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**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

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[I] indicates that the member concerned has a relevant registered interest. The full register of interests can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests/>

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Lord Ashton of Hyde	Chief Whip
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Baroness Berridge	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade
Lord Bethell	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care and Whip
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Lord Greenhalgh	Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Lord Grimstone of Boscobel	Minister of State, Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for International Trade
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Baroness Sugg	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Lord True	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport
Baroness Williams of Trafford	Minister of State, Home Office
Viscount Younger of Leckie	Whip

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Written Statements

Thursday, 10 September 2020

Coronavirus: Renters

[HLWS441]

Lord Greenhalgh: My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I wish to update the House on the comprehensive measures that the Government is taking to ensure renters affected by coronavirus continue to be protected over autumn and winter.

The Government has already taken unprecedented action to ensure that renters were protected from eviction at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, including agreeing with the courts to stay possession proceedings for a total of six months.

I would like to express my thanks to landlords for their forbearance in many cases, and my sympathy to smaller landlords and buy to let landlords, who in some cases have experienced hardship as a result.

We have also put in place a major package of financial support to help communities through the pandemic. Through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, we have provided support for businesses to pay staff salaries and have also strengthened the welfare safety-net with a nearly £9.3 billion boost to the welfare system. This includes an extra £1 billion to increase Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates so that they cover the lowest 30% of market rents, meaning we now spend £25 billion supporting households to meet the cost of rent in the private and social rented sectors.

For those renters who require additional support, there is an existing £180 million of Government funding for Discretionary Housing Payments made available this year - an increase of £40 million from last year - for councils to distribute to support renters with housing costs.

We will keep these measures under review and our decisions will continue to be guided by the latest public health advice.

Whilst the measures we introduced were justified at the height of the pandemic, it is now right that we consider how we adapt our approach moving forward.

As we move forward, we will strike a balance of prioritising public health and supporting the most vulnerable over winter, whilst ensuring landlords can access and exercise their right to justice for the most serious cases, such as cases of anti-social behaviour.

On 28 August, we introduced regulations to require landlords to give tenants six months' notice before they can commence new eviction action, except in the most egregious cases, such as incidents of anti-social behaviour and serious rent arrears. These regulations will remain in place until the end of March 2021, and provide

reassurance to responsible tenants that they will not face new court proceedings during this time. This approach ensures tenants will remain safe and have additional time to find new accommodation, while empowering landlords to take action where necessary, for example if a tenant's antisocial behaviour is severely impacting their neighbours' quality of life.

We have been working with the judiciary to consider new court arrangements within the current statutory framework, to be put in place once possession proceedings resume, to ensure appropriate support to all parties. I am grateful to the Master of the Rolls and the working group which he established to consider those practical arrangements, and extend particular thanks to Mr Justice Knowles and all the members of the working group for their work on these matters.

The new Civil Procedure Rules, made via Statutory Instrument in July will come into force on 20 September. This will require landlords to set out any relevant information about a tenant's circumstances, including information on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, when bringing a possession claim to court. Landlords will also be required to notify the court and their tenant where they wish to continue pursuing a possession claim that was already in the system before 3 August.

When possession proceedings resume, it is critical to ensure court time is used effectively. The listing of cases is a judicial function. The judiciary will look to prioritise cases, reflecting those issues highlighted by a broad range of stakeholders represented on the working group as putting the most strain on litigants. We understand this will include claims issued before the stay commenced in March 2020, as well as cases involving anti-social behaviour, extreme rent arrears, domestic abuse, fraud and deception, illegal occupiers and squatters or abandonment of a property. This will provide assurance to landlords, their tenants and neighbours facing the most egregious cases.

We're also taking steps to ensure that no enforcement of evictions will take place in areas where local lockdown measures are in force which restrict access to premises. Guidance will be issued to bailiffs to ensure that no enforcement of possession orders will proceed where local measures are in place to protect public health. This will prevent tenants being forced out of their home at an unsettling time in areas when the public health risks could be greater.

In addition, the Government is taking steps to prevent eviction action taking place over the Christmas period, other than in the most serious cases, ensuring vulnerable tenants are not forced from their homes at a time when public and local authorities may be dealing with the usual level of increased demand for services during this time. This too will be achieved through guidance to bailiffs that they should not enforce possession orders in the weeks of Christmas.

Comprehensive new guidance for landlords and tenants to explain all these new arrangements and how they

impact on the possessions process in courts will be published shortly.

Taken together, these new arrangements strongly incentivise landlords and tenants to sustain tenancies as far as possible and to discuss their situation before bringing a possession claim to court. Where cases do end up in court, these measures ensure court time is prioritised effectively, that the most egregious cases are dealt with as a priority and that court users – both tenants and landlords – have the additional support they may need.

Changes in Immigration Rules

[HLWS440]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My hon Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Future Borders and Immigration (Kevin Foster) has today made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

My Rt Hon friend the Home Secretary is today laying before the House a Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules.

We have made changes to the Immigration Rules which will introduce the Student and Child Student routes to replace the Tier 4 (General) and Tier 4 (Child) routes.

The changes are being introduced to give effect to the Government's plan to create a global visa system which applies equally to all individuals coming to the UK to work or study, including EEA nationals, with the exception of Irish Nationals.

The Student and Child Student routes, collectively referred to as the Student routes, are for both European Economic Area (EEA) and non-EEA nationals who wish to come to the UK for the purpose of study. The routes are the first to be introduced as part of the new points-based immigration system, and the first to be simplified in line with the recommendations of the Law Commission in its report, 'Simplifying the Immigration Rules', to which the Government responded on 25 March 2020. We have consulted the Simplification of the Immigration Rules Review Committee, which represents several external stakeholders, on the drafting of the simplified rules. The Immigration Rules will eventually be consolidated in the new style.

As part of the new simplified style, we are introducing new Rules on English Language and Finance (which will only apply to the new Student and Child Student routes at this stage) with the intention of creating Rules on themes which apply across several routes. These thematic Rules include changes to:

- ensure applicants only need to prove the required level of English language to the Home Office once;
- update the majority speaking English language country list to include Malta and Ireland (where, for example a non-Irish national has a degree from an Irish

university they can rely on this to show their English language ability);

- allow applicants who have gained GCSE/A-level or Scottish Highers in English while at school in the UK to rely on this to prove their English language ability, replacing the ability of Child Students to rely on 6 months in the UK to prove English;

- no longer require applicants who have met the maintenance requirement on their current route to meet it again if they have been supporting themselves in the UK for more than a year;

- allow applicants to rely on electronic bank statements;

- allow applicants to show they meet maintenance requirements by relying on a wider range of accounts.

EEA nationals are subject to transitional arrangements until the transition period ends on 31 December. An EEA or Swiss national who makes an application in the UK under the new Student rules before 1 January 2021 will have their application rejected since they continue to have Freedom of Movement under EU law and are entitled to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. EEA nationals who apply under the Student rules from outside the UK will only be granted leave that commences on or after 1 January 2021, provided they meet the requirements of the route.

The list of countries whose nationals may submit reduced documentary evidence (formerly Appendix H) has been updated to add all the countries which form part of the EEA and Switzerland. Appendix 15 of the Immigration Rules will be deleted and replaced with a new Appendix ATAS which sets out requirements and conditions for the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS). EEA and Swiss nationals, and nationals of the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore and South Korea will be exempted from having to apply for an ATAS certificate in order to study certain sensitive subjects in the UK.

The Tier 4 (General) and Tier 4 (Child) routes will be closed to new applications after 0859 on 5 October 2020. References to Tier 4 have either been deleted from the Immigration Rules or amended where appropriate to reflect the new Student and Child Student rules. All references to Students or Child Students in the new rules must be read as including references to people who currently hold leave as Tier 4 Migrants, including in Part 9, Appendix AR and Appendix W. All Student and Child Student applications, including Dependant of a Student applications, which are made at or after 0900 on 5 October 2020 will be decided in accordance with the new Student rules, even where they are accompanied by a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies which was issued under the Tier 4 rules and policy in place before 0900 on 5 October.

Written Answers

Thursday, 10 September 2020

Broadband: Standards

Asked by *Viscount Waverley*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to improve the UK's broadband speed ranking. [HL7916]

Baroness Barran: The average broadband speed in the UK rose by 18% last year according to Ofcom's annual report, which is available here, and attached: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0038/194897/uk-home-broadband-performance.pdf. The average home speed is now 64Mbps, up from 54.2Mbps the year before. This was largely due to the growing availability and take-up of superfast and ultrafast full-fibre and cable services.

To improve broadband speeds, the government is committed to providing nationwide gigabit-capable broadband as soon as possible. Gigabit-capable connectivity can provide speeds of at least 1,000Mbps, and is reliable and future-proof. 26% of the UK (or 7.5 million) premises are able to access these speeds, and 16% of the UK has access to full fibre.

BT Openreach has a target to connect 20 million premises with full fibre by the mid to late-2020s, and Virgin Media has pledged to upgrade its entire network to gigabit-capable by the end of 2021. These initiatives will provide UK citizens with a world class, future-proof digital infrastructure system, as well as helping to drive the UK up the broadband speed table at the same time.

The Answer includes the following attached material:

UK Home Broadband Performance [Broadband Performance.pdf]

The material can be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-09-07/HL7916>

Contact Tracing: Computer Software

Asked by *Baroness Finlay of Llandaff*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportion of smartphones currently in circulation in the UK which are fully functional with (1) the NHSX COVID-19 contact tracing application, and (2) the new contact tracing application currently under development that uses the Google and Apple exposure notification application programming interface. [HL7633]

Lord Bethell: The NHS Test and Trace app which is currently being trialled will require smartphones to be running Apple iOS 13.5 and above or Android Marshmallow 6.0 and above. Estimates show that 82% of Apple smartphones and 91% of Android smartphones in the United Kingdom run or are capable of running these versions.

Coronavirus: Disease Control

Asked by *Lord Lipsey*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether, under the restrictions in place to address the COVID-19 pandemic in England, when two households join to form an extended household, that extended household has to remain the same, or whether another individual or family can be substituted to form a new extended household. [HL7668]

Lord Bethell: A 'support bubble' is a close support network between a household of any size and a single adult household. Households with more than one adult can expand their close support network so that it includes an additional single adult household.

Support bubbles should be exclusive. This means people should not switch the household they are in a support bubble with or make connections with multiple households. This is to avoid creating chains of transmission.

Diabetes: Coronavirus

Asked by *Lord Rennard*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the research published on 19 May by NHS England which found that higher blood glucose levels and obesity increased the risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19 for people with diabetes, what steps they are taking to ensure that the care of people with diabetes is prioritised to address these modifiable risk factors. [HL7470]

Asked by *Lord Rennard*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support the NHS to identify people with diabetes (1) whose care has been disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) who have refrained from seeking clinical support, and (3) who require improvements in their diabetes control. [HL7471]

Asked by *Lord Rennard*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that people with diabetes can continue to access the care and treatment they need during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL7472]

Asked by *Lord Rennard*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to improve secondary prevention of health complications associated with diabetes in the light of the impact of COVID-19. [HL7473]

Lord Bethell: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and an analysis of diabetes risk, NHS England has worked with partners to publish guidance which includes how to safely maintain essential diabetes services, conduct remote diabetes reviews and methods to prioritise the review of patients as part of local recovery efforts.

Extra measures have also been put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic so that people living with diabetes can continue to access support, including commissioning services to help people with diabetes of all ages self-manage their condition using online digital structured education programmes. To address the effect that COVID-19 had on referrals into the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme, NHS England will use a 'direct to consumer' model to sit alongside Public Health England and NHS England health marketing proposals.

Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review

Asked by Lord Truscott

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made in relation to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy; whom they have consulted as part of that Review; and when they anticipate it will be completed. [HL7739]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: In a phased approach, Her Majesty's Government is undertaking detailed horizon-scanning, covering future trends, opportunities, risks and threats; gathering evidence and conducting policy analysis; and developing policy, capability and systems reform options.

Her Majesty's Government is engaging with external experts and wider stakeholders with an interest in our nation's security and prosperity, and the global challenges the UK will face over the coming years. This includes our allies and partners, building on an ongoing dialogue about COVID-19 response and recovery, the Devolved Administrations, civil society and external experts in the UK and overseas. Her Majesty's Government has also launched a Call for Evidence to hear from the public and stakeholders to inform the long-term strategic aims of our international policy and national security, rooted in our national interests.

The Integrated Review process remains closely aligned with the Comprehensive Spending Review, to be published in autumn. This allows the Government to ensure that departments have the resources they need to deliver the Integrated Review's conclusions.

Internet: Safety

Asked by Lord McNally

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they intend to publish the outcome of their consultation on the Online Harms White Paper which closed in July 2019. [HL7679]

Baroness Barran: The Government is firmly committed to making the UK the safest place to be online, and we are working at pace on our proposals. We will publish a full government response later this year.

Maira Shahbaz

Asked by Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Pakistan about the ruling of Lahore High Court on 4 August, which decided in favour of a man accused of kidnapping Maira Shahbaz, fabricating a marriage certificate, and forcing her to convert to Islam. [HL7626]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are closely monitoring Maira Shahbaz's case following her reported abduction in April. The UK Government strongly condemns the forced marriage and forced conversion of women and girls.

We are concerned about women's and girls' rights and ongoing reports of forced marriage and forced conversion in Pakistan of women and girls from religious minorities such as Hindus, Christians and Sikhs.

We regularly raise our concerns about Freedom of Religion or Belief, women and girl's rights and gender equality with the government of Pakistan at a senior level. Most recently, I raised our human rights concerns with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 15 July.

Asked by Lord Shinkwin

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Pakistan about the ruling of Lahore High Court on the legality of the marriage and religious conversion of Maira Shahbaz, in the light of (1) reports that she was abducted at gunpoint by the man to whom she was subsequently married, and (2) the earlier ruling of the Faisalabad and District Sessions Court that she was underage at the time of the marriage. [HL7714]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are closely monitoring Maira Shahbaz's case following her reported abduction in April. The UK Government strongly condemns the forced marriage and forced conversion of women and girls.

We are concerned about women's and girls' rights and ongoing reports of forced marriage and forced conversion in Pakistan of women and girls from religious minorities such as Hindus, Christians and Sikhs.

We regularly raise our concerns about Freedom of Religion or Belief, women and girl's rights and gender equality with the government of Pakistan at a senior level. Most recently, I raised our human rights concerns with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 15 July.

McKinsey and Company: Contact Tracing

Asked by Lord Scriven

To ask Her Majesty's Government when McKinsey were contracted to review the NHS Test and Trace system; how they approached that company about

undertaking that review; and which criteria they used to choose that company for such an undertaking. [HL6985]

Lord Bethell: The contract with McKinsey commenced on 18 May 2020. McKinsey was approached via the Crown Commercial service Management Consultancy Framework 2. It was selected following the guidance on the framework due to its experience on working on similar requirements, its ability to deliver at pace and its ability to deliver at extremely short notice given the urgency of the COVID-19 situation.

Overseas Aid

Asked by The Earl of Sandwich

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to (1) identify the 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income committed to spending on aid within the merged accounts of the Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and (2) account for combined inter-departmental projects for the purposes of the commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income on aid. [HL7710]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The FCDO's Statistics on International Development publications will continue to report on the UK's Official Development Assistance spend, all of which contributes to the 0.7 commitment. Sufficient spending plans are in place to meet the 0.7 commitment in 2020.

Universities: Admissions

Asked by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with universities regarding accommodating the demand for places on courses following the withdrawal of A-level results based on algorithms; and what additional resources are being made available to universities as a result of the change of policy. [HL7611]

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, has written directly to all Vice Chancellors and has set up a Higher Education Taskforce so that the government can work with the sector to build capacity, harness expert views and tackle challenges. Together, we have agreed that all students who achieved the required grades will be offered a place at their first-choice university, wherever possible.

We have taken a number of steps to support this commitment. We have announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, we will completely remove temporary student number controls to help ensure there are no additional barriers to students being able to progress to higher education.

We have announced that we will lift caps on domestic medicine and dentistry courses in the next academic year. We will support providers to offer places to as many students who have met the grades for their current offer as they have capacity for, and where there are clinical placements available, through additional grant funding to support the costs of this provision.

We will also provide additional teaching grant funding to increase capacity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and other high-cost subjects, which are vital to the country's social needs and economy. The Office for Students (OfS) will consult the sector on the details of how the allocations are made.

Providers will also be eligible to bid for a share of up to £10 million in funding to support capital expenditure. This funding will be used to support the infrastructure required to accommodate additional students recruited as a result of the changes to policy on A level grades.

The fund will be administered by the OfS, and providers will be eligible to bid for projects that support expansion in 2020/21.

We will continue to monitor the situation and to consider the effects that deferrals will have on future years. Funding decisions for future years will be taken at the Spending Review.

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