dual nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran so that they can be reunited with their loved ones.

■ **Overseas Aid: Schools**

Nickie Aiken:

[\[152645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure the return of (a) the poorest and most marginalised and (b) all children to school.

Wendy Morton:

FCDO country offices are actively supporting partner governments to open schools up **when it is safe to do so** to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised are not left behind.

The UK is also supporting global efforts to ensure all children return to school. We have provided £20 million to UNICEF to protect vulnerable children, £5 million to the Education Cannot Wait fund to support emergency education in conflict-affected countries, and £5.3 million to UNHCR to fund the salaries of over 5,500 teachers in refugee camps across 10 countries. In the meantime, our bilateral support to 18 countries has pivoted to ensure that girls, children with disabilities, and those affected by conflict can continue to access learning materials so that they are ready to return to school once it is safe to do so.

Nickie Aiken:[\[152646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking at an international level to agree a global plan to ensure the safe return of all children to school.

Wendy Morton:

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, two thirds of the academic year have been lost on average worldwide. It is important that schools in low and lower middle income countries reopen **as soon as it is safe to do so**.

The FCDO is playing a leading role in championing every girl's right to 12 years of quality education. We are using our G7 presidency to ensure the safe return of all children to school. We are asking our international partners to get behind two ambitious global targets - to see 40 million more girls into education, and a third more reading by the age of 10 in low and middle income countries by 2025. On 28 and 29 July, the UK and Kenya will co-host the Global Education Summit: Financing the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in London. GPE aims to raise \$5 billion over the next five years to help education systems build back better following COVID-19, and ensure all children return to school to learn.

■ Saudi Arabia: Political Prisoners**Claudia Webbe:**[\[153419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with US counterpart on encouraging Saudi Arabia to (a) release and lift restrictions on Loujain Alhathloul and other women's rights activists and (b) release Prince Turki Bin Abdullah and other political detainees.

Claudia Webbe:[\[153420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he last had discussions with his (a) Saudi counterpart and (b) European counterparts on the cases of (i) Prince Turki Bin Abdullah, (ii) Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef and (iii) other political detainees and women's rights activists denied fair trials.

James Cleverly:

The Foreign Secretary raised a number of human rights issues including the detention of women's rights defenders, during his visit to Saudi Arabia in March 2020. FCDO Ministers and senior officials also regularly raise human rights with the Saudi authorities. We continue to monitor the cases of Women's rights defenders; and Prince Turki bin Abdullah and Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef. We have consistently pressed for due process and raised concerns about the use of solitary confinement, lack of family contact and allegations of torture, and were pleased to see Loujain Al Hathloul reunited with her family on 10 February.

The UK regularly engages international partners on human rights. For example, in September, the UK, alongside international partners, signed a statement at the UN Human Rights Council expressing concern over the use of arbitrary detention and calling for the release of all political detainees. In November, the UK Ambassador for Human Rights and six European counterparts released a joint statement reiterating our call for the release of all political detainees.

■ Yemen: Humanitarian Aid**Nickie Aiken:**[\[152643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on the humanitarian situation in Yemen of the US designation of the Houthis as a terror organisation.

Nickie Aiken:[\[152644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what exceptions and general licences to the US Houthi terror designation will be issued to protect organisations supplying essential commercial and humanitarian produce to Yemen.

James Cleverly:

On 5 February, the US announced that they will reverse the previous administration's designation of the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. We welcome this decision and have engaged closely with the US administration on this matter, sharing our concerns that designation would seriously disrupt humanitarian operations in Yemen.

However, we cannot ignore Houthi actions. These include the use of children and sexual violence as tools of war, the persecution of religious minorities and attacks on civilians. On 30 December, the Houthi attack on Aden airport killed 27 civilians and injured over 100 others. We must address the Houthi sense of impunity to make progress of the peace process.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Abortion**

Daniel Kawczynski: [\[147800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many women required treatment for uterine perforation or a cervical tear following (a) a home medical abortion between 30 March and 30 November 2020 and (b) a medical abortion between those dates in each of the last five years.

Helen Whately:

The information is not held in the format requested. The Department collects data on the number of procedures rather than the number of women treated.

■ Abortion: Drugs

Dame Diana Johnson: [\[912292\]](#)

What his Department's timeframe is for the publication of its response to the early medical abortions consultation on home use of both pills for early medical abortion up to 10 weeks gestation.

Helen Whately:

The consultation on whether to make permanent the current temporary measure allowing for home use of both pills for early medical abortion closes on 26 February.

We will carefully consider all of the responses received, and plan to publish the Government's response later this year.

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Rehabilitation

Ian Mearns: [\[151679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the implications for his policies of the recommendations for service provision presented in the qualitative study on addressing the needs of older adults receiving alcohol treatment during the covid-19 pandemic, published by the Drink Wise, Age Well programme in November 2020.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The Department will consider the recommendations made in the study.

Ian Mearns: [\[151680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle (a) age and (b) socio-economic inequalities in alcohol treatment service provision.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: Local authorities are responsible for assessing local needs and commissioning services to meet these needs, including substance misuse treatment services for people with alcohol dependence.

Public Health England supports local authorities in this work by providing data, guidance and advice. This includes the Local Alcohol Profiles for England (LAPE) which provide local data alongside national comparisons to support local health improvement and an intelligence-driven approach to understanding and meeting local need. Inequalities data is included wherever possible to allow local government, health organisations, commissioners and other agencies to assess the extent of variation in alcohol-related harm. The LAPE is available at the following link:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/local-alcohol-profiles>

■ Back Pain: Antidepressants**Jim Shannon:****[151712]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has received recent representations on the effectiveness of the prolonged use of anti-depressants prescribed for long-term back pain.

Edward Argar:

A search of the Department's Ministerial correspondence database has identified no specific representations received recently on this topic.

■ Blood: Donors**Anne Marie Morris:****[151719]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 10 December 2020 to Question HL10527 on Blood: Donors, when his Department plans to publish its response to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's comprehensive review of the safety of immunoglobulins produced from fractionated UK plasma.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: A response to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's review of the safety of immunoglobulins from fractionated United Kingdom plasma will be published by the spring.

■ Breast Cancer**Caroline Lucas:****[142886]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of (a) NHS England, (b) The Health Quality Improvement Partnership and (c) The National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service on improving data collection on metastatic breast cancer patients.

Jo Churchill:

NHS England and Improvement are currently engaging with a range of stakeholders regarding a secondary breast cancer audit. The collection of data has been mentioned as part of these discussions.

■ Car Washes: Coronavirus**Julian Sturdy:**[\[110804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what comparative assessment he has made of the risk of covid-19 transmission at automated and hand car washes; and what the evidential basis is for shutting (a) automated and (b) hand car washes under covid-19 lockdown restrictions from 5 November 2020.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

No such assessment has been made.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies provided advice and evidence to the Department on the risks of transmission through different routes and environments which is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933225/S0824_SARS-CoV-2_Transmission_routes_and_environments.pdf

■ Care Homes: Coronavirus**Helen Hayes:**[\[100492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the average turnaround time for receipt of weekly covid-19 test results by care homes.

Helen Whately:

We do not hold the data in the format requested.

Helen Hayes:[\[91104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of covid-19 tests in care homes sent for analysis have not had a result reported to the care home provider.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 21 September 2020]: We do not hold data in the format requested.

■ Cervical Cancer: Screening**Mike Kane:**[\[153264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of using mRNA-based HPV tests in primary cervical cancer screening.

Mike Kane:

[\[153265\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of using digital cytology in the UK's cervical cancer screening programme.

Jo Churchill:

The National Cervical Screening Programme uses both deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and ribonucleic acid (RNA) based human papillomavirus (HPV) testing in the programme.

Laboratories can choose to use either the DNA or RNA HPV testing methods as both are approved.

The United Kingdom National Screening Committee has received a proposal to consider the use of digital pathology in the cancer screening programmes and work to assess this is under way.

■ **Coronavirus: Ashford**

Barbara Keeley:

[\[123554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the imposition of local covid-19 restrictions on 29 June 2020, if he will publish the evidence which informed the Government's decision not to implement district-level restrictions in areas with high infection rates such as Ashford in Kent.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 7 December 2020]: Restrictions are not placed on district level but at county and regional levels. Decisions on tiers are made by Ministers based on public health recommendations from senior clinical and scientific advisors, guided by five key indicators; the case detection rate in all age groups; case detection rates among the over 60 year olds; the rate at which case rates are rising or falling; the positivity rate; and pressures on the National Health Service. Final decisions on tiering are made by the COVID-19 Operations Committee.

■ **Coronavirus: Contact Tracing**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[136566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of requiring people to provide their employer's details when presenting for covid-19 tests to assist with the contact tracing of their work environments.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 18 January 2021]: NHS Test and Trace collects individuals' employer details to ensure that those infected can be supported and that the wider organisation is protected.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control**Emma Hardy:** [\[121904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the lowest number is of positive covid-19 cases which an area must have per 100,000 of their population before moving from tier 3 to tier 2 restrictions.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We do not make decisions on restrictions based purely on the case rate per 100,000 of population. Decisions on tiers are made by Ministers based on public health recommendations from senior clinical and scientific advisors, guided by five key indicators; the case detection rate in all age groups; case detection rates among the over 60 year olds; the rate at which case rates are rising or falling; the positivity rate; and pressures on the National Health Service. Final decisions on tiering are made by the COVID-19 Operations Committee.

Simon Fell: [\[912282\]](#)

What steps his Department is taking to support the NHS in tackling future waves of coronavirus.

Edward Argar:

We have made over £59 billion available this year to support the response to COVID-19 and are committing a further £20.3 billion in 2021/22, of which £3 billion is to support National Health Service recovery from the impact of the pandemic.

The Government continues to ensure the NHS has the resourcing and support it needs to meet any pressures or costs arising from its continued response to COVID-19.

■ Coronavirus: Health Education**Munira Wilson:** [\[151868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the new strains of covid-19, what plans he has to (a) review and (b) update the covid-19 symptom list promoted to the public.

Helen Whately:

Scientific experts keep the symptoms under review as our understanding of the virus develops. Anyone experiencing the main symptoms— a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or a loss or change to sense of smell or taste – should obtain a test as soon as possible and immediately self-isolate alongside their household.

Munira Wilson: [\[151869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether new strains of covid-19 present symptoms that are currently not published by the NHS.

Helen Whately:

Scientific experts keep the symptoms under review as our understanding of the virus develops. Anyone experiencing the main symptoms— a high temperature, a new

continuous cough, or a loss or change to sense of smell or taste – should obtain a test as soon as possible and immediately self-isolate alongside their household.

■ **Coronavirus: Hospitals**

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[140955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to provide staff to Nightingale hospitals in the event that general hospitals are overwhelmed by covid-19 patients.

Edward Argar:

The Nightingale hospitals stand ready to provide support to local services and accept patients if needed based on local clinical advice. The National Health Service has flexed hospital capacity throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so, including staffing Nightingale hospitals as needed.

■ **Coronavirus: Hydroxychloroquine**

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[151597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the Government's policy is on the use of hydroxychloroquine as a means of preventing and treating covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[151598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine (a) in early treatment for covid-19 and (b) for prophylactic use in Greece and Turkey.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: In the United Kingdom, the RECOVERY trial produced clear results that showed the use of hydroxychloroquine in hospital settings did not have a statistically significant impact on patient outcomes.

Hydroxychloroquine has been trialled in the community setting in the PRINCIPLE trial, however results are not yet available. At this time, hydroxychloroquine is not recommended or authorised for treatment of novel COVID-19 outside a trial setting.

There are currently two active trials in Turkey for the treatment of mild to moderate coronavirus that are investigating the efficacy of hydroxychloroquine in combination with other drugs. These trials have not yet published any results and do not assess the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine as a prophylactic.

■ **Coronavirus: Liverpool**

Neale Hanvey:

[\[124875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how the design of the Liverpool Innova later flow test programme was developed; which research protocol was used to conduct the study; how informed consent was secured from participants of the study; and which Research Ethics Committee approved the study.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 8 December 2020]: The Liverpool City testing pilot was developed in collaboration between NHS Test and Trace, Liverpool City Council, NHS Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group, Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership and the 8th Engineer Brigade. This was a service evaluation and not intended as a research study. The Department and NHS Test and Trace liaised with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority over the use of the Innova lateral flow device in this post-validation pilot service.

The secondary analysis of data provided in a health protection activity is not classified as research and so does not require research ethics committee review. Where the gathering of additional information required interactions that were not a routine element of the pilot service, the local research ethics committee approvals were obtained.

Ian Byrne:[\[148048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his oral contribution on covid-19 mutations on 2 February 2021, if he will write to Members representing any related constituencies in Liverpool on risks posed by mutations discovered in that place.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 8 February 2021]: The Parliamentary under-Secretary of State (Lord Bethell) called those hon. Members whose constituencies would be affected by surge testing due to the new South African variant and contacted the affected Metro Mayors and the Combined Authority Mayor of Liverpool

We are committed to keeping Parliamentarians updated.

■ Coronavirus: Migrants**Stephen Timms:**[\[151591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether support payments are available to people with no recourse to public funds who are unable to access Test and Trace Support Payments; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: Those who do not meet the criteria for Test and Trace Support Payments, are on a low income and will face financial hardship as a result of self-isolating could be eligible for a £500 discretionary payment. Local authorities are responsible for the criteria used for discretionary payments in their area. Local authorities can make a £500 discretionary payment to individuals who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, are employed or self-employed and are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.

■ Coronavirus: Screening

Philip Davies:

[\[114806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what logistical support is provided to local authorities where mass testing is taking place to ensure that such testing is carried out effectively.

Helen Whately:

NHS Test and Trace regional convenors and Community Testing Programme Liaison Teams support local areas in designing schemes through to delivery. The regional convenors work with other members of the regional partnership team including the regional directors of public health, to provide a link to NHS Test and Trace, the Department and support coordination between areas and with Government agencies. As participating local areas are identified, local Liaison Teams can offer further guidance, detailed planning, logistical and communications support and share lessons learnt from other testing pilots and programmes.

Mr Steve Baker:

[\[115624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to help diagnostic companies who supply covid-19 tests and are unable to renew their relevant insurance to meet his Department's requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 19 November 2020]: The Department is aware of this issue and is consulting trade representatives of the insurance industry to determine their position and understand the best course of action.

Dan Jarvis:

[\[117261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to make free antibody tests available for key workers in supermarkets.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 23 November 2020]: At present there are no plans to make antibody tests available to supermarket workers, but we keep this under regular review.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[124655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to progress approval of the NHS National Screening Committee for the use of lateral flow tests for covid-19 which give results in thirty minutes; and what assessment that Committee made of the accuracy of the tests.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 8 December 2020]: The UK National Screening Committee's (NSC) role is to provide advice to Ministers and the National Health Service on all aspects of screening and to support implementation of screening programmes. The NSC 'screening' as follows: "Screening is the process of identifying healthy people who may have an increased chance of a disease or condition. Lateral flow devices (LFDs) are used to identify positive asymptomatic individuals. LFDs are not designed to

identify healthy people at increased risk of contracting COVID-19, nor are they intended to improve the health outcomes of those who are tested. Accordingly, the use of LFDs does not amount to screening and therefore their use does not fall within the remit of the NSC.

Emma Hardy:

[129091]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the accuracy of lateral flow covid-19 testing.

Helen Whately:

Lateral flow tests are validated technology. These tests have undergone rigorous testing and evaluation, including at Public Health England's research laboratories to ensure they are verified for use, with latest figures showing sensitivity of 57.5% generally and 84.3% in people with high viral loads. This means they are accurate, reliable and successfully identify those with COVID-19 who do not show symptoms and could pass on the virus.

Mr Kevan Jones:

[130654]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress has been made on mass testing in tier 3 areas; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

The community testing programme was launched in December 2020 with the aim of using asymptomatic testing to find and isolate positive cases within the community in order to help reduce the spread of the virus. The current focus of community testing is on those who have to leave home to work during lockdown, with local authorities able to focus on the right people in their areas and decide how the testing is best delivered. Community led testing forms an important part of our overall asymptomatic testing programme in identifying and isolating cases to break the chains of transmission. We have expanded the eligibility of community led testing to all local authorities across England. As part of this expansion, all participating local authorities will be able to deliver testing over a longer period of time, moving away from a six-week intervals to constant delivery until the end of March.

■ **Coronavirus: Staffordshire**

Jonathan Gullis:

[82563]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the covid-19 testing capacity in (a) Stoke-on-Trent and (b) Staffordshire.

Helen Whately:

We have increased our testing capacity from 2000 tests a day in March to over 700,000 tests per day. People in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire with Covid symptoms are able to access tests either at Regional and Local testing sites or by ordering a home test.

The Community Testing Programme (CTP) was launched in December 2020 with the aim of using rapid asymptomatic testing to find and isolate positive cases within the community in order to help reduce the spread of the virus

Stoke on Trent, East Staffordshire, South Staffordshire and Staffordshire Moorlands are currently rolling out community testing.

■ **Coronavirus: Undocumented Migrants**

Barry Gardiner:

[142760]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what public information he is providing to reassure (a) illegal migrants and (b) overstayers that they should not avoid medical treatment if they have symptoms of covid-19, and can come forward for (i) medical assistance or (ii) to receive immunisation without being reported to the Home Office.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 28 January 2021]: The Department has published a message on the National Health Service website stating that overseas visitors to England, including anyone living in the United Kingdom without permission, will not be charged for testing or treatment for COVID-19 or for vaccination. The message also states that no immigration checks are needed to receive these services.

This message has been shared with Public Health England and included in the migrant health guide. Translated information on testing and treatment is currently available in 40 languages and will shortly be updated to include the information on vaccination. The Department is engaged in producing further communications materials and is working with other government departments to ensure this message reaches vulnerable migrant groups.

■ **Coronavirus: Universities**

Caroline Lucas:

[99580]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the effect on the transmission of covid-19 of making tests available for all returning students to universities; and what assessment he has made of the consequences for best practice testing policy for returning students of the most recently-released data on the proportion of returning students who have tested positive for covid-19 and who were asymptomatic; and if he will make a statement.

Helen Whately:

Universities are providing asymptomatic testing to students and staff upon return to campus. Regular ongoing lateral flow device testing was introduced for eligible university students and staff from 25 January. This involves twice weekly testing for those who are asymptomatic.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Sarah Owen:** [\[107753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what preparations the Government is making with community pharmacies for the distribution of a covid-19 vaccine.

Sarah Owen: [\[107754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) discussions the Government is holding and (b) steps the Government is taking with large chain pharmacies on the distribution of a covid-19 vaccine.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 2 November 2020]: NHS England and NHS Improvement are working with all the national pharmacy organisations on plans to ensure that community pharmacies, including large chain pharmacies, are used to optimal effect in the COVID-19 vaccination programme, starting with the sites that can do this at scale. As of 22 February 2021, 196 community pharmacies have now started to offer the COVID-19 vaccination service, with more pharmacies joining the service over the coming weeks. We expect 200 community pharmacies sites to offer the COVID-19 vaccination service as of 8 March 2021. Some pharmacists and members of their team have also been working with general practitioners to deliver the vaccine in many areas of the country.

John McDonnell: [\[146761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, by what date he is planning for all domiciliary care staff in England to have been vaccinated; and how many of those staff have been vaccinated to date.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 4 February 2021]: We offered a first vaccine to everyone in the first four priority groups, including domiciliary care staff by 15 February. We are working with NHS England to publish data on the vaccination of domiciliary care staff shortly.

Jonathan Edwards: [\[912287\]](#)

What steps his Department has taken to ensure that the covid-19 vaccination programme provides protection for people with weak immune systems.

Nadhim Zahawi:

As per the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) advice, many immunosuppressed individuals qualify for vaccination in priority groups four or six. For those whom the vaccination is not advised, a general practitioner or relevant clinician will host a consultation. It is important that clinically extremely vulnerable people should continue following government advice on reducing risk. The United Kingdom is leading the way on vaccine research. As soon as sufficient evidence becomes available, the JCVI will provide advice on strategies to protect

immunosuppressed individuals and consider if certain vaccines are preferred for particular groups.

Stephen Timms: [\[912290\]](#)

What plans his Department has for the covid-19 vaccination of undocumented migrants.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The main aim for the COVID-19 vaccine programme is to protect all those individuals most at risk from mortality and morbidity, without discrimination.

As a result, all undocumented migrants will be able to access COVID-19 vaccinations free of charge in line with the advice on prioritisation set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Ben Lake: [\[912294\]](#)

What recent discussions he has had with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on the covid-19 vaccination of immuno-suppressed individuals.

Nadhim Zahawi:

As per the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) advice, many immunosuppressed individuals qualify for vaccination in priority groups four or six. For those whom the vaccination is not advised, a general practitioner or relevant clinician will host a consultation. It is important that clinically extremely vulnerable people should continue following government advice on reducing risk. The United Kingdom is leading the way on vaccine research. As soon as sufficient evidence becomes available, the JCVI will provide advice on strategies to protect immunosuppressed individuals and consider if certain vaccines are preferred for particular groups.

■ **Coronavirus: Vitamin C**

James Wild: [\[153397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the efficacy of Vitamin C in boosting immunity to covid-19.

Jo Churchill:

In 2020, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) conducted a rapid scoping exercise on nutrition and immune function in relation to COVID-19, which included consideration of vitamin C and found a lack of robust evidence to suggest that specific nutrients or supplements can prevent individuals from catching COVID-19 or mitigate its effects.

Public Health England and the SACN are continuing to monitor evidence as it is published and will review and update guidance if necessary.

■ Dementia: Research**Jim Shannon:****[152526]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government has commissioned research on the effect of consuming nuts on protecting against dementia.

Jo Churchill:

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition published a position statement on diet, cognitive impairment and dementias in 2018. The statement concluded that there was insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions on the association between diet, including the effect of eating nuts, on cognitive impairment or dementia. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-statement-on-diet-cognitive-impairment-and-dementia>

The statement broadly supports existing advice to eat a healthy diet as depicted in the Eatwell Guide. However, the report indicates that, overall, there is not currently enough evidence to support a relationship between diet and the prevention of dementia.

■ Dental Services: Mothers**Sarah Olney:****[151794]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 27 January 2021 to Question 138005, on Dental Services: Mothers, what estimate his Department has made of the number of new mothers that have missed out on receiving dental services exempt from charge during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The Department has made no such estimate.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Coronavirus**Liam Byrne:****[153136]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) policies and (b) grant and funding programmes his Department has introduced to provide support to individuals and organisations in response to the covid-19 outbreak; and what funding has been allocated to each of those programmes in the 2020-21 financial year.

Edward Argar:

As part of the 2020 Spending Review, HM Treasury announced that for 2020-21 agreed funding includes; £52 billion for frontline health services to tackle the pandemic including £22 billion for the Test and Trace programme; over £15 billion for the procurement of personal protective equipment; and £2.7 billion to support the development and procurement of vaccines. This also included £3 billion for a package of additional capacity initiatives to support the National Health Service through the winter, including keeping the Nightingale hospitals capacity available,

accessing increased capacity from independent sector providers and supporting increased safe discharge of patients from NHS hospitals.

Additionally, we have implemented a temporary NHS finance regime for the first half of the year that ensured every penny spent in NHS systems was fully reimbursed and provided approximately £2.7 billion extra funding to cover the second half of this financial year, to support NHS organisations to manage ongoing COVID-19 pressures and resume routine activity. We have provided up to £1.46 billion for infection control and other grants, funding predominantly given to local authorities to help cover the costs of implementing measures to reduce transmission. This was first introduced in May 2020 and was then extended to March 2021.

Chris Law:

[\[912309\]](#)

What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Matt Hancock:

The Government has assessed and managed the impact of COVID-19, taking the necessary action to suppress the virus, prevent the National Health Service from becoming overwhelmed and save lives. Levels of infection are showing clear signs of coming down and over 17 million people – one in three – have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Overseas Aid

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[152449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much Official Development Assistance his Department was allocated in the financial years (a) 2019-20 and (b) 2020-21; and what estimate his Department has made of the amount of Official Development Assistance his Department will be allocated for the financial year 2021-22.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]:

The information requested is shown in the following table:

YEAR	£ MILLION
2019-20	289
2020-21	273
2021-22	207

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions**Gareth Thomas:** [\[154687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to answer Question 137116 tabled by the hon. Member for Harrow West on 13 January 2021.

Edward Argar:

We take parliamentary scrutiny incredibly seriously and it is fundamentally important that hon. Members are provided with accurate and timely information to enable them to hold the Government to account. We are working rapidly to provide all Members with accurate answers to their questions, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's question will be answered as soon as possible.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[155328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 109579, on Coronavirus: Screening, tabled on 28 October 2020 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[155329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 140918, on Coronavirus: Vaccination, tabled on 20 January 2021 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[155330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 140920, on Coronavirus: Quarantine, tabled on 20 January 2021 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[155331\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 140921, on Coronavirus: Quarantine, tabled on 20 January 2021 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[155332\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 141585, on Coronavirus: Vaccination, tabled on 21 January 2021 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[155333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 141586, on Test and Trace Support Payment, tabled on 21 January 2021 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[155334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to provide a substantive Answer to Question 141587, on Coronavirus: Quarantine, tabled on 21 January 2021 by the hon. Member for Slough.

Edward Argar:

We take parliamentary scrutiny incredibly seriously and it is fundamentally important that hon. Members are provided with accurate and timely information to enable them to hold the Government to account. We are working rapidly to provide all Members with accurate answers to their questions, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's questions will be answered as soon as possible.

■ **Drugs: Rehabilitation**

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[152424\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the report entitled Drug deaths: England and Wales see highest number since records began published in the BMJ on 15 October 2020, what steps he is taking to address the high numbers of drug-related deaths in the UK.

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[152425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the report entitled Drug deaths: England and Wales see highest number since records began published in the BMJ on 15 October 2020, what discussions he has had with (a) NHS England and (b) Clinical Commissioning Groups regarding the reduction of in-patient detoxification provision in England.

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[152426\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with (a) NHS England and (b) Clinical Commissioning Groups about providing additional financial support to the five remaining inpatient detoxification units in England.

Jo Churchill:

Local authorities are responsible for assessing the needs of their local population and commissioning drug prevention, treatment and harm reduction services, including in-patient detoxification. The Government has recently announced an additional £80 million to fund drug treatment in 2021/22. A proportion of this funding will be specifically allocated to expanding the provision of inpatient detoxification and to expand use of the life-saving overdose medication, naloxone.

This funding is in addition to the money local authorities already spend on substance misuse from the public health grant. Local authority spending through the public health grant will be maintained next financial year, meaning local authorities can continue to invest in prevention and essential frontline health services.

While no specific discussions have taken place, the additional funding is expected to strengthen provision of this part of the drug treatment system.

■ Eating Disorders: Research

Wera Hobhouse: [\[131379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Health Survey for England 2019's finding that 16 per cent of adults aged 16 and over screened positive for a possible eating disorder, whether his Department will commission research to assess the prevalence of eating disorders.

Edward Argar:

The Department through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funds a range of research in mental health to inform national mental health policy, including eating disorders. Since 2011, the NIHR's research programmes have invested over £7.8 million in eating disorders research.

■ Eating Disorders: Young People

Jim Shannon: [\[153246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many young people were diagnosed with an eating disorder between March and December 2020.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The information is not held in the format requested. The access and waiting time standard for children and young people with eating disorders is measured from when an individual starts treatment, rather than by diagnosis.

■ Food: Advertising

Craig Whittaker: [\[153183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans the Government has to exempt SME food and drink manufacturers from proposed restrictions on online advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

Jo Churchill:

The consultation on the proposal to introduce a total restriction of online advertising for products high in fat, salt and sugar asked a question on the impact of the proposals on small businesses and we are engaging with industry to understand these in more detail to factor in the final policy decision. We will publish the response to the consultation shortly.

■ Food: Delivery Services

Craig Whittaker: [\[153185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the proportion of food ordered on UK food delivery apps in the last 12 months that is classified as high in fat, sugar and salt.

Jo Churchill:

No specific assessment has been made.

■ **Food: Hygiene**

Sarah Olney:

[\[151793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to Answer of 23 October 2020 to Question 99072, for what reason the Food Standards Agency has banned the conduction of remote hygiene inspections when Ofsted has carried out all planned inspection remotely.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: Inspections for assessing compliance with food hygiene law are not directly comparable with the inspections that Ofsted undertake.

The Food Standards Agency and local authorities continue to use remote assessment techniques, where appropriate, to reduce footfall and the spread of COVID-19. Onsite visits continue where there is a need to assess and address public health risks.

■ **Health Services**

Marco Longhi:

[\[912288\]](#)

What steps his Department is taking to support the provision of non-covid-19 healthcare treatment.

Matt Hancock:

In addition to the funding already provided to the National Health Service, we are providing an additional £3 billion next year, on top of the long-term settlement, to support recovery from COVID-19.

■ **Health Services: Coronavirus**

Jim Shannon:

[\[153249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the planned timescale is for continuing to commission healthcare services from the private sector to increase capacity during the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

The previous national contracts with independent hospitals expired at the end of December 2020 and were replaced by new national contracts to cover January, February and March 2021. The Department and NHS England and NHS Improvement will continue to work to secure all appropriate inpatient capacity and other resource across England.

■ Health Services: Protective Clothing

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[153097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how long he plans to continue to provide free personal protective equipment (PPE) to CQC registered settings; and whether he has made an assessment of the effect of that provision on businesses that would ordinarily have supplied that PPE on a commercial basis.

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[153099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to continue free provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to CQC registered settings; and whether he has made an assessment of the effect of his planned policy on that matter on businesses that supply PPE on a commercial basis.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The Government is extending the provision of free personal protective equipment (PPE) for all health, social care and public sector workers until the end of June. The Government has made this decision to ensure that frontline and wider public service workers can access rigorously tested and high-quality PPE as vaccination efforts progress. The scheme will be reviewed in April 2021 to determine PPE provision beyond June 2021.

The Department remains in constructive discussions with wholesalers on the provision of COVID-19 PPE and we have sought and considered a range of viewpoints in reaching the decision to continue provision. The PPE we are providing is for COVID-19 purposes only and we have established limits to ordering to ensure providers are using the PPE portal for this purpose. This means that wholesale business-as-usual PPE distribution continues as before.

■ Healthy Start Scheme: Vitamins

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:

[\[152544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the length of the shelf life of Healthy Start vitamin supplies containing three months' worth of tablets that are provided by the Government to eligible people.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The shelf-life of Healthy Start Vitamins tablets for women is 24 months and the shelf-life of Healthy Start Vitamins drops for children is 15 months. Both products are supplied in containers which contain eight weeks' supply.

■ Heart Diseases: St Helens**Conor McGinn:**[\[151759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many heart (a) operations and (b) procedures were performed in each year since 2010 across the St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group area.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The number of heart operations and procedures recorded for patients in the St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group for in each year from 2010-11 to 2019-20 is shown in the following table:

YEAR	OPERATIONS	PROCEDURES
2010-11	1,125	1,476
2011-12	1,153	1,657
2012-13	1,153	1,593
2013-14	1,060	1,480
2014-15	1,107	1,532
2015-16	1,185	1,612
2016-17	1,503	1,982
2017-18	1,290	1,747
2018-19	1,199	1,646
2019-20	1,207	1,592

■ Heart Diseases: Surgery**Thangam Debbonaire:**[\[153288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many heart operations have been carried out by NHS England since March 2020.

Jo Churchill:

The latest data shows that 215,127 heart operations were carried out between March and December 2020.

Thangam Debbonaire:[\[153290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many patients have died whilst waiting for heart surgery in England since March 2020.

Jo Churchill:

This information is not held centrally.

■ Hepatitis: Prisons**Ms Lyn Brown:****[150734]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many prisons have machines capable of running diagnostic tests for Hepatitis C on site in England and Wales.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

All 112 prisons in England have access to hepatitis C diagnosis. Local authorities decide which method is utilised to achieve diagnosis. This is usually either a 'point of care' antibody test, a dry blood spot test or onsite PCR testing machines. Prisons may also have access to other diagnostic kit such as portable fibroscanners, to assess liver cirrhosis.

NHS England and NHS Improvement have offered 'point of care' PCR testing machines to every trust leading hepatitis C diagnosis and treatment pathways, including prisons. NHS England and NHS Improvement also offer the option of taking machines into 30 prisons per year as a part of the 'High Intensity Test & Treat' programme, to supplement reception screening.

Ms Lyn Brown:**[150737]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the effect on the efficacy of prison diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C of (a) short sentence lengths, (b) short periods spent in prison on remand, (c) short recalls to prison and (d) the use of prisons as a place of safety.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Prisons in England use an 'opt-out' testing offer to diagnose hepatitis C infection. Testing is offered either at reception into prison or within 72 hours at the more extensive healthcare assessment. Individuals can be diagnosed, referred to a virtual consultation with the specialist treatment team and start treatment within days. Hepatitis C diagnosis and treatment for prisoners on a short sentence and remand will, to an extent, rely upon the prisoner rate of uptake for offered tests.

For those who start but do not complete treatment, medicines can be provided to take out on release and a 'Follow Me' facility can be used to ensure patients remain engaged with their treatment. Prisoners on short recalls are unlikely to start treatment within a one to two-week period. However, they will receive the opt-out testing offer and referral processes are in place for those individuals testing positive. If individuals are already diagnosed and/or have started treatment, this can be continued through case management between prison health and the trust specialist treatment team.

Prisons should not be used as a place of safety as alternative provision is available and more suitable for people who need to be kept safe.

■ Hospitals: Coronavirus

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

[98889]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps hospitals are taking before they discharge covid-19-positive patients into the nursing sector.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 8 October 2020]: We are working with the Care Quality Commission and the National Health Service to ensure anyone who is likely to be infectious with COVID-19 is discharged to a designated care setting to complete a period of isolation before moving to a care home. These settings must meet a set of agreed standards to provide safe care for COVID-19 positive residents. This is to further support safe and timely discharge and protect care home residents and staff from COVID-19.

■ Influenza: Vaccination

John Spellar:

[152407]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many doses of influenza vaccine his Department purchased in (a) 2019 and (b) 2020.

Jo Churchill:

The Department has procured over eight million additional doses of seasonal flu vaccine this season, so that we can increase uptake in existing groups and extend the programme to all those over 50 years and household contacts of those who are on the National Health Service Shielding Patient list.

In 2019, the Department centrally procured 400,000 flu vaccines, in addition to those ordered locally by general practitioners and pharmacies, to provide security to vaccine supply chains.

■ Medical Detection Dogs: Coronavirus

Rachel Reeves:

[152510]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what records are available relating to the awarding of funding by the Government to the Medical Detection Dogs charity as part of the covid-19 response.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The announcement of Government funding the trials can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-detection-dogs-trial-launches>

The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSTM) published information relating to the funding award on their website, which specifies the amount awarded to LSTM to conduct the research, which can be found at the following link: <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2020/uk-government-supports-covid-19-detection-dogs-trial>

Rachel Reeves:

[\[152511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what records his Department holds relating to the (a) intended and (b) ultimate use of funding awarded by the Government to the Medical Detection Dogs charity as part of the covid-19 response.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's (LSTHM) letter of application states the intended purposes of the research grant. Annex 2 of the Grant Agreement with LSTHM details the activities that funding be directed towards. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's Phase 1 trial report will outline how these funds have been used to determine whether trained dogs can discriminate pre-symptomatic, asymptomatic and mild cases of SARS-CoV-2 from uninfected individuals by their smell, using breath and odour samples.

■ Medicine: Research

Allan Dorans:

[\[912281\]](#)

What assessment he has made of the adequacy of financial support available to medical research charities during the covid-19 pandemic.

Matt Hancock:

We have some of the finest, globally-recognised medical research charities right across the United Kingdom, which are an integral part of our world-leading life sciences sector. Last week I met medical research charities to discuss what more we can do to support them and our life sciences sector as a whole go from strength to strength across all parts of the UK.

■ Members: Correspondence

Paul Maynard:

[\[152457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to reply to the letter of 26 October 2020 from the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys on access to dental and GP services.

Edward Argar:

We replied to the hon. Member's letter on 11 February 2021.

Paul Maynard:

[\[152459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to reply to the letter of 5 November 2020 from the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys on hospital communications for the visually impaired raised on behalf of a constituent.

Edward Argar:

We are working to provide all Members and external correspondents with accurate answers to their correspondence, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's letter will be answered as soon as possible.

■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People

Paul Blomfield:

[\[912295\]](#)

What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the operation of child and adolescent mental health services.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We know that some children and young people have found this period difficult for their mental health and we are absolutely committed to ensuring they have access to the right support.

Children and young people's community and specialist mental health services have remained open throughout the pandemic and continue to offer support using digital and remote approaches while maintaining face to face appointments where appropriate.

All mental health trusts have made available 24 hours a day, seven days a week all age urgent mental health helplines so children and young people in crisis can get urgent help when they need it.

■ Mental Illness: Yorkshire and the Humber

Jon Trickett:

[\[148689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many patients were held under the Mental Health Act 1983 in Yorkshire and the Humber region in (a) 2010 and (b) 2020.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 8 February 2021]: The information is not available in the format requested.

■ NHS Test and Trace: Consultants

Helen Hayes:

[\[148851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish (a) the personal specifications outlining the (i) qualifications and (ii) experience requirements for consultants applying to work on the NHS Test and Trace programme and (b) data on the average daily pay rate of the consultants employed by each of those firms so deploying consultants on that programme.

Helen Whately:

We do not have a personal specification for consultants. The suppliers contracted to deliver the services that meet our business requirements are responsible for ensuring that the consultants hold the necessary qualifications, skills and experience. The pay rates of individual consultants engaged from each supplier is commercially sensitive.

■ NHS Test and Trace: Databases

Mr Steve Baker:

[R] [\[153230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Health and Social Care and the National Police Chiefs' Council agreed in October 2020 on police access to NHS Test and Trace data.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department and the police is currently being updated to reflect amendments to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020 on 29 January and feedback from the Information Commissioners Office. These updates are currently being agreed by all parties and the MoU will be published as soon as practically possible.

■ NHS: Negligence

Jim Shannon:

[\[145794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to his Answer of 24 November 2020 to Question 114179, if his Department will publish the findings of the Medicines Safety Improvement Board's review of progress against the recommendations of the Short Life Working Group on reducing medication-related harm, conducted on behalf of the National Director of Patient Safety.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

A report on the progress made in response to the recommendations of the short life working group was considered by the Medicines Safety Improvement Board in December 2020 in the context of the development of the National Patient Safety Strategy.

The Medicines Safety Improvement Programme's website is being updated and will reflect the direction of travel for the programme and incorporate progress that has been made to date.

■ NHS: Surgery

Holly Mumby-Croft:

[\[147104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to set clinical priority areas for reducing the NHS elective surgical backlog as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

Priorities for elective treatment are based firstly on clinical urgency and then by those who have been waiting longest. However, the profile of the backlog is subject to regional variation and decisions will need to take into account local needs and aim to maximise the available local capacity.

In October 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement set out a framework and support tools to be used in the clinical validation of surgical waiting lists and support in managing the surgical backlog. These are designed to better stratify patients based on clinical urgency and facilitate mutually agreed decision making with patients.

■ Obesity: Health Services

Ben Bradley:

[\[912284\]](#)

What assessment he has made of the effect of the obesity strategy on the cost of living.

Jo Churchill:

The Healthy Weight Strategy is not about making food more expensive or restricting people's choices, but helping people eat healthier with the money they have.

■ Pharmacy: Coronavirus

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[128874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that community pharmacy staff are regularly tested for covid-19 including when they are not displaying symptoms.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 17 December 2020]: Lateral flow tests have been provided across primary care including general practice, community pharmacy.

Staff are asked to test themselves at home twice a week with results available before coming to work.

■ Restaurants: Coronavirus

Olivia Blake:

[\[103664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the rate of covid-19 transmission amongst (a) employees and (b) customers of fast-food restaurant outlets.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 19 October 2020]: There is potential for higher than average risk due to venues for socialisation such as restaurants having higher than average proximity and occupant density, prolonged duration of exposure and challenges in maintaining adequate ventilation.

■ Smoking

Lee Anderson:

[\[153374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what comparative assessment the Government has made of trends in the consumption of (a) vapes and e-cigarettes, (b) heated tobacco products, (c) tobacco and nicotine and (d) cigarettes.

Jo Churchill:

The Office for National Statistics' 'Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2019' shows that smoking prevalence in England has decreased from 17.8% in 2014 to 13.9% in 2019. The percentage of adults using e-cigarettes in England has increased from 3.7% in 2014 to 5.5% in 2019. Of those who use e-cigarettes daily, 42% also smoke cigarettes. Among smokers and vapers, greater use of e-cigarettes is associated with lower use of smoked tobacco.

Public Health England closely monitors trends in tobacco and nicotine products and will publish its next Vaping in England report later this month. A range of data sources are used including official and academic surveys. Use of heated tobacco products has consistently remained at rates of less than 1% of the adult population in England.

■ Suicide**Jim Shannon:**[\[153248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the number of (a) women and (b) men who have died by suicide since March 2020; and what the breakdown is by age group of those people.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

No such estimate has been made.

■ Surgery: Children**Paul Bristow:**[\[153410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to prevent the cancellation of priority 2 paediatric surgical procedures.

Edward Argar:

The National Health Service continues to make full use of available capacity for non-urgent elective services, both in the NHS and in contracted independent hospitals, in order to maintain elective activity, including non-urgent paediatric operations, as far as possible.

■ Test and Trace Support Payment**Richard Burgon:**[\[110872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have applied for the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment since it was introduced, broken down by the smallest available geographical unit for which data is available.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 9 November 2020]: We are working closely with all 314 local authorities in England to collate information on the number of applications and successful applications for the Test and Trace Support Payment. We will publish this information in due course.

Stephen Timms:

[\[150654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the eligibility criteria are for local authorities' discretionary hardship payments under the NHS Test and Trace support scheme.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 11 February 2021]: From 19 January 2021, an individual can make a claim for the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme or a discretionary payment up to 28 days after the first day of their self-isolation period. If they are not eligible for the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment but meet the other criteria, are on a low income and will face financial hardship as a result of self-isolating, they could be eligible for a £500 discretionary payment. Local authorities are responsible for the criteria used for discretionary payments in their area.

■ Tobacco: Regulation

Lee Anderson:

[\[153373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Post Implementation Review of the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016, if he will make it his policy to accept submissions directly from scientists and experts in the harm reduction sphere, in order to give due weight to the evidence from participants.

Jo Churchill:

The Government launched a consultation on the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 and the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 as part of our statutory obligation to conduct post implementation reviews on the legislation. It is a public consultation and open to any individual or any organisation wishing to submit a response.

■ Travel: Quarantine

Mr Ben Bradshaw:

[\[150674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans the Government has to (a) replace or (b) supplement the covid-19 quarantine system for people arriving in the UK with GPS tracking technology.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We continue to look at the role that technology can play in ensuring arrivals are quarantining and to provide them with support through their quarantine period.

Due to the increased risk of new variants entering the United Kingdom, introducing managed quarantine facilities for 'red list' arrivals and home quarantine with mandatory testing for other arrivals is the right course of action to take now to safeguard public health and the vaccine programme.

Julian Sturdy:

[\[153234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the financial effect on middle and low-income families in the event that the

new international travel covid-19 testing measures announced on 9 February 2021 are maintained beyond when holidays abroad are allowed to resume.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

Under the current national restrictions, it is illegal to go on holiday. For those facing significant financial hardship as a result of testing charges, there is support available detailed on GOV.UK. This is available for individuals who already receive income-related benefits and they will be required to pay back their debt to the Government in 12 monthly instalments. All of these measures will be kept under constant review including the impact on families and those with protected characteristics.

■ **Vitamin C**

James Wild:

[\[153398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment Public Health England has made of implications for its policies of the literature review entitled Vitamin C: An Adjunctive Therapy for Respiratory Infection, Sepsis and Covid-19, published on 7 December 2020.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England has not formally assessed this review.

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) considered nutrition and immune function in relation to COVID-19 at its meeting in June 2020. The SACN agreed that their scoping exercise indicates a lack of robust evidence at this current time to suggest that specific nutrients such as vitamin C can reduce the risk or severity of COVID-19. This scoping exercise may be updated, or a more formal assessment undertaken, if robust evidence becomes available. The SACN noted that there was currently no new evidence that would change current dietary advice in relation to immune function.

■ **Vitamin C: Clinical Trials**

James Wild:

[\[153399\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the REMAP-CAP clinical trial on Vitamin C will conclude.

Jo Churchill:

REMAP-CAP is an adaptive trial and results are monitored on an ongoing basis. A Statistical Analysis Committee (SAC) regularly evaluates the trial data to determine whether a pre-specified threshold for statistical significance or statistical trigger is reached. If a statistical trigger has occurred, it is communicated immediately to the trial Data Safety and Monitoring Board (DSMB).

The DSMB is responsible for determining whether a statistical trigger should lead to conclusion of a trial arm. The DSMB is also responsible for ensuring treatments that are clearly ineffective will be discontinued promptly. The DSMB have not yet reported any statistical triggers or safety concerns for vitamin C in REMAP-CAP and the

Principle Investigators of REMAP-CAP and Department are blinded from SAC evaluations.

Conclusion will be dependent on recruitment to REMAP-CAP and the strength of any therapeutic effect of vitamin C.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Community Relations: British National (Overseas)

Stephen Kinnock:

[\[152548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the BN(O) visa scheme, which Minister is leading on the integration of British Nationals (Overseas) into local communities.

Luke Hall:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The UK has a strong historic relationship with the people of Hong Kong. This Government is proudly honouring its promise to uphold the freedoms of BN(O) status holders, allowing them to build a new life for them and their family here.

Departments across Government are working together closely to ensure that all necessary support and guidance is provided for all BN(O) status holders who take advantage of our generous offer and come and live, work and study in the UK. Further details will be set out in due course.

■ Local Government Finance

Daniel Zeichner:

[\[912399\]](#)

What steps he is taking to help ensure the adequacy of future funding for local authorities whose student populations will be reduced for Census 2021 during the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

We are working closely with the Cabinet Office on the delivery of the elections and the census. We have provided extra funds to make sure they can be delivered safely, and we have published guidance alongside that as well. We have also committed, for the coming year, £11 billion directly to councils since the start of the pandemic, of which Cambridge City Council has so far received more than £5.4 million. On top of that, it will have the additional funding to help it deliver elections, and its share of the £1.55 billion that we have announced to help with covid-related pressures next year, including election pressures.

■ Local Government: Meetings

Dan Jarvis:

[\[152529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of ending virtual participation

for Local Authorities on Local Authority business such as the constitutional meetings of local councils during the covid-19 outbreak.

Dan Jarvis: [\[152530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of enabling (a) permanent virtual participation and (b) hybrid participation for parish and town council meetings.

Dan Jarvis: [\[152531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to enable the extension of virtual participation for (a) local authorities and (b) mayoral combined authorities beyond the current cut-off date.

Luke Hall:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The Government keeps all policy under review. To extend the facility for all local authorities to continue to meet remotely or in hybrid form after 7 May 2021 would require primary legislation. We have received representations from local authorities and sector representative organisations making the case for the continuation of remote meetings beyond 7 May 2021 and we are carefully considering next steps in this area, including representations to facilitate remote or hybrid meetings permanently.

■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Peter Kyle: [\[153307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to announce the funding criteria for applications to the Shared Prosperity Fund; and when the fund will open to applications.

Luke Hall:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) will help to level up and create opportunity across the UK for places most in need, such as ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and rural and coastal communities, and for people who face labour market barriers. The November 2020 Spending Review set out the main strategic elements of the UKSPF in the Heads of Terms. The Government will publish a UK-wide investment framework in Spring 2021 and confirm multi-year funding profiles at the next Spending Review. In addition, to help local areas prepare over 2021/22 for the introduction of the UKSPF, we will provide additional UK funding to support our communities to pilot programmes and new approaches. Further details on the operation of the additional funding in 2021/22 will be published soon.

■ Universities: Levelling Up Fund

Tracy Brabin:

[\[151789\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of explicitly including universities as potential recipients of the Levelling Up Fund.

Luke Hall:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: The Levelling Up Fund will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery.

The Fund will be jointly managed by the Treasury, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Department for Transport. It will invest in a broad range of high value local projects, including bypasses and other local road schemes, bus lanes, rail station upgrades, regenerating eyesores, upgrading town centres and community infrastructure, and local arts and culture.

We will publish a prospectus for the Fund soon.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Trade Agreements: India

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[153152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what recent discussions she has had with (a) her Indian counterpart and (b) representatives of Indian businesses on strengthening business, trade and investment relationships with (i) the British Overseas Territories and (ii) Gibraltar.

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[153153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that (a) the British Overseas Territories and (b) Gibraltar are able to benefit from the Enhanced Trade Partnership with India.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

In all trade deals, HM Government is seeking trade outcomes that support British Overseas Territories' economic interests, and which reflect their unique characteristics.

My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade and I have regular discussions with our respective counterparts. Most recently, the Minister for Commerce and Industry of India, Shri Piyush Goyal, and my Rt Hon Friend met on Saturday, 6th February 2021, at New Delhi, to discuss the Anglo-Indian trade and investment relationship. Discussions were held on the entire range of bilateral trade and economic relations.

Following significant work over the last year, we have committed to launching an Enhanced Trade Partnership with India, through which both sides will continue to

work to bring down trade barriers, open up opportunities for trade and investment, and chart the route towards a potential Free Trade Agreement.

TRANSPORT

■ Bus Services: Disability

Sam Tarry:

[\[152673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the £2 million to provide audio and visual equipment for buses, announced on 29 October 2019, how much of that funding has been distributed to operators to date.

Rachel Maclean:

Accessible information plays an important role in making travel easier for everyone, but is particularly important for many disabled people. We want passengers to have access to audible and visible next stop information, regardless of the bus service they use.

On 29 October 2019 we confirmed our partnership with the Real Time Information Group to manage a £2 million fund to provide audible and visible information on buses. Whilst COVID-19 has constrained our ability to launch the competition earlier as we sought to minimise the burdens placed on bus companies, it is our intention to make payments to operators in the 2021/22 financial year.

In the meantime, we are encouraging operators to continue investing in accessible information when introducing new and upgraded vehicles, ensuring that all passengers can travel with confidence.

■ Buses: Exhaust Emissions

Sam Tarry:

[\[152669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to publish details on how the £120 million announced in the Spending Review 2020 for zero-emission buses can be accessed.

Sam Tarry:

[\[152671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many zero-emission buses his Department plans to provide funding for in the financial years (a) 2021-22, (b) 2022-23 and (c) 2023-24.

Rachel Maclean:

As set out in the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution and the Spending Review 2020, the Government will invest £120 million in 2021-22 to start the delivery of the 4,000 zero emission buses announced by the Prime Minister last year.

Together with existing funding for the All Electric Bus Town or City, Government funding for 2021/22 could support the purchase of 800 zero emission buses and the infrastructure needed to support them.

Further details on how funding in 2021-22 will be distributed will be announced in the spring.

■ Buses: Manufacturing Industries

Sam Tarry:

[\[152670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effect on the UK bus manufacturing industry of the covid-19 pandemic; and what steps he is taking to help secure the future of that industry in the UK.

Rachel Maclean:

The UK Government is committed to ensuring the UK has a strong public transport sector.

During the pandemic, bus manufacturing firms have benefited from participation in the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

Going forward, the government expects that the All-Electric Bus Town or City competition and the planned introduction of 4,000 zero-emission buses will provide additional opportunities for bus manufacturers. Further details are expected to be included in the National Bus Strategy, which will be launched in the coming weeks.

■ Driving Licences and Technology

Dr James Davies:

[\[152581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with industry representatives on the introduction of (a) Graduated Driver Licences and (b) mandatory telematic devices to cars in the UK.

Rachel Maclean:

In October 2020 the Department for Transport discussed the topic of a Graduated Driver Licence and compulsory black box usage at the Transport Select Committee on Young and Novice Drivers.

After giving our reasoning that we are not currently pursuing the topic as a future policy, the Secretary of State has accordingly not met with industry representatives on the matter.

The Department for Transport take any consideration of restrictions on any road users very seriously, particularly those in rural areas for access to education, employment and leisure.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this Government has no current plans to enforce any further restrictions which could be detrimental to the younger generation's prospects for employment, education or livelihood.

■ Driving Tests: Coronavirus

Apsana Begum:

[153406]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will waive the charge for the driving theory test for people who passed the theory test in the past two years but have been unable to take their practical driving test owing to the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

There are no current plans to waive the charge of a theory test for those whose theory test certificates have expired, given that they will have already received the service for which they paid.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) pays its contractor, Pearson, per theory test delivered. If candidates were exempted from having to pay for a retake then the DVSA and in turn other fee payers would incur these costs. This would be unfair to fee payers who would not benefit from the arrangement.

In addition, applications for a re-test would need to be validated and systems amended to remove the requirement for payment in these cases. The DVSA's focus should rightly be on developing solutions to address the backlog of practical driving tests that has arisen as a result of the pandemic.

■ M1: Sheffield

Lee Rowley:

[152619]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to his Department's Smart Motorway Safety Evidence Stocktake and Action Plan, what progress his Department has made in investigating whether more can be done on to improve the M1 smart motorway between Junctions 30 to 35 (Sheffield).

Rachel Maclean:

We have committed £500 million to deliver smart motorway safety improvements across the strategic road network. The Secretary of State has asked Highways England for a one-year on report since the Safety Evidence Stocktake and Action Plan was published, setting out the progress in delivering the 18-point Action Plan and identifying actions that can be delivered early. He has asked for the report by 12 March 2021 so any accelerated works can rapidly be put in place.

For the M1 J32-35a, Highways England will commence the installation of SVD in February 2021 and it is expected to be operational in Summer 2021.

For the M1 J28-31, Highways England are expected to start the installation of SVD in August 2021 and it is expected to be operational by March 2022.

All emergency areas now have a new bright orange road surface and new, more frequent signs have been installed.

■ Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation

John Spellar:

[153116]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the renewable transport fuel obligation to include existing renewable capacity.

Rachel Maclean:

The Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) has been successful in promoting a market for a broad range of low carbon fuels. Low carbon fuels eligible for reward under the RTFO include renewable hydrogen made using renewable energy from existing production capacity. We plan to consult on potential changes to the RTFO scheme later this year. This will include proposals on how renewable hydrogen can be further supported, whilst respecting the principle of not diverting renewable energy away from existing uses and causing additional greenhouse gas emissions. The consultation will be accompanied by a cost benefit analysis.

■ Shipping: Quarantine

Stephen Morgan:

[152627]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of excluding seafarers from the requirement to self-isolate when returning from travel to a country on the UK's travel ban list during the covid-19 outbreak.

Robert Courts:

The UK Government's border health measures are part of our strategy to tackle variants of concern, and to protect both the progress we have made in bringing cases down and the effectiveness of our vaccination programme.

Therefore, on top of the travel ban for all on non-residents coming from the 33 countries on the red list, all UK/Irish residents arriving from the 33 red-list countries must now quarantine in a government assigned hotel for 10 days from arrival, or longer if they test positive during their stay.

Since the start of the pandemic, the UK has provided exemptions for seafarers from the need to self-isolate where it has been safe to do so. However, there is currently not an exemption for seafarers who arrive in the UK having travelled through a 'red list' country in the preceding 10 days.

There are limited exemptions to maximise the benefits of managed quarantine and the exemptions list will remain as tight as reasonably possible to maximise the public health benefits.

Full details on quarantining can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-quarantine-when-you-arrive-in-england>

■ Taxis: Coronavirus**Stuart Anderson:****[152650]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Government has provided financial assistance to help support taxi and private hire vehicle drivers who have lost earnings during the covid-19 outbreak with (a) overhead, (b) maintenance and (c) licensing costs.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government has announced several measures available to UK businesses, including the taxi and private hire sector, to support them through this challenging time. The majority of taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) drivers are self-employed and can therefore apply for grants through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). Over the first three rounds of the scheme, a total of up to £21,570 has been made available. HMRC will announce details of the fourth grant on 3 March 2021.

Owners, operators and drivers of taxis and PHVs may also be eligible for the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) or the coronavirus Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs).

In addition, some local authorities are using discretionary grants to support local businesses, including taxi and PHV businesses. Owners, operators and drivers of taxis and PHVs should contact the relevant local authority regarding these schemes.

The Government has launched a 'support finder' tool (<https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder>) to help businesses and self-employed workers quickly and easily determine what financial support is available to them.

■ Travel: Coronavirus**Seema Malhotra:****[152534]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has undertaken forecast modelling to produce scenarios on when international travel may resume in 2021.

Robert Courts:

DfT maintain a capability to produce a range of demand scenarios, reflecting the uncertainty surrounding the potential shape of recovery, for internal use.

WALES**■ Welsh Local Government Association****Ruth Jones:****[152639]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, when he last met representatives of the Welsh Local Government Association.

Simon Hart:

My Ministerial Team and I have regular discussions with the Welsh Local Government Association. Only on Monday 22 February, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales attended a meeting of the WLGA's rural forum to discuss UK government activity to support rural Wales following the end of the Transition Period.

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Kickstart Scheme****Sarah Olney:****[153329]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to encourage businesses to use a gateway for the Kickstart scheme.

Mims Davies:

[Holding answer 22 February 2021]: We encourage any employer looking to access the scheme, who needs support in the application process or delivering employability support, to apply for funding through one of the Kickstart gateways. Guidance on finding a Kickstart Gateway, including a list of many approved Gateways that continues to be updated, can be found on the Kickstart scheme website.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Advanced Research and Invention Agency

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng):

[\[HCWS787\]](#)

The UK has a proud history of scientific excellence and invention. Charles Babbage, Ada Lovelace, and later, Alan Turing pioneered early predecessors of the computer. Thomas Newcomen and James Watt gave us the steam engine, and Michael Faraday gave us the modern battery.

This Government is committed to continuing this tradition and cementing our role as a science superpower. That is why our manifesto committed to creating a new funding agency, focused on high-risk, high-reward research. I am pleased to update the House that we will be fulfilling this commitment through a new **Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)**, and we will also be introducing a Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows to create this body.

ARIA will have the sole focus to fund ground-breaking research – research that sparks transformational societal change through the creation of new technologies and new industries.

With £800 million committed to ARIA up to 2024/25, ARIA will form a central part of delivering on our R&D Roadmap, published in July 2020, to ensure the UK is the best place for scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs to live and work, while helping to power up the UK's economic and social recovery.

As we have developed ARIA, we have sought best practice from international partners. Success stories include DARPA in the US, whose predecessor, ARPA, was instrumental in creating transformational technologies like the internet and GPS. More recently, DARPA has been behind precursors to technologies such as Apple's Siri.

We have also listened to the scientific community about how these models can best be adapted for the UK to enhance our R&D offer. This includes ensuring ARIA complements existing funders and makes a distinct contribution to the wider R&D landscape. To this end, ARIA will have a bespoke purpose and structure, and will work in partnership with UKRI and across the ecosystem.

ARIA's key features will be:

- A singular focus on high-risk, high reward research funding. ARIA will provide support for transformational, long-term science and technology. ARIA will not be restricted in whether it funds pure science, applied science, or technological development – in fact, often it will do aspects of each within a single programme.
- A high tolerance for risk and failure. Failure is part of the scientific process, and particularly central to finding the technological breakthroughs that have the

potential to create the industries and jobs of the future. ARIA will not shy away from high risk, in the pursuit of high rewards.

- Minimal bureaucracy. The recent approach to COVID rapid response funds and the Vaccine Taskforce has led to a cultural shift around funding and decision-making, towards a more lean and agile system, and ARIA will continue this trend. It will have an innovative approach to funding, with the ability to use mechanisms such as seed grants and prizes to ensure the best support for the best ideas. ARIA's programme managers will be able to pull in scientists on projects within in a matter of weeks.
- To empower exceptional talent. ARIA will be run by exceptional scientists who have the expertise to identify the most exciting and ground-breaking research to invest in. Government will invest in these exceptional individuals, empowering them to use their expertise to identify what research to back rather than providing a research focus for the organisation, and giving them the freedom to start and stop projects quickly and redirect funding efficiently.

Alongside the Bill, we will recruit a visionary CEO and experienced Chair. They will develop ARIA by setting the agenda, shaping the culture, and building an exceptional team for the agency.

ARIA will further diversify our rich and dynamic R&D system, taking us to the next level of scientific and technological advances. Its successes stand to have an impact for how we fund R&D in the future, and ensure we maintain our outstanding global reputation for innovation and discovery.

■ Research and Development Update

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Science, Research and Innovation) (Amanda Solloway):

[\[HCWS786\]](#)

I am tabling this statement for the benefit of Honourable and Right Honourable Members, to bring to their attention the support that the Government is providing to United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded doctoral students to address the challenges related to COVID-19 restrictions.

When lockdown began last year, UKRI communicated immediately that PhD studentships should not be suspended ensuring students could continue to receive their stipends. In April 2020, £44m of urgent funding was announced for up to 6-month extensions for PhD students in their final year who could not complete their studies as originally planned due to COVID-19 restrictions. This was taken up by 77% of eligible students.

In November 2020, a further £19.1m was allocated to Research Organisations hosting UKRI funded students. This enabled those organisations to target additional support to those UKRI funded students who needed it most including those whose study had been impacted by caring responsibilities or health reasons, and those in their final year.

These two phases of funding amount to £63m of funding and will provide support to approximately 10,000 students.

Since the introduction of the current restrictions in January, the Government has continued to monitor the impact on the research sector. I asked UKRI to explore what else could be done to help and I can now confirm that we will be providing additional support to UKRI funded PhD students.

A further £7m will now be made available to allocate extensions, based on need, to those students still to complete their studies. Additionally, UKRI are exploring options to increase flexibility for grant holding organisations to allocate existing funding for training and cohort development activity to fund extensions.

Research England will also be delivering around £11m of block grant funding to English universities as a contribution to their support for their postgraduate research communities, including to students funded by universities themselves and to self-financed students.

By the end of this phase of support funding, UKRI will have provided additional support totalling £70m, including extensions, to around half of all their funded students who were studying at the start of the first lockdown extension. This support has been targeted at those most in need and with equality, diversity and inclusion considered throughout.

Ensuring that the research sector in the UK has the people and skills it needs is crucial to realising Government's ambition to cement our status as a science superpower. We will continue to monitor this situation closely, to ensure that we are able to consider additional support if necessary.

CABINET OFFICE

■ Meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office
(Michael Gove):**

[\[HCWS790\]](#)

The next meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee will take place on 24 February 2021, by video conference, hosted by the UK.

The meeting will be co-chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and Vice President of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič.

The agenda will include four items:

1. Introduction and opening remarks from co-chairs

1.1 Stocktake of Specialised Committee activity

2. Update on Withdrawal Agreement Implementation since the end of the transition period

2.1 Citizens' Rights 2.2 Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol

3. AOB

4. Concluding remarks

The UK delegation will include:

- Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
- The Paymaster General, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP

Representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive have been invited to form part of the UK delegation.

■ **UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement: update on provisional application**

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove):

[\[HCWS791\]](#)

Today the UK-EU Partnership Council has agreed to extend the date on which provisional application of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) will cease from 28 February 2021 to 30 April 2021.

The decision was taken by written procedure: the EU co-chair of the Partnership Council, Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, proposed extension by letter on Friday 19 February, and the current UK co-chair, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, agreed to this proposal today, 23 February. This exchange of letters formalises the adoption of the decision. Copies of the letters and the draft decision have been published on GOV.UK.

Provisionally applying the TCA was not the UK's preferred outcome in the first place, given the uncertainty it creates for businesses, individuals and the Parties. The extension of provisional application prolongs that uncertainty and it is disappointing that the EU did not complete its internal procedures in the timeframe set out in the TCA. We expect the EU to meet the new timeline.

EDUCATION

■ **Higher Education Update**

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

[\[HCWS784\]](#)

Last week the Department for Education laid the 'Higher education: free speech and academic freedom' Command Paper in Parliament and then published it more widely. This sets out how Government proposes to deliver on its 2019 manifesto commitment to strengthen academic freedom and freedom of speech in universities in England.

This Government has always been clear in its commitment to strengthen academic freedom and ensure that our universities are places where free speech can thrive. Without action to counter attempts to discourage or even silence unpopular views, intellectual life on campus for both staff and students may be unfairly narrowed and diminished.

Despite protections which are currently in place, a body of research has shown evidence of a 'chilling effect' on students and staff, who report feeling unable freely to express their views within the law without fear of repercussion. This is emphasised by a small number of high-profile incidents in which staff or students have been threatened with negative consequences, sometimes successfully, confirming that the fear of repercussion is not

always unfounded. The Government therefore considers it necessary to take action, including by amending legislation.

This Command Paper identifies key limitations of the current framework and proposes a clear way forward, to clarify and strengthen the legislation on freedom of speech and academic freedom, and thereby ensure that the aforementioned 'chilling effect' is effectively dealt with. Freedom of speech and academic freedom are fundamental principles of university life, and it is our duty to afford the necessary protections where these are found to be lacking. The Government intends to take action after carefully considering and discussing the options laid out in this paper with stakeholders. We will announce further steps in due course.

I will place copies of the Command Paper in the libraries of both Houses.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **GuarantCo: Callable Capital Agreement**

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Dominic Raab): [\[HCWS789\]](#)

It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Minister concerned to present a departmental minute to Parliament giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the statement, except in cases of special urgency.

I have today laid a departmental minute outlining details of a new liability of up to £90 million which FCDO has undertaken in respect of the Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG). This £90 million increase will be added to the existing liability of £40 million for PIDG which has been in place since 2016, creating a total liability of £130 million.

GuarantCo was established in 2003 as an investment facility of PIDG. PIDG encourages and mobilises private investment in infrastructure in the frontier markets of sub-Saharan Africa and south and south-east Asia. PIDG makes it viable for private investors to participate in infrastructure deals, using limited sums from its publicly funded trust to crowd-in many times that value in private capital. The UK has committed over £1 billion to PIDG since 2002 alongside other donors. This has collectively leveraged over £26 billion in investment from the private sector and partner international and development finance institutions.

PIDG supports private investment throughout the project development cycle from its earliest stages, through a number of separate facilities or companies. GuarantCo supports local currency lending for infrastructure projects in developing countries by providing guarantees to banks and bond investors. This helps to reduce the risks to borrowers of borrowing in hard currency for projects that earn revenues locally, whilst reducing the risks to lenders to enable them to finance projects in developing countries.

In this way, it helps to promote domestic infrastructure financing and self-sustaining capital market development in low and lower-middle income countries.

GuarantCo's business model requires it to demonstrate the capacity to honour guarantees for transactions it is discussing with counterparties. GuarantCo expects to only have a minimal number of defaulting projects. However, it needs to have a legally solid call on sufficient capital for it to pay out against called guarantees.

Until 2016, the UK supported GuarantCo through paid-in capital. To ensure better value for money for UK taxpayer funding, the UK entered into an arrangement with GuarantCo in 2016 to provide support in the form of unfunded, callable equity (capital). It is this arrangement which FCDO is now proposing to amend, increasing the callable capital to a total of £130 million, and adjusting the terms to better reflect the current operating environment of GuarantCo. This form of support allows cash to remain with HM Government, only releasing funds if and when there is a clear need for the money.

GuarantCo will continue to be able to leverage its increased equity base as it will have a sovereign guarantee of callable capital. Consequently, it will be able to continue its development objectives and significantly expand its pipeline of projects.

FCDO's total contingent liability for GuarantCo would be increased by £90 million to a total of £130 million under this renewed callable capital agreement. This £90 million increase is part of the overall approved budget for PIDG under its current business case. The sole purpose of this arrangement is to achieve better value for money for taxpayers by providing callable capital instead of cash while achieving the same development outcomes.

The agreement would be in place for 20 years and capital can be called by GuarantCo only if pre-defined 'trigger' events are met. The trigger events are based on GuarantCo's liquidity position. If its liquidity falls below the amount of USD \$100m, this would trigger a tranche of the callable capital to be paid out (subsequent tranches would be paid out only if liquidity fell below this amount again, with three tranches in total). For this trigger event to occur would require GuarantCo to lose over 60% of its paid-in equity (approximately US \$200 million). FCDO considers the risk of this happening to be low but not negligible. Even if called towards the end of the agreement, it would still provide better value for money than FCDO providing cash now. FCDO will continue to review the financial performance with GuarantCo regularly and GuarantCo will be required to report quarterly on the risk of the capital being called. In the circumstance where the contingent liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this minute was laid before parliament a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or by otherwise raising the matter in parliament, final approval to proceed with incurring the liability will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

■ Remedial order to address State Immunity Act 1978 - European Convention on Human Rights incompatibility

Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams):

[\[HCWS788\]](#)

In 2017, the Supreme Court judgment in the case of *Benkharbouche v Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs* [2017] UKSC 62 held that certain provisions of the State Immunity Act 1978 were incompatible with Articles 6 and 14 of the European Convention of Human Rights. The incompatibility related to employment claims brought by individuals employed by diplomatic missions in London. The government has considered the Supreme Court's judgment and decided to address the incompatibility by way of a remedial order under section 10 and schedule 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will lay the draft remedial order before Parliament in due course.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Extension to Bailiff Enforcement Regulations

Minister of State for Housing (Christopher Pincher):

[\[HCWS793\]](#)

I wish to update the House on the Government's continuing commitment to protecting tenants over the national lockdown period, whilst ensuring landlords can access justice in the most serious cases.

Preventing the enforcement of evictions against residential tenants

The Government laid a Statutory Instrument on 19 February which extends existing protections for renters by continuing to prevent enforcement agents (bailiffs) from attending residential premises to enforce a writ or warrant of possession except in the most serious circumstances. This measure will continue to protect public health by preventing people being evicted from their homes by enforcement agents, at a time when the risk of virus transmission remains high, and to avoid placing additional burdens on the NHS and local authorities.

Exemptions continue to be in place for the most serious cases that present the most strain on landlords and on local communities. These circumstances are illegal occupation, false statement, anti-social behaviour, perpetrators of domestic abuse in the social sector, where a property is unoccupied following death of a tenant and serious rent arrears of 6 months' rent or more. The SI applies to England only and expires at the end of 31 March 2021. Given that 14 days' notice is required before an eviction can take place, no evictions are expected before 14 April except in the most serious circumstances.

Wider Measures

The requirement on landlords to provide tenants with six months' notice before starting formal possession proceedings continues to apply in all but the most serious cases until at least 31 March 2021. This means that most renters served notice today can stay in

their homes until August 2021, with time to find alternative support or accommodation. We will keep these measures under review.

Most tenants are continuing to pay their rent as normal. However, we recognise that a small proportion are experiencing trouble paying their rent. The Government has put in place a significant financial package to support them.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has offered support for businesses to pay staff salaries, enabling people to continue to pay their rent and has been extended until April 2021. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme is also available.

In addition, the Government has put in place an unprecedented amount of financial support to ensure tenants can continue to pay their rent. Notably, we have increased the local housing allowance rate (LHA) to the 30th percentile. The increased LHA rates are expected to provide 1.5 million claimants with around £600 per year of housing support more than they would otherwise have received. This measure maintains that significant increase for all rates, by protecting the rates at the current levels in cash terms in 2021/22, even in areas where the 30th percentile of local rents has gone down. This continued investment in LHA will support claimants in the private rented sector to manage housing costs. We have also increased Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by up to £1,040 for the year. We spend around £30 billion a year on housing benefits – and spend more than any other OECD country as a proportion of GDP on housing support (2018 data).

Guidance

We have updated our guidance to support landlords and tenants in the social and private rented sectors navigate the possessions process, which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-possession-action-process-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants>.

We have also recently updated our COVID renting guidance for landlords, tenants and local authorities to ensure it reflects the latest information. It can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants>

■ Local Government Update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): **[HCWS785]**

As I told the House on 12 October 2020 [[hyperlink](#) / column reference (HCWS502)] I have issued invitations under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) to principal councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and Somerset, including associated existing unitary councils, to submit proposals for moving to unitary local government in those areas.

On 9 December, I received eight locally-led proposals - four from councils in Cumbria, two from councils in North Yorkshire and two from councils in Somerset. In the case of each area there is a proposal made by the county council for a unitary authority covering

the whole area. In the case of North Yorkshire and Somerset there is a proposal from district councils for two unitary authorities in each area. In Cumbria district councils have made three proposals, each of which involve establishing two unitary authorities.

Today I have launched a consultation on all eight proposals. I would welcome views from any interested person, including residents, and I am consulting the councils which made the proposals, other councils affected by the proposals, and councils in neighbouring areas. I am also consulting public service providers, including health providers and the police, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and certain other business, voluntary sector and educational bodies.

The consultation period will run for eight weeks until Monday 19 April. The consultation document is available [here](#) and those responding may do so on the department's online platform 'Citizen Space' or by e-mail or post. The consultation will provide information to help my assessment of the merits of each proposal and I will carefully consider all the representations I receive, along with all other relevant information available to me.

The context of this consultation is that the 2007 Act provides that before any proposal is implemented I must consult any council affected by the proposal that did not make it and any other persons I consider appropriate. Once the consultation is concluded, I will decide, subject to parliamentary approval, which, if any, proposals are to be implemented, with or without modification. In taking these decisions I will have regard to all the representations I have received, including those from the consultation, and all other relevant information available to me, and reach a balanced judgement assessing the proposals against the three criteria - whether they are likely to improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal, whether they command a good deal of local support as assessed in the round across the whole area of the proposal, and whether the area of any new unitary council is a credible geography.

I am also announcing today that I intend as soon as practicable to make and lay before Parliament Orders under the Local Government Act 2000 to reschedule the ordinary elections to principal councils in the three areas due to be held on 6 May 2021 for one year to May 2022. The elections for local Police and Crime Commissioners, as well as elections to any town or parish councils, will continue to take place in May 2021.

In deciding to reschedule the 6 May 2021 local elections to principal councils in the three areas, I have carefully considered all the representations I have received including the views expressed by councils. I have also had regard both to the importance of local elections as the foundation of our local democracy and ensuring the accountability of councils to local people, and to the risks of continuing with the May 2021 elections in the areas when consultations are taking place on proposals which could, if implemented, result in the abolition of those councils. Elections in such circumstances risk confusing voters and would be hard to justify where members could be elected to serve shortened terms.

Accordingly, I have concluded that, irrespective of what my future decisions might be on the restructuring proposals, the right course is to reschedule the May 2021 local elections. If no unitary proposal is implemented in an area, the rescheduled elections will

take place in May 2022. If a unitary proposal is implemented the rescheduled elections will be replaced by elections in May 2022 to the new unitary authority or authorities which could be in shadow form or a continuing council taking on the functions of the other councils in the area.

Finally, I would reiterate that the Government will not impose top-down government solutions. We will continue, as I am now currently doing, to follow a locally-led approach where councils can develop proposals which have strong local support. This has been the Government's consistent approach since 2010, when top-down restructuring was stopped through the Local Government Act 2010. When considering reform, those in an area will know what is best – the very essence of localism to which the Government remains committed.

TREASURY

■ The Double Taxation Convention between the United Kingdom and Sweden

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

[\[HCWS792\]](#)

A Protocol to the Double Taxation Convention with Sweden was signed on 23 February. The Protocol will give effect to certain OECD/G20 base erosion and profit shifting recommendations that protect tax treaties against avoidance activities, ensuring that the UK's double taxation agreement with Sweden meets the minimum OECD/G20 recommended standards. The text of the Protocol is available on HM Revenue and Customs' pages of the GOV.UK website and will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. The text of the Protocol will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.