



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 5 March 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:31 P.M., 05 March 2021). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Biofuels

Martyn Day:

[\[158123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of increasing the amount of biomass feedstocks produced domestically in the UK.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

In the Government's response to Climate Change Committee's (CCC) latest annual progress report to Parliament, we announced that we will publish a new Biomass Strategy in 2022.

This will review what amount of sustainable biomass could be available to the UK, and how this resource could be best utilised across the economy to help achieve our net zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050.

The Strategy will also assess the UK's current biomass sustainability standards, which are already some of the world's most stringent, to see where and how we can improve them even further.

As part of the strategy development, we will be launching a "Call for Evidence" on the role of biomass to help achieve zero, enabling interested stakeholders to contribute their views on biomass.

In addition, the Department will shortly be launching a £4m Biomass Feedstocks Innovation programme, investigating productivity innovations for domestic biomass supply.

■ Business: Coronavirus

Ruth Jones:

[\[158202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps the Government is taking to support businesses that have become heavily indebted during the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

The Government has provided an unprecedented business support package totalling over £280 billion. This includes billions in loans, grants, and business rates relief. As of 21 February 2021, businesses across the UK have benefitted from over 1.5 million Government-guaranteed loans worth over £72 billion to support their cashflow through the pandemic.

We recognise that some borrowers will benefit from repayment flexibility, that is why we announced the Pay As You Grow measures, which give Bounce Back Loan borrowers more time and greater flexibility to repay their loans.

We have also enabled lenders to extend the repayment period for Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) facilities beyond 6 years (up to a maximum of 10 years), where this is needed in connection with the provision of forbearance. CBILS term extensions are offered at the discretion of lenders. This measure is designed to help businesses that would struggle to repay their CBILS facility on their existing terms, by reducing monthly repayments.

Grant funding has also been made available via Local Authorities to help businesses forced to close due to national and localised restrictions, and for businesses severely impacted by restrictions even if not required to close. This includes the Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment (CBLP), the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), and the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) schemes.

Businesses can also access tailored advice through the Business Support Helpline, online via the Business Support website or through local Growth Hubs in England.

Ruth Jones:

[158203]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on UK Government support for businesses that have become heavily indebted during the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

The UK Government is committed to supporting people, businesses and individuals across the devolved administrations. This includes a total of £19 billion in funding for the devolved administrations since the start of the pandemic, meaning at least £5.9 billion for the Welsh Government. Following discussions with the devolved administrations, additional funding totalling £729m has been provided to allow each of the devolved administrations to provide further support to businesses on a discretionary basis.

The devolved administrations have also benefitted from UK-wide support programmes, including through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Self-Employed Income Support Scheme and business lending schemes.

As of 21 February 2021, the Government's UK-wide lending schemes have approved over 1.5 million Government-guaranteed loans worth over £72 billion to support cashflow for businesses across the UK affected by COVID-19.

We recognise that some borrowers will benefit from repayment flexibility, and that is why we announced the Pay As You Grow measures, which give Bounce Back Loan borrowers more time and greater flexibility to repay their loans.

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■ Carbon Emissions

Ruth Jones:

[\[158212\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent steps he has taken to meet the Government's net zero carbon emissions target by 2050.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The UK has decarbonised its economy at the fastest rate amongst G20 countries since 2000. My Rt hon Friend the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan for a green industrial revolution will build on this success and accelerate our path to net zero. Spanning clean energy, buildings, transport, nature and innovative technologies, the Plan will mobilise £12 billion of government investment to unlock three times as much private sector investment by 2030, level up regions across the UK, and support up to 250,000 highly-skilled green jobs.

Ahead of COP26, we will set out ambitious plans across key sectors of the economy to meet our carbon budgets and net zero. We have recently published the Energy White Paper and the first phase of our Transport Decarbonisation Plan, and will publish the Heat and Building Strategy in due course. We will also publish a comprehensive Net Zero Strategy setting out the government's vision for transitioning to a net zero economy.

■ Climate Change

Julian Sturdy:

[\[158029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to implement climate change policies that (a) ensure the UK makes a proportionate contribution to limiting global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial temperatures, (b) accurately record all UK carbon emissions, including shipping and aviation, (c) protect and restore diverse habitats along overseas supply chains and (d) restore UK soils, wildlife habitats and species populations.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

As the independent Climate Change Committee recognise, we have made world-leading progress in cutting our emissions while growing the economy. Since setting our net zero target, we have announced my Rt hon Friend the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan, as well as our Energy White Paper, which demonstrates our commitment to eradicating our contribution to climate change by 2050.

For its carbon targets, the UK follows the agreed international approach for estimating and reporting greenhouse gas emissions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, which is for countries to report the emissions produced within their territories. We are considering recommendations on International Aviation and Shipping carefully ahead of setting the sixth carbon budget.

The UK will be dedicating at least £3bn of international climate finance in the next five years to climate change solutions that protect and restore nature. In 2019, we

launched the Global Resource Initiative (GRI) to advise on reducing the deforestation impacts of key UK supply chains. The GRI published 14 recommendations for action and government responded in November 2020, detailing how it would take this forward. As part of its COP26 Presidency, the UK also launched the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) dialogue to bring together governments of major producer and consumer countries to agree actions which reduce deforestation.

We are committed to protecting and restoring the UK's natural environment. The 25 Year Environment Plan will create or restore 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat in England. We have also doubled funding to £80m for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to kick start a programme of nature-based projects to address the twin challenges of halting biodiversity loss and tackling climate change.

■ **Climate Change: Citizens' Juries**

Julian Sturdy:

[\[158030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the effect of citizens' assemblies on Government climate change policy.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

Achieving our net zero target must be a shared endeavour between governments, businesses and individuals.

The Climate Assembly UK was commissioned by six Parliamentary Select committees to explore how the UK should reach net zero by 2050. We welcome the Climate Assembly UK's recommendations, which demonstrate strong public support for the Government's intention to deliver a UK economy which is stronger, cleaner, more sustainable and more resilient.

In September 2020 we invited the Climate Assembly UK expert leads to present the Assembly's findings to officials. These briefings were attended by over 400 officials. We are looking closely at the Climate Assembly UK report's findings and government departments will consider its findings as we develop our plans for reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

As we develop our plans for reaching net zero emissions by 2050, we will continue to engage the public on the changes that are needed to develop our ambitions on net zero and we will listen very attentively to feedback.

■ **Conditions of Employment**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[158116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of UK whistleblowing legislation to (a) ensure that it keeps pace with international developments and (b) maintain the UK's position on worker rights.

Paul Scully:

The Government recognises how valuable it is that whistleblowers are prepared to shine a light on wrongdoing and believes that they should be able to do so without fear of recrimination. We have also been clear that there will be no reduction in workers' rights.

The Government remains committed to reviewing the UK whistleblowing framework and will carry this out once sufficient time has passed for there to be the necessary evidence available to assess the impact of reforms. The most recent change introduced in 2017 was a new legislative requirement for most prescribed persons to produce an annual report on whistleblowing disclosures made to them by workers.

Consumer Information: Disinformation**Lucy Powell:****[158933]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure consumers are protected against misinformation online, including fake and misleading reviews.

Paul Scully:

The Government is committed to protecting consumers from unfair behaviours. The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs) prohibits fake and misleading reviews online. Alleged breaches of the CPRs should be sent in the first instance to the Citizens Advice consumer service, www.citizensadvice.org.uk/, who will refer on cases to trading standards for appropriate enforcement action.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has issued guidance to consumers on avoiding fake reviews which can be found at: <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/avoiding-fake-views-a-guide-to-testimonials-and-endorsements.html>.

Furthermore, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) opened an investigation into online reviews displayed on several major websites in May 2020. The CMA will investigate, among other things, whether the traders responsible for the websites are taking sufficient measures to remove fake and misleading reviews. Details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/online-reviews>.

Debt Relief Orders**Afzal Khan:****[158195]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of requiring the Insolvency Service to commit to review every three years the Debt Relief Order monetary eligibility criteria to ensure continued access to DROs.

Paul Scully:

No assessment has been made of potential merits of requiring the Insolvency Service to commit to review the Debt Relief Order monetary eligibility criteria every three years and there are no plans to do so. However, the Government keeps the legislative framework for insolvency under regular review.

■ Digital Markets Taskforce

Lucy Powell: [\[158934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department plans to implement the recommendation of the Digital Markets Taskforce for the Government to strengthen powers to tackle unlawful or illegal activity or content on digital platforms which could result in economic detriment to consumers and businesses.

Lucy Powell: [\[158935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department plans to implement the recommendation of the Digital Markets Taskforce to give the Competition and Markets Authority additional powers to prevent the trading of online reviews.

Paul Scully:

The Government is committed to ensuring digital markets remain competitive and deliver positive outcomes for consumers, small businesses, and society. That is why we have announced funding to establish a new Digital Markets Unit within the Competition and Markets Authority from 2021-22. We set up the Digital Markets Taskforce in March to offer expert advice.

The Government is now considering the Taskforce's recommendations and will respond in due course.

■ Energy: Prices

Saqib Bhatti: [\[159055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will publish data on the number of households in each region that have switched energy suppliers in each month since 1 January 2019.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

Monthly data on the number of households switching energy suppliers for gas and electricity is published by BEIS here <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/quarterly-domestic-energy-switching-statistics>. This is not available by region.

BEIS statistics are based on switching data also published by Ofgem at:

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/data-portal/number-domestic-customers-switching-supplier-fuel-type-gb>

■ Ports: Competition

Kelly Tolhurst: [\[158983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the competitiveness of the ports sector.

Kelly Tolhurst:

[\[158984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of the lack of separation between port authorities and port service providers in some areas on anti-competitive behaviour in the ports sector.

Kelly Tolhurst:

[\[158985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of limited potential for entry into the ports sector on anti-competitive behaviour in that sector.

Paul Scully:

Under competition law, responsibility for investigating individual and market-wide competition issues falls to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the UK's competition authority. If an individual is concerned about the conduct of individual ports, or the state of competition in the market as a whole, these concerns can be submitted to the CMA. The Government has ensured that the CMA has significant powers to investigate and act against anticompetitive conduct. As an independent authority, the CMA has discretion to investigate competition cases which, according to its prioritisation principles, it considers most appropriate. The CMA also has powers to conduct detailed examinations of why particular markets may not be working well, and decide what remedial action is appropriate.

■ Products: Internet

Alexander Stafford:

[\[159064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the risk in respect of the sale of unsafe products on online marketplaces.

Paul Scully:

The Government is committed to ensuring that only safe products can be sold in the UK. All distributors have a duty to act with due care to ensure products they are selling are safe, this includes online retailers.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) proactively engages with major online marketplaces to ensure that they are playing their part in protecting UK consumers from unsafe products and has recently taken action to ensure that a number of non-compliant products being sold by overseas third-party sellers have been removed from sale.

Looking forward, OPSS is developing a new voluntary commitment for online marketplaces to agree actions they will take to reduce the risks from unsafe products being sold online. This will enable online marketplaces to demonstrate their commitment to the safety of their consumers in the UK by publicly promising to work with UK regulators.

To ensure that the UK's Product Safety framework is flexible and fit for the future, OPSS is conducting a review. The review will ensure we have a framework that delivers safety for consumers while supporting businesses to innovate and grow and will consider the impact on product safety of new business models, including e-commerce and third-party marketplaces.

■ Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme

Martyn Day:

[\[158124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what plans his Department has for further UK-wide decarbonisation policies when the non-domestic renewable heat incentive comes to an end in March 2021.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The Government is planning to publish a Heat and Buildings Strategy in due course, which will set out the immediate actions we will take to reduce emissions from buildings.

In addition, from April to July 2020, the Department consulted on "Future support for low carbon heat", setting out proposals for future schemes to follow the closure of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). A government response to this consultation will be published shortly.

As part of this consultation In April 2020 we detailed proposals for the Green Gas Support Scheme (GGSS). This scheme will by provide tariff support for biomethane produced via anaerobic digestion and injected into the gas grid, and is due to open to applicants for four years in Autumn 2021.

Also included was the Clean Heat Grant (CHG), which will launch in April 2022. The CHG will be targeted at households and small non-domestic buildings, to enable the installation of heat pumps and, in limited circumstances, biomass, to provide space and water heating.

■ Social Clubs: Coronavirus

Justin Madders:

[\[158093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of financial support for social clubs during the period of covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Paul Scully:

The Government has brought forward a substantial package of financial support for the hospitality sector over the last year. On 3 March 2021, my Rt hon Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer set out in the Budget a £65 billion three-point plan to provide support for jobs and businesses, with extensions to furlough, self-employed support, business grants, loans and VAT cuts – bringing total fiscal support to over £407 billion.

Justin Madders:

[\[158094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with representatives of social clubs on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on such clubs.

Paul Scully:

I meet regularly with the groups representing the hospitality sector to understand the impact of the pandemic on jobs and businesses.

The Government has brought forward a substantial package of financial support for the sector over the last year and, and my Rt hon Friend the Prime Minister's 'COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021' provides a roadmap out of the current lockdown in England. On 3 March 2021, my Rt hon Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer set out in the Budget a £65 billion three-point plan to provide support for jobs and businesses, with extensions to furlough, self-employed support, business grants, loans and VAT cuts – bringing total fiscal support to over £407 billion.

Justin Madders:

[\[158095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of social clubs on social isolation and loneliness.

Paul Scully:

The Government recognises that hospitality, including social clubs, plays an important role in supporting our communities and helping to combat loneliness. However, the restrictions put in place to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 are necessary to protect the NHS and to save lives.

The Government has brought forward a substantial package of financial support for the hospitality sector over the last year and, and my Rt hon Friend the Prime Minister's 'COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021' provides a roadmap out of the current lockdown in England.

On 3 March 2021, my Rt hon Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer set out in the Budget a £65 billion three-point plan to provide support for jobs and businesses, with extensions to furlough, self-employed support, business grants, loans and VAT cuts – bringing total fiscal support to over £407 billion.

■ Vehicles: Debt Relief Orders

Afzal Khan:

[\[158194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) increasing the Debt Relief Order vehicle value threshold to £2,000 and (b) excluding mobility scooters from the threshold.

Paul Scully:

The Government has recently consulted on proposals to increase the eligibility criteria for Debt Relief Orders to help more people deal with their financial difficulties and to provide a fresh start. The consultation includes proposals to increase the total amount of debt allowable in a Debt Relief Order but does not include proposals for

any increase in the monetary limit for motor vehicles or the exclusion of mobility scooters. Following the closure of the consultation on 26 February 2021, the Government is reviewing the responses.

■ Weddings: Coronavirus

Andrew Lewer:

[\[159022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department will take to provide sector specific support to the wedding industry in response to the restrictions to guest numbers being in place until 21 June 2021.

Paul Scully:

Over the course of the pandemic the Government has provided an unprecedented package of financial support to businesses, including those in the wedding industry, which we keep under regular review.

My Rt hon Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget a raft of new measures to further support businesses, including those in the wedding industry. These include:

- Extension of the Coronavirus Job Support Scheme to the end of September 2021.
- £5 billion for new Restart Grants.
- The Government is also providing all Local Authorities in England with an additional £425 million of discretionary business grant funding, on top of the £1.6 billion already allocated.
- Eligible businesses in hospitality sector will benefit from business rates relief worth over £6 billion in 2021 to 2022.

My Rt hon Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer also announced the launch of the Events Research Programme, to pilot events with larger crowd sizes, including weddings with the aim of removing restrictions on events in Step 4 of the roadmap.

EDUCATION

■ Department for Education: Staff

Wes Streeting:

[\[160737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of civil servants in his Department have worked in an early years, school, college or university setting prior to joining the Department.

Nick Gibb:

The information requested is not held centrally. The Department does not hold information on the previous employment of its staff.

■ Minerals: Higher Education**Steve Double:****[160725]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to improve the (a) availability and (b) quality of university courses related to the UK's industrial critical minerals needs.

Michelle Donelan:

It is one of the government's highest priorities and an important manifesto commitment to drive up quality and standards in higher education (HE), which is a fundamental part of our levelling up agenda. We owe it to all our students, wherever they are from, that at the very least they can expect a minimum standard of excellence that is going to lead to a qualification that will improve their future prospects and help them achieve their life goals.

In order to be registered with the English HE regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), HE providers in England are required to meet a minimum set of requirements. These are designed to ensure that all students receive a high-quality academic experience, students' interests are protected and that students' qualifications hold their value over time. Providers must deliver successful outcomes for all their students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study. The government welcomes the recent OfS consultation on regulating quality and standards in HE and expects the OfS to progress rapidly to ensure that a robust and enhanced quality regime will be operational as soon as possible.

The OfS provides funding to support high-cost science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which will include high skilled jobs in the minerals industry. Further details can be found here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/skills-and-employment/supporting-stem-subjects/>.

The Strategic Priorities Grant, formerly referred to as the HE Teaching Grant, will play an important role in supporting providers and students to develop the skills and knowledge needed locally, regionally, and nationally to support the economy. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has asked the OfS to reform the Grant for the 2021-22 financial year, to ensure that more of taxpayers' money is spent on supporting HE provision which aligns with national priorities, such as healthcare, STEM and subjects meeting specific labour market needs.

The OfS will consult on these changes before final allocations for the 2021-22 financial year are confirmed.

We are also reforming higher technical education to make it more prestigious and popular so that it delivers the skills employers need. We will introduce high-quality, nationally recognised approved higher technical qualifications that meet employer needs, starting with the digital route from September 2022.

■ Pupils: Absenteeism

Wes Streeting:

[160738]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many fines have been issued for non-attendance at schools in England since September 2020.

Nick Gibb:

Information on fines issued for non-attendance at school relating to the 2020/21 academic year will not be available until March 2022.

Where pupils are absent, the Department asks schools and local authorities to work with families to discuss the reasons behind the child's absence and together agree an action plan so that the right support can be put in place to help them return to full-time attendance.

Attendance fines for parents are available to be used by schools and local authorities to improve attendance, but only as a last resort, and where there is no valid reason for the child's absence.

■ Pupils: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis:

[160670]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance his Department issued to schools for the return of clinically extremely vulnerable students as covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased.

Nick Gibb:

The Department for Education has worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England to develop our guidance, which can be found at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964351/Schools_coronavirus_operational_guidance.pdf.

DHSC are the lead department on shielding and clinical vulnerability policy. We work closely with them on the policy for clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) staff and students. DHSC and PHE guidance for CEV people sets out which additional measures people in this group need to take:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>.

The advice for pupils who have been confirmed as CEV is to shield and stay at home as much as possible until 31 March. They are advised not to attend school while shielding advice applies. The guidance for CEV individuals is advisory, although they are strongly advised to follow the advice in order to keep themselves safe .

Schools are required to provide remote education to pupils who are unable to attend school because they are complying with government guidance, as provided for in the Remote Education Temporary Continuity Direction. This can be found at the following

link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-temporary-continuity-direction-explanatory-note>.

As outlined in our guidance, where CEV individuals are shielding, it is important that schools put systems in place to keep in contact with them, offer pastoral support and check they are able to access education support.

CEV advice applies to individuals and not households. Those living with someone who is CEV, but who are not CEV themselves, can attend education, but they should ensure that they maintain good prevention practice in the workplace and home settings.

The Department has published information for parents and carers on remote education and on how they can best support their child while learning from home. This includes resources and advice to help parents and carers on how to establish a routine with their child, and how best to support mental health and wellbeing during this period: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19?priority-taxon=b350e61d-1db9-4cc2-bb44-fab02882ac25>.

Additionally, we published information for parents and carers about attending schools, nurseries and colleges in the spring term 2021. This can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Theresa Villiers:

[160566]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional funding he plans to make available to support schools as they reopen to students.

Nick Gibb:

Schools have continued to receive their core funding throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, regardless of any periods of reduced attendance, with this year marking the first year of a three-year increase to core funding - the biggest in a decade. This will ensure they can continue to pay their staff and meet other regular financial commitments.

In February 2021, the Department appointed Sir Kevan Collins as Education Recovery Commissioner to advise on the approach to education recovery and the development of a long-term plan to help pupils make up their lost education over the course of this Parliament. As an immediate step, we have made available a further £700 million to support education recovery measures. This builds on the £1 billion from last year and brings the total available to £1.7 billion. Funding will support pupils in nurseries, schools and colleges and provides an additional 'Recovery Premium' to schools, expansion of tutoring in schools and colleges, summer schools in 2021 and early language support .

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[160592]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what advice has been made available to schools in areas with a high covid-19 infection rate on reopening.

Nick Gibb:

On 22 February 2021, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, confirmed that, based on the Government's assessment of the current data against its 4 tests for relaxing restrictions, it will be possible for children to return to schools from 8 March 2021. The latest data suggests that COVID-19 infection rates have fallen across all ages, including in children and young people.

Schools should continue to implement the system of controls. These are the measures that schools have been using since the start of the autumn term. We have strengthened the system of controls in secondary schools by recommending that staff and pupils wear face coverings anywhere in the school where social distancing is not possible. More information is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964351/Schools_coronavirus_operational_guidance.pdf.

Our programme of rapid COVID-19 testing is going to continue to be an important part of how we keep COVID-19 infection rates down within schools and across the wider community. Since January 2021, we have been delivering rapid testing kits to secondary schools and colleges to help identify pupils or staff who are infected with COVID-19 but may not yet show any symptoms. Pupils returning to secondary schools from 8 March will be strongly encouraged to take a rapid test for COVID-19 before their face-to-face teaching re-starts. Staff in both primary and secondary schools are now also going to be able to be tested twice a week, whether they are showing COVID-19 symptoms or not. This means that we can ask those with positive results to self-isolate and further reduce the spread of the virus.

In the event that COVID-19 restrictions in schools are needed to help contain the spread of the virus, the Government may ask schools to change how they are delivering education for a short period of time. To assist with this, on 22 February, we published a revised contingency framework, which outlines how schools should operate in the event of any restrictions. The contingency framework is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings-excluding-universities#contingency-framework-principles>.

The contingency framework is different from the processes for managing COVID-19 cases or outbreaks in individual schools and the process for alleviating operational challenges including staff shortages. Existing processes and roles for school leaders and Directors of Public Health in addressing those issues are unchanged.

Any decision that attendance at education or childcare settings should be restricted will not be taken lightly. The Department will work with other Government Departments, the Chief Medical Officer, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, Public Health England, the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Test and Trace and

relevant local authorities to ensure the decision is informed by the available evidence and recent data. These will be ministerial decisions made on an area-by-area basis in the light of all available evidence, public health advice and local and national circumstances.

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[160593]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what advice he has received on reducing the risk of increasing covid-19 infection rates when schools reopen; and what the key recommendations of that advice were.

Nick Gibb:

The Department continues to work closely with other Government departments throughout its response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including Public Health England (PHE) and the Department of Health and Social Care, as well as stakeholders across the sector. We ensure that our policy is based on the latest scientific and medical advice, and we continue to develop comprehensive guidance based on the PHE-endorsed 'system of controls' and to understand the impact and effectiveness of these measures on staff, pupils and parents.

As new evidence or data emerges, the Department updates its advice accordingly to ensure that all our schools have the right safety measures in place. On 22 February 2021, we updated our guidance to support the full opening to education from 8 March, which includes updated advice on face coverings. The guidance can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964351/Schools_coronavirus_operational_guidance.pdf.

We know that the predominant new variant of COVID-19 is more transmissible. PHE advice remains that the way to control this virus is with the 'system of controls', even with the current new variants. The 'system of controls' measures outlined in our guidance create an environment for children and staff where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced. Schools need to continue to implement these controls to the fullest extent possible.

While it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, there is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults. The Department recently published 'Evidence summary: COVID-19 - children, young people and education settings', which can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963639/DfE_Evidence_summary_COVID-19_-_children_young_people_and_education_settings.pdf.

Based on the recent Office for National Statistics data, the risks to education staff are similar to those for most other occupations. This data can be found at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19infectionsinthecommunityinengland/characteristicsofpeopletestingpositivefor covid19inengland22february2021>.

The Department will continue to keep our guidance and advice to schools under review to help ensure they remain as safe as possible.

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[160594]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of (a) delaying schools reopening and (b) blended learning in areas with the highest rates of covid-19.

Nick Gibb:

The Government has been committed to getting all pupils back into schools full-time, as soon as the public health picture allows. In doing so, the Department is guided by the scientific and medical experts. Data and evidence are considered regularly, including by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), the Joint Biosecurity Centre, Public Health England and the Chief Medical Officers.

On 22 February 2021, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, confirmed that, based on the Government's assessment of the current data against its 4 tests for relaxing restrictions, it will be possible for children to return to schools from 8 March 2021. The latest data suggests that COVID-19 infection rates have fallen across all ages, including in children and young people.

Missing face-to-face education has severe impacts for children and young people, with clear evidence that further time out of education is detrimental for cognitive and academic development, health and wellbeing.

There should be no need to reduce occupancy in schools by implementing rotas or providing blended learning. Instead, everyone should follow the system of controls set out in our published guidance, which have been strengthened and are the correct measures for minimising the risk of transmission within schools:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963541/Schools_coronavirus_operational_guidance.pdf.

In the event that restrictions in schools are needed to help contain the spread of the virus, the Government may ask schools to change how they are delivering education for a short period of time. To assist with this, on 22 February, we published a revised contingency framework, which outlines how schools should operate in the event of any restrictions. The contingency framework is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings-excluding-universities#contingency-framework-principles>.

The contingency framework is different from the processes for managing COVID-19 cases or outbreaks in individual schools and the process for alleviating operational challenges including staff shortages. Existing processes and roles for school leaders and Directors of Public Health in addressing those issues are unchanged.

Wes Streeting:[\[160739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much of the £700 million catch-up funding announced on 22 February 2021 is additional funding; and how much of that funding is being allocated from within his Department's existing resources.

Nick Gibb:

As announced by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, the £300 million funding for tutoring represents additional funding from Her Majesty's Treasury, including a contribution to support the academic elements of secondary level summer schools.

Elsewhere, the package makes available a further £400 million across the 2021-22 academic year. While over half of this is new funding, the Department has contributed towards the cost of this package through reprioritising funding from within the Department's existing budgets. This includes funding from unallocated headroom where adjustments to forecasts have enabled us to release additional resources.

Where we have identified additional resources, it is right that we have prioritised them to the front line.

■ Turing Scheme**Emma Hardy:**[\[160777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 25 February 2021 to Question 155341 on the Turing Scheme, what steps he is taking to (a) identify the geographical areas of disadvantage and (b) actively target and promote the Turing scheme in those areas; what funding has been allocated for such promotion; and whether such funding is part of the stated budget for that scheme.

Michelle Donelan:

Successful applications for the Turing Scheme will support social mobility and widen participation across the UK. The scheme will help and promote equal access and opportunities to all pupils, students and learners regardless of background, in line with the government's levelling-up agenda. It will offer additional financial support for disadvantaged students and, unlike Erasmus, there will be additional funds available to pay for disadvantaged students' travel costs. More information on the Turing Scheme, including the aim for widening access, is available on the scheme's website: www.turing-scheme.org.uk.

The Turing Scheme's delivery partner, a consortium of the British Council and Ecorys, will actively promote the scheme across the whole of the UK, concentrating on areas of socio-economic disadvantage and lower social mobility, including the department's identified Opportunity Areas, because disadvantaged students have been typically under-represented when it comes to taking advantage of international education opportunities. .

The UK-wide scheme is demand-led. However, the qualitative assessment criteria are positively weighted towards projects that reach out to groups with fewer opportunities.

Funding for the UK-wide promotion is part of the administration costs for the scheme, allowed for within the overall budget.

■ Vocational Education: Finance

Andrew Bridgen:

[\[157110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he is planning to review the methods of assessing the financial health of training providers in receipt of funding from the ESFA.

Gillian Keegan:

We continue to keep our approach to managing the sector's financial position under review and update our guidance to reflect changing financial standards and prevailing economic conditions. Our guidance is freely available for public scrutiny.

A small team of highly experienced contract managers has been set up to focus on delivering enhanced monitoring and oversight of the top, approximately, 30 largest and most complex independent training providers. This work includes a more in-depth understanding and monitoring of these providers' future strategy and financial position so that the likelihood and impact of large-scale provider failure is reduced.

As part of the flagship apprenticeship provision, organisations new to apprenticeship delivery are subject to an early monitoring regime. To maximise successful provision overall, we offer enhanced financial monitoring to organisations we perceive may be in financial difficulty.

Access to apprenticeship delivery is strictly controlled and targets not only an organisation's financial status, but also its assessed ability to deliver and the grades awarded by Ofsted.

Ofsted inspects further education providers in line with its published 'frequency of inspection guidance' determined by the provider's previous grade. Ofsted also uses a broad range of information to assess risk and performance when selecting providers for inspection.

The ESFA sets out in its guidance and removal from the register of apprenticeship training providers guidance what action may be taken if there is a poor Ofsted outcome.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Bomb Disposal: Marine Environment

Dr Lisa Cameron:

[\[158961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to mitigate the effects of offshore unexploded ordnance disposal on marine mammals.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra recognises the impact that underwater noise from clearing unexploded ordnance can have on vulnerable marine species. We are working closely with other government departments, the Marine Management Organisation, statutory nature conservation bodies and marine industries to reduce underwater noise but must ensure any clearance method for the removal of unexploded ordnance is both safe and effective.

Defra is investigating deflagration as an alternative to detonation in the removal of unexploded ordnance from the seabed. This involves the controlled burning of explosive material in a manner that does not result in full detonation. We welcome the research commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy into the impact of using low order deflagration techniques for unexploded ordnance removal which is ongoing.

The Marine Management Organisation already includes the use of deflagration as an advisory voluntary request within marine deemed licences requesting that developers investigate deflagration as an initial method of mitigation.

■ Cats and Dogs: Sales**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[157964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that cats and dogs are sold legally with legitimate documentation on their health and history.

Victoria Prentis:

Under *The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018*, anyone who is in the business of selling animals as pets, who breeds dogs and advertises a business of selling dogs and/or who breeds three or more litters in a 12 month period needs a licence from their local authority. All licensees must adhere to strict minimum animal welfare standards. Any licensee advertising animals for sale will need to include their licence number in the advert and specify the local authority who issued the licence. Additional requirements placed on advertisements include that the age of the animal for sale must be displayed along with a recognisable photograph. Licensed dog breeders must ensure that the purchaser is informed of the age, sex and veterinary record of the dog being sold.

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing the 2018 Regulations and have powers to grant, refuse or revoke a licence. Anyone who has concerns about the welfare of a cats or dogs being sold, whether online or from a licensed establishment, should report the matter to the relevant local authority who have powers to investigate such matters.

The Government continues to raise awareness regarding the improper selling of pets by deceitful sellers through its 'Petfished' campaign. This seeks to educate prospective pet buyers on common tricks and tactics used by deceitful sellers which may result in the purchase of a mistreated or unwell pet. This includes providing clear

signposting on where responsible breeders and rehoming centres can be found and encouraging prospective buyers to research the seller thoroughly before they visit and decide to purchase. The campaign provides a list of red flags for buyers to look out for when searching for a pet online. The step by step guide on buying a dog or cat includes a reminder to check whether your new pet will be vaccinated and socialised before you take it home. More information can be found here:

<https://getyourpetsafely.campaign.gov.uk/>

■ Dogs: Exports and Imports

Andrew Rosindell:

[157963]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the minimum age of dogs being imported and exported to six months.

Victoria Prentis:

The end of the transition period has opened up new opportunities for managing our own pet travel and commercial importation rules. We are actively listening to the concerns of stakeholders and the Government is considering options to strengthen our efforts to tackle puppy smuggling and prevent the low-welfare importation and movement of these animals including looking at the minimum age of dogs entering Great Britain (GB).

These options will take into consideration the results from our latest disease risk assessments for GB, recommendations of stakeholders such as the British Veterinary Association and Dogs Trust, and recent Parliamentary work from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

The conditions which apply to commercial exports and pet movements from GB are governed by the relevant legislation of the country of destination.

■ Dogs: Imports

John Spellar:

[157953]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will introduce measures to restrict the age at which puppies can be imported to at least 14 weeks.

Victoria Prentis:

Defra takes the issue of puppy smuggling and other illegal importations of pets seriously. It is an abhorrent trade which causes suffering to these animals and puts the health of pets and people in the UK at risk.

As per our pet travel and commercial importation requirements, the minimum age a cat, dog or ferret can be vaccinated against rabies is 12 weeks old, followed by a 21 day wait when travelling from an EU Member State or another 'listed' third country. This means that the minimum age a cat, dog or ferret can enter GB from an EU Member State or another listed third country is 15 weeks old.

At present, there has been no substantive change to the pet travel requirements for pets entering Great Britain (GB) from the EU.

Now the Transition Period has ended, we have the opportunity to manage our own pet travel and commercial importation rules. We are actively listening to the concerns of stakeholders and the Government is considering options to strengthen our efforts to tackle puppy smuggling. These options will take into consideration the results from our latest disease risk assessments for GB and recommendations of stakeholders such as the British Veterinary Association and Dogs Trust, and recent parliamentary work from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

■ Fisheries: Ports

Kerry McCarthy:

[158879]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the (a) covid-19 pandemic and (b) end of the transition period on the income of UK fishing ports.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government fully recognises the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the end of the Transition Period on the UK fishing industry and has been taking action to ensure that the industry continues to thrive. This includes announcing a £23 million Seafood Response Fund to support seafood businesses across the UK where they have experienced a verifiable loss due to failures in the EU export processes. And, on 21 February, the expanded Seafood Response Fund for the UK's fishing and shellfish aquaculture sectors was announced, to target the needs of the whole UK fishing industry. The fund will draw on the existing £23 million but provide cash grants for more fishing businesses. Additionally, we have set up the UK Seafood Exports Working Group which meets twice weekly, inviting the top ten exporters to engage with Defra and HMRC.

The Government is also providing further support to businesses to adapt to new export processes. Defra and HMRC is offering targeted, proactive and hands on support to fisheries exporters to help them successfully meet the new requirements. This includes a new online training package (<https://glsr.live/euexportjourney>) to guide fish exporters through each step of the export journey and offer tips, lessons learned and advice on what to do if difficulties are encountered. We are also offering a series of teach-in workshops providing training on specific steps of the exports journey and related technical areas.

■ Food and Drinks: Manufacturing Industries

Daniel Zeichner:

[157338]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of (a) changes to Commission Decision 2007/275/EC and (b) Commission Implementing Regulation 2020/2235 on the operations of UK food and drink manufacturers.

Victoria Prentis:

New EU rules will apply from April that will impact on traders who export certain animals, germinal products and products of animal origin, including composites. The EU has not published all of the details, however we are not aware of any changes to the rate of physical checks that will take place at the EU border. These are set out in existing EU rules. The new rules will mean there will be an increase in the number of composite product EHCs required.

■ Import Controls: Ports**Kerry McCarthy:**[\[158877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the introduction of import controls at UK ports in July 2021 on the supply of (a) food and (b) category 1 goods.

Kerry McCarthy:[\[158878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the introduction of import controls at UK ports in July 2021 on the price of food.

Victoria Prentis:

We have well established ways of working with the food industry and across the Government, including with the Devolved Administrations, on preparedness for and response to potential food supply chain disruptions.

We have identified and regularly monitor Category 1 food products which could be affected by the introduction of import controls and the potential impacts, and worked closely with the industry to support their contingency planning. We will continue to communicate the latest guidance regarding the importing of such products via the Government-led food industry engagement forums to help build understanding of the requirements for regulatory compliance. We are working with industry to help improve representation of food businesses and hauliers for pre-notification fitness testing to support trader readiness. Our assessment of risk is that overall food supply will be maintained.

Consumer food prices depend on a range of factors including agri-food import costs, domestic agricultural prices, domestic labour and manufacturing costs, and Sterling exchange rates. Some technical barriers to trade, such as sanitary and phytosanitary checks, will also apply for specific items to businesses trading with the EU. Changes in food prices can result from any of these factors. Most food industry sectors are accustomed to fluctuations in supply chain costs. These do not necessarily translate into price rises.

■ Packaging: Recycling**Ruth Jones:** [\[158210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to add flexible packaging to the proposed core list of materials required to be collected for recycling from households and businesses in England from 2023.

Rebecca Pow:

We want to see recycling of plastic film increased. The Environment Bill states that waste collection authorities in England must arrange for the collection of a core set of materials, including plastics, from households and businesses.

We are launching a consultation in Spring 2021 on proposals to introduce plastic films into kerbside collections as part of the plastic recyclable waste stream. The inclusion of plastic films will simplify recycling for householders and will contribute to achieving the ambitious plastic packaging targets that will be placed on producers through our proposal for Extended Producer Responsibility.

Ruth Jones: [\[158211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent estimate he has made of the volume of flexible packaging that would be diverted from landfill in the event that such material was collected for recycling from households in England from 2023.

Rebecca Pow:

In our 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy we committed to taking actions to help stimulate private investment in reprocessing and recycling infrastructure, as this will help to meet the target of 65% of municipal waste to be recycled by 2035.

In 2019 we consulted on such actions. Namely, a deposit return scheme (DRS) for drinks containers, extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging and consistency in recycling collections, which will be legislated for using primary powers granted by the Environment Bill. These measures will stimulate investment in improved collection and sorting, increasing the supply of higher quality materials needed to support investment in domestic reprocessing infrastructure. In addition, HM Treasury's Plastic Packaging Tax will increase the demand for recycled plastic, further stimulating investment in domestic reprocessing.

We plan to undertake second consultations on a DRS for drinks containers, packaging EPR, and consistency in recycling collections this spring.

Flexible packaging will be considered as part of EPR and consistency consultations. Initial analysis suggests flexible packaging could make an important contribution to plastic packaging recycling rates, and therefore reduce the amount of this material that would otherwise be sent to landfill or energy from waste facilities. We will be setting out our policy proposals and supporting analysis in relation to flexible packaging in these consultations.

■ Recycling

Ruth Jones:

[\[158209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) increase the quantity of flexible packaging being recycled and (b) improve recycling infrastructure.

Rebecca Pow:

In our 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy we committed to taking actions to help stimulate private investment in reprocessing and recycling infrastructure, as this will help to meet the target of 65% of municipal waste to be recycled by 2035.

In 2019 we consulted on such actions. Namely, a deposit return scheme (DRS) for drinks containers, extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging and consistency in recycling collections, which will be legislated for using primary powers granted by the Environment Bill. These measures will stimulate investment in improved collection and sorting, increasing the supply of higher quality materials needed to support investment in domestic reprocessing infrastructure. In addition, HM Treasury's Plastic Packaging Tax will increase the demand for recycled plastic, further stimulating investment in domestic reprocessing.

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Flexible packaging will be considered as part of EPR and consistency consultations. Initial analysis suggests flexible packaging could make an important contribution to plastic packaging recycling rates, and therefore reduce the amount of this material that would otherwise be sent to landfill or energy from waste facilities. We will be setting out our policy proposals and supporting analysis in relation to flexible packaging in these consultations.

■ Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force and Seafood Exports Working Group

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[158880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the membership and terms of reference of (a) the Seafood Exports Working Group and (b) the Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force.

Victoria Prentis:

The Seafood Exports Working Group has been established to monitor live issues (across the UK) arising from the end of the transition period and work with industry on required responses to minimise disruption to trade flows of seafood. The Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce has been established to address medium and longer term export issues faced by Scottish traders of seafood. The primary aim is to increase confidence in the seafood and aquaculture supply chain by ensuring medium and longer-term issues are resolved. The Terms of Reference for the Seafood Exports Working Group and the Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce are attached.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **Afghanistan: Armed Conflict****Mr Barry Sheerman:**[\[158857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to advocate for the protection of civilians in dangerous parts of Afghanistan.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is deeply concerned about the current levels of violence throughout Afghanistan, including targeted attacks on civilians, which risk undermining peace efforts. There is an urgent need for a reduction in violence, leading to a comprehensive ceasefire, and meaningful engagement in a political process that can deliver the peace that Afghans want and deserve. In discussions with Afghanistan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar on 18 January and 11 February respectively, the Minister of State for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon expressed the UK's condemnation of the increasing violence faced by the people of Afghanistan.

The UK is committed to supporting security and stability in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister spoke to the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, on 26 February. He reiterated the UK's longstanding support for the Afghan government's fight against the Taliban as part of the NATO coalition. There are around 750 UK troops in Afghanistan as part of NATO's mission to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. British military personnel act as advisors to Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) and lead the Kabul Security Force, which protects and enables NATO advisers, improving security in the capital. The UK will continue to help sustain the ANDSF, including through funding and other support, as they work to ensure the protection of civilians, lasting peace and long-term security and stability for the benefit of all Afghans.

■ **Armed Conflict****Mr Barry Sheerman:**[\[158856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking (a) to mitigate the effects of war on women and children and (b) to safeguard vulnerable people in places of war.

James Cleverly:

The UK is committed to reducing the disproportional impact of conflict on women and children through championing the crucial role they can play in conflict prevention and resolution, and building on the commitments made through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies. The UK is a world leader on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), including at the UN Security Council, and on tackling sexual violence in conflict through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI). The UK's fourth National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security recognises the specific impacts of conflict on women and girls and outlines

the UK's approach to support women and girls to exercise their human rights. For example, in Yemen the UK has supported the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities' (UNFPA) Global Programme to End Child Marriage until the end of 2020, providing 5,000 adolescent girls in Yemen, with life skills training and services for psychosocial support. The UK is an active member of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which leads the international response to violations committed against children in conflict.

■ Bahrain: Politics and Government

Layla Moran:

[\[158192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department is making to the Bahraini Government on the (a) treatment of peaceful protest and assembly in that country and (b) risk that its application of alternative sentencing is discriminatory.

James Cleverly:

Bahrain is a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office human rights priority country. We continue to monitor and encourage the government of Bahrain's delivery on its international and domestic human rights commitments.

We have consistently underlined, across the region, the importance of respect for the right to peaceful protest, freedom of speech freedom of assembly and the rule of law.

With UK support, Bahrain has successfully implemented new legislation allowing for alternatives to detention for some offences. Over 2,900 people have already benefitted from the introduction of these changes. We recognise this as a positive move to reform the judicial system. We continue to encourage Bahrain to monitor the impact of alternative sentencing, for example on re-offending rates, and to support its use in a forward looking way that fosters continuous evaluation and improvement.

■ Bahrain: Prisoner's Release

Layla Moran:

[\[158193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department is making to the Bahraini Government on securing the release of Abdulhadi Mushaima.

James Cleverly:

We understand that Abdulhadi Mushaima is in detention and due to be released on 17 May 2021. We will continue to monitor and raise this case if/and when appropriate.

■ Bangladesh: Rohingya**Rushanara Ali:**[\[159311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure access to covid-19 vaccinations for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Nigel Adams:

The British High Commission in Dhaka has been working closely with the Government of Bangladesh to ensure the Rohingya refugees are included in the national vaccination plan. In the first phase starting in March, around 125,000 of the more vulnerable refugees are due to receive their first vaccination dose. 5,000 frontline health and other workers engaged in the refugee camps will also be vaccinated in this initial phase. The refugees will receive vaccines through COVAX, the multilateral initiative designed to support global and equitable access to vaccines. The COVAX Advance Market Commitment, to which the UK has committed £548m, will supply vaccines to 92 developing countries.

■ Climate Change**Ruth Jones:**[\[158206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking ahead of COP26 to work with partners in the global south on tackling climate change.

James Duddridge:

As host of COP26, securing greater global ambition to address climate change is a priority for this Government. The Foreign Secretary and FCDO ministers regularly raise the subject in their engagements with a wide range of governments. On 31 March, COP President-Designate Alok Sharma and the Foreign Secretary will host the Climate Development Ministerial which will bring together countries and partners including in the global South to identify practical solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing vulnerable countries.

Since 2011 we have helped over 66m people cope with the effects of climate change and natural disasters, and provided 33m people with improved access to clean energy. We actively encourage countries to commit financial support for developing countries most vulnerable to climate change. The UK leads by example - the Prime Minister committed to doubling UK International Climate Finance to £11.6bn over the next 5 years. On 25 January the UK launched an Adaptation Action Coalition to mobilise action on adaptation and galvanise momentum ahead of COP. This was a joint initiative with Egypt, Malawi, St Lucia, Bangladesh, Netherlands and the UN Development Programme.

■ Developing Countries: Coronavirus

Rushanara Ali:

[\[159310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support health systems in the poorest countries to distribute and administer covid-19 vaccinations.

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 the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines, and of which the UK is one of the largest bilateral donors. Our commitment helped encourage other donors to commit \$1 billion by the end of 2020, and our funding will contribute to the supply of at least 1.3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021 for up to 92 developing countries.

The COVAX AMC aims to supply fully subsidised doses to vaccinate up to 20 percent of country populations, initially prioritising healthcare workers, and then expanding to cover other priority groups. Countries will then be able to procure additional doses to increase coverage further, subject to vaccine availability. COVAX is supporting countries in assessing vaccine introduction readiness, and to develop detailed national deployment and vaccination plans, including support needed to strengthen delivery systems. Our network of health advisers in relevant AMC countries are working to support host governments in applying to the COVAX AMC, and preparing for vaccine delivery.

■ Developing Countries: Education

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[158853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support the education of girls in lower income countries worldwide.

Wendy Morton:

No development intervention is more transformational than 12 years of quality education for girls. That is why it is a major priority for this government, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Between 2015 and 2020, the UK supported at least 15.6 million children in gaining a decent education, of which 8.1 million were girls. However, COVID-19 has raised the stakes for girls' education, deepening the crisis in basic skills that they already face. In response, we have adapted our education programmes in 18 countries, and provided new funding to support refugees and displaced children access education in some of the toughest parts of the world.

As FCDO, we will continue to deploy the UK's diplomatic clout and world-leading development expertise to secure greater global ambition and investment in girls' education. We will soon be publishing an Action Plan, calling on the world to do more to step up in giving every girl access to 12 years of quality education. We will also use our G7 presidency this year to rally the international community in stepping up on

support to girls' education, and co-host with Kenya the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education in July 2021.

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[158855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to work with international partners to ensure that United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Four is reached by 2030 and all children are provided with a high quality education, irrespective of their country of origin.

Wendy Morton:

To manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FCDO has adapted its bilateral education programmes in 18 countries as well as providing additional funding, including £5 million to Education Cannot Wait, UNHCR, and UNICEF.

We will be using our G7 presidency this year to champion initiatives in getting SDG4 back on track. This includes our two global objectives on girls' education - 40 million more girls in primary and secondary education, and one third more girls reading by age 10 in low- and middle-income countries by 2025. We will also co-host with Kenya the replenishment summit of the Global Partnership for Education, which is for the world's only partnership and fund dedicated entirely to children in lower-income countries obtaining a quality education, and has an important role in supporting SDG4 and closing the financing gap.

■ Developing Countries: Sustainable Development

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[160598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the planned reduction in Official Development Assistance spend from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent on (a) the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal target 5.6 and (b) girls and women in the global south.

Wendy Morton:

Promoting gender equality and advancing women and girls' rights around the world is a priority for the UK Government. The seismic impact of the pandemic on the UK economy has forced us to take the tough but necessary decision, to temporarily reduce the overall amount we spend on ODA. Despite this, the UK remains committed to advancing gender equality, and we will take full advantage of the opportunities that 2021 will offer. This includes the UK's Presidency of the G7, co-hosting the Global Partnership for Education replenishment, COP26 and co-leadership of the new global Action Coalition on GBV.

The UK is proud to defend comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning; these are fundamental to the empowerment and health of girls and women in the global south. For example, between 2019 and 2020 alone, UK aid helped over 25 million women and girls use modern methods of contraception. We are working through the implications of the ODA reductions for individual programmes and activities. No decisions on individual country or sectoral budgets have been made yet.

■ Israel: Palestinians

Wes Streeting:

[\[158135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the Government of Israel on (a) the case of Issa Amro and (b) upholding Palestinians' right to undertake take non-violent protest in support of Palestinian human rights and statehood.

James Cleverly:

Officials from our Consulate-General in Jerusalem attended Mr Amro's court hearing on 6 January. We continue to urge the Israeli Government to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations. We have also raised concerns with the Palestinian Authority about the narrowing of space for civil society to operate in the West Bank.

■ Overseas Aid: Poverty

Ruth Jones:

[\[158207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that his Department allocates aid to projects that are focused on poverty.

James Duddridge:

We remain firmly committed to helping the world's poorest people. Our aid budget will continue to serve the primary aim of reducing poverty in developing countries. The new strategic approach to ODA will ensure every penny we spend goes as far as possible and makes a world-leading difference. The Foreign Secretary has set out how we will deliver better results for the world's poorest as well as for the UK through focusing on seven global challenges where the UK can make the most difference.

■ Saudi Arabia: Foreign Relations

Mick Whitley:

[\[159032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of emulating the US administration's change in policy on relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

James Cleverly:

US-Saudi relations are a matter for the US administration. The UK and Saudi Arabia have a longstanding bilateral relationship. We have vital national security and prosperity interests in maintaining and developing our relationship with Saudi Arabia, including in how we work together to tackle regional threats. We regularly raise concerns with the Saudi authorities through diplomatic channels, including Ministers, our Ambassador, and the British Embassy in Riyadh. No aspect of our relationship with Saudi Arabia prevents us from speaking frankly about human rights.

■ Saudi Arabia: Human Rights**Mick Whitley:**[\[159029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is (a) taking and (b) planning to take to compel the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to end human rights abuses.

James Cleverly:

Our close relationship with Saudi Arabia allows us to raise human rights with the Saudi authorities through a range of diplomatic channels, including Ministers, our Ambassador, and the British Embassy in Riyadh.

In September 2020, the UK signed a UN Human Rights Council statement calling for the release of all political detainees, opposing the use of the death penalty in all circumstances and calling for all those responsible for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi to be held account. On 29 November, the UK Ambassador for Human Rights and six European counterparts released a joint statement reiterating our call for the release of all political detainees, including women's rights defenders.

We expect Saudi Arabia to uphold the highest human rights standards. We will continue to raise human rights with the Saudi authorities and monitor issues of concern.

Mick Whitley:[\[159030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the activities of human rights defenders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

James Cleverly:

FCDO Ministers, our Ambassador and Embassy officials in Riyadh frequently raise concerns over the continued detention of human rights defenders, at senior levels with the Saudi authorities. In September 2020, the UK signed a UN Human Rights Council statement calling for the release of all political detainees. On 29 November 2020, the UK Ambassador for Human Rights and six European counterparts released a joint statement reiterating our call for the release of all political detainees, including women's rights defenders. On 25 February, the Foreign Secretary raised the continued detention of at least three women's rights defenders with his Saudi counterpart. We will continue to maintain a regular dialogue with the Saudi authorities on a range of human rights issues, including human rights defenders.

Mick Whitley:[\[159031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the steps the Government is taking to promote human rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

James Cleverly:

Our Annual Human Rights & Democracy Report highlights the human rights situation around the world and the role we have played. Constructive engagement on issues

helps develop mutual understanding and supports change. We have seen some positive changes including to the Kafala (migrant) system, reforms to the laws on the use of the death penalty against minors and on women's rights. We continue to raise - both publically and privately - human rights cases of concern. In order for the UK to act as a force for good, we must operate from a platform of engagement and influence.

■ Syria: Armed Conflict

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[158859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to advocate for the protection of civilians in dangerous parts of Syria.

James Cleverly:

The UK continues to highlight violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Syria. We support accountability efforts for the most serious crimes committed in Syria and have contributed over £13 million since 2012 in support of efforts to gather evidence and assist victims of human rights abuses and violations. UK support to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability has contributed to the first successful convictions of crimes perpetrated in Syria: a former member of Daesh and a Syrian official Anwar Raslan were both found guilty of crimes against humanity in Germany in 2020 and 2021, respectively.

More widely, the UK is also at the forefront of the humanitarian response, as one of the largest bilateral donors to the Syria Crisis. The UK focuses on helping those most in need, and is driving the wider international humanitarian response to do the same. We have spent over £3.5 billion in response to the regional Syria Crisis, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis and our aid provides life-saving support to millions of Syrians.

■ Yemen: Armed Conflict

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[158858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to advocate for the protection of civilians in dangerous parts of Yemen.

James Cleverly:

The UK calls on all the parties to the conflict to respect human rights and comply with their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). All parties to the conflict must stop and investigate any attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The UK fully supports UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths' efforts to bring the parties to the table to negotiate a lasting peace agreement. The only sustainable way to protect civilians and bring long-term stability to Yemen is an inclusive political settlement and an end to the conflict.

■ Yemen: Humanitarian Aid**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[157966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what humanitarian assistance his Department is providing to Yemen.

James Cleverly:

The UK has committed £214 million in humanitarian assistance to Yemen this financial year (2020/21), of which £207m has already been disbursed. This takes our total commitment to over £1 billion since the conflict began in 2015.

Our funding is providing support to at least 500,000 vulnerable people each month to help them buy food and household essentials, enrolling 25,000 children on malnutrition programmes and providing 1 million people with improved water supply and basic sanitation across Yemen.

■ Yemen: Military Intervention**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[157965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking in partnership with UN Security Council partners to halt the Houthi offensive in Marib, Yemen.

James Cleverly:

We strongly condemn the renewed Houthi offensive on Marib. The fighting has already displaced thousands of civilians, and many more are at risk. On 18 February, at the UN Security Council, the UK called for increased international pressure on the Houthis to stop the Ma'rib offensive. Subsequently, the UK brought forward a Security Council resolution, which further condemns the Houthi offensive. The UK fully supports UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths' efforts to secure a lasting political settlement to the conflict, and we continue to urge the Houthis to avoid further escalation and engage constructively with the Special Envoy. Minister Cleverly spoke with Special Envoy Griffiths on 1 March to discuss how the UK can best support the UN-led peace process.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Abortion: Drugs****Daniel Kawczynski:**[\[147799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average amount of time was under the pills by post regime between abortion pills being sent to women and the HSA4 form being submitted to the Chief Medical Officer.

Helen Whately:

Further breakdowns of the provisional 2020 data are not available as we are reviewing and assuring the underlying data in advance of the annual National Statistics publication in summer 2021.

In England the Abortion Regulations require that Form HSA4 be submitted to the Chief Medical Officer within 14 days of the termination.

■ **Coronavirus: Disease Control**

Alex Norris:

[\[104180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of clinically extremely vulnerable people who will be unable to return to work on 1 November 2020 because their workplace is not covid-secure.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 20 October 2020]: The information is not available in the format requested.

■ **Coronavirus: Quarantine**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[141587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to ensure that low -income parents and guardians whose child is asked to self-isolate due to the covid-19 outbreak are supported financially.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 26 January 2021]: If an individual has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, they may be eligible for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment. This scheme supports people who are employed or self-employed, on a low income, unable to work from home and losing money as a result. The payment is in addition to other financial assistance that people receive, such as Statutory Sick Pay. Those who do not qualify for the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme may be eligible for other support, such as Universal Credit and New Style Employment and Support Allowance.

The Government keeps all elements of its COVID-19 response under review, including the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme. We are also working closely with the 314 local authorities in England to monitor the effectiveness of the scheme, including the potential impact on groups who are not eligible to claim for it.

■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[\[104079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of covid-19 test results have been returned within (a) 24 hours, (b) 48 hours, (c) 72 hours, (d) 96 and (e) after 96 hours in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 20 October 2020]: Data on the proportion of test results received within 24 and 48 hours for in person testing, home test kits and satellite test centres and results received within 72 hours for satellite test centres in England is available at the following link:

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

Data on test results received after 96 hours or more is not collected.

Bill Esterson: [\[160643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many days it takes to identify new cases of the P1 Brazilian variant of covid-19 using genomic sequencing

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 4 March 2021]: On average, to report the variant profile for a person from taking a test to a confirmed specific variant positive result takes approximately ten days. NHS Test and Trace have established higher priority rapid processes for testing individuals who within the national surveillance programme are suspected to be at higher risk of being P1 variant positive. These higher priority channels can reduce the overall time by one to two days.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Jonathan Ashworth: [\[146894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the covid-19 vaccination programme on covid-19 infection rates for NHS staff.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 4 February 2021]: The SIREN study will assess the effect of the COVID-19 vaccination programme on infection rates for National Health Service staff in its study of health care workers. Analysis is currently in progress, but data from early February will be required for a more robust assessment and this will be published in due course.

Data is also currently being assessed from pillar 1 and 2 testing data in those identified as likely to be health care workers.

Lee Anderson: [\[151854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to commission a long term study of immune responses in people vaccinated against covid-19.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Public Health England's surveillance strategy monitor how effective the vaccine is at protecting against a range of outcomes, including infection, symptomatic disease, hospitalisations, mortality, and onwards transmission. The surveillance strategy is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccine-surveillance-strategy>

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the UK Research and Innovation are jointly funding the UK Coronavirus Immunology Consortium to address key questions around the immune system's response to COVID-19. The NIHR's

Health Protection Research Unit in Respiratory Infections is also looking at the size and longevity of the immune response.

Alexander Stafford: [\[151888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to commission a long term study of immune responses in people vaccinated against covid-19.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Public Health England's surveillance strategy will monitor how effective the vaccine is at protecting against a range of outcomes, including infection, symptomatic disease, hospitalisations, mortality, and onward transmission. The surveillance strategy is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccine-surveillance-strategy>

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the UK Research and Innovation are jointly funding the UK Coronavirus Immunology Consortium to address key questions around the immune system's response to COVID-19. The NIHR's Health Protection Research Unit in Respiratory Infections is also looking at the size and longevity of the immune response.

Paul Blomfield: [\[156362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of prioritising people with ME and chronic fatigue syndrome for covid-19 vaccination.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has not identified any robust data to indicate that, as a group, persons with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome are at higher risk of mortality from COVID-19 and therefore are not included as a group for prioritisation for vaccination in the vaccine programme.

Prioritisation for phase two has not yet been decided, but interim advice has been published by the JCVI recommending an age-based approach which the Government has accepted in principle. Phase two of the COVID-19 vaccine programme will cover all adults under 50 not already included in Phase one.

Christian Matheson: [\[158083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to identify and invite for covid-19 vaccinations those adults with learning disabilities who are not identified as such on their GP's register.

Nadhim Zahawi:

NHS England and NHS Improvement are asking stakeholders and voluntary and third sector partners to encourage people who have a severe and profound learning disability to come forward to their local general practitioner (GP). GPs should then assess the individual and if appropriate, add them to the list to be offered a vaccine.

Liz Twist: [\[159005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether people with asthma not included in groups 4 and 6 are planned to be prioritised in the next phase of the covid-19 vaccination programme.

Liz Twist: [\[159006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has made of the implications for prioritisation in the next phase of the covid-19 vaccination programme of the 2020 findings of King's College London that people with asthma may be at increased risk of hospitalisation and of developing long covid.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Adults with asthma which requires continuous or repeated use of systemic steroids or with previous exacerbations requiring hospital admission, will be vaccinated in phase one, priority group six which includes all individuals aged 16 to 64 years old with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality. Individuals with more severe asthma may have been included in the clinically extremely vulnerable group, in which case they will be vaccinated in priority group four in phase one. All other adults aged 50 years old or above with asthma are being vaccinated within the phase one priority group associated with their age.

Alex Sobel: [\[159021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of prioritising people with myalgic encephalomyelitis for covid-19 vaccinations.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has not identified any robust data to indicate that, as a group, persons with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome are at higher risk from COVID-19, therefore those under 50 years old with this condition are not prioritised for phase one of the programme.

Alexander Stafford: [\[159057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the proportion of care home (a) residents and (b) staff who have refused the covid-19 vaccine dose in (i) Rother Valley, (ii) South Yorkshire and (iii) England.

Nadhim Zahawi:

Data on vaccine refusal is not collected.

■ NHS and Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme 2020

Justin Madders: [\[160705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of claims received by the NHS and Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme

were made by (a) healthcare and (b) social care workers; and if he will publish a breakdown of claims by occupation.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 4 March 2021]: The latest data for the NHS and Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme (England) was released on 23 February, with 354 claims to the Scheme having been received in total. Of these, 209 have come from the National Health Service, 138 from social care and seven are of an unknown employment type. The NHS Business Services Authority has requested further information from the claimant in these cases. Further information on claims by occupation is not available.

■ **NHS: Staff**

Ms Harriet Harman:

[\[146751\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what provision there is for NHS employees to take paid leave to care for their children of primary school-age and under when the child is ill.

Helen Whately:

The National Health Service Terms and Conditions Handbook Section 33: Balancing work and personal life sets out the approach employers should take to recognising employees needs for a positive work and life balance. All NHS employers must have a carer's policy to address the needs of people with caring responsibilities.

Carer policies include the provision for paid special leave for emergencies, including caring for dependents which includes children from birth to 14 years old or to 18 years old if they have a disability. Employers are expected to be as supportive and flexible as possible in these circumstances.

Guidance was also published by NHS Employers in late March 2020 for those staff who would need to self-isolate and to care for their child where their child contracted COVID-19. Staff in this position should continue to receive full pay.

■ **Social Services**

John McDonnell:

[\[146762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to bring forward proposals on the social care plan announced by the Prime Minister in July 2019; and whether he plans to bring forward a (a) White Paper or (b) Bill.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 4 February 2021]: As set out in the 2020 Spending Review, the Government is committed to the reform of the adult social care system and will bring forward proposals later this year, the form of which is to be confirmed.

■ St Giles Hospice: Finance**Michael Fabricant:** [\[140742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when an outstanding payment of £483,393 dating from July 2020 will be paid to St Giles Hospice of Whittington near Lichfield.

Helen Whately:

NHS England and Improvement are in the process of reconciling the final payments covering July 2020 from this scheme. NHS England and NHS Improvement have not yet set a date by which final payments will be made but advise they expect the process to be completed and payments made, including any final funding due to St Giles Hospice, shortly.

HOME OFFICE**■ Computer Misuse Act 1990****Carla Lockhart:** [\[158235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the Computer Misuse Act 1990 as a result of increased reliance on secure digital technologies during the covid-19 pandemic and the increased threat posed by cyber crime.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office keeps the Computer Misuse Act (CMA) under regular re-view. The Home Office have been engaged in ongoing discussions with relevant partners in law enforcement, government and private sector to ensure that the legislation continues to remain effective.

The Home Office and its operational partners continue to monitor and respond to the cybercrime threat during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also have a gov.uk page on coronavirus-related fraud and cybercrime. The page includes easy-to-follow steps for people to better protect themselves and signposts other relevant advice and tips.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Redbridge**Wes Streeting:** [\[158139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much funding has been provided to support the London Fire Brigade in the London Borough of Redbridge in each year since 2010.

Kit Malthouse:

The Home Office does not hold this information. The amount of funding allocated to London Fire Brigade is a matter for the Mayor.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE**■ Exports**

Emily Thornberry: [\[161707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 24 February 2021 to Question 154868, how the total for export wins reported by her Department in its 2019-20 annual report was calculated; and what that figure was by quarter.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 24 February 2021 to Question 154868, how the total for outward direct investment wins reported by her Department in its 2019-20 annual report was calculated; and what that figure was by quarter.

Graham Stuart:

An Export or Outward Direct Investment Win is a deal, contract, sale, or other specific type of agreement for an eligible UK company resulting from support provided by the Department for International Trade (DIT) and captures the expected value of the Win up to a five-year period. DIT creates a Win record using a digital framework. Once entered, the UK customer which received support is required to confirm the Win details. A Win counts once it has been confirmed. It is the sum of these wins (post validation) that is reported.

The Department is not able to provide, reliably, the breakdowns requested.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, pursuant to the 6 July 2020 publication Statistics on DIT export support objectives (2019 to 2020), what (a) proportion and (b) value of total export wins recorded by her Department in the first three quarters of 2019-20 were over £50 million.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, with reference to the 6 July 2020 publication Statistics on DIT export support objectives (2019 to 2020), what (a) proportion and (b) value of total export wins recorded by her Department in the first three quarters of 2019-20 were led by, or contributed to by, departmental teams in the English regions.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, with reference to the 6 July 2020 publication Statistics on DIT export support objectives (2019 to 2020), what her Department's validated export wins over £50 million recorded from the first to third quarters of the financial year 2019/20 were, by English region where that data is available.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, with reference to the 6 July 2020 publication Statistics on DIT export support objectives (2019 to 2020), what her Department's validated export wins over £50 million were from the first to third quarters of the financial year 2019/20, by target overseas region where that data is available.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, with reference to the 6 July 2020 publication Statistics on DIT export support objectives (2019 to 2020), what her Department's validated export wins over £50 million were from the first to third quarters of the financial year 2019-20, by size of UK business where that data is available.

Emily Thornberry: [\[161714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, with reference to the 6 July 2020 publication Statistics on DIT export support objectives (2019 to 2020), what her Department's validated export wins over £50 million were from the first to third quarters of the financial year 2019/20, by economic sector where that data is available.

Graham Stuart:

The Department is not able to provide, reliably, the breakdowns requested.

■ Minerals: Business

Steve Double: [\[160721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps she is taking to attract critical mineral companies to (a) invest in UK businesses and (b) set up business in the UK.

Graham Stuart:

The Department for International Trade (DIT) and partners in other Departments are working together to identify and target critical minerals extractive, processing and refining companies to invest in the UK, with a focus on the critical raw materials required to deliver Industrial Strategy objectives. Our Foreign Direct Investment strategy is similarly focused on securing investment in the extraction and, crucially, processing of these commodities. This includes support for the development of indigenous resources, such as lithium in Cornwall, through our Mining High Potential Opportunity programme, along with driving processing capacity.

■ Minerals: Procurement

Steve Double: [\[160719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what assessment she has made of the UK's global and regional competitiveness in relation to critical minerals supply chains.

Graham Stuart:

My Department has assessed the risks of potential disruption to the UK's critical minerals supply chains and agreed actions to mitigate these risks and make our supply chains better able to withstand future shocks.

Steve Double:[\[160720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, which international counterparts she is in discussions with on critical mineral supply chains.

Graham Stuart:

My Department is in regular discussions regarding critical mineral supply chains with a range of trading partners including Five Eyes allies. DIT and the Cabinet Office recently hosted an international conference to facilitate technical discussions with officials and experts on the global challenges surrounding critical mineral mining.

JUSTICE**■ Judiciary: Retirement****Justin Madders:**[\[158091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when his Department plans to publish the outcome of the consultation on Judicial Mandatory Retirement Age, which closed on 16 October 2020.

Chris Philp:

The Government's consultation on proposals to increase the mandatory retirement age for judicial office holders received over 1000 responses from the magistracy, the judiciary and their associated bodies, as well as stakeholders from the legal profession.

We are currently finalising the consultation response and will publish this shortly, with a view to legislate for any changes we decide to make at the earliest opportunity.

■ Magistrates' Courts: Barkingside**Wes Streeting:**[\[158132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many cases are awaiting trial at Barkingside Magistrates Court; and what estimate he has made of the current average waiting time for a case to reach the court.

Chris Philp:

Barkingside Magistrates' Court is in the North East London Local Justice Area, and all trials for that area are listed at Romford Magistrates' Court. There are currently 109 motoring cases and 395 non motoring cases awaiting summary trial at Romford Magistrates' Court, along with 53 Youth case trials.

The average waiting time for a case between charge and first listing at Barkingside Magistrates' Court is 17 days for bail cases with an anticipated guilty plea, 29 days

for bail cases with an anticipated not guilty plea. Where the police do not bail the defendant, the case will be listed before the next sitting of the court.

■ Prison Accommodation

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[157984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee by the Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service on the 11 February 2021, Q46, which prisons will receive a share of the 1,000 extra temporary accommodation places; and how many each prison will receive.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[157985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee by the Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service on the 11 February 2021, Q46, what the cost is of the 1,000 extra temporary accommodation places.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[157986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee by the Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service on the 11 February 2021, Q46, how many temporary accommodation cells, additional to the accommodation available in March 2020, he plans to have installed by 1 January 2022.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[157987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee by the Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service on the 11 February 2021, Q46, what lessons have been learnt on the (a) suitability and (b) value for money of temporary accommodation constructed within prison sites from the experience during the covid-19 outbreak to date.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[157988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee by the Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service on the 11 February 2021, Q46, what assessment he has made of the effect of increased use of accommodation within existing prison sites on access of residents to (a) healthcare, (b) education, (c) exercise and (d) association spaces and (e) other shared prison facilities over the next two years.

Alex Chalk:

As part of the Prime Minister's commitment announced on 30 June 2020 to 'Build, build, build', we have secured funding to design and build 1,000 additional temporary prison places. The Rapid Deployment Cells Project has been initiated to create a new design that can be quickly deployed to meet the technical and security standards of the closed estate. Funding has been secured to progress the Outline Business Case and we are working towards a final business case with costs to be informed by

professional service providers and cost consultants. This is an ambitious project that aims to deliver 1,000 additional prison places in the 2021/22 financial year.

The prisons that will benefit from this accommodation, along with the number of prison places that will be created at each location, have not yet been finalised. The installation and deployment strategy will follow from the final site selection, along with the suppliers of the accommodation. We will agree the dates on which this new accommodation will be installed in due course.

Our expectation is that we will begin installation of the first prison places in December 2021.

The temporary accommodation installed for COVID-19 has proven successful. It has contributed to the full implementation of the compartmentalisation strategy in the prison estate as part of the COVID-19 management strategy. Regarding the suitability of this type of accommodation, prisons have noted the benefits of a safe space in which to shield, isolate or remain distinct from the wider prison population, allowing key workers to remain in their roles while minimising the risks to the wider prison population. This type of accommodation has allowed prisons to reduce cell sharing and the use of shared sanitation. Residents have reported improvements in their mental health and appreciating the opportunities that this accommodation has offered. The accommodation installed for COVID-19 has only been suitable for Cat D and risk-assessed Cat C men and women. In order to make sure we have a design for accommodation that can be deployed quickly in the future, the Rapid Deployment Cells Project will design accommodation to meet Cat C security standards.

We have continually sought to identify value for money ways to purchase and install temporary accommodation, as required in our on-going and evolving response to the COVID-19 crisis. The interaction with the relevant supply chain and actual deployment of temporary accommodation has also assisted in evaluating how and where this type of accommodation may prove useful in the future. We continue to identify opportunities to achieve greater value for money, for example transitioning to mains electricity, rather than use of generators, where the temporary accommodation continues to be in use.

The temporary accommodation installed for COVID-19 did not increase operational capacity at prisons and therefore did not put any additional pressure on services already in place, such as healthcare, education, and other shared prison facilities. We did identify, however, that the use of the accommodation as shielding units required additional space for prisoners to associate and exercise in shelter, where necessary, away from the wider prison population. We have taken steps to put necessary provisions in place at each prison that requires it. If the existing temporary accommodation in prisons transitions into operational capacity, then in line with processes in place to increase capacity at a prison site, we will assess the level of ancillaries and services required (including staffing and healthcare) to support the change in population and make sure the appropriate provisions are in place.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE**■ Leader of the House of Commons: Written Questions****Kate Osamor:**[\[158992\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the time taken to answer Questions (a) 102133 tabled on 9 October 2020 and (b) 105481 to 105483 tabled on 19 October 2020.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg:

During the height of the pandemic, departments were under significant pressure when replying to written questions and correspondence and I had some sympathy with departments. Nevertheless, members must receive full and timely responses when they request information. I continue to raise the hon. members specific questions with the Department for Health and Social Care and have impressed upon it the need to answer these questions as a matter of urgency.

TRANSPORT**■ Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme: Non-domestic Rates****Rachel Hopkins:**[\[158238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will extend the Airport and Ground Operations Support scheme to cover business rates for 2021-22.

Robert Courts:

Government stands ready to support companies during this pandemic. Companies can draw upon a package of measures, including the Airport and Ground Operators Support Scheme (AGOSS) which opened for applications on 29 January to provide support to eligible businesses, covering the equivalent of their business rates liabilities or COVID 19 losses – whichever is lower – in financial year 2020/21, subject to certain conditions and a cap per claimant of £8m.

The Department recognises the severe impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on travel and work continues to understand how best the industry can be supported at this time.

My Rt Hon Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced this week that we are renewing the Airports and Ground Operations Support Scheme for a further six months from the start of 2021-22.

■ Cycling and Walking: Finance**Fabian Hamilton:**[\[157958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to his Department's publication, Gear change: A bold vision for cycling and walking, published in 2020, whether the target that half of all journeys in towns and cities being walked or cycled by

2030 replaces the target to double cycling and walking by 2025 in the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

It does not: The Gear Change vision and Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy aims are complementary. The second Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS 2) will be published once the Government has agreed its long-term spending plans for active travel at the next multi-year Spending Review. It will give a statutory basis to the vision outlined in the Gear Change plan, as well as setting out the financial resources available for cycling and walking and the other matters required by the Infrastructure Act 2015, including targets for cycling and walking. These plans will be formally set out to Parliament in due course.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Carbon Emissions**

Matt Western:

[\[159003\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a zero emissions vehicle mandate for manufacturers to produce, import or sell new electric vehicles.

Rachel Maclean:

The Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, published in November 2020, brought forward the end of sale date of new petrol and diesel cars and vans to 2030. It also announced that a Green Paper would be published later this year to consider the regulatory options available to deliver these phase out dates and support supply of electric vehicles to the UK market.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**

Matt Western:

[\[159002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to phase out the (a) EV Homecharge Scheme and (b) Workplace Charging Scheme after 2022.

Rachel Maclean:

At the Spending Review in November last year the Government allocated £275 million over four years to extend support for charge point installation at homes, workplaces and on-street locations, while reforming these schemes so that they target difficult parts of the market such as leaseholders and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Over the coming years the EVHS will be transformed to target people in rented and leasehold accommodation.

■ **Euston Station: High Speed 2 Railway Line**

Gavin Newlands:

[\[158969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish the total number of land and property acquisitions by High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd in connection with the development of London Euston station which were secured by (a) legal agreement with owners and (b) Compulsory Purchase Orders.

Andrew Stephenson:

(a) Nine interests have been or are currently being acquired by legal agreement with owners.

(b) Ninety-five interests have been or are currently being acquired by Compulsory Purchase Orders.

■ High Speed 2 Railway Line**Alexander Stafford:****[159058]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many residential properties have been acquired by HS2 Ltd by (a) compulsory purchase, (b) through private agreement, and (c) statutory blight in (i) Rother Valley and (ii) England.

Andrew Stephenson:

HS2 Ltd. does not classify its cases by property type, such as “residential” in this way. Properties frequently have a mixed use clarification or can contain more than one type of property.

i) With regards to properties acquired in the Rother Valley:

1. 0 properties have been acquired by compulsory purchase as this area is not currently covered by CPO powers. Such powers come post Royal Assent of a Bill.
2. 1 property has been acquired through Private Agreement.
3. 37 properties have been acquired via Statutory Blight (or the Express Purchase Scheme)

ii) With regards to properties acquired in England:

1. Information not held at a property level for compulsory purchase.
2. 60 properties have been acquired through Private Agreement.

600 properties have been acquired via Statutory Blight (or the Express Purchase Scheme)

■ High Speed 2 Railway Line: Compensation**Alexander Stafford:****[159059]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what proportion of properties required for the development of HS2 Phase 2b eastern leg have received full compensation in accordance with the Compensation Code.

Andrew Stephenson:

Until a Bill for the Phase 2b eastern leg has achieved Royal Assent and design development has concluded, the number of properties required for the Phase 2b eastern leg will not be finalised, therefore the proportion of properties cannot be estimated at this time.

Alexander Stafford:

[159060]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the average length of time is for HS2 Ltd to agree (a) a statutory blight and (b) a non-statutory property compensation with a property owner.

Andrew Stephenson:

a) For completed statutory blight and Express Purchase claims, the mean average of days it has taken from receiving the form of claim to date of acquisition approval is 356 days.

b) Rolling six month figures:

Need to Sell Scheme – 64 days

Rural Support Zone Scheme – 21 days

Alexander Stafford:

[159061]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the complaint process is for property owners who are dissatisfied with HS2 Ltd's handling of blight claims.

Andrew Stephenson:

Claimants are advised to contact the HS2 Helpdesk or their acquisition case manager in the first instance. Claimants can also submit a formal complaint to HS2 Ltd in line with its published complaints handling policy. Further details can be found here:

<https://www.hs2.org.uk/how-to-complain/>

Alexander Stafford:

[159062]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the process is for HS2 Ltd in agreeing the market value of properties through the (a) statutory blight and (b) non-statutory property compensation schemes.

Andrew Stephenson:

a) HS2 Ltd follows the statutory process for determining compensation under statutory blight in line with other Acquiring Authorities. In practice, the Acquiring Authority and claimant each appoint a surveyor to assess the unblighted market value of the property and the disturbance compensation. Each valuer will look at comparable property transactions and value the property disregarding the underlying scheme for which the CPO powers exist. The valuers will discuss their valuations, comparables and methodologies to explore the potential to reach an agreement. Where agreement cannot be reached, the Compensation Code provides for disputes as to the level of compensation to be determined by the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber).

b) For the discretionary schemes introduced by the Secretary of State, the valuation approach is set out in published guidance and provides for each party to commission a valuation from a Registered Valuer. Where the two valuations are within 10% of each other (calculated by taking the difference between the two values as a percentage of the higher value) the Secretary of State will offer a price that is the average of the two valuations. If the valuations differ by more than 10% (calculated

as above) an additional valuation will be obtained from HS2 Ltd's pool of valuers (chosen by the applicant). The third valuer will be provided with the previous reports for consideration, with the valuation figures themselves removed. The offer will be made on the average of the closest two valuations.

Alexander Stafford:

[\[159063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many complaints have been received from landowners in relation to the valuation of property in the HS2 (a) statutory blight and (b) non-statutory property compensation schemes.

Andrew Stephenson:

Valuation disputes fall outside of HS2 Ltd.'s formal complaints procedure as it is covered by other processes, whether in the Compensation Code or Government policy.

These areas include:

- matters set out in a contract with HS2 Ltd. or a company working for HS2 Ltd (for example, a licence for access to land or property);
- matters set out in English law (for example, the process set out for dealing with blight notices);
- the valuation of a property that HS2 Ltd are buying;
- matters to do with compensation HS2 Ltd are paying as a result of compulsory purchase; and
- reviews or appeals about decisions under any of HS2 Ltd's statutory or discretionary property schemes.

■ Motorways

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[159052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will launch a review into the safety of smart motorways; and will he make a statement.

Rachel Maclean:

We recognise the concerns around smart motorway safety and commissioned an urgent stocktake of the evidence which was published on the 12 March 2020. A package of 18 measures costing £500 million will allow us to retain the benefits of smart motorways while addressing the concerns that have been identified. The 18-point Action Plan includes the faster rollout of a radar-based, stopped vehicle detection (SVD) system across the all lane running motorway network, and national and targeted communications campaigns to further increase awareness and understanding.

The Secretary of State has asked for a one-year on report from Highways England setting out 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 be rapidly put in place.

■ Railway Stations: Pedestrian Areas

Kate Osamor:

[\[158995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to accelerate the installation of tactile paving on train platforms at mainline stations.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Platform edge tactiles are part of the scope for more than 100 accessible routes due to be installed under our Access for All programme by 2024. In addition, whenever the industry installs, replaces or renews platform infrastructure they are required to install tactiles.

I have asked Network Rail to work up a costed plan for a wider roll out of tactiles for stations where tactiles are not being delivered under another programme.

Liz Twist:

[\[159011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what funding will be made available for the acceleration of the installation of tactile paving at mainline rail stations.

Liz Twist:

[\[159012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will prioritise the installation of tactile paving at all mainline rail stations.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Platform edge tactiles are part of the scope for more than 100 accessible routes due to be installed under our Access for All programme by 2024. In addition, whenever the industry installs, replaces or renews platform infrastructure they are required to install tactiles.

I have asked Network Rail to work up a costed plan for a wider roll out of tactiles for stations where tactiles are not being delivered under another programme.

■ Road Traffic Control

Dean Russell:

[\[159054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the importance of advertising Traffic Regulation Orders in local newspapers to (a) the elderly and vulnerable, (b) other local residents and (b) local media organisations.

Rachel Maclean:

The most recent assessments we have made about Traffic Regulation Orders are in two reports. The first discovery research report was published in 2019 and laid the foundations for the second report available here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-regulation-orders-identifying-improvements-to-the-legislative-process-in-england.

Each of these reports considered the impacts on different groups of potential improvements to the legislative process.

The Department plans to consult on proposed reforms to Traffic Regulation Orders more generally later in 2021. An Impact Assessment will accompany this consultation.

■ Tyne and Wear Metro: Finance

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[157978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what additional financial provision has been made available to support the Tyne and Wear Metro between (a) April 2021 to March 2022 and (b) in subsequent years above the historic and agreed Metropolitan Rail Grant.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[157979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will grant additional funding to Nexus to support the cost of operating the Tyne and Wear Metro beyond March 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department for Transport has reviewed the recovery plans which light rail operators, including Nexus, submitted as part of receiving emergency Government funding, and will discuss those with each light rail operator in March. The Department continues to be in regular discussions with light rail operators to assess funding requirements beyond the currently agreed emergency funding package.

To date the Government has announced up to £41 million in Light Rail Revenue Restart Grant (LRRRG) scheme funding for the Tyne & Wear Metro for the period from March 2020 to the end of the 20/21 financial year.

TREASURY

■ Bank Cards

Pat McFadden: [\[159262\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent representations he has received on raising the limit for contactless spending to £100.

Pat McFadden: [\[159263\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment his Department has made of the risk of fraud in respect of raising the limit for contactless spending to £100; and if he will make a statement.

John Glen:

The Government's EU exit deal allows the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to change the legal contactless limits, which were previously set by the European Commission. On 3 March, the FCA increased the legal single contactless payment limit from £45 to £100.

The FCA undertook a public consultation ahead of taking its decision and has carefully considered the potential impacts on fraud from these changes. When the

contactless payment limits were last raised in Spring 2020 from £30 to £45 there was no significant recorded increase in fraud levels.

■ Directors: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas: [\[158904\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department has identified a method of income certification which would enable directors of micro limited companies to access support during the covid-19 crisis that accurately reflects previous income levels; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) rely on verified HMRC data to identify and target support to those in need. The data that would enable the Government to design a scheme for company directors, including who is a working director and what part of their income it would be appropriate to support, has not historically been and is not collected by HMRC because it has not been needed to administer the tax system. Information held by other bodies such as Companies House also does not in itself provide the verifiable data to target support to those in need. The Government has engaged closely with representative groups in an effort to overcome these operational constraints.

■ Help to Buy Scheme: Individual Savings Accounts

Thangam Debbonaire: [\[159327\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of making house purchases above £250,000 outside London eligible for Help to Buy ISA bonuses.

John Glen:

The Help to Buy: ISA scheme aims to help those that are struggling to save enough to get onto the housing ladder. The property price cap allows the Government to target support at the first-time buyers who need it the most. Since the scheme launched in 2015, 359,250 property completions have been supported through the scheme with a mean property value of £174,281, below the average first-time buyer house price of £204,964 and well within the property price cap outside London of £250,000.

■ Taxation

Caroline Lucas: [\[158905\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish the criteria used to determine the circumstances in which (a) self-certification and (b) a statement from an accountant are considered a reliable means of certifying a business or an individual's statement of income.

Jesse Norman:

The context for when and whether to use self-certification in a scheme design is important.

In relation to Self-Assessment HMRC have built up systems and processes over many years that mitigate the risks of fraud and error in Self-Assessment returns. This information has been used to identify those eligible for the SEISS, and thus eligibility for the scheme is not based on self-certification. The same is true for the CJRS.

Through the SEISS the Government has been able to support millions of self-employed people rapidly and effectively. The Government has based the populations eligible for CJRS and SEISS on data that it already holds and that can be quickly and easily verified at large scale.

Without these precautions, the support schemes would be at risk of delay, unmanageable operational overload through the need for manual processing, significant error and fraudulent attacks.

More widely, it is appropriate that the tax system make some qualified use of self-certification. For example, under the SEISS, self-certification helps to target support within the population identified through Self-Assessment returns better; it is not used to determine eligibility in the first place.

WORK AND PENSIONS■ **Jobcentres: Galashiels****John Lamont:**[\[158999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support she is providing to Galashiels Job Centre to further assist the unemployed.

Mims Davies:

Through our Plan for Jobs, the department is providing broad ranging support for all jobseekers. Currently, support includes the Kickstart scheme, Job Finding Support, Sector Based Work Academy Programmes and Job Entry Targeted Support in Scotland.

In addition, the government is investing an additional £150 million into the Flexible Support Fund, which will increase the capacity of the Rapid Response Service, supporting people through redundancy and providing additional local support to claimants by removing barriers to work such as travel expenses for attending interviews and child care.

Our Jobcentre Work Coaches provide support on finding a job, help with retraining or skills advice, CV, job applications and access to the new vacancies we record every day, as well as signposting to our Jobhelp website. We are increasing the number of Work Coaches in Jobcentre Plus by 13,500 by March 2021. With 17 new Work Coaches joining the team at Galashiels Jobcentre in January.

The Galashiels Jobcentre team are working closely with Scottish Borders College to identify and deliver suitable provision for local residents, and have also partnered with employers in the area to deliver Mentoring Circles and Sector-based Work Academy Programmes.

■ Kickstart Scheme

Seema Malhotra:

[\[158930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the oral evidence of the Minister for Employment at the Work and Pensions Committee of 11 February 2021, what steps her Department has taken to ensure that Kickstart scheme placements provide young participants with a positive experience; and what criteria her Department is using to assess whether such placements are providing that experience.

Mims Davies:

[Holding answer 2 March 2021]: The Department for Work and Pensions' is committed to delivering high quality Kickstart jobs across GB. We have put a rigorous approval process in place to ensure Kickstart jobs support young people to develop basic work skills, build their experience and CV. Ongoing customer insight work and regular contact between Kickstart Scheme participants and their work coaches is being undertaken. We will continue to gather insight and in due course, evaluate our findings.

■ Universal Credit

Justin Madders:

[\[158092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many universal credit claimants have had wages assigned to different assessment periods under the legislation introduced to comply with court ruling case no. C1/2019/0593.

Will Quince:

The amendment affects claimants who receive monthly wages. Where two payments in one assessment period is identified we take the required action.

Weekly figures of Universal Credit claimants who have their monthly-paid wages assigned to different assessment periods since the Universal Credit (Earned Income) Amendment Regulations 2020 came into force on 16th November 2020 are shown in the table below.

WEEK ENDING	VOLUME
22/11/2020	8
29/11/2020	43
06/12/2020	510
13/12/2020	392

WEEK ENDING	VOLUME
20/12/2020	180
27/12/2020	173
03/01/2021	544
10/01/2021	1186
17/01/2021	608
24/01/2021	316
31/01/2021	197
07/02/2021	540
14/02/2021	466
21/02/2021	243

The UC data supplied is derived from unpublished management information and a database which relies on manual input. This was collected for internal Departmental use only and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard. The data should therefore be treated with caution.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force and Seafood Exports Working Group

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[158880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the membership and terms of reference of (a) the Seafood Exports Working Group and (b) the Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 5 March 2021. The correct answer should have been:

Victoria Prentis:

The Seafood Exports Working Group has been established to monitor live issues (across the UK) arising from the end of the transition period and work with industry on required responses to minimise disruption to trade flows of seafood. The Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce has been established to address medium and longer term export issues faced by Scottish traders of seafood. The primary aim is to increase confidence in the seafood and aquaculture supply chain by ensuring medium and longer-term issues are resolved. The Terms of Reference for the Seafood Exports Working Group and the Scottish Seafood Exports Taskforce are attached.

Attachments:

1. [PQ 158880 Att 1- Seafood Exports Working Group Terms of Reference.pdf](#)

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Tigray: Sexual Offences

Sarah Champion:

[\[157130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that people who have been subject to sexual violence in the Tigray Region have access to (a) medical care and (b) support.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 3 March 2021. The correct answer should have been:

James Duddridge:

~~We note that the Government of Ethiopia has declared a zero policy on sexual violence and the stated intention to establish a national joint taskforce (including the Ministry of Defence with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth) to investigate alleged cases of sexual violence against women in Tigray. We will monitor the effectiveness of this taskforce in bringing perpetrators to justice. UK-funded aid agencies in Tigray are working hard to deliver support in challenging circumstances, including food, shelter, water and healthcare. The UK is currently working closely with~~

its partners to ensure that survivors have an increasing access to specialised services and justice. I re-enforced the urgency of the need for humanitarian access when I spoke with the Ethiopian Ambassador on 24 February.

We condemned in the strongest terms the reported killings of civilians and acts of sexual violence via a joint statement on Ethiopia with 41 other countries at the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council. We also note the statement on 21 January by Pramila Patten, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We support the UN's call for a "zero tolerance" policy for such crimes and we continue to call for independent, international, investigations into allegations of human right abuses. The UK is particularly concerned about the increased risks that conflict presents for women and girls in relation to gender-based violence and to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. We continue to lobby for the protection of women, girls and boys at official level. We encourage the Government of Ethiopia to invite an independent UN fact finding mission to support their current accountability effort on international law compliance.

We note that the Government of Ethiopia has declared a zero policy on sexual violence and the stated intention to establish a national joint taskforce (including the Ministry of Defence with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth) to investigate alleged cases of sexual violence against women in Tigray. We will monitor the effectiveness of this taskforce in bringing perpetrators to justice. UK-funded aid agencies in Tigray are working hard to deliver support in challenging circumstances, including food, shelter, water and healthcare. The UK is currently working closely with its partners to ensure that survivors have an increasing access to specialised services and justice. I re-enforced the urgency of the need for humanitarian access when I spoke with the Ethiopian Ambassador on 24 February.