



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 24 March 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:31 P.M., 24 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

■ **Bus Services: Restart Grant Scheme**

Emma Hardy:

[\[172110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department has issued guidance to local authorities to exclude coach tour operators from the Restart Payments; and if he will make a statement.

Paul Scully:

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

Coach Tour Operators are not eligible for the Restart Grant Scheme. This is because eligible businesses must offer in-person services, where the main service and activity takes place in a fixed rate-paying premises, in the relevant sectors.

However, they may be able to access discretionary support through the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). This funding gives Local Authorities the ability to provide support that suits their local area including to support those businesses not required to close but which have had their trade severely affected by the restrictions. My Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced an additional £425m will be made available via ARG meaning that more than £2bn has been made available to local authorities since November 2020.

Guidance was published for Local Authorities on 17th March for both the Restart Grants and the Additional Restrictions Grant, and guidance for the Additional Restrictions Grant identifies that group tour and coach operators can be considered for support through this funding.

■ **Carbon Emissions**

Luke Pollard:

[\[169958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency on his proposals for Net Zero Plus.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

The UK is already leading the fight against climate change as we work to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In setting our carbon emission ambitions, we take advice from the Climate Change Committee, an independent, statutory body which provides expert advice to Government on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Adapting to, as well as mitigating, the inevitable changes in our climate is

vital. That is why, we are taking robust action to improve the resilience of our people, economy and environment.

We work closely with Defra on net zero and support their work on adaptation. My Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State engages regularly with his DEFRA counterpart, including through the Climate Action Committees.

The Environment Agency plays an important role in helping to achieve net zero, for example, as part of the Nature for Climate Fund, it is planting over 850,000 trees, providing carbon savings that will help us to achieve our carbon budgets, while also helping to improve flood resilience and air quality and provide habitat for wildlife.

■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

Dr Matthew Offord:

[169837]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, (a) how many and (b) which countries are being assisted by the UK to procure covid-19 vaccines.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The UK is proud to have joined COVAX, an international initiative to support the discovery, manufacture, and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines across the world.

COVAX is an international alliance co-led by the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and World Health Organization (WHO), with participation from over 180 countries.

The UK is one of the largest bilateral donors to the COVAX Advanced Market Commitment (AMC), which will give lower and middle-income countries equitable access to vaccines that are developed. The UK has committed £548 million to the COVAX AMC.

COVAX has so far shipped over 29 million COVID-19 vaccines to 46 countries.

Full details of UK's GAVI commitments can be found here at <https://www.gavi.org/investing-gavi/funding/donor-profiles/united-kingdom>.

Full details of COVAX's rollout can be found here at <https://www.gavi.org/covax-vaccine-roll-out>.

■ **Overseas Aid: UK Research and Innovation**

Dr Rupa Huq:

[172097]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what impact assessment he has undertaken on the reduction in Official Development Assistance on funding for UKRI.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government recognises the importance of supporting international research partnerships, and supporting the UK research sector. Our commitment to research and innovation has been clearly demonstrated by my Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget announcement of increasing investment in R&D across

government to £14.6bn in 2021/22, and as has been set out in our Integrated Review ambitions, international collaboration is central to a healthy and productive R&D sector.

We are working with UKRI and all our Global Challenges Research Fund and Newton Fund Delivery Partners to manage the impact of next year's ODA allocation.

■ Postal Services

Bob Blackman:

[\[169834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that everyone is able to access their post safely, including those affected by (a) domestic abuse and (b) homelessness.

Paul Scully:

The Government recognises the importance of access to post for all users, especially those that are homeless or suffer at the hands of domestic abuse. The universal postal service is intended to provide an accessible postal service for all.

Royal Mail operates two services to help vulnerable customers have access to their post. Its redirection service can be specially accessed by people with personal safety concerns and its PO Box service provides options for customers designed to meet specific circumstances and preferences.

The Government will continue to work with Royal Mail and the Post Office on how vulnerable groups can best be supported.

■ Renewable Energy

Alexander Stafford:

[\[169993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what progress he has made on the preparation of Contracts for Difference Auction Round 4; what changes he is planning on support for wave and tidal technology deployment in the UK; and if he will make a statement.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

As announced by my Rt. Hon. Friend the Prime Minister in October 2020, the next Contracts for Difference (CfD) auction round (Allocation Round 4) is due to open in late 2021. Preparations for the round are ongoing, and we will publish the timetable for the round and information on allocation round parameters later this year.

The Government recently ran a Call for Evidence inviting views on the scope for marine technologies across the UK. This concluded on 30th September 2020 and we are currently reviewing the responses received. Wave and tidal stream projects remain eligible to compete in pot 2 for CfD auctions and will be considered in the wider context of setting auction parameters.

■ TrustMark**Drew Hendry:** [\[172091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions his Department has held with Trust Mark about implementing additional consumer protections within the scheme's system, in the context of reports of individuals registering businesses with scheme providers running multiple limited companies that have not met works standards and have subsequently ceased trading prior to consumers complaints being resolved.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

In order to become a business registered with TrustMark, the business must demonstrate to the TrustMark Scheme Provider that it complies with the rigorous TrustMark Framework Operating Requirements. These requirements have clear conditions, including the disclosure of any previous and/or present business interests that will impact upon the registration of the business. This has been established to prevent manipulation of the Government Endorsed Quality Scheme including through accessing multiple schemes where compliance with the Framework Operating Requirements has not been demonstrated.

As part of the ongoing development of the Scheme, the requirement for consumer protection for all works being undertaken via a TrustMark Registered Business, is being strengthened to provide greater protection to the consumer. TrustMark is currently in discussion with multiple parties to develop improved provisions to ensure that both consumers and businesses are suitably protected as a requirement of the TrustMark Scheme.

■ Water Power**Alexander Stafford:** [\[169994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he plans to take to support the development of the onshore supply chain for tidal and wave technologies; and if he will make a statement.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

Tidal and wave technologies could have a potentially important role in the long-term decarbonisation of the UK, however, they will have to reduce their costs sufficiently, to compete with other renewable technologies. We are committed to growing a development of a competitive UK supply chain in parallel with our plans for increasing the deployment of renewable electricity generating technologies. We are continuing to consider policy related to these technologies in light of the information received from the recent Marine Energy Call for Evidence on the potential of marine energy projects.

Alexander Stafford: [\[169995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will set out a target for wave and tidal stream energy from 2030 onwards.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

Following our recent Call for Evidence which invited views on the potential of marine energy projects, we are now considering policy related to wave and tidal energy in light of the information received from the Call for Evidence. Wave and tidal stream projects remain eligible to compete in pot 2 for CfD auctions.

Weddings: Coronavirus**Adam Holloway:**[\[172027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether weddings will be restricted to places of worship, public buildings and outdoor settings that are already open at Steps 2 and 3 of the Roadmap.

Paul Scully:

At Step 2, which will be no earlier than 12 April, weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are permitted for up to 15 people in COVID-19 Secure venues that are permitted to open or where a broader exemption applies. Receptions can take place with up to 15 people in the form of a sit-down meal and in any COVID-19 Secure outdoor venue that is permitted to open. Such receptions must not take place in people's private gardens or public outdoor spaces.

At Step 3, which will be no earlier than 17 May, weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are permitted for up to 30 people in COVID-19 Secure venues that are permitted to open. Receptions can also proceed with up to 30 people in a COVID-19 Secure indoor venue, or outdoors.

Further information on the venues where weddings and civil partnership ceremonies may take place can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships>.

CABINET OFFICE**Blood: Contamination****Wayne David:**[\[172021\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what discussions he has had with (a) the Welsh Government and (b) the other devolved administrations on implementing a framework for compensation for the victims of contaminated blood to ensure that there is parity of support for all the victims across the UK.

Penny Mordaunt:

Work is currently underway across the government on a number of infected blood issues. I will update the House shortly on progress.

The (then) Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster wrote to the Chair of the Infected Blood Inquiry on 2 July 2018, approving legal support funding for people infected, and

their families. Details of how to apply for funding are on the Inquiry's website - [Statement of Approach: Legal Representation at Public Expense.](#)

■ **Census: Internet**

Charlotte Nichols: [\[169972\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that Census 2021 is accessible to people who do not have internet access.

Chloe Smith:

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

Attachments:

1. UKSAs response to PQ169972 [UKSA's final response to PQ169972 v1.pdf]

■ **Civil Servants: Stoke on Trent**

Jonathan Gullis: [\[169977\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to deliver civil service jobs in Stoke-on-Trent.

Julia Lopez:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to PQ [129140](#) on 22 December 2020. A number of announcements have been made on Places for Growth locations. This includes the Cabinet Office establishing a second headquarters in Glasgow, a joint headquarters for FCDO in East Kilbride and a new economic campus in Darlington. Further announcements for other departments will be made in due course.

■ **Civil Servants: Termination of Employment**

Esther McVey: [\[168902\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the process of notification is to hon. Members on the loss of civil service jobs in their constituency.

Julia Lopez:

Departments are responsible for their individual operating model decisions.

The Government has committed to ensuring that the administration of Government is less London-centric by relocating 22,000 Civil Service roles out of central London and into the regions and nations of the United Kingdom by the end of the decade.

■ **Import Controls: UK Trade with EU**

Kerry McCarthy: [\[158873\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the readiness of (a) inland and (b) port border infrastructure by July 2021 for the introduction and enforcement of EU import controls.

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[158874\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's research and analysis, Reasonable Worst Case Scenario for borders at the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, published on 23 September 2020, whether his Department plans to update that research for the introduction of the enforcement of import controls on EU goods from July 2021; and if he will make a statement.

Kerry McCarthy:

[\[158876\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the effect on UK trade flows of the end of the EU Exit transition period.

Penny Mordaunt:

I refer the hon. Member to the Written Statement published on 11 March.

(<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-03-11/hcws841>).

The Reasonable Worst Case Scenario planning assumptions published on 23 September related specifically to the potential for disruption to freight travelling at the end of the Transition Period. The Government is using a broad range of approaches to planning and preparing for the next phases of border controls.

Freight levels have increased since the beginning of the year, and volumes are now at the equivalent 2020 levels. The Border Operations Centre in the Cabinet Office is monitoring border flow.

■ UK Trade with EU: Northern Ireland

Stephen Farry:

[\[171772\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the EU27 states are aware that there is no requirement for CN22 customers labels on parcels or packets being directly sent from Northern Ireland.

Penny Mordaunt:

We have set out through clear guidance the temporary arrangements that apply for movements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is for the European Union to ensure that it and Member States are upholding their obligations in full, including with regard to the fact that movements from Northern Ireland into the EU should not be subject to any controls that do not otherwise apply to movements within the EU.

We also engage regularly with operators regarding these arrangements, during which we have underlined the fact that parcel movements from Northern Ireland directly to the EU should be treated on the same basis as movements within the EU. However it is for the European Union to ensure that the rights of Northern Ireland operators are given full effect in EU Member States. We have and will continue to raise any issues in that regard with the Commission.

DEFENCE**■ Armed Forces: Complaints**

Stephen Morgan: [\[172113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many of the 35 recommendations made by the Service Complaints Ombudsman in Annual Reports 2016 – 2019 have been implemented.

Johnny Mercer:

Since 2016, the Service Complaints Ombudsman has made 35 recommendations in total across four annual reports; 12 in 2016, 10 in 2017, nine in 2018, and four in 2019. Of those 35 recommendations, to date, we consider 21 to have been implemented either in whole or in part (eight from 2016, four from 2017, six from 2018 and three from 2019). Four recommendations made in the 2017 annual report were considered by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) but were not accepted, however, we assured the Ombudsman that they would remain under active consideration by us. The remaining 10 recommendations are currently being considered by the Service Complaints and Service Justice Transformation team following the Wigston Review into Inappropriate Behaviours. Regular updates are provided by MOD to the Service Complaints Ombudsman on the progress of all open recommendations.

■ Inappropriate Behaviours in the Armed Forces Review

Stephen Morgan: [\[172112\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress his Department has made on implementing the recommendations of the Wigston Review.

Johnny Mercer:

The Secretary of State for Defence commissioned a review to assess progress implementing the Wigston recommendations which was published in December 2020. Led by Danuta Gray (Non-Executive Board Member), it concluded that good progress had been made. The Unacceptable Behaviours Progress Review can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unacceptable-behaviours-progress-review>

In particular, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has established a whole-force bullying, harassment, and discrimination helpline, introduced 'active bystander' training to give people the tools to intervene when they witness or hear of unacceptable behaviour, updated policy guidance, and widened the remit of our Diversity and Inclusion Advisers to clearly cover civilians.

We have also agreed reforms to the Service Complaints System and conducted research into the over-representation of women and black and ethnic minority personnel within it.

We remain committed to implementing the Wigston and Gray review recommendations. The MOD is currently working to roll-out climate assessments across Defence, conduct sexual harassment surveys in each of the single Services,

and introduce an improved investigations service for bullying, harassment, and discrimination complaints.

■ **Military Aircraft: Satellite Communications**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[172022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to help ensure RAF operations based overseas are protected from hostile attempts to interrupt satellite communications to and from aircraft taking off and landing.

James Heappey:

The United Kingdom Government takes a multi-layered approach to detect, understand and deter state threats below the threshold of war through persistent engagement overseas. When aircraft are deployed overseas on operations a wide range of multi-layered Force Protection measures are put in place to ensure their safety.

■ **National Security: Research**

Carla Lockhart:

[\[171780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what criteria his Department uses to determine good faith security research, as outlined in his Department's Vulnerability Disclosure Policy.

Jeremy Quin:

A Vulnerability Disclosure Policy (VDP) is a 'see something, say something' process to allow security researchers to report a vulnerability in MOD systems (found through e.g. ethical hacking). MOD launched its VDP in December 2020.

Practically, 'to act in good faith' means working to find vulnerabilities in IT systems without causing damage to them, disrupting their operation, or exfiltrating data in an unauthorised manner. There are no set criteria for acting in good faith because the situations are context dependent. However, it does not give researchers permission to act in any manner that is inconsistent with the law, or which might cause the MOD or partner organisations to be in breach of any legal obligations.

■ **Nuclear Weapons**

Caroline Lucas:

[\[170597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the plans in the Integrated Review to increase the overall nuclear warhead stockpile ceiling from 180 to no more than 260, what proportion of the additional warheads will be low-yield warheads capable of tactical use; and if he will make a statement.

Jeremy Quin:

The Integrated Review increased our nuclear weapons stockpile ceiling from no more than 225 to no more than 260. None of the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons are designed for tactical use during conflict. The nuclear deterrent exists to deter the

most extreme threats to our national security and way of life, which cannot be deterred by other means.

■ Roll-on Roll-off Ships

Ian Mearns:

[\[170607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the publication of the Integrated Review on 16 March 2021, what steps he taking to procure strategic roll-on roll-off ferry services for the armed forces after the contract with Foreland Shipping expires in December 2024.

Jeremy Quin:

Consideration will be given in due course to the best value for money commercial strategy to deliver Sealift Capability post 2024. It would be inappropriate to comment further in advance of that work being undertaken.

■ Trident Missiles

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[170558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the increase in nuclear warheads announced in the Integrated Review on 16 March 2021, (a) how many extra Trident Missiles will be required, (b) at what cost and (c) by which date.

Jeremy Quin:

The UK has sufficient Trident II D5 missiles for its needs. The recent announcement in the Integrated Review to limit our overall nuclear weapon stockpile to no more than 260 warheads does not change this.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Football Index

Ben Lake:

[\[170705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions he has had with the Gambling Commission on the gambling platform Football Index.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Gambling Commission has suspended the licence of BetIndex Ltd, the operators of Football Index, while it carries out an investigation.

The Secretary of State and I have met the Gambling Commission twice to discuss this issue, and have requested and received urgent reports.

■ Football: Coronavirus

Sir George Howarth:

[\[171518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent representations he has received on the effect of covid-19 restrictions on (a) lower league and (b) amateur football.

Nigel Huddleston:

Sports and physical activity are incredibly important for our physical and mental health, and are a vital weapon against coronavirus. We are in regular contact with The Football Association about lower league and amateur football, and they are also invited to regular meetings of the Sport Working Group which I chair. Through these meetings we are continuing discussions with representatives from the sport and physical activity sector about the steps required to reopen indoor and outdoor sports facilities.

Many football clubs have benefited from the multi-billion pound package of cross-sector business support from the Government that has enabled many sports clubs and leisure businesses to survive, including the furlough scheme and business interruption loan scheme. Sports have accessed many hundreds of millions of pounds of support through this.

As part of this, Sport England has provided £220m directly to support community sport clubs and exercise centres through this pandemic, via a range of funds including their £35m Community Emergency Fund. This support is available to both men's and women's clubs with the latest figures showing £10.5m has already been awarded to over 1,500 football clubs. This sector support was recently boosted by an extra £50m to help grassroots sports clubs and organisations as part of Sport England's new strategy Uniting the Movement.

National League clubs have also received further government support from the Sport Winter Survival Package. Steps 3-6 of the National League system will receive up to £10 million of grant support to protect the immediate future of approximately 850 clubs over the winter period. We also confirmed the second tranche of funding from the Package will provide an initial 19 National League Step 1-2 clubs with loans offers worth up to £5.4 million. Further awards will be announced in due course.

At Budget, the Chancellor also announced that the Government will provide an initial £25 million to support the growth of grassroots football, which will be enough to build around 700 new pitches across the UK.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[\[172092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, for what reason isolated apartments used for holiday accommodation with a shared lobby area not permitted to open on 12 April.

Nigel Huddleston:

Self contained accommodation can open in Step 2 of the Roadmap, which will be no earlier than the 12th April. This is defined as accommodation in which facilities (such as kitchens, sleeping facilities and indoor communal areas such as lobbies, staircases and corridors) are exclusive to single households and their support bubbles.

This means certain types of holiday accommodation cannot open until Step 3, including apartments that can only be accessed via a shared lobby area.

The Government's reopening plan is to take a cautious, gradual and phased approach to reopening. This will reduce the risk of unsustainable pressure on the NHS, potentially leading to another lockdown. In aggregate, Step 2 prioritises outdoor activity over indoor activity, and activity within households rather than between them, based on the scientific advice about likelihood of transmission. Travel and tourism inherently involves a lot of travel across the country, as well as household mixing. Allowing all guest accommodation and household mixing to reopen at Step 2, before more of the population is vaccinated, could substantially increase the risk of the NHS being put under unsustainable pressure.

The Government has put in a number of measures to assist the sector prior to reopening, including the extension of the furlough scheme, VAT cut and business rates relief as well as the new restart grants.

■ Internet: Safety**Chi Onwurah:**[\[172076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Oral Statement of 16 March 2021, Official Report, column 175 on Integrated Review, what legislative proposals on powers to tackle (a) collective online harms and (b) threats to democracy will be contained in the online safety bill.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government is clear that the new online harms regulatory framework must be targeted and proportionate. As announced in the full government response to the Online Harms White Paper, published in December, our new laws will apply to content or activity which could cause significant physical or psychological harm to an individual. The duty of care will apply to threats to our democracy, including some disinformation and misinformation content where this meets the definition of harm.

The duty of care will not apply to content and activity which only causes harm to society in general as this would be difficult to define and could incentivise excessive takedown of legal material. It is essential that the legislative measures also uphold and protect freedom of expression online. An overly broad scope risks imposing disproportionate regulatory burdens and could dilute efforts to tackle the most serious illegal activity including CSEA and terrorist content.

However, it is, and it always will be, an absolute priority to protect our democratic and electoral processes. That is why the Government has robust systems in place to

protect the UK against foreign interference. These bring together government, civil society and private sector organisations to monitor and respond to interference, in whatever form it takes, to ensure our democracy stays open, vibrant and transparent.

■ **Misinformation and Suicide: Internet**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[169791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps the Government is taking to block websites which (a) promote misinformation on and (b) encourage suicide.

Caroline Dinenage:

In December 2020, we published the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, which sets out new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online.

Under a new legal duty of care, in-scope companies will need to remove and limit the spread of illegal content and protect children from harmful content and activity online. This includes illegal content on websites which encourages or incites suicide online, with all companies expected to take swift and effective action against such content. Companies will also be required to tackle illegal disinformation, for example, where this contains direct incitement to violence, such as encouraging burning down phone masts on the false premise they spread coronavirus.

We also recognise that some users, including young adults, may be exposed to harmful content that relates to self-harm or suicide which does not breach a criminal threshold. The major companies will also have a duty to tackle legal but harmful content, including material which relates to self-harm or suicide, which can have a serious psychological and emotional impact. These companies will also need to set out what content, including misinformation and disinformation, is acceptable in their terms and conditions. If what is appearing on their services does not match up with the promises made to users, Ofcom will be able to take enforcement action.

■ **Mobile Phones: Rural Areas**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[173009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what proportion of the £1 billion budget for the Shared Rural Network will be invested during stage one.

Matt Warman:

The Shared Rural Network programme will be delivered in two parts running in parallel. The first phase will see the four Mobile Network Operators collectively invest over £530 million in a shared network of new and existing phone masts. This will help tackle partial not spots - areas where there is currently coverage from at least one, but not all operators. Starting second and running in parallel the government is investing over £500 million to go even further to significantly reduce total not-spots - those hard-to-reach areas where there is currently no coverage from any operator.

The mobile network operators have already commenced work on the first element of the programme, which is funded by the industry and are on track to eliminate the majority of partial not-spots by mid-2024.

Now that funding has been released for the total not-spot element of the programme, the government and the operators remain confident that combined coverage will be delivered to 95% of the UK by the end of 2025, with areas around the UK starting to see improvements to 4G coverage long before completion.

■ Museums and Galleries: Coronavirus

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[169984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department plan to take to encourage visits to museums as covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government's roadmap to recovery reaffirms its commitment to publish a Tourism Recovery Plan in support of the sector. The Government intends to set out proposals in the spring, including plans for a world class marketing campaign to welcome back visitors to the UK as soon as it is safe to do so.

DCMS has been working closely with the museums sector to ensure that they are ready for reopening. The government published the roadmap on 22 February, which sets out a step-by-step plan to ease restrictions in England cautiously. Under the roadmap, we seek to reopen outdoor elements of museums and galleries in Step 2 (no earlier than 12 April), with indoor elements at these attractions opening at Step 3 (no earlier than 17 May).

The design of the roadmap has been informed by the latest scientific evidence and seeks a balance between our key social and economic priorities, whilst preserving the health and safety of the country. The scientific evidence shows that opening too early or too quickly risks a further lockdown.

■ Parliament Square: Flags

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[171534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of flying the flags of the Commonwealth countries in Parliament Square for the full week around Commonwealth Day in 2022.

Caroline Dinenage:

Each year, on Commonwealth Day the department arranges for the flags of Commonwealth countries to be flown in Parliament Square. There are currently no plans for this to be extended for the full week around Commonwealth Day in 2022. Any decision on changes to the current flag flying programme would need to be agreed with FCDO, No10 and the Royal Household.

■ Technology: Entertainments

Sir George Howarth:

[\[171516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the scale of the contribution to the UK economy from the technical support industry to the entertainment industry.

Caroline Dinenage:

The Government recognises the importance of the technical support and production services industry to the entertainment sector, and its contribution to the UK economy. We appreciate that the Covid-19 pandemic presents a significant challenge to this industry.

The Government undertakes a monthly assessment of the GVA of the cultural sector as a whole. It is estimated that GVA in the cultural sector shrank by 28% in March to December 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. In comparison, DCMS sectors (excluding Civil Society) shrank by 18% and the UK economy as a whole shrank by 11%. These monthly GVA estimates are based on incomplete information and should only be used to illustrate general trends, rather than be taken as definitive measures.

The Government recognises that there are many individuals and freelancers working across these industries. This is why the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) were extended to September 2021 at Budget. Also announced at Budget were changes to the SEISS scheme, meaning that 600,000 more people are now able to claim for the first time.

Through the CJRS, the Government is currently supporting 315,000 employees in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sectors.

The Department has remained in close contact with the technical support industry and production services sector throughout the pandemic and continues to hold regular meetings with a wide range of companies and representative organisations to understand the challenges they are facing and provide Government support targeted to their needs.

EDUCATION

■ Children: Social Services

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:

[\[172082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the consultation on the renewal of Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, how many responses supported the extension.

Vicky Ford:

The public consultation to seek views on extending and amending the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 received 212 responses.

Analysis showed that the majority of respondents agreed with the proposals to extend existing flexibilities in relation to virtual visits, medical reports (for fostering and adoption) and the minimum frequency of Ofsted inspections.

The table below sets out the number of respondents on each flexibility:

FLEXIBILITY	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS IN AGREEMENT TO EXTEND EXISTING FLEXIBILITIES
Medical Reports	202
Virtual Visits	193
Ofsted inspection cycle	176

The government's response to the consultation has been published and is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-adoption-and-children-coronavirus-amendment-no-2-regulations-2020>.

■ Health Education: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas:**[169830]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the minimum skills and knowledge pupils should have by the end of the 2020-21 school year on Relationships and sex education and health education taking into account lost teaching time for lessons as a result of covid-19 restrictions; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

We want to support all young people to be happy, healthy and safe and to equip them for adult life and to make a positive contribution to society.

Given the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department clarified that the statutory requirement for relationships, sex and health education allows schools flexibility over when to discharge their duty in teaching the new curriculum within the first year of compulsory teaching.

Schools are required to provide some relationships, sex and health education to all secondary age pupils in the academic year 2020-21, and to provide some relationships and health education to all primary age pupils. We expect schools to adjust the curriculum to prioritise topics which support pupils to re-engage with their peers in school. These might include mental wellbeing, physical health and fitness, respectful relationships and being safe.

The Department invested up to £2 million in the financial year 2019-20 and is investing up to £2.4 million in the current financial year to fund a support programme of work to help schools in their preparations. The support programme includes online training modules to train non-specialist teachers, an implementation guide published in September 2020, and grant funding to 21 lead Teaching Schools covering all eight regions to deliver a train the trainer and peer support programme to primary and secondary schools in their region. This programme has supported over 2,000 schools since May 2020, and we expect around a further 1500 schools to be helped by spring 2021. Additionally, we have made lessons available on the Oak National Academy for pupils to access at online.

Given that some schools may have only just begun teaching the new statutory curriculum, we do not believe now is the right time to ask Ofsted to undertake a review of relationships, sex and health education. The subjects are covered in the Ofsted framework and when routine inspections resume, Ofsted will monitor the quality of education, including the quality of teaching and how assessment is used to embed knowledge. Specific content on consent and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender+ (LGBT+) rights and relationships are embedded in the curriculum and the teacher training modules available on GOV.UK.

The Department is monitoring the confidence of teachers to deliver the new curriculum through school surveys.

■ Health Education: Finance

Caroline Lucas:

[\[169828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what funding his Department will allocate to support schools to deliver Relationships and sex education and health education in the financial year 2021-22; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is committed to supporting schools to deliver high quality teaching of relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education. We anticipate spending up to £2.4 million in this financial year to develop a programme of support for schools. Further funding beyond this financial year is to be confirmed.

■ Health Education: Training

Caroline Lucas:

[\[169831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many teachers have accessed training as part of the £6 million in funding allocated to implementation support for Relationships and sex education and health education in financial year 2019-20; and how many hours of training in that subject those teachers have received.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is committed to supporting schools to deliver high quality teaching of Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education. We anticipate spending up to £2.4 million in this financial year to develop

a programme of support for schools. Further funding beyond this financial year is to be confirmed.

The Department has published training materials to help teachers to build their subject knowledge, increase their confidence and the quality of their teaching practice. Thirteen training modules and one further module to support pupils with special educational needs and disability are now published on GOV.UK. These can be freely accessed and downloaded via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health>. The Department is also grant funding 20 Teaching Schools, covering all eight Regional School Commissioner regions, to deliver a Train the Trainer / Peer Support cascade training programme to schools in their regions. The training support can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health#training-support-for-schools>.

The Department's training materials and programme of training and support are designed to support schools to train other teachers within their own settings. We are unable to confirm the total number of teachers that have accessed the training or how many hours of training have been received. As a broad indication of the take-up so far, our modules have been downloaded 35,536 times in the past 12 months and we anticipate that by the end of March 2021, around 3,500 schools will have accessed the Train the Trainer / Peer Support training, which they are then expected to cascade within their own schools.

Caroline Lucas:

[169832]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make Relationships Education, Sex and Relationships Education and Health Education available as a free teacher subject specialism training course; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

The Department is committed to supporting schools to deliver high quality relationships education in primary schools, relationships and sex education in secondary schools, and health education in all state-funded schools. To support schools in their preparations, the Department is investing in a central support package to help all schools to build their subject knowledge, increase their confidence and the quality of their teaching practice .

The Department has published advice for teachers on how to implement the relationships, sex and health education curriculum, alongside teacher training modules to help all teachers increase their confidence and quality of teaching. Thirteen training modules and one further module to support pupils with special educational needs and disability are now published on GOV.UK. These can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health>. These materials are freely available to all teachers.

The Department is grant funding 20 Teaching Schools, covering all eight Regional School Commissioner regions, to deliver a Train the Trainer / Peer Support cascade training programme to schools in their regions. All Teaching Schools have plans in

place to deliver training until March 2021. The training support can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health#training-support-for-schools>.

■ Music: Education

Simon Jupp:

[171781]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the future provision of funding for Music Education Hubs.

Nick Gibb:

Music Education Hubs have a vital role to play not only in core school music but also ensuring our children have access to all the benefits of a wider musical education through instrumental lessons and ensembles. They have acted swiftly and innovatively to support schools through the COVID-19 outbreak, including the continuation of continuing professional development to classroom teachers.

Following the one year Spending Review settlement announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 15 December 2020, the Department will continue to fund Music Education Hubs for the financial year 2021-22. Funding has been confirmed with Arts Council England and all Music Education Hubs organisations have recently been updated on this matter. An announcement on the national funding will be made shortly, followed by further details on specific funding allocations issued to individual hubs.

■ Pupils: Disability

Lilian Greenwood:

[172060]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 18th March 2021 to Question 168885 on Pupils: Hearing Impairment, what specific guidance and advice has been issued to (a) schools, (b) colleges and (c) nurseries on how to meet the duties they have to make reasonable adjustments for deaf and disabled pupils since 8 March 2021.

Nick Gibb:

The Department's advice on face coverings is outlined clearly in our guidance, which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>; and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>.

As the guidance outlines, those who rely on visual signals for communication, or communicate with or provide support to such individuals, are currently exempt from any requirement to wear face coverings in education and childcare settings or in public places. The same exemptions apply in education and childcare settings and we expect staff, pupils and students to be sensitive to those needs, noting that some

people are less able to wear face coverings and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

Education and childcare settings should follow the system of controls as outlined in our guidance and put in place proportionate control measures that suit their individual circumstances, based on a thorough risk assessment. This should include making reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and students to support them to access education successfully.

■ Pupils: Hearing Impairment and Lipreading

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the effect of new guidance on mask wearing in schools during the covid-19 outbreak on (a) pupils who are deaf and (b) other pupils who rely on lipreading or facial expressions for communication.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government has taken to ensure that school staff are familiar with the guidelines concerning exemptions to mask wearing during the covid-19 outbreak for (a) deaf pupils and (b) other pupils who rely on lipreading or facial expressions for communication.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the merits of including reasonable adjustments for (a) deaf pupils and (b) other pupils who rely on lipreading or facial expressions within the guidance for schools on mask wearing during the covid-19 outbreak alongside the guidance on exemptions.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential that the statement on the effectiveness and safety of transparent face coverings in the guidance for schools on mask wearing during the covid-19 outbreak may discourage some teaching staff from using such masks.

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. The Department is continuing to work to ensure that our policy is based on the latest scientific and medical advice, in order to develop comprehensive guidance based on the PHE-endorsed 'system of controls' and to understand the effect of these measures on staff, pupils and parents.

The Department recently published updated guidance for schools to support the return to full attendance from 8 March, which includes updated advice on face coverings. This guidance explains the actions school leaders should take to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their school. The guidance can be found

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

As the guidance outlines, where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated, the Department recommends that face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

From 8 March, the Department recommends that in schools and colleges where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn in classrooms unless social distancing can be maintained. The Department is recommending these additional precautionary measures for a for a time limited period until Easter.

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

Individuals working with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate are exempt from wearing a face covering in environments where they are normally required.

Transparent face coverings, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate, can also be worn. There is currently very limited evidence regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings, but they may be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

As with all measures, they will be under review and guidance will be updated as necessary.

■ Secondary Education: Coronavirus

Philip Davies:

[169813]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of masks on levels of (a) learning and (b) development in secondary school students.

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. The Department is continuing to work to ensure that our policy is based on the latest scientific and medical advice, in order to develop comprehensive guidance based on the PHE-endorsed 'system of controls' and to understand the effect of these measures on staff, pupils and parents.

On 22 February, the Department published 'Evidence summary: COVID-19 - children, young people and education settings', which includes a section on face coverings, details of which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-summary-covid-19-children-young-people-and-education-settings>.

The Department recently published updated guidance for schools to support the return to full attendance, which includes updated advice on face coverings. The guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>.

In addition, the Department also published updated guidance on the use of face coverings in education for schools and other education institutions that teach people in Years 7 and above in England which can be found here:

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

As the guidance outlines, in settings where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and pupils when moving around the premises, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Since 8 March, the Department has recommended that face coverings should also be worn by staff and pupils in classrooms and in other learning environments, such as workshops, and during activities, unless social distancing can be maintained.

The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of COVID-19 droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others.

We recognise that the wearing of face coverings may impact communication, but, on balance, increased use of face coverings will strengthen the current safety measures in place in schools following the increased transmissibility of new COVID-19 variants and whilst prevalence remains high in the community.

We are recommending these additional precautionary measures for a for a time limited period until Easter. As with all measures, we will keep this under review and update guidance as necessary.

■ Sex and Relationship Education: Gender Based Violence

Caroline Lucas:

[169825]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the reopening of the Home Office consultation on Violence Against Women and Girls call for evidence, what discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the effect of good quality Relationship and Sex Education and Relationship Education on tackling some of the underlying causes of male violence against women; whether any new joint work between his Department and the Home Office is planned as part of the development of the Government's next Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, meets regularly with Cabinet colleagues to discuss the Department's agenda.

Tackling violence against women is a top priority for this Government and we are determined to step-up our response to prevent these crimes and improve support and outcomes for victims.

The Department welcomes the reopening of the Home Office's consultation on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and would encourage everyone to take part, if they have not already done so. Officials will continue to work closely with the Home Office on the development of the Government's forthcoming Tackling VAWG Strategy, which will be informed by the responses received to the call for evidence. The new VAWG Strategy will focus on prevention, drive forward improvements in the effort to target perpetrators, respond to the changing nature of crimes against women and girls and, most importantly, will continue to put victims at the heart of our approach.

The Department is supporting teachers to deliver the statutory relationships, sex and health education curriculum through a support programme which consists of an implementation guide, online teacher training modules and virtual training led by teaching schools. The newly published 'Being Safe' module covers issues such as rape, harassment and abuse.

■ Students: Loans**Daniel Zeichner:**[\[167884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of higher education students in England in the academic year 2020-21 have had applications for a full maintenance loan declined as a result of not being able to provide information about their parent or guardian's financial circumstances because the definition of estrangement, as outlined in the current Student Support Regulations, was not met.

Michelle Donelan:

The government is aware of the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 outbreak will have on some students. I have written to universities and other higher education (HE) providers to highlight the vulnerability of estranged students and ask them to prioritise this group for additional support.

The Student Loans Company (SLC) does not hold readily available data on the number of people who applied for means-tested living costs support but did not provide household financial information to support their application and then subsequently made a maintenance loan application on the basis of being estranged from their family.

The SLC data for new and returning full-time undergraduate students for the 2020/21 academic year suggests that 7,917 applicants originally stated they were estranged when applying for a maintenance loan. Of these, 598 applicants (7.55%) have so far been awarded only the non-means tested basic rate of maintenance loan because

they have either not demonstrated they were estranged or otherwise independent, or they have not provided any household financial information.

7,319 of the 7,917 applicants (92.45%) have so far been awarded their entitlement as an estranged student, as they requested. Students who have so far been awarded the non-means tested basic rate of maintenance loan only may be awarded a higher rate maintenance loan if they provide the required information at a later point in the academic year.

All eligible students qualify for a partially means-tested loan for living costs. Students on the lowest incomes, including most students assessed as estranged from their parents, will qualify for the maximum loan for living costs which has been increased by 2.9% for the current 2020/21 academic year and 3.1% for 2021/22 to record levels in cash terms.

The government has meanwhile worked closely with the Office for Students (OfS) to help clarify that HE providers can draw upon existing funding this academic year to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students. HE providers are able to use OfS Student Premium funding worth around £256 million towards student hardship funds. We have also made an additional £70 million of student hardship funding available to HE providers this financial year. HE providers will have flexibility in how they distribute the funding to students, in a way that will best prioritise those in greatest need.

Additional bursaries are offered by some HE providers for students who are estranged from their families.

I would be happy to meet with the hon. Member for Cambridge to discuss this matter.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agricultural Machinery: Auctions

Alicia Kearns:

[\[169975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when the Government plans to allow farm machinery auctions to resume as covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Victoria Prentis:

Auctions of livestock or agricultural equipment have been permitted through the present lockdown; however, these auctions should be carried out virtually or by telephone where possible. If an auction cannot go ahead virtually or by telephone, then auction houses should only admit people who need to be there for business purposes, work purposes or if another permitted exemption applies.

The Government has set out its intention to ease the rules on in-person attendance at auctions, no earlier than 12 April. At Step 2, people should only visit indoor auction houses with people from their own household or support bubble, unless they are there for business purposes, work purposes or if another permitted exemption

applies. People can visit outdoor auctions, which includes those held on farm premises, in groups of up to six people or with one other household.

Outdoor gatherings must be limited to 6 people or 2 households, and no indoor mixing will be allowed unless otherwise exempt. This does not limit a permitted event to a maximum of 6 people or 2 households in total, it solely limits people from attending the event in a group of larger than 6 people or 2 households.

At Step 3, no earlier than 17 May, people will be able to visit indoor auction houses in a group of up to six or with one other household. Further information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reopening-businesses-and-venues-in-england/reopening-businesses-and-venues>.

At all Steps, auction houses should take the necessary measures to ensure they are Covid-19 Secure: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/closing-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england>.

■ Avian Influenza: Disease Control

Luke Pollard:

[169035]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure the continued enforcement of restrictions on chickens and other birds in response to avian flu concerns.

Victoria Prentis:

Effective animal disease control is one of Defra's key priorities.

In response to the increasing risk of avian influenza incursion into poultry and other captive birds in GB, Avian Influenza Prevention Zones (AIPZ) were put in place in each of the GB administrations on the 11 November 2020. These require people who keep birds to ensure they have enhanced biosecurity measures in place. In response to a further increase in the risk additional measures requiring all the birds to be housed indoors came into force across GB on the 14 December 2020. Following a reduction in the risk of avian influenza incursion in both wild and kept birds to medium, the 31 March 2021 will be the last day birds in GB will be required to be housed as part of the AIPZ, however the AIPZs will remain in force across GB and all other biosecurity measures set out in the AIPZs will remain a legal requirement until further notice. Biosecurity guidance and a biosecurity self-assessment checklist to assist all bird keepers in complying with the new rules are available on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu>.

Local Authorities have the responsibility to ensure compliance with the AIPZ and other avian influenza controls. We have established an enforcement working group with representatives from local authorities, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and GB policy leads. This Group has met regularly throughout the current avian influenza outbreak to share knowledge and expertise.

Defra Ministers and officials talk regularly to representative organisations. We post the latest advice, key messages and situational updates on [our gov.uk guidance](#)

[page](#), social media channels, issue national, local and trade press releases and have [a rolling gov.uk news story](#). The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer and others have given media interviews to raise awareness of the disease control measures that have come into force.

■ Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Darren Jones: [\[169943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress has been made on bringing forward legislative proposals to ban new licences for badger culling in England.

Darren Jones: [\[169944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the Written Statement of 27 January 2021, HCWS738 on Bovine TB, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of cutting short extant badger culling licences at the same time as he plans to ban new licences from being issued in 2022.

Victoria Prentis:

In January 2021 we launched a consultation on the next phase of bovine TB eradication strategy as part of our objective for TB-free status in England by 2038. The consultation includes proposals to stop issuing intensive cull licences for new areas after 2022 and could see new four-year licences, after two-years of culling, be revoked after a progress evaluation by the Chief Veterinary Officer.

The consultation also includes proposals to restrict supplementary badger control licences to two years and to prohibit the issuing of new licences for areas licensed after 2020.

The consultation closes on 24 March 2021 and a government response and next steps will be published thereafter. Changes to the intensive and supplementary cull licences will be implemented by Natural England through revised guidance from Defra, which we are also consulting on. Details can be found at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/bovine-tb-2020/eradication-of-btb-england/>.

■ Carbon Emissions

Luke Pollard: [\[169957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency on his proposals for Net Zero Plus.

Luke Pollard: [\[169959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans he has to adopt the concept of Net Zero Plus as advocated by the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency.

Rebecca Pow:

The Secretary of State has regular, productive conversations with Sir James Bevan, the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, about a range of operational and policy issues. This includes net zero. Sir James' speech on More than Net Zero reflects the government's commitment to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. Both mitigating and adapting to climate change is essential if we are to meet this goal and government is taking action to deliver on this. This is why mitigating and adapting to climate change is one of the ten goals in the 25 Year Environment Plan. Mitigation and adaptation are also both embedded into other goals, such as air quality and thriving plants and wildlife.

The UK is already leading the fight against climate change by delivering on our world-leading target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Whilst we continue to reduce our contribution to climate change, we are also taking robust action to improve the resilience of our people, economy and environment.

Our second National Adaptation Programme (NAP) (a five-yearly requirement under the UK Climate Change Act 2008) was published in 2018 setting out how we will address climate change risks in the following five years. It follows from the second Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) published in 2017. The NAP includes actions in a broad range of areas, including the natural environment, infrastructure, people and the built environment, business and industry, and local government.

The UK co-convened December's Climate Ambition Summit to galvanise global action towards a resilient, net zero emissions future. Alongside our updated Nationally Determined Contribution, the UK became one of the first countries in the world to fulfil a key commitment of the Paris Agreement by publishing our first Adaptation Communication. The Adaptation Communication sets out what we are doing to prepare for the effects of climate change at home and support those facing impacts overseas.

■ Chemicals: Regulation**Colum Eastwood:**[\[172124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to Answer of 25 February to Question 156629, what steps he is taking to consult (a) non-governmental organisations from Northern Ireland and (b) other non-governmental organisations on the new Chemicals Strategy set out in Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

Rebecca Pow:

Following the end of the Transition Period and our departure from the EU, the Government, working with the Devolved Administrations, is developing an ambitious Chemicals Strategy which will set out our immediate priorities, and provide a framework for any actions we will need to take to achieve safer and more environmentally sustainable management of chemicals for present and future generations.

As we develop our Strategy, we are continuing to gather evidence and engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including environmental and human health NGOs from across the UK. We will set out next steps in due course.

■ Fisheries: Finance

Luke Pollard: [\[169960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the £100 million fund for fishing industry upgrades, whether his Department plans to make allocations to the nations of the UK based on the Barnett formula or national share of fishing opportunities.

Victoria Prentis:

We will make an announcement on the £100 million fund shortly. The money will modernise and rejuvenate the industry, support economic growth for our coastal communities and strengthen the long-term sustainability of the sector. It is our intention to ensure the sector benefits from this investment in all parts of the UK.

■ Pesticides: Exports

Daisy Cooper: [\[169966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy to ban the export of pesticides not allowed in the UK or the EU to (a) India and (b) other countries; and whether he has made an assessment of the (i) health and (ii) environmental impacts of those pesticides.

Victoria Prentis:

Pesticides may be used in the UK if the active substance has been approved and the product has been authorised. Assessments for approval and authorisation cover potential risks to health and to the environment.

The export from the UK of pesticides is regulated under the Great Britain Prior Informed Consent (PIC) regulatory regime for the export and import of certain hazardous chemicals. Companies intending to export any of these chemicals from the UK must notify the importing country via the exporter's Designated National Authority. For Great Britain, the Designated National Authority is the Health and Safety Executive.

The exchange of information that PIC provides allows the importing countries to make informed decisions on the import of those chemicals for their specific circumstances and on how to handle and use them safely.

■ Rural Areas: Crime

Alicia Kearns: [\[169974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support local police forces in tackling (a) fly-tipping and (b) other rural crime; and

how many incidents of fly-tipping have been recorded in England and Wales in the last two years.

Rebecca Pow:

Fly-tipping is a crime which blights local communities and the environment, and we are committed to tackling this unacceptable behaviour.

Enforcement against fly-tipping is mainly carried out by local authorities, and we expect them to investigate all incidents of fly-tipping, including those incidents on private land. In recent years we have bolstered local authorities' powers to tackle fly-tipping, such as by introducing the power to issue fixed penalty notices and to stop and seize vehicles of suspected fly-tippers. Our 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy set out our strategic approach to prevent, detect and deter waste crime.

Defra chairs the National Fly-Tipping Prevention Group, which includes representatives from the police force, local authorities, and organisations representing landowners, such as the National Farmers Union, National Trust, and Country Land and Business Association. The National Fly-Tipping Prevention Group shares a common aim to help prevent and tackle fly-tipping and share best practice.

The Environment Bill includes several measures to help tackle waste crime. The Bill will ensure agencies and authorities can work more effectively to combat waste crime through better access to evidence and improved powers of entry. These new powers will help ensure waste criminals, such as illegitimate waste operators reliant on fly-tipping for income, are held accountable for their actions

The Government recognises that there can be particular challenges in responding to rural crime, and so to drive down crime in rural and urban areas, we are recruiting an additional 20,000 officers over the next three years, with 4,000 of these officers already on our streets. To aid with the biggest recruitment drive in decades and to ensure that the criminal justice system can deal with the results, we are investing £85 million in the Crown Prosecution Service.

We also welcome the rural affairs strategy published by the National Police Chiefs' Council in July 2018. This sets out the operational and organisational policing priorities for local police forces in respect of tackling crimes that predominantly affect rural communities.

Local authorities reported 975,631 incidents of fly-tipping in England in 2019/20, this was an increase of 2% from the 957,157 incidents reported in 2018/19. These statistics are available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fly-tipping-in-england>. Waste is a devolved matter and I can therefore only comment on incidents of fly-tipping in England.

■ Tree Planting: Climate Change**Julian Sturdy:**[\[169850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of including fast-growing Sequoia and Giant Redwood trees in the Government's tree planting and climate change programmes.

Rebecca Pow:

The UK has a robust and widely welcomed forestry standard in place – the UK Forestry Standard. This is the UK governments' guide to sustainable forestry. It is based on international scientific evidence. The relevant public authority in each UK country assesses woodland creation proposals against this standard before giving approval to such schemes. This robust regulatory framework provides a high level of scrutiny to protect landscapes and the wider environment to ensure the right tree is planted in the right place for the right reason.

Both species are included in the Ecological Site Classification Decision Support System to aid the selection of species suited to site conditions. It is accessible online via a web browser to help guide forest managers and planners to select ecologically suited species to sites.

There is some limited experience of growing both species in British conditions. The Coast Redwood is available from some forest nurseries and is being used by Forestry England on land they manage.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Brightway Holdings: Malaysia****Bill Esterson:**[\[171586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the oral contribution of the hon. Member for Sefton Central of 18 March 2021, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Malaysian Government's investigation into the involvement of Brightway Holdings in modern slavery.

Nigel Adams:

The Government has not made an assessment of allegations of Brightway Holdings involvement in modern slavery in Malaysia nor of the Malaysian Government's investigations of the company, which are still ongoing.

The UK is committed to ending modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking worldwide by 2030. In Malaysia, NHS Supply Chain works with suppliers of personal protective equipment (PPE) to increase awareness of the issues and risks that can exist in supply chains and to provide guidance around managing labour standards and adherence to NHS Supply Chain's Supplier Code of Conduct.

The UK has funded projects in Malaysia through the Home Office's Modern Slavery Innovation Fund (£248,000 in 2020/21), including responsible recruiting in public

sector supply chains, workers representation and partnership with the Ethical Trading Initiative.

■ India: Agriculture

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 January 2021 to Question 133032, what assessment he has made of whether the Indian Government's response to the recent farmers' protest movement in that country has been (a) proportionate and (b) legal.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the effect of proposed farming laws in India on global environmental standards.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[169816\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential effect of proposed farming laws in India on poverty levels in rural areas in that country.

Nigel Adams:

We recognise the interest in the Indian Government's agricultural reform programme, and we respect India's democratic process, which includes the ability to debate and peacefully protest. Agricultural reform is a domestic issue for India and it is not for the UK to make public assessments about the efficacy of these reforms.

■ Jonathan Taylor

Mr Andrew Mitchell: [\[172016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent support his Department and the UK consulate in Croatia have provided to whistleblower Jonathan Taylor.

Wendy Morton:

I raised Mr Taylor's case with the Monegasque Foreign Secretary and the Croatian State Secretary for European Affairs on 13 November 2020 and sought assurances that both authorities would treat Mr Taylor fairly. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) officials are providing ongoing consular support to Mr Taylor. Consular officials continue to seek updates from the Croatian courts. In December 2020, the British Ambassador in Zagreb met Mr Taylor to discuss his concerns and explain how the FCDO could assist him, and the Acting Deputy Head of Mission spoke to Mr Taylor on 10 March.

Mr Andrew Mitchell: [\[172017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the (a) French and (b) Monegasque Governments about

the extradition of whistleblower Jonathan Taylor in relation to the European Convention on Extradition 1957.

Mr Andrew Mitchell: [\[172018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department has made to the Monaco Authorities on the potential conducting of virtual or online proceedings relating to the whistleblower Jonathan Taylor's case.

Wendy Morton:

As set out in the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, we cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, or bypass their laws, just as we would not accept similar interference here. The FCDO cannot seek to interfere in Monegasque court processes. Any concerns about the way in which Mr Taylor might be able to give evidence are a matter for the Monegasque legal system and Mr Taylor's lawyers. As part of our consular assistance to British nationals overseas we can raise concerns about individuals on diplomatic channels. I raised Mr Taylor's case with the Monegasque Foreign Secretary on 13 November 2020 to seek assurances that he would be treated fairly. Monaco provided direct assurances to Croatia in January.

■ **Mozambique: Violence**

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[170761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Mozambican counterpart on the ongoing violence in that country.

James Duddridge:

The UK is deeply concerned by the deteriorating security situation in northern Mozambique, and the increasing attacks by groups with links to Islamic extremism. We are supporting the Government of Mozambique to address the drivers of insecurity and violence and have provided £19m of humanitarian and development support to those displaced by the conflict. I [Minister Duddridge] spoke to Foreign Minister Macamo on 4 February to raise the need for Mozambique to follow through on investigations of human rights abuses by all sides involved in the conflict. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon also spoke to Foreign Minister Macamo on 11 March when he reaffirmed that we would continue to work with Mozambique on their counterterrorism efforts and underlined the importance of respect for human rights.

■ **Overseas Aid**

Ian Mearns: [\[172058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed reduction in the foreign aid budget on (a) the Voluntary Service Overseas and (b) other charities and schemes that help people volunteer on projects around the world.

Wendy Morton:

The impact of the global pandemic on the UK economy has forced us to take the tough but necessary decision to temporarily reduce our aid budget. We are now working through the implications of these changes for all individual programmes and partners, including Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO).

Volunteers and volunteering organisations like VSO make an important contribution. We have offered VSO a short-term funding extension for the Volunteering for Development programme, while the review process continues.

■ Sri Lanka: Sanctions**Dr Rupa Huq:****[172098]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) Magnitsky sanctions are imposed on perpetrators of war crimes in Sri Lanka and (b) refugees are not forced to return to Sri Lanka.

Nigel Adams:

The UK's Global Human Rights sanctions regime offers a powerful tool to hold to account those involved in serious human rights violations or abuses. It is not appropriate to speculate on who may be designated in the future as to do so would reduce the impact of the designations.

The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it, in accordance with our international obligations under the Refugee Convention and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Refugees who are at risk of persecution or serious harm in their country will not be expected to return there. Protection is normally granted where a claimant has a well-founded fear of persecution under the Refugee Convention or their circumstances engage our obligations under Article 3 (ECHR).

The UK government remains concerned about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and the lack of progress on justice and accountability, and actively raises its concerns with the government of Sri Lanka, both privately and publicly. On 23 March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a new resolution on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. This UK-led resolution makes clear the international community's continued commitment to these important issues. It calls on Sri Lanka to make meaningful progress on accountability and human rights. It also enhances the role of the UN in monitoring the situation and collecting evidence of human rights violations that can be used in future accountability processes

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE■ **Coronavirus: Quarantine**

Daniel Zeichner: [\[165576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the guidance from NHS England and NHS Improvement to chief executives on 2 March 2020 stating that staff should receive full pay while in self-isolation due to the covid-19 outbreak, including bank staff and sub-contractors, who have to be physically present at an NHS facility to carry out their duties, applies to workers employed by Sodexo at NHS Testing sites.

Helen Whately:

The testing sites run by Sodexo had not been established at the time of NHS England and NHS Improvement's letter of 2 March 2020.

As Sodexo is an independent organisation, they are able to adopt those terms and conditions.

■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

Sir Desmond Swayne: [\[168813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will update <https://www.gov.uk/get-workplace-coronavirus-tests> to enable employers who are sole traders to register via that webpage to order free rapid lateral flow coronavirus tests for their employees.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 18 March 2021]: Sole traders can register for rapid lateral flow testing in their workplace and order tests online. However due to the status of these sole trader businesses, we are currently unable to validate/approve via the site at the moment. Sole traders should provide the Department with the following information to p-and-psector@dhsc.gov.uk:

- Name of sole trader;
- Registration number or equivalent of sole trader;
- Size or number of employees;
- Email of main contact; and
- Industry/sector.

Once approval is granted, sole traders are able to order rapid lateral flow testing kits to be sent to their place of work through the standard online portal.

Emma Hardy: [\[169011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether it is mandatory for a person to get a covid-19 test in the event that they are found to have broken national lockdown restrictions.

Helen Whately:

It is not mandatory for a person to have a COVID-19 test if they are found to have breached national restrictions.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[133728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that the elderly who receive regular daily at home care are prioritised for covid-19 vaccinations in line with those who receive similar care in care homes.

Andrew Rosindell:[\[133729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that elderly patients receiving hospital care are prioritised for covid-19 vaccinations in line with those who receive similar care in care homes.

Nadhim Zahawi:

By mid-February, all elderly people who receive care at home had been offered the vaccine. Elderly patients receiving hospital care were offered the vaccine if clinicians deemed it safe for them to receive it.

Sarah Champion:[\[134439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the process is for arranging a covid-19 vaccination for carers employed directly by their client rather than by the NHS, a local authority or a private company.

Nadhim Zahawi:

[Holding answer 13 January 2021]: All frontline health and social care workers are eligible regardless of who they are employed by as long as they are providing care and support to someone who is clinically vulnerable to Covid-19. This includes social care workers providing care in people's own homes, day centres, care homes for working age adults or supported housing; whether they care for clinically vulnerable adults or children; or who they are employed by, whether private companies, charities, local authorities or the NHS.

If a carer is caring for multiple patients particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, the carer would be considered a frontline social care worker and therefore eligible for vaccination as a part of cohort 2.

Local authorities and employers will work together to identify frontline social care workers that are eligible to receive the vaccine, including directly employed personal assistants.

The Department advise self-employed social carer workers to contact the Adult Social Care lead for their Local Authority at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-consent-form-and-letter-for-social-care-staff>.

■ Musculoskeletal Disorders: Remote Working**Apsana Begum:**[\[154667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate has made of the number of musculoskeletal issues arising from home-working arrangements during the covid-19 outbreak; and whether his Department is taking steps to develop a strategy to tackle those issues.

Edward Argar:

No such estimate has been made.

We will continue to monitor prevalence and treat musculoskeletal conditions, taking into account long standing best practice guidance in this area, including from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

■ NHS Test and Trace**Navendu Mishra:**[\[140313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much money in total has been awarded by the Government to companies for NHS Test and Trace contracts.

Helen Whately:

As of 18 January 2021, NHS Test and Trace has signed 407 contracts worth £7 billion with 217 public and private organisations.

■ Schools: Coronavirus**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[167359\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of establishing a system by which a negative PCR test for covid-19 can overrule a positive lateral flow test conducted at a school.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 16 March 2021]: Recent evaluation of lateral flow tests suggests they are at least 99.9% specific which means that the risk of false positives is extremely low.

Tests taken on test sites, such as on school and college grounds, do not currently need confirmation by polymerase chain reaction testing. This is because these tests are done in a supervised environment where the individual being tested swabs themselves under supervision of a trained operator, and the trained operator processes the test and reads the result.

HOME OFFICE**■ Belarus: Asylum****Daniel Kawczynski:****[172029]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the total number of political asylums granted by UK to citizens of Belarus was in (a) 2019 and (b) 2020.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office publishes data on asylum applications in the '[Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on the number of the initial decision on asylum applications are published in tables Asy_D02 of the [asylum and resettlement detailed datasets](#).

Please note, the data relates to all initial decisions on asylum applications, regardless of reason. The definition of asylum, as used by Immigration Statistics Quarterly release, can be found in the asylum section of the [user guide](#).

Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate to December 2020.

Additionally, the Home Office publishes a high-level overview of the data in the '[summary tables](#)'. The 'contents' sheet contains an overview of all available data on asylum and resettlement.

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

■ Educational Visits: Germany**Sir Desmond Swayne:****[169777]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to allow German School parties on short term visits to the UK to use identity cards as accepted travel documents at the UK border.

Kevin Foster:

EEA identity cards are among the least secure documents seen at the UK border and are, as a rule, not as secure as corresponding national passports. They continue to dominate detection figures for document abuse at the border.

The Government is committed to strengthening the security of our border, so we phase out the use of EU, EEA and Swiss national identity cards as a valid travel document for entry to the UK.

From 1 October 2021, EU, EEA and Swiss nationals will require a passport to travel to the UK unless they have status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), are frontier workers, S2Healthcare Visitors or Service Providers from Switzerland. These groups will still be able to use national identity cards for travel until at least 31 December 2025.

Making an exception to this for German school parties would mean treating a particular group of EEA citizens whose rights are not enshrined in the withdrawal

agreements more generously than other EEA citizens, and more generously than students from other countries.

We do not accept identity cards as a travel document from any other nationalities. This means we expect the millions of people who visit the UK from outside the EU (including the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) each year to hold a passport. We will now expect those visiting from EEA countries to do the same.

We have provided almost a year's notice for this change to allow people to plan ahead and obtain a passport, if they need to, before they travel.

■ Home Office: Stoke on Trent

Jonathan Gullis: [\[169978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to deliver civil service jobs in her Department to Stoke-on-Trent.

Kevin Foster:

The Home Office employs Civil Servants across the UK and is already a major employer in some towns and smaller cities. The Home Office intends to go beyond the conventional Government footprint and size to identify appropriate locations where we could locate future job opportunities.

This will further enhance representation within the Home Office of the communities we serve and support the economic growth across the UK. The long term plans are being developed and we will share them in due course.

■ Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

Rachael Maskell: [\[172093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to enable paramedic advanced practitioners working in hospital settings to prescribe medication they can administer in the community.

Kit Malthouse:

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs provided advice to Ministers on the prescribing and administration of specified controlled drugs by paramedics in October 2019. The Home Office is working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to consider the advice. Although the Government, and DHSC in particular, is prioritising work addressing COVID-19, we intend to respond in the near future.

■ Radicalism: Internet

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[169990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle extremist propaganda online.

Kevin Foster:

We know terrorists and extremists exploit a wide range of platforms to spread their views and to incite terrorist attacks. The Government has been clear there can be no safe spaces for terrorists to promote and share their extreme views online.

To tackle terrorism online, the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU), based in the Metropolitan Police, refers illegal terrorist content to tech companies for removal. Within the Home Office, we work closely with our international partners and engage with tech companies to discuss how platforms can best safeguard their users from terrorism, while also encouraging tech companies work together as one coordinated body through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), to reduce the availability of terrorist content online.

On the 15th December the Government published the Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation. This sets out the new expectations on companies to keep their users safe, including that companies must tackle illegal content on their platforms and protect children from harmful content and activity online. The major platforms will need to tackle legal but harmful content accessed by adults, through their terms and conditions.

The Online Safety Bill, which will give effect to the regulatory framework outlined in the Full Government Response, will be ready this year.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Affordable Housing: Bolton****Yasmin Qureshi:****[172051]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many affordable homes were built in Bolton in each year since 2010.

Christopher Pincher:

The number of affordable homes delivered by local authority, broken down by new build and acquisitions can be found in Live Table 1011, which can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Imran Ahmad Khan:****[169983]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions he has had with religious leaders on supporting uptake of the covid-19 vaccine among followers of their religion.

Eddie Hughes:

Alongside the Minister for Vaccines, MHCLG ministers have met regularly with faith leaders to discuss the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, address any concerns raised by leaders and encourage take up throughout religious communities. This has

included discussion at the Places of Worship Taskforce and wider faith leader roundtables. We have also encouraged faith leaders to volunteer places of worship to become vaccine sites and support take up in their local community

My Department is also providing regular FAQ updates to faith leaders to be disseminated through their networks, including tackling the spread of disinformation on the vaccine.

■ Free Zones

Bridget Phillipson: [\[172066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made, for each of the port operators involved in the eight successful Freeport bids, in view of the responsibilities they will exercise for ensuring goods on site follow the correct customs processes, as to whether those companies are fit and proper to exercise such responsibilities in the context of (a) their corporate record and (b) their beneficial owners; and if he will make a statement.

Bridget Phillipson: [\[172067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made, for each of the port operators involved in the eight successful Freeport bids, in view of the responsibilities they will be required to be authorised to exercise for ensuring goods on site follow the correct customs processes, of the resources that will be necessary for HMRC to deploy in order for it to exercise appropriate due diligence in terms of (a) evaluating and assessing their application for authorisation to exercise these responsibilities and (b) monitoring and inspecting their exercise of these responsibilities, and if he will make a statement.

Bridget Phillipson: [\[172070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the requirement that freeport operators are fit and proper persons to allow excise goods to enter and be processed in the Freeport customs site in line with the existing excise rules and conditions, how he plans to assess that requirement; if he will publish the criteria by which that assessment is made; how he plans to ensure that approved operators continue to meet that standard after initially being found to do so; how he plans to ensure that he is aware of any change in the fitness and propriety with which such responsibilities are discharged; and what assessment he has made of the implications for the freeport designation in the event that an operator is found not to be a fit and proper person to exercise such responsibilities (a) before and (b) after the Freeport commences operation.

Luke Hall:

Freeport customs sites will be authorised by the UK Government. There are a number of requirements, including robust security requirements and ensuring goods remain under customs control, that both operators and businesses will have to demonstrate as part of the authorisation. Additionally, to protect the UK's customs

compliance regime, HMRC and Border Force will continue to conduct compliance checks on goods within the Freeport customs site.

Work is ongoing to develop the HMRC operational processes that are required to support the introduction of Freeports. Once completed, this work will inform the resources required for HMRC to authorise customs sites.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the requirement that freeport operators maintain current obligations under the Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds (Information on the Payer) Regulations 2017, how he plans to ensure that (a) those operators are able to do so when the Freeport starts operating, (b) those operators continue to do so once the Freeport starts operating, (c) he is aware of any change in the competence and propriety with which such responsibilities are discharged; how he plans to resource his policies on those matters; and if he will make a statement.

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[172069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the requirement that freeport operators meet obligations under the OECD Code of Conduct for Clean Free Trade Zones and the anti-illicit trade and security measures therein, what plans he has to ensure that (a) those operators are able to do so when the Freeport starts operating, (b) those operators continue to do so once the Freeport starts operating, (c) he is aware of any change in the effectiveness with which such responsibilities are discharged; how he plans to resource his approach to those issues; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall:

The UK plays a key role in tackling cross-border illegal activity and this is not going to change. Freeports are commonly used across the globe, and we have learned from these examples to build upon our current expertise.

Freeports will have to adhere to the OECD Code of Conduct for clean Free Trade Zones and must maintain the current obligations on Freeports set out in the UK's Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds (Information on the Payer) Regulations 2017.

Freeport customs sites will be authorised by the UK Government and must meet robust security requirements to mitigate risks. These bodies will be able to withhold or withdraw authorisation if individual sites have not met the required standards. HMRC and Border Force will continue to conduct compliance checks on goods within the Freeport customs site.

Each Freeport Governance Body will need to maintain a record of all the businesses operating, or applying to operate, within the tax site. This record will need to be readily accessible by HMRC, the NCA, and Border Force operatives. It will also need to be kept up to date and contain information about the beneficial owner of the business.

It will also need to actively manage security risks across physical, personnel, and cyber domains, and work with MHCLG, HMRC, Border Force, the NCA, and Home Office to conduct an annual audit of the security measures in place and any breaches.

■ Free Zones: Foreign Companies

Bridget Phillipson: [\[172065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate he has made of the number of approved bids for Freeport bids were (a) led by and (b) involved companies with overseas (i) registration and (ii) beneficial ownership.

Luke Hall:

My Department led the fair, open and transparent selection process to determine successful Freeport locations in England. As part of that process, officials evaluated the memberships of bidding coalitions and proposed governance structures with respect to the requirements set out in the Bidding Prospectus

Freeports will be hubs for international trade and investment, attracting new businesses to the UK and bringing jobs and opportunity to some of our most deprived communities. They will unite ports, local authorities, businesses and other key local stakeholders in service of the common goal of boosting prosperity in their regions.

■ Hospitality Industry: Non-domestic Rates

Steve Double: [\[169887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance will be provided to hospitality businesses on how to access full business rates relief under the allowance where they trade across different local authority areas.

Luke Hall:

Following the commitment made by the Chancellor at the Budget to extend the expanded retail discount into 2021-22, my Department published guidance on 4 March to help authorities implement their local schemes.

The guidance sets out how the eligibility criteria and cash cap (which applies from 1 July) operates and how authorities should determine the award of relief. Local authorities are responsible for implementing the discount having regard to the guidance. Any ratepayer who considers that they should have been eligible for relief that has been withheld should contact the relevant local authority.

■ Levelling Up Fund and Towns Fund: Employment

Steve Reed: [\[172078\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate he has made of the number of jobs that will be created by the (a) Towns Fund and (b) Levelling Up Fund.

Steve Reed:

[\[172079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the effect on economic productivity of the (a) Towns Fund and (b) Levelling Up Fund.

Luke Hall:

The £3.6 billion Towns Fund will drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth through land use, economic assets including cultural assets, skills and enterprise infrastructure, and connectivity. Full details of the intervention framework can be found in the Towns Fund Further Guidance. The Department will publish its Monitoring and Evaluation strategy in the Spring.

The £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund will invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK, including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport, and investing in cultural and heritage assets.

■ Local Government: Meetings

Kate Hollern:

[\[172084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans his Department has to extend the ability of local authorities to hold meetings remotely through (a) primary and (b) secondary legislation; and if he will publish those plans.

Kate Hollern:

[\[172085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions officials his Department have had with local authorities on the duration of remote council meetings.

Kate Hollern:

[\[172086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on public health of ending remote council meetings under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Kate Hollern:

[\[172087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what his Department's policy is on social distancing in council meetings during the covid-19 outbreak; whether local authorities that cannot implement social distancing measures are required to make alternative provisions; and what those alternative provisions should be.

Luke Hall:

Where local authority meetings take place face-to-face the 'Working safely during coronavirus' guidance published on gov.uk should be followed. Ultimately it is for local authorities to carry out their own risk assessments and follow the 'working safely' guidance to ensure meetings take place safely. It is for the local authority to decide what is appropriate in their specific circumstances.

The Government keeps all policy under review. To extend the facility for all local authorities to continue to meet remotely or in hybrid form after 7 May 2021 would require primary legislation.

We have received representations from local authorities and sector representative organisations making the case for the continuation of remote meetings beyond 7 May 2021 and are carefully considering next steps in this area.

■ **Local Growth Deals**

Steve Reed: [\[169863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the reason is for the difference between the £9 billion in total investment through local growth deals and the £12 billion allocated to that fund.

Luke Hall:

Government has awarded £9.1 billion from the Local Growth Fund to local areas via three rounds of Growth Deals with Local Enterprise Partnerships. The remaining elements relate to Department of Transport and Department for Education projects as well as MHCLG housing programmes including long-term housing transactions through the Home Building Fund, and pre-commitments for the Regional Growth Fund.

■ **Non-domestic Rates: Billing**

Steve Double: [\[169888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Government plans to publish advice to local authorities on delaying billing of business rates until after a sustained period of trading has occurred.

Luke Hall:

The terms of business rates reliefs for 2021-22 were set out by the Chancellor at the Budget. Business rates billing is a matter for local authorities. They are best placed to make judgements about how best to pursue liabilities. If a ratepayer is experiencing difficulties in paying their bill, they should contact their local authority as soon as possible.

In addition to business rates measures, the Government has provided a package of support grants for businesses. Including the new Restart Grant scheme available from April, the Government will have provided a total of £25 billion to business grants throughout the course of the pandemic .

■ **Parks: Finance**

Lilian Greenwood: [\[172062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure sufficient funding is provided to maintain parks to the Government standard set out in the Green Flag Award.

Luke Hall:

The Green Flag Awards scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces by setting a benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the UK and internationally.

The Government announced in September 2020 a £40 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund in England as part of the Government's wider green economic recovery, jobs and skills package, bringing forward funding for environmental charities and their partners to start work on projects across England to restore nature and tackle climate change.

The fund will help create up to 3,000 jobs and safeguard up to 2,000 others in areas such as protecting species, finding nature-based solutions to tackling climate change, conservation rangers and connecting people with nature. Up to 100% of project costs will be available whilst delivering against the goals of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

■ Recreation Spaces: Facilities**Lilian Greenwood:**[\[172064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ensure adequate (a) staffing, (b) toilets and (c) other facilities are provided at parks and green spaces.

Luke Hall:

The Government has set up the Future Parks Accelerator, which is a joint National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Trust programme to support a cohort of eight local authority areas to transform their parks estates, testing and learning from new and innovative models of parks management and funding to create more sustainable parks estates for the future.

The learning from the programme will be shared widely across the parks sector.

■ Recreation Spaces: Finance**Lilian Greenwood:**[\[172061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what direct financial support his Department is providing to local authority parks and green spaces.

Luke Hall:

The Government recognises the value of parks and green spaces in providing vibrant and inclusive locations for communities to socialise, volunteer, work, and exercise. It recognises that green spaces foster health, well-being, integration, and social engagement.

In 2021-22, local government will on average see a cash terms increase of up to 4.6% in Core Spending Power – a real-terms increase. This is in line with last year's

increase and recognises the resources councils need to meet their pressures and maintain current service levels.

The Settlement is unringfenced to ensure local areas can prioritise based on their own understanding of the needs of their local communities.

The Government has made £16.3 million available between 2017 - 2019 to support parks and green spaces.

This includes those in urban environments by funding; £9.7 million Local Authority Parks Improvement Fund; £5.1 million Pocket Parks and Pocket Parks Plus programmes; £1.41 million to test and pilot new management and funding models for parks through the Future Parks Accelerator programme; £55,000 to fund a Parks Action Group Coordinator; £30,000 on Green Infrastructure – working with Natural England to develop new standards for green spaces; £20,000 towards a skills event to promote continued professional development for parks professionals and £130,000 Community Empowerment Programme encouraging local communities become involved in the stewardship of community parks and green spaces.

■ Regional Planning and Development

Steve Reed: [\[172080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will publish Government commissioned research into public attitudes to its levelling up agenda by external polling and communications agencies.

Steve Reed: [\[172081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will publish research Commissioned by his Department into public attitudes to its levelling up agenda by external polling and communications agencies.

Luke Hall:

I refer the hon Member to the answer to Question UIN 168941 on 18 March 2021.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Department for International Trade: Government Chief Scientific Adviser

Greg Clark: [\[170578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, how many meetings she had with her Department's Chief Scientific Adviser from (a) 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020, (b) 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2020, (c) 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020 and (d) 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Graham Stuart:

I refer the hon. Member to my answer given on 27 May 2020 to Question UIN: 48351.

■ Trade Agreements: Australasia

Gareth Thomas:

[\[170521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what plans Department has to engage with stakeholders from the higher education and research sector on potential free trade agreements with (a) Australia and (b) New Zealand; and if she will make a statement.

Greg Hands:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Exports on 23rd March 2021, UIN: 168823.

JUSTICE

■ Judiciary: Equality

Tulip Siddiq:

[\[169926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to ensure diversity in appointments to the judiciary.

Chris Philp:

Encouraging diversity in the judiciary is a priority for the Ministry of Justice. The Lord Chancellor has a shared statutory responsibility for judicial diversity alongside the Lord Chief Justice and the Chair of the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC). All three are members of the Judicial Diversity Forum, which brings together leaders from organisations across the legal sector to improve judicial diversity.

The Judicial Diversity Forum's first combined statistical report was published on 17 September 2020, bringing together data on the diversity of the judiciary, judicial appointments and from the relevant legal professions (solicitors, barristers and legal executives). Published alongside the statistical report is a summary of the wide range of actions that its members are undertaking – at different career stages, either collectively or individually to help increase judicial diversity. The statistical report and the Action Plan were published on the Judicial Appointments Commission website:

<https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/new-team-will-lead-on-targeted-diversity-initiatives/>

MoJ specifically committed to doing the following:

- Funding a two-year pilot programme of targeted outreach and support activity by the JAC, which officially launched on 9 November. A small and separate unit within the JAC, called the 'Targeted Outreach and Research Team' has been tasked with engaging and providing advice and guidance to potential candidates from underrepresented backgrounds including BAME, women, disabled and solicitor candidates for specific senior court and tribunal roles.

- Reviewing the statutory and non-statutory eligibility criteria for appointment with the aim of removing barriers that discourage or prevent application for judicial posts from CILEx.
- Continuing to support the Pre-Application Judicial Education programme (PAJE) which provides support and information to those considering a judicial role and targets lawyers from under-represented groups including women, BAME, those with disabilities and non-barristers across England and Wales.
- Publishing a revised Salaried Part-Time Working policy (SPTW) which offers the judiciary a more flexible working offer – it was published in October 2020.

For the magistracy, MoJ is investing £1m in a recruitment and attraction programme to recruit more and more diverse magistrates. This will include the introduction of new IT that will enable better tracking of magistrate recruitment data, and outcomes, including by diversity data. We will also be investing in a targeted marketing strategy in 2021 directed at under-represented groups in local areas to boost magistrate recruitment. All judicial appointments are made solely on merit.

■ **Judiciary: Females**

Tulip Siddiq:

[\[169927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of male-only membership clubs on opportunities for women in the judiciary.

Chris Philp:

No known assessment has been undertaken by the department of the potential effect of male-only membership clubs on opportunities for women in the judiciary. It is not a requirement to record club membership for judicial officeholders. Judicial appointments are made solely on merit and information is not collected from candidates for judicial office about membership of clubs or networks.

■ **Prisoners: Mental Illness**

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[169817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Wakefield for reporting year 1 May 2019 – 30 April 2020, published in March 2021, what steps he plans to take to respond to the recommendation to ensure expeditious transfers of prisoners who present with serious acute mental health conditions to appropriate mental health accommodation as a matter of extreme urgency.

Alex Chalk:

We have a responsibility to ensure those in prison receive appropriate care in the right setting, at the right time. If a prisoner is suffering from a mental disorder to an extent that warrants detention under the Mental Health Act, they should be transferred to hospital. We recognise that currently this takes too long, and we are

determined to improve the transfer process, ensure delays are reduced and avoid prison being used inappropriately.

NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) will shortly be publishing revised guidance on the transfer and remission to hospital from prison. The new guidance will promote timely access to appropriate treatment under the Mental Health Act and reduce unnecessary delays to treatment.

In the recently published DHSC and MoJ White Paper on *Reforming the Mental Health Act*, the government has committed to introduce a new statutory time limit of 28 days for transfers to mental health hospitals, once the NHSE/I guidance has been fully embedded in practice. We will also introduce a new independent role to oversee the transfer process which will further help to reduce unnecessary delays.

The Government's full response to the Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Wakefield will be issued shortly.

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY

■ Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority: Staff

John Spellar:

[\[172858\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, how many IPSA staff are normally based at their office in the Strand.

Sir Charles Walker:

IPSA staff are currently working remotely, in accordance with government Covid-19 guidelines. During 2019 - 20 there was an average of 83 full-time equivalent staff working for IPSA, based in 85 Strand.

TRANSPORT

■ Road Traffic Control

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[171560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps is he taking to encourage local authorities to expand low traffic zones in their neighbourhoods.

Rachel Maclean:

Local authorities are responsible for managing traffic on their roads, including implementation of measures such as low-traffic neighbourhoods. In July 2020 the Government announced ambitious plans for cycling and walking, and committed £2 billion of funding for active travel over the next 5 years. The details are set out in the Prime Minister's Gear Change plan and can be viewed at www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-plan-for-england.

The Plan sets out a comprehensive, long term vision to increase active travel and embed the benefits of walking and cycling into how we live, work and move around. This includes the creation of new low-traffic neighbourhoods, to stop rat-running and make it easier to walk and cycle.

■ **Trams: Greater Manchester**

Yasmin Qureshi: [\[172052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he has taken to progress the feasibility study for the Bolton-Bury tramline.

Rachel Maclean:

Through the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund, the Department has announced funding of up to £50,000 to develop plans to extend the Metrolink to Bolton and Bury. The Department and Network Rail are providing support to Transport for Greater Manchester to conduct a feasibility study.

TREASURY

■ **Alarms: VAT**

Caroline Nokes: [\[169842\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what income the exchequer receives from VAT on personal safety alarms.

Jesse Norman:

HMRC does not hold information on the amount of VAT collected from personal safety alarms. Businesses are not required to provide information at this level in their tax returns as this would impose an excessive administrative burden.

Caroline Nokes: [\[169843\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the barriers to making personal safety alarms zero-rated for VAT.

Jesse Norman:

Emergency alarm systems are standard-rated with exception to those that are designed to be operated by a disabled person which are Zero-rated enabling disabled persons to call for help in case of illness or injury.

VAT raises significant revenue to be used for public spending, on services such as the health, defence, and education. The extension of the z/r would have to be considered in the context of £50bn of VAT relief requests that Government has received since the EU referendum.

Extending the current VAT relief to all would come at a significant cost to the Exchequer, and there are no current plans to extend the scope of the relief already in place. However, the Government keeps all taxes under review.

■ Business: Coronavirus

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[169803\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending covid-19-related financial support to include businesses which were set up in between national lockdowns and have fixed costs but did not begin to trade before covid-19 restrictions were reintroduced.

Kemi Badenoch:

Throughout this crisis, the government has sought to protect people's jobs and livelihoods while also support businesses and public services across the UK. To do this, the government has put in place an economic package of support which will provide businesses and individuals with certainty over the coming months, even as measures to prevent further spread of the virus change. The cumulative cost to the government of this support since the start of the pandemic £352 billion.

To aid businesses and employees through the next stage of the pandemic, the government will extend the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) for a further five months from May, until the end of September 2021. As of the 15 February, there have been 11.2 million unique jobs supported by the CJRS since its inception. A total of 1.3 million employers have made a claim through the CJRS since it started in March 2020, totalling £53.8 billion in claims. Employers that created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 2 March will be eligible to claim from periods starting on or after 1 May.

Businesses which are forced to close as a result of the restrictions imposed on the 5 January have been able to claim grants of up to £3,000 per month, based on their rateable value, through the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed). They can also claim a one-off grant of up to £9,000, in addition to the monthly grant. Businesses which are not able to receive these grants for closed businesses may be able to benefit from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). At Budget we announced an additional £425 million of ARG funding, taking the total to over £2 billion. It is up to each local authority to determine eligibility for this scheme based on their assessment of local economic need; however, we encourage local authorities to support businesses which have been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, but which are ineligible for the other grant schemes. As of 17 January, the LRSG (Closed) had provided £573 million worth of grants and the ARG has provided £143 million worth of grants.

To support businesses through the next stage of the pandemic, the government is providing a new Restart Grant of up to £18,000 to over 680,000 business premises, giving them the certainty that they need to plan ahead and safely relaunch trading over the coming months. Businesses that have been set up between lockdowns and are trading on the 1 April 2021 will be eligible, subject to the broader eligibility criteria. Businesses will also benefit from the new Recovery Loan Scheme which will replace the CBILS and BBLs. Businesses have previously been able to use the access to

finance schemes (CBILS, CLBILS, Future Fund and BBLs) with over £68 billion dispersed through those schemes.

Finally, businesses have benefited from tax holidays and deferrals, such as the reduction in VAT for tourism and hospitality businesses, and business rates holidays for eligible businesses across the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. Businesses have also benefitted from the moratorium on commercial tenant evictions, which has been extended until 30 June.

■ Child Care Vouchers

Kate Green: [\[172074\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of total parental contributions to childcare vouchers in the 2020-21 financial year.

Steve Barclay:

The government does not hold data for parental contributions made towards childcare vouchers. We obtain estimates of numbers of recipients and value of vouchers from data supplied voluntarily by voucher providers to HMRC. These estimates for 2020/21 will be available in Autumn 2021.

■ Child Care Vouchers: Coronavirus

Kate Green: [\[172075\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with (a) employers and (b) HMRC on refunding childcare voucher payments to families who have not been able to use them as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Steve Barclay:

The availability of a refund on childcare vouchers will depend on the precise terms and conditions of the employer's childcare voucher scheme, which is a contractual arrangement between the parent, the employer and the childcare voucher provider.

Some schemes allow for refunds on the value of childcare vouchers in certain circumstances but there is no legal requirement to do so. Where a refund is provided, the refund is treated as income from the employee's employment and should be subject to deductions of tax and National Insurance Contributions in the normal way.

Due to coronavirus restrictions, employees may not be using all of their childcare vouchers. Users of the childcare voucher scheme can continue to receive childcare vouchers, but may wish to temporarily reduce their contributions so that they don't accumulate a stockpile.

Contributions can then be increased as and when required. Varying the amount will not affect continuing eligibility, providing that the normal conditions of the scheme are met.

■ Debts: Developing Countries

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

[\[172019\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department plan to take during the G7 Presidency to work with international partners to ensure that private creditors participate in multilateral debt restructuring agreements for developing countries in the context of the Common Framework.

John Glen:

We regularly work with our international partners in the G7, G20 and Paris Club on debt issues, including private sector participation in debt restructurings. We also engage directly with the private sector, including through the Institute of International Finance.

Support for Low-Income Developing Countries is a key priority for the UK's G7 presidency this year and we have made clear our expectation that the private sector will offer debt treatment on at least as favourable terms as the official sector under the Common Framework agreed by the G20 last November.

■ National Skills Academies: Shipbuilding

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[171527\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions officials in his Department have had with stakeholder groups on the approval of the Shared Outcome Fund bid for the creation of a National Skills Academy for Maritime (Shipbuilding).

Kemi Badenoch:

HMT Officials are in regular contact with stakeholders. But it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, who are leading the National Skills Academy for Maritime bid, to engage with relevant stakeholders prior to submission of the bid.

This Government is committed to supporting people to develop the skills needed to get good jobs and improve national productivity. The Department for Education recently published the 'Skills for Jobs' White Paper which sets out how the government will put employers at the heart of the skills system to ensure skills provision meets local labour market needs.

The Shared Outcomes Fund encourage Departments to work together to overcome some of the most difficult social, environmental and economic challenges that sit across the areas of responsibility of multiple public sector organisations.

The second round of the Shared Outcomes Fund, announced at Spending Review 2020, will provide a further £200 million for projects to improve the join up across government.

The assessment process to award the funding is ongoing.

■ Treasury: Chief Scientific Advisers**Greg Clark:** [\[170582\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many meetings he had with his Department's Chief Scientific Adviser from (a) 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020, (b) 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2020, (c) 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020 and (d) 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Kemi Badenoch:

HM Treasury is committed to ensuring that we access the very best scientific expertise. The Director for the Enterprise and Growth Unit, who is responsible for public science funding, acts as HM Treasury's Chief Scientific Adviser and meets with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regularly.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES**■ Clubs: Discrimination****Tulip Siddiq:** [\[169928\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what the Government's policy is on membership clubs that exclude women.

Kemi Badenoch:

Under Part 7 and Schedule 16 of the Equality Act 2010, associations, including private clubs, may lawfully restrict their membership to people who share a characteristic, such as sex. This provides scope for associations to restrict membership only to women, as well as those restricting membership only to men.

This is based on the understanding that, if a group of private individuals wish to form a club, then it is appropriate that they should be able to determine membership of the club.

It is however unlawful for a private club that restricts its membership to people who share a particular protected characteristic to discriminate against members, associates, or guests because of other protected characteristics.

■ Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities**Helen Hayes:** [\[914026\]](#)

What progress the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has made on its report on ethnic disparities and inequality.

Kemi Badenoch:

The independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has reviewed inequality in the UK, focusing on areas including poverty, education, employment, health and the criminal justice system. They have held meetings with key delivery partners and agencies for these areas, gathered evidence from a range of external stakeholders and influencers, and ran an open Call for Evidence that invited evidence

from across the United Kingdom. Yesterday, I spoke with Chair of the Commission, Dr Tony Sewell. The Commission is of course independent of government, but he has assured me that their report will be submitted to the Prime Minister shortly.

■ Disadvantaged: Education

Ian Mearns:

[\[914018\]](#)

What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on educational inequalities.

Kemi Badenoch:

Disadvantaged pupils have always been at the heart of education policy. We have taken unprecedented action to address educational inequalities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 24 February, we announced a £700 million Education Recovery package, building on the £1bn from last year. As well as a range of measures to support all pupils to recover lost learning, the package includes significant funding aimed at addressing the needs of disadvantaged pupils. This includes a one-off £302 million Recovery Premium for the next academic year that will be allocated to schools based on the same methodology as the pupil premium. Schools with more disadvantaged pupils will therefore receive larger allocations. Within this package is a £22m accelerator fund, towards evidence-based approaches that support children and young people in disadvantaged areas.

In June 2020 as part of the £1 billion Covid catch up package, we announced £350 million to fund the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) for disadvantaged students for the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22. The programme will provide additional, targeted support for those children and young people who have been hardest hit from disruption to their education as a result of school closures.

There is extensive evidence that tutoring is one of the most effective ways to accelerate pupil progress, and we want to extend this opportunity to disadvantaged and vulnerable learners. We are also funding small group tuition for 16 to 19-year-olds and early language skills in reception classes.

The Education Endowment Foundation was founded in 2011 to research and promote the most effective ways of accelerating pupil progress. They have published guidance to help schools make the most of this additional funding.

We are investing over £400 million to support access to remote education and online social care services. To date, over 1.2 million laptops and tablets have been delivered to schools, trusts, local authorities and further education providers. Since 2011 we have continued to provide Pupil Premium funding – worth £2.4bn again this year – for school leaders to use, based on the needs of their disadvantaged pupils.

■ Equal Pay: Cambridgeshire

Daniel Zeichner: [\[914021\]](#)

What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling gender-pay disparities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Kemi Badenoch:

The national gender pay gap is now at a record low, with the full-time gender pay gap at only 7%. Peterborough and Cambridgeshire also have pay gaps below the national average. Despite this, we need to keep making progress on this issue. Across the country, we will continue to make it easier for women to get into higher-paid jobs and sectors. As we build back from COVID-19 we will also look to increase the number of women in STEM professions, and to increase the availability of flexible working for everyone, to ensure the gender pay gap continues to reduce going forwards.

■ Females: Employment

Mrs Sheryll Murray: [\[914000\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment she has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on female employment.

Kemi Badenoch:

The latest ONS official statistics show the female employment rate at 71.8% up to the end of January 2021. This Government recognises that times are hard for many women, and men, which is why we have extended the furlough scheme until September, alongside new measures in our Plan for Jobs, such as our £2bn Kickstart Scheme and the Restart programme, which launches in the summer.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Carer's Allowance

Stuart Anderson: [\[171724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to increase the uptake of carer's allowance.

Justin Tomlinson:

1 million carers were entitled to Carer's Allowance in 2010/11. By 2025/26 we forecast that this will have increased to just over 1.5 million.

Information on Carer's Allowance is widely available, including online through Gov.uk. Organisations supporting carers, and other stakeholders and partners, also make information available on carers benefits, including Carer's Allowance.

Carer's Allowance can be applied for online and since this option was made available in October 2013 over 1.5 million people have applied that way. Since April 2020, over 90% of Carer's Allowance applications have been made online and over 90% of those customers have said they are happy with the online service.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Chief Scientific Advisers**Greg Clark:** [\[170580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many meetings she had with her Department's Chief Scientific Adviser from (a) 1 March 2020 to 31 May 2020, (b) 1 June 2020 to 31 August 2020, (c) 1 September 2020 to 30 November 2020 and (d) 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Guy Opperman:

Between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Department's Chief Scientific Adviser met in a total of 6 meetings. This included:

- (a) 2 meetings between March 2020 – May 2020
- (b) 2 meetings between June 2020 – August 2020
- (c) 1 meeting between September 2020 – November 2020
- (d) 1 meeting between December 2020 – February 2021

■ Employment: Disability**Vicky Foxcroft:** [\[169900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many times the Reasonable Adjustment Forum has met over the last 12 months.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Reasonable Adjustments Forum has met three times since its creation in July 2020. The dates were 14 October 2020, 9 December 2020 and 24 February 2021.

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[169901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many times (a) she and (b) the Minister for Disabled People has attended the Reasonable Adjustment Forum over the last 12 months.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Reasonable Adjustments Forum is a working level meeting that was established in order to identify, test and recommend service improvements for those with accessible communication needs.

Due to the informal nature of these meetings and the focus on processes, Ministers do not attend. However, they are aware of the important work of the group.

Vicky Foxcroft: [\[169903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent progress her Department has made on the commitments set out in the Improving Lives: the Work, Health, Disability Green Paper.

Justin Tomlinson:

In 2017 'Improving Lives' set out the Government's goal to see one million more disabled people in work by 2027. In the first three years of the goal, between 2017 and 2020, the number of disabled people in employment increased by 800,000.

We are continuing to build our evidence base on what works, through ongoing research, tests and large scale trials including of Employment Advice in NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapy services and Individual Placement and Support in partnership with the health system.

In 2019, our '[Health is Everyone's Business](#)' consultation set out proposals to support and encourage employers to minimise the risk of ill-health related job loss among their employees, including employers incentives and obligations, reforms to SSP, and Occupational Health reform. We intend to publish our response shortly.

The Department is bringing forward a Green Paper on health and disability support to consider how we improve our current service so it's better and easier to use, explore how we provide extra support to navigate the system, and understand how we improve our employment support offer.

One of the commitments from Improving Lives was to publish annual statistics to support the monitoring of progress on disability employment. The most recent statistics, published in 2020, provide detailed analysis and break downs of the number of disabled people in employment. The latest statistics are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2019>

Vicky Foxcroft:**[169904]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people have received support from the Personal Support Package announced in the Improving Lives: the future of work, health and disability White Paper.

Vicky Foxcroft:**[169905]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the number of people who have found employment as a result of the Personal Support Package announced in the Improving Lives: the future of work, health and disability White Paper.

Justin Tomlinson:

The Personal Support Package (PSP) introduced in 2017 has helped fund a range of new initiatives and additional voluntary support for claimants with long term health conditions and disabilities.

This has included additional work coach time, mental health training for work coaches and more than doubling the number of Disability Employment Advisors to approximately 685 across England, Scotland and Wales in the 19/20 financial year. We aim to increase this number further during the 21/22 financial year.

It has also funded a number of small scale tests of new interventions designed to help understand what works to support claimants with long term health conditions and disabilities.

The PSP was not designed as an impact evaluation with a robust counterfactual and therefore we are unable to quantify the number of employment outcomes due to the PSP.

In the Improving Lives: the future of work, health and disability White Paper in 2017, we set a goal to see one million more disabled people in work by 2027. In the first three years of the goal, between 2017 and 2020, the number of disabled people in employment increased by 800,000.

■ **Personal Independence Payment: Appeals**

Kate Osamor:

[\[171672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of personal independence payment claimants offered an increased benefits award by her Department in 2020, after lodging their appeal, which if accepted would have lapsed their appeal were (a) accepted and (b) declined.

Kate Osamor:

[\[171673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of personal independence payment claimants who accepted an offer made by her Department in 2020 of an increased benefits award after lodging their appeal subsequently then appealed this new offer.

Justin Tomlinson:

The information requested is not available.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

EDUCATION

■ Further Education and Higher Education: Antisemitism

Alicia Kearns:

[\[167338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) higher and (b) further education establishments have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 18 March 2021. The correct answer should have been:

Michelle Donelan:

The government has asked all English higher education (HE) providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. The IHRA definition is an important tool in tackling antisemitism. Adopting this widely recognised definition sends a strong signal that HE providers take these issues seriously. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, wrote to HE leaders most recently in October 2020 to reiterate the importance of the definition and to urge all providers to consider adopting it.

The government is pleased to report that at least 91 providers have now adopted the definition, **of which** (78 are HE providers and 13 are further education colleges providers), with many more preparing to adopt the definition. The decision on adoption of the definition rests with individual providers. However, the government will continue to urge them to adopt the definition and will ensure that HE is a genuinely fulfilling and welcoming experience for everyone.

I am proud that so many providers have taken a positive step towards eradicating antisemitism by adopting the IHRA definition, but further progress is still needed to stamp it out. This is why, in the Secretary of State's most recent strategic guidance letter to the OfS, the government asked the OfS to undertake a scoping exercise to identify providers who are reluctant to adopt the definition. The letter asked providers to consider introducing mandatory reporting of antisemitic incident numbers by providers, with the aim of ensuring a robust evidence base, which the OfS can then use to effectively regulate in this area.

The Secretary of State also asked the OfS to ensure that, if antisemitic incidents do occur at a provider, they should consider if it is relevant in a particular case whether the provider has adopted the IHRA definition when considering which sanctions, including monetary penalties, would be appropriate to apply.

We will continue to work across the government to ensure that racism and religious hatred of any kind is not tolerated anywhere, including in our world-leading universities.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Jerusalem: Internally Displaced People****Stephen Timms:**[\[169783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2021 to Question 164342, what assessment he has made of whether the forcible transfer of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem potentially constitutes a war crime.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 22 March 2021. The correct answer should have been:

James Cleverly:

It is the policy of this government that any judgment on whether serious crimes under international law have occurred is a matter for judicial decision after consideration of all the available evidence, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. The UK regularly engages with Israel on issues of concern related to its occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including evictions and demolitions. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances ~~evictions and~~ **forcible transfers and** demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Health Services: Reciprocal Arrangements****Paul Blomfield:**[\[137184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the differences in coverage of (a) countries and (b) services are between the European Health Insurance Card scheme and the UK Global Health Insurance Card; and if he will make a statement.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 18 January 2021. The correct answer should have been:

Edward Argar:

The reciprocal healthcare coverage under the United Kingdom-European Union Trade and Cooperation Agreement for those on a temporary stay in an EU member state is the same, in terms of healthcare services which can be accessed by individuals, compared to the previous coverage under EU Regulations 883 and 987. However, under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement, crew or passengers of a vessel or aircraft may now be covered for necessary healthcare on their arrival in an EU member state if the need arose whilst on a voyage, which is not the case under the EU Regulations.

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement provides reciprocal healthcare coverage for travel to EU member states only. European Free Trade Area states are not covered. The UK Global Health Insurance Card has been launched to

recognise this new agreement and will gradually replace old European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) once they expire.

Under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, UK nationals who were residing and/or working in the EU, and EU citizens residing and/or working in the UK, before 1 January 2021 are eligible to apply for a new UK EHIC which can be used for travel to EU member states, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. For those who are not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK has agreed a bilateral reciprocal arrangement with Norway which means UK nationals are covered for necessary healthcare there.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Energy Policy update 1

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

[\[HCWS879\]](#)

Today I am delighted to announce a landmark agreement between Government and the oil and gas industry – the North Sea Transition Deal - to support the industry's transition to clean, green energy and secure future of high-skilled oil and gas workers and the supply chain. This follows our commitment to securing a Deal in the 2019 Conservative Party manifesto and is the first of its kind to be agreed by a G7 nation.

The offshore oil and gas industry has been a major British industrial success story. For decades, the sector has strengthened our energy security, generated significant tax revenue to fund our public services, and currently supports around 260,000 jobs across the UK. From the Shetland Islands and Aberdeen to Teesside and the Humber, the industry is critical to the health of local economies across the country.

In the Energy White Paper, we have committed to work with industry to make the UK Continental Shelf a net zero basin by 2050. The oil and gas industry will have a critical role in maintaining our energy security through this transition. Domestically produced gas still met approximately 46 percent of the country's supply of gas in 2019 and the Climate Change Committee forecasts our continued need for fossil fuels for years to come.

The North Sea Transition Deal between the UK Government and oil and gas industry will support workers, businesses, and the supply chain as it transitions to a net zero future by harnessing the industry's existing capabilities, infrastructure, and private investment potential to exploit new and emerging technologies such as hydrogen production, Carbon Capture Usage and Storage and offshore wind – as well as offshore decommissioning.

Through the Deal, the oil and gas sector and government will work together over the long-term to deliver the skills, innovation and new infrastructure required to decarbonise North Sea production, as well as other carbon intensive industries. Not only will the Deal support existing companies to decarbonise in preparation for a net zero future, but it will also attract new industrial sectors to base themselves in the UK, develop new export opportunities for British businesses, and secure new high-value jobs.

Through the package of measures, the Deal is expected to support up to 40,000 jobs across the supply chain and is expected to cut pollution by up to 60 million tonnes by 2030 including 15 million tonnes from oil and gas production on the UK Continental Shelf - the equivalent of annual emissions from 90% of the UK's homes.

The North Sea Transition Deal

Delivery of the new Green Industrial Revolution will require a strong partnership between government, regulators and industry. This Deal sets out a template for that partnership

and includes an ambitious plan to meet stretching greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. The Deal aims to support and anchor the expert supply chain that has built up around oil and gas in the UK, to both safeguard and create new high-quality jobs.

The Deal includes:

- The sector setting early targets to reduce emissions by 10% by 2025 and 25% by 2027 and has committed to cut emissions by 50% by 2030. This will be supported by joint work to address the commercial and regulatory barriers to electrification of offshore platforms to realise these targets.
- Joint government and industry investment of up to £16 billion by 2030 to reduce carbon emissions. This includes up to £3 billion to replace fossil fuel-based power supplies on oil and gas platforms with renewable energy, up to £3 billion on Carbon Capture Usage and Storage, and up to £10 billion for hydrogen production.
- By 2030, the sector will voluntarily commit to ensuring that 50% of its offshore decommissioning and new energy technology projects will be provided by local businesses, helping to anchor jobs to the UK. This will be supported by the appointment of an Industry Supply Chain Champion who will support the coordination of local growth and job opportunities with other sectors, such as Carbon Capture Usage and Storage and offshore wind.
- A 60Mt reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, including 15Mt through the progressive decarbonisation of UKCS production over the period to 2030.[1]
- Support for up to 40,000 direct and indirect supply chain jobs in decarbonising UKCS production and the CCUS and hydrogen sectors.

Today's announcement delivers on the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan and builds on our ambitious Energy White Paper, which set out how the government would support the decarbonisation of offshore oil and gas production while promoting opportunities for the sector to transition to clean energy.

To aid the transition to a green economy, today's package follows the recent Budget in which the Chancellor committed to funding that targets the oil and gas sector and supports businesses to develop green energy. This includes up to £27 million for the Aberdeen Energy Transition Zone to transform the area into a green energy hub and up to £5 million additional funding for the Global Underwater Hub based in Aberdeen to open up opportunities for the city to become a global hub for underwater engineering, including in offshore wind and hydrogen – further supporting the creation of green jobs and helping the transition to net zero.

I will place a copy of the North Sea Transition Deal in the Libraries of the House.

The Review of Future Licensing of Offshore Oil and Gas

We committed in September 2020 to reviewing policy on licensing for North Sea oil and gas to ensure it was compatible with our climate change objectives. This included assessing whether licensing for new oil and gas exploration and production should

continue in its current form, as well as the scope for formalising any aspects of our existing processes to provide additional assurances.

Noting the ongoing role of oil and gas on our path to net zero, the Government will introduce a new Climate Compatibility Checkpoint on future oil and gas licensing rounds to ensure they are compatible with wider climate objectives, including net-zero emissions by 2050. This checkpoint will use the latest evidence of the time, looking at the UK's demand for oil and gas, the sector's projected production levels, the increasing prevalence of clean technologies such as offshore wind and carbon capture, and the sector's continued progress against its ambitious emissions reduction targets.

Design of this checkpoint will be completed by the end of 2021, before the next oil and gas licensing round. The Oil and Gas Authority has already indicated that they will not be running a new licensing round this year. In parallel, the Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning is commencing work on a new Offshore Energy Strategic Environmental Assessment which will underpin future licensing rounds.

Government response to the public consultation 'Aligning UK international support for the clean energy transition'

At the Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the UK will end new direct financial or promotional support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas, other than in limited circumstances, as soon as possible. A consultation on this and how to accelerate growth in UK clean energy exports was subsequently held until 8 February 2021.

Following the consultation, the Government will no longer provide support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas from 31 March 2021. This will include UK Export Finance support, international aid funding, and trade promotion for new crude oil, natural gas and thermal coal projects.

To support the UK's energy sector in making this transition, we will provide a one-year exemption for Small and Medium sized Enterprises, to ensure the most vulnerable firms are given time to adjust; a new 'Transition Export Development Guarantee', so that oil and gas focused companies with credible transition plans can benefit from UK Export Finance's working capital support to achieve these plans; and publish a comprehensive and transparent description of the exemptions underpinning the policy shift, to provide clarity and certainty for business and civil society.

This balanced approach will make the UK an even stronger and more credible international partner to the growing number of countries who are seeking to make the transition to a cleaner future. The UK will build on the implementation of the policy shift by working with likeminded partners to make similar commitments, including through our G7 and COP26 Presidencies.

[1] The 60Mt also includes emissions savings from CCUS and hydrogen already set out in the PM's 10 Point Plan.

■ Energy Policy update 2

UK International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for the COP26 Presidency and Minister of State (Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth) (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): [\[HCWS880\]](#)

Today, the Government published its consultation on proposals requiring mandatory climate-related financial disclosures by publicly quoted companies, large private companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs).

In November 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that in order to accelerate progress on climate risk disclosures, the UK will move towards mandatory Taskforce on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) across major segments of the UK economy by 2025, with a significant portion of requirements to be introduced by 2023. This will make the UK the first G20 country to make TCFD-aligned disclosures mandatory across the economy.

TCFD is an industry-led initiative which seeks to develop recommendations for climate-related financial disclosures. In 2017, the TCFD launched their recommendations, which set out how companies of any size, and in any sector or geography, could better manage and disclose their climate-related financial risks. Our proposed regulations will require companies to disclose information in line with the four pillars of TCFD (Governance, Strategy, Risk Management and Metrics & Targets).

High-quality disclosure of how organisations will manage the material financial risks and opportunities arising from climate change will improve transparency and encourage better informed pricing and capital allocation. As a result, and over time, TCFD-aligned disclosures will support investment decisions aligned with our transition to net zero. Our ambitious proposals will ensure the U.K. is leading the way ahead of COP26, where we will have an opportunity to encourage other countries to replicate our action.

I will place a copy of the Consultation Document in the Libraries of the House.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Departmental Update on Flags

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): [\[HCWS883\]](#)

The Union flag will now be flown on UK Government buildings every day unless another flag is being flown - acting as a visual symbol of the UK's union, heritage and pride.

Currently, Union flags are only required to be flown on all UK Government buildings in England, Wales and Scotland on designated days, such as the Queen's birthday.

The changes will apply to all Government buildings across the UK, with the Union flag being flown by default if nothing else is being flown, such as another national flag of the UK, or a county flag or other flags to mark civic pride. The guidance will also encourage

other buildings, such as councils, to follow this example, where they have a flagpole and wish to fly a flag.

The Union Flag is the National Flag of the United Kingdom, and it is so called because it embodies the emblems of the three constituent nations united under one Sovereign – the Kingdoms of England and Wales, of Scotland and of Northern Ireland. It serves as a reminder of our shared history and union. Flags, other than the Union such as national flags of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, the Armed Forces flag, the Commonwealth flag, county and other local flags can be flown on non-designated days.

We will also cut red tape to allow dual flagging – where two flags can be flown on one pole. This will allow organisations to highlight local and national identities, for example by flying a Middlesex county flag alongside the Union flag in Middlesex, or the Saltire alongside the Union flag in Scotland. Where organisations have two flag poles, they can fly the Union flag alongside another flag, for example flying the Saltire alongside the Union flag in Scotland.

The Union Flag must always be flown in the superior position.

Following our departure from the European Union, planning regulations (in England) introduced by the then Government in 2007 that allow the EU flag to be flown on public buildings without securing express consent in the normal way, will also be removed.

Instead, new ‘deemed consent’ will be granted for the NHS flags. This will allow for NHS flags to be flown, without the need for express consent – alongside the Union flag.

The changes will help champion the UK’s national identities and strengthen our shared pride in the union through the institutions that define Britain.

This guidance is [published](#) today and will apply from the summer.

Attachments:

1. Flag Flying Guidance [Flag Flying UK Government Buildings Guidance 24 March 2021.pdf]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ DHSC Update

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): [\[HCWS884\]](#)

I wish to inform the House of progress in establishing the UK Health Security Agency and the appointment of its leadership.

In August 2020, the Government announced its intention to create a new body, bringing together the at-scale operational response capability of NHS Test and Trace, the Joint Biosecurity Centre’s intelligence and analytical capability and the public health science and health protection expertise of Public Health England into an organisation focused wholly on protecting people from external threats to this country’s health.

From 1 April, we will formally establish the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). The UKHSA will be this country's permanent standing capacity to prepare for, prevent and respond to threats to health.

The UKHSA will plan for the risk of future infectious disease pandemics and other major health threats, maintaining this focus both during a crisis and in better times. It will work with partners around the world and lead the UK's global contribution to global health protection research. The new Agency will prevent threats by deploying the full weight of our analytic and genomic capability, on infectious diseases and beyond, and will hold responsibility for our health security scientific capabilities including those at Porton Down and Colindale. It will respond to the threats we face with speed and scale, including terrorist threats to health, another pandemic or environmental hazards.

The Agency will operate with local and national partners to deliver its brief, including building a strong partnership with local government and Directors of Public Health. It will work with the national public health bodies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, continuing strong collaborative work such as the Joint Biosecurity Centre to support health security for the whole of the UK.

UKHSA will be empowered to hire the very best team possible from around the world. Its Chief Executive will be Dr Jenny Harries, who has performed brilliantly during this crisis. Dr Harries previously led the public health response to the Novichok poisonings, she played a critical part in the UK's Ebola response and last year, as Deputy Chief Medical Officer, she's delivered the shielding programme which is both incredibly sensitive and has been superbly delivered. Dr Harries' distinguished career as both a public health physician, and crucially, as a public health leader, make her impeccably qualified for this role.

Ian Peters will be UKHSA's Chair. Under Ian's leadership as Chairman of Barts Health NHS Trust, the Trust has built an impressive track record in life sciences with the combination of private sector, academic and Government capability that is so important to delivering excellence at scale. Ian brings his extensive experience of leadership in the public and private sector to this task, including several years as Managing Director of British Gas. Both Dr Harries and Mr Peters will be appointed from 1 April.

To protect operational continuity and provide for necessary staff consultations, the transition of responsibilities and capabilities from Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace into the new Agency will take place over the coming months, with the UKHSA fully operational from October 2021. Until this date, PHE and NHS Test and Trace will continue to deliver their existing functions.

I will provide a further update in due course on the Government's wider plans for public health reform, including on arrangements for promoting and improving health.

■ Sale of a Credit Guarantee Finance loan by the Department of Health and Social Care

Minister of State (Minister for Health) (Edward Argar): [\[HCWS881\]](#)

In 2005 The Department of Health (as it was then) made two loans under a policy created by HM Treasury called Credit Guarantee Finance, one for the PFI (Private Finance Initiative) scheme at the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust for the Bexley Oncology Wing and the other for the PFI scheme at the Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust for the redevelopment of the Queen Alexandra Hospital. The purpose of the policy was to reduce the financing costs of Private Finance Initiative deals and improve their value for money. An assessment at the time concluded that these objectives had been met.

It has now been agreed that the Department of Health and Social Care will sell its entire interest in the Credit Guarantee Finance loan which was used for the PFI scheme at Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth.

The Credit Guarantee Loan which was used for the PFI scheme at Bexley Oncology Wing, at the Leeds was repaid in full in 2017.

■ Specialty and Associate Specialist doctors' contract agreement

Minister of State for Care (Helen Whately): [\[HCWS877\]](#)

I am pleased to confirm that specialty and associate specialist doctors have backed a multi-year pay and contract reform agreement.

This is a diverse group of doctors who play a vital role in delivering high-quality care within healthcare teams and we recognise the particular issues they have faced. This agreement focuses on fixing long-standing concerns around equality of pay and terms and conditions for this group of staff. The agreement will improve their experiences of work and provide more opportunities to progress in their careers, in return for contractual changes which will deliver improvements to NHS services.

The deal will give around 10,000 doctors the option to transfer to new contracts. The contract changes prioritise doctors' physical and mental wellbeing through introducing new limits on work in unsocial hours and additional annual leave to improve equity with other staff groups. The new pay scales will have fewer progression points, enabling faster progression to the top of the pay scale, heeding the recommendations from the Gender Pay Gap in Medicine Review. The introduction of a new senior grade will expand opportunities for career progression for specialty doctors.

Over recent years we have sought major contractual reforms right across the NHS workforce. Public sector pay must deliver value for money for the taxpayer and this agreement commits investment in return for reforms which will help improve recruitment and retention, enhance morale and boost capacity and productivity.

This agreement delivers on the commitment in the NHS People Plan to make these roles more attractive and fulfilling and will help us retain more talent to ensure our NHS is there for everyone in the years to come.

HOME OFFICE

■ **New Plan for Immigration****The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Immigration Compliance and Justice (Chris Philp):**[\[HCWS878\]](#)

We have today published the New Plan for Immigration – the Government’s landmark programme to deliver the first comprehensive overhaul of the asylum system in decades.

These reforms are explained in more detail in our policy statement, which we have published today. To inform the proposals set out and ensure we can deliver effective change across the system, we have also launched a public consultation and run a wide-reaching engagement process. We will use this opportunity to listen to a wide range of views from stakeholders and sectors as well as members of the public.

The policy statement and consultation are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>

TREASURY

■ **Public Spending****The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay):**[\[HCWS882\]](#)

On 15 February the UK Government announced an additional £2.1 billion for the devolved administrations through the Barnett formula to support people, businesses and public services affected by coronavirus. This was on top of the £16.8 billion that had previously been guaranteed.

In recognition of the exceptional circumstances and in response to calls for flexibility, the devolved administrations were given the option to carry forward any of the £2.1 billion into 2021-22 on top of their existing facilities to transfer funding between financial years.

The devolved administrations have now confirmed they wish to carry forward the following amounts. They will receive this funding at Main Estimates 2021-22.

£MILLION	SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT	WELSH GOVERNMENT	NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE
Resource DEL excluding depreciation	873.510	497.557	238.054
Capital DEL (general)	236.845	137.130	74.964
Capital DEL (Financial Transactions)	41.532	25.530	14.039
Total DEL	1,151.888	660.218	327.057

The devolved administrations' 2020-21 funding as at Supplementary Estimates 2020-21 is therefore being reduced by the same amount.

In line with the Statement of Funding Policy the Welsh Government is also switching £501 million from Resource DEL to Capital DEL (general).

This means that revised 2020-21 funding is as follows:

£MILLION	SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT	WELSH GOVERNMENT	NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE
Resource DEL excluding depreciation	39,210.215	17,923.931	14,974.531
Capital DEL (general)	4,836.545	2,837.569	1,591.874
Capital DEL (Financial Transactions)	612.198	313.696	214.816
Total DEL	44,658.957	21,075.195	16,781.222