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**Wednesday
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**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

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<i>Minister</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Baroness Evans of Bowes Park	Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal
Earl Howe	Deputy Leader of the House of Lords
Lord Agnew of Oulton	Minister of State, Cabinet Office and Treasury
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon	Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Lord Ashton of Hyde	Chief Whip
Baroness Barran	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
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
Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist	Whip
Lord Callanan	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Earl of Courtown	Deputy Chief Whip
Lord Gardiner of Kimble	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Baroness Goldie	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park	Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
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
Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay	Whip
Baroness Penn	Whip
Baroness Scott of Bybrook	Whip
Baroness Stedman-Scott	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions
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

Wednesday, 23 September 2020

Loot Boxes: Call for Evidence Launch

[HLWS459]

Baroness Barran: My Honourable Friend the Minister of State for Digital and Culture, Caroline Dinenage MP, has made the following Statement:

I am today launching a call for evidence on loot boxes in video games. I want to understand fully the existing research and concerns around loot boxes including any evidence of links to gambling-like behaviour and problem gambling amongst young people. This fulfils a commitment the government announced on 8 June as part of its response to the DCMS Select Committee's report on Immersive and Addictive Technologies.

The government takes concerns around potential harms from loot boxes seriously. This open call for evidence will seek detailed information on the impact of loot boxes on players, particularly children and young people, examining concerns that loot boxes may encourage gambling-like behaviour and lead to problem gambling, as well as examining the size and scale of the loot box market in the UK, and the impact of current voluntary and statutory protections. The call for evidence will also seek information on the direct experiences of video games players and adults responsible for children and young people who play video games.

In 2019, the government committed to review the Gambling Act with a particular focus on tackling issues around online loot boxes. The results from the call for evidence will be considered alongside the review of the Gambling Act and will inform future actions in regard to loot boxes. The government stands ready to take action should the outcomes of the call for evidence support taking a new approach to ensure users, and particularly young people, are better protected.

The government continues to support the growth of the video games sector in the UK, recognising that video games bring great economic, cultural and social benefits. Over half the UK population plays games, the vast majority engaging safely with content that allows them to enjoy fun, exciting play, find moments of relaxation, socialise and learn new skills. The video games sector, a key part of the UK's world-leading creative industries, is also a cutting edge creator and adopter of innovative new

technologies, and a provider of highly skilled creative jobs.

However, evolving digital technologies such as video games also present new responsibilities to ensure that users - particularly children and vulnerable people - are not exposed to harm.

I believe the call for evidence the government is launching today is an important step towards gathering the evidence required to ensure we can support the further growth of this innovative and important industry while protecting users.

The call for evidence document will be available on gov.uk.

Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee

[HLWS460]

Lord True: My Rt Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for Cabinet Office (Michael Gove), has today made the following Written Statement:

The fourth meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee will take place on 28 September 2020 in Brussels, with delegations attending in person and by video conference.

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

The agenda will include three items:

1. Introduction and opening remarks from co-chairs
 - 1.1 Stocktake of Specialised Committee meetings
 2. Update on Withdrawal Agreement Implementation
 - 2.1 Citizens' rights
 - 2.2 Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland
 - 2.3 Protocol on Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus
 - 2.4 Protocol on Gibraltar
 - 2.5 Financial provisions
3. AOB and concluding remarks

The UK delegation will include:

- Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP
 - The Paymaster General, Rt Hon. Penny Mordaunt MP
- Representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive have also been invited to form part of the UK delegation.

Written Answers

Wednesday, 23 September 2020

Agriculture: Innovation

Asked by **Lord Pendry**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the case for regulating the use of new technology in the development of non-genetically modified organism products. [HL7984]

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: The Government believes in a science-based approach to regulating genetically modified organisms and newer precision breeding technologies such as gene-editing (GE). We are supportive of the benefits that GM and new precision breeding technologies could bring to business and consumers, and in supporting economic growth.

The current EU rules capture GE organisms within the regulatory framework for GMO legislation. The Government's assessment is that if a GE organism could have been produced naturally or through traditional breeding methods then it should not be captured by GMO legislation.

The Government intends to consult the public this autumn on whether changes to primary legislation may be required for the regulation of precision breeding technologies to become more science-based and not subject to unnecessary regulatory burdens.

If GE organisms become classed as non-GMOs then other regulatory frameworks may apply depending on the intended use of the product.

Assessments

Asked by **Lord Porter of Spalding**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure the successful operation of the 2021 BTEC, GCSE, and A-Level examinations and the subsequent publication of results. [HL7985]

Baroness Berridge: We are clear in our intention for exams and assessments to proceed next year. The department will continue to work with school and college stakeholders, Ofqual and the awarding organisations, to ensure that BTEC, GCSE, AS and A level exams and assessments in 2021 are fair and proceed smoothly.

Ofqual has already consulted on a range of possible adaptations to GCSE, AS and A level exams and assessments next year on a subject-by-subject basis, and has announced some changes that will reduce pressure on teaching time, and help ensure those young people taking exams next year have the same opportunities to progress as the students before them. Ofqual has also consulted and engaged with awarding organisations to agree revisions to its Extraordinary Regulatory Framework for vocational and technical qualifications (which include BTECs) and

its associated guidance on how awarding organisations can adapt assessments in 2020/21. We will continue to discuss these issues with school and college stakeholders, Ofqual and the awarding organisations, to ensure that exams and assessments in 2021 are fair.

Asylum

Asked by **Lord Boateng**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the role of voluntary organisations in meeting the needs of asylum seekers in terms of the supply of (1) accommodation, (2) food, and (3) other essential items, where there is no eligibility or access on the part of individual asylum seekers to public funds; and how they consult such organisations to inform their understanding of (1) the nature of unmet needs, and (2) the impact on affected individuals and local services, of asylum seekers. [HL7960]

Asked by **Lord Boateng**

To ask Her Majesty's Government when Ministers last met representatives of voluntary organisations working to meet the needs of asylum seekers to discuss the concerns such organisations have about the impact of the Government's policies on asylum seekers and the communities in which they are based; and which (1) Ministers, and (2) Departments, were involved in any such meetings. [HL7961]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: In March the Home Office set up a dedicated engagement channel with the Voluntary and Community sector on asylum and resettlement matters related to Covid-19. The British Red Cross were nominated by the sector as the single point of contact, and they were provided with a dedicated single point of contact within the Home Office. This allowed the Home Office to better understand the impact of Covid-19 on affected individuals and local services, and to work collaboratively with the sector to keep people safe. At the request of the sector, we have returned to a business as usual approach, but are continuing to speak regularly with relevant organisations.

Asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute are provided with free accommodation and other assistance to cover their essential living needs.

The accommodation is arranged by private sector providers through contractual arrangements with the Home Office. There was extensive consultation with the voluntary sector about these arrangements before the contracts were let. Support to cover essential living needs is generally proved through a weekly cash allowance, currently set as £39.60 for each person in the household. The level of the allowance is reviewed annually, and voluntary groups are invited to submit their views.

Discussion about on-going matters generally takes place through the National Asylum Stakeholder Forum, which includes key voluntary groups such as the Refugee Council, Refugee Action and the British Red Cross.

The Home Office engages with non-government organisations (NGOs) on the needs of asylum seekers primarily through the National Asylum Stakeholder Forum (NASF). This consists of two Strategic Engagement Groups (SEG), one for asylum and one for resettlement. Underpinned by NASF Sub-Groups; including groups focused on asylum decision making, asylum support, integration and mental health. These forums provide a strategic and constructive space for discussion and consultation on asylum and resettlement matters, identifying areas where the Home Office and stakeholders can work jointly to make improvements to the asylum and resettlement systems and their underpinning policies and processes. SEG and NASF meetings are held quarterly and are jointly chaired by senior Home Office officials and their NGO counterparts.

The last Asylum SEG was held on 11 June 2020, the next being 17 September 2020. Immigration ministers have met with NGOs previously, such as Caroline Noakes, the then Immigration Minister, in July 2019.

In addition, the Home Office regularly engages with the sector through informal routes such as bilateral or small group meetings.

BBC: Ethnic Groups

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the BBC about increasing the number of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic leaders within that organisation. [HL8210]

Baroness Barran: The government is clear that the BBC should be leading the way on both on and off-screen diversity, and the BBC Charter specifically requires the BBC to ensure its organisation and management reflects the diversity of the UK.

The government looks forward to the BBC's new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which will be published later this year, and to see how the BBC will work to better serve all diverse audiences across the UK nations and regions in future.

However, the BBC is independent of the government and responsible for decisions on its editorial and operational matters, including those on recruitment and staffing. As the independent regulator of the BBC, it is for Ofcom to hold the BBC to account.

Bridges: Repairs and Maintenance

Asked by Baroness Randerson

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of bridges in England that are not able to support vehicles over a certain weight as a result of structural weakness. [HL8147]

Asked by Baroness Randerson

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much funding they have allocated for bridge repairs in England in (1)

this financial year, and (2) the subsequent five years. [HL8148]

Asked by Baroness Randerson

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much the Department for Transport has spent on bridge repairs in England in each of the last five years. [HL8149]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: On the Strategic Road Network (SRN) which is managed by Highways England, there is one structure which has a signed weight restriction, but this applies only to lanes 2 and 3. Lane 1 is unrestricted for vehicles complying with the Construction and Use Regulations. Highways England also has responsibility for most road carrying bridges crossing the SRN. Of these bridges, 84 have been identified as currently having a signed weight restriction. On the local highway network, it is a matter for each local highway authority to assess its bridge stock and the Department does not hold this information.

Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, the Department allocated £4,825 million by formula to local authorities in England, outside London, for the maintenance of their entire local road network, including bridges. Over the same period, the Department also allocated £75.4 million to local authorities through the highways maintenance challenge fund for 20 bridge maintenance projects. In addition, £892.7 million was spent on bridge repairs on the SRN.

The spend in each year is shown in the table below:

<i>£millions</i>	<i>Local Highways Maintenance Block</i>	<i>Highways maintenance Challenge Fund</i>	<i>SRN Bridge Repairs</i>
2015/16	901	32.6	161.6
2016/17	876		142.9
2017/18	876	16.5	202.8
2018/19	1,296		195.4
2019/20	876	26.3	190.0
Total	4,825	75.4	892.7

In 2020/21, the Department is allocating £876 million by formula to local authorities in England, outside London, for the maintenance of their entire local road network including bridges. During 2020/21, the Department has also allocated £31.9 million through the Highways Maintenance Challenge Fund to nine bridge maintenance projects.

Future funding decisions for local highways maintenance, including bridges, will be made as part of the current Spending Review.

There is also a proposed bridge maintenance project for the Tame Valley Viaduct in Birmingham in the local authority Majors scheme pipeline, a £93.5 million scheme. This is subject to full approval and the forecast funding profile is detailed in the table below:

2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
0.9	16.9	21.3	17.0	15.9

£millions

The planned funding for bridge repairs on the SRN, for the current financial year and the four remaining years of the current Road Investment Strategy period is shown in the table below. Funding levels for 2025/26 will be subject to future Road Investment Strategies.

2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
171.0	227.0	315.0	351.0	388.0	1,452.0

£millions

Business: Government Assistance

Asked by *Lord Myners*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether the publication of the names of borrowers under various financial support arrangements established by the Government would facilitate the identification of funding provided to businesses controlled by unidentifiable owners in tax havens or controlled by directors previously convicted of fraud. [[HL7978](#)]

Lord Agnew of Oulton: The Government has focused efforts on getting support to those who need it in a fast, fair and transparent manner, with data on loan applications and volume and value of loans approved under the loan guarantee schemes published regularly on Gov.UK.

It would be disproportionate for the Government to publish details of each individual recipient of those loans and grant payments.

Furthermore, the Government have been clear that the loans must be repaid, and banks are undertaking appropriate precautions against fraud, including customer checks and the monitoring of transactions. Any fraudulent applications can be criminally prosecuted.

China: Human Rights

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to support the proposal by UN independent experts on 26 June for (1) a UN Human Rights Council special session on China, and (2) the appointment of a dedicated UN special rapporteur on human rights in China. [[HL7966](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is committed to working with international partners at the UN to raise our serious concerns about Human Rights in China. We have played a leading role at the Human Rights Council, and in the UN Third Committee to register the breadth and depth of international concern. On 30 June, the UK read out a formal statement on behalf of 28 countries at the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council highlighting

arbitrary detention, widespread surveillance and restrictions, particularly those targeting Uyghurs and other minorities, and urging China to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights meaningful access to Xinjiang. On 29 October 2019 the UK read out a statement on Xinjiang on behalf of 23 countries at the UN Third Committee in New York. We will continue to seek opportunities in relevant UN fora to maximise pressure on China to comply with international human rights norms.

China: Sanctions

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to apply sanctions to any Chinese Communist Party Official found to be responsible for the forced sterilisation of or other human rights abuse against Uyghur Muslims in China. [[HL7965](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The FCDO are carefully considering further designations under the Global Human Rights regime. We will keep all evidence and potential listings under close review. It is not appropriate to speculate on who may be designated in the future, as to do so could reduce their impact.

China: Uyghurs

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they (1) to attend, and (3) to support, the independent tribunal established by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC to examine whether the Uyghur people are being subjected to genocide. [[HL7968](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have serious concerns about gross abuses of human rights occurring in Xinjiang and welcome any work that is rigorous, balanced and raises awareness of the situation faced by Uyghurs and other minorities in China. We are aware of this initiative by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, and will study any resulting report carefully.

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

Asked by *Lord Allen of Kensington*

To ask Her Majesty's Government which member countries of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership are currently supportive of the UK becoming a member; and what lobbying activity they are undertaking with those members who are not yet supportive. [[HL7953](#)]

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel: Pursuing potential accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a priority for the HM Government and is a key part of our trade negotiations programme. We have engaged with all eleven member countries, at both ministerial and official level. Most recently, on 9th September 2020, my Rt Hon.

Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade addressed a United Kingdom-CPTPP Senior Officials' meeting and all CPTPP members have welcomed our interest in accession. Prior to that, on 10th July 2020, the Secretary of State convened Heads of Mission from all CPTPP countries to discuss the United Kingdom's potential accession. We will continue to engage all members as we consider our application, an approach that aligns with the accession process for new CPTPP members, which encourages countries to engage informally with every CPTPP member.

Coronavirus: Vaccination

Asked by Lord Scriven

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assurances they have received from companies about how many vaccinations for COVID-19 it will be possible to manufacture and produce in the UK by December. [HL8033]

Lord Callanan: Owing to commercial sensitivities the Government is not able to reveal such information concerning vaccine developers at this time. The Vaccines Taskforce has taken action to scale up UK vaccine manufacturing capabilities, so that if and when a vaccine is found it can be produced at pace. This includes funding to accelerate and expand the new Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, bring online a Rapid Deployment Facility, and a new state-of-the-art centre to scale up COVID-19 vaccine and gene therapy manufacturing. Government has also partnered with Wockhardt to provide fill and finish services.

Asked by Lord Truscott

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on 8 September (HC Deb, cols 517-519), what is the nature of the vaccines which form the basis of the agreements in place with six separate vaccine developers; and who are the developers. [HL8039]

Lord Callanan: The UK has secured access to 6 different candidates, across 4 different vaccine types, reflecting the government's strategy to ensure the UK has a supply of vaccines should any of these prove safe and effective:

Adenoviral vaccines (University of Oxford/AstraZeneca, Janssen);

mRNA vaccines (BioNTech/Pfizer);

Inactivated whole virus vaccines (Valneva);

Protein adjuvant vaccines (GlaxoSmithKline/Sanofi, Novavax).

Asked by Lord Truscott

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many doses for a COVID-19 vaccine they have purchased from companies based in (1) the United States, (2) China, and (3) Russia; if none, whether they plan to purchase

such vaccines from those countries; and if so, when. [HL8040]

Lord Callanan: The UK Government has agreements in the US with BioNTech/Pfizer for 30 million doses, Novavax for 60 million doses and Janssen for 30 million doses of their not-for-profit vaccine. We are taking a portfolio-based approach that monitors the landscape of coronavirus vaccine development, both here in the UK and internationally. Although we continue to investigate further potential vaccine candidates worldwide, we are currently not able to give any further information on these candidates owing to commercial sensitivity. We will, however, announce agreements with any other vaccine developers in due course.

Developing Countries: Contraceptives

Asked by Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what countries supported by UK aid have provided contraception as part of their package of essential health care services during the COVID 19 pandemic. [HL8037]

Baroness Sugg: Many countries such as Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Nigeria have provided contraception as part of their package of essential health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic with support from UK aid. The UK believes that family planning is central to a country's essential health care package and we are working to ensure all essential services are protected during the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that COVID-19 has had a huge effect - a recent WHO survey showed 68% out of 105 countries experienced disruptions to their family planning services. Our country, regional, and global programmes, such as the Global Financing Facility and UNFPA Reproductive Health Supplies programme, support partners to advocate and innovate to reduce these disruptions.

Ethiopia: Internally Displaced People

Asked by Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government what humanitarian assistance they are providing to internally displaced people in the Oromia Region in Ethiopia; and what steps they have taken to protect civilians displaced by conflict in that area. [HL8115]

Baroness Sugg: In Oromia region, the UK is providing vital humanitarian aid to people affected by forced displacement including nutrition assistance to women and children, safe drinking water, health care services and shelter. The UK Government is working with UN partners and the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that the UK's assistance is well targeted and reaches the most vulnerable, including those displaced by conflict.

During his visit to Ethiopia last month, the UK's Minister for Africa met with the Regional President of Oromia and discussed the importance of development and

improving people's livelihoods to address grievances in the region.

Government Departments: Staff

Asked by Lord Myners

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to publish the weekly reports on the percentage of full-time employees of each Government department attending the workplace at least once per week; and if not, why not. [HL7976]

Lord True: Civil servants have continued to work throughout the pandemic to deliver public services and support the Government. There are no plans to centrally publish the information requested.

Greece: Migrant Camps

Asked by Baroness Altmann

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to support victims of the fire at the Moria refugee camp in Lesbos; and whether they plan to bring any of those affected, including children, to the UK. [HL8041]

Baroness Sugg: The UK is responding to requests by the Greek Government to provide specific humanitarian goods and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is urgently making plans for the delivery of these goods.

The UK has a long and proud history of welcoming those in need and escaping persecution. Throughout the pandemic the UK has remained ready to receive those accepted for transfer under the Dublin III Regulation. We remain in regular contact with sending Member States, including Greece, who are responsible for arranging transfers.

Asked by Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they are providing to the refugees based in the Moria camp on Lesbos after the recent fire; and what steps they are taking to support sexual and reproductive health and rights services in that camp. [HL8167]

Baroness Sugg: The UK is responding to requests by the Greek Government to provide specific humanitarian goods and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is urgently making plans for the delivery of these goods. The UK has historically provided support to international organisations working in the camps on a range of issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and will continue to do so.

Greece: Refugees

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of

Greece about reports that that government has expelled over one thousand refugees. [HL8060]

Baroness Sugg: We are in close touch with the Greek Government on migration issues and the UK Government remains committed to supporting Greece's efforts to manage migration effectively. Greece has rejected allegations of conducting pushback operations against migrant vessels seeking to reach its territory. We urge all those involved to uphold international human rights standards in respect of migrants and to avoid any actions that may endanger human life.

Horizon Europe

Asked by Baroness Randerson

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the progress in negotiations with the EU on the UK's access to the Horizon Europe research funding programme. [HL7992]

Lord Callanan: The Government has made clear in its Roadmap that we aim to maintain a close and friendly relationship with our European partners and are in negotiations with the EU seeking to agree a fair and balanced deal for participation in certain EU R&D schemes, including Horizon Europe. Negotiations with the European Commission are ongoing and it is too early to make an assessment.

My Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has made several Written Ministerial Statements in the House of Commons that provide an update on the UK's negotiations with the EU, including on EU Programmes. These include HCWS271 (Official Report, 8th June 2020) and HCWS346 (Official Report, 7th July 2020).

Housing: Databases

Asked by Lord Allan of Hallam

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take to promote the use of the Unique Property Reference Numbers and Unique Street Reference Numbers that were released as open data in July in (1) the public sector, and (2) the private sector. [HL7839]

Lord True: The Geospatial Commission has released the Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRN) and Unique Street Reference Numbers (USRN) free of charge, as part of its updated contract with Ordnance Survey. UPRNs and USRNs are critical identifiers in linking housing, planning, infrastructure and construction data in particular.

In order to promote their common usage, the Open Standards Board, part of the Government Digital Service, has mandated that UPRNs and USRNs are used in all public sector data sets that reference properties and streets. In parallel, the Geospatial Commission, Ordnance Survey, Geoplace, the Improvement Service Scotland and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local

Government continue to undertake an extensive process of engagement with creators and users of geospatial data in both the public and private sectors. This includes a programme of presentations, webinars, newsletters, specialist blogs and best practice guides.

Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft

Asked by Lord Campbell of Pittenweem

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they plan to proceed with the acquisition of more F-35 Lightning aircraft; and how many such aircraft will be purchased. [HL8176]

Baroness Goldie: The UK's F-35B aircraft are procured using a 'Block Buy' approach through the US-led Joint Programme Office. The UK has ordered 35 aircraft to date, and procurement of the next 13 has already commenced, these will be delivered through the 'Block Buy 2' Programme (also referred to as Lot 15-17). This will take the UK to 48 F-35B aircraft.

Further decisions on procurement beyond the 48 aircraft will follow the ongoing Integrated Review.

Kickstart Scheme: Disability

Asked by Lord Browne of Ladyton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that young disabled people are able to fully benefit from the Kickstart Scheme. [HL8238]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: We are encouraging employers to create a range of opportunities through the Kickstart Scheme for all young people aged 16 to 24 who are at risk of long-term unemployment including those who have disabilities. Job Centre Plus Work Coaches will identify those young people most in need of the extra support offered by the Kickstart Scheme. We encourage organisations that work with disabled young people to take part in the Kickstart scheme, acting as gateway organisations for their networks of small and medium employers, to encourage and support young people into a number of careers. This will help ensure that there is nothing to exclude young disabled people, or any disadvantaged groups, from accessing the Kickstart Scheme.

The Department for Work and Pensions also offers a range of support programmes including Access to Work and Disability Confident to advise and support employers looking to take on disabled jobseekers – this support can be accessed through local Jobcentres.

Malta: Refugees

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Malta about migrants and refugees alleged to be detained on ill-equipped ferries in Maltese waters. [HL8059]

Baroness Sugg: The FCDO is aware of reports that irregular migrants rescued in Malta's Search and Rescue Zone have been kept aboard vessels outside Malta's territorial waters. The Government of Malta has said that keeping irregular migrants aboard vessels at sea has been a precaution to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas raised the importance of protecting the rights of irregular migrants with Malta's Foreign Minister during the UK-Malta migration dialogue on 27 July.

NatWest: Closures

Asked by Baroness Whitaker

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of NatWest bank's closure, without explanation, of the accounts of (1) small business customers after their approval for loans under the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, and (2) the members of the Facebook group 'NatWest closed down my account'. [HL8000]

Lord Agnew of Oulton: The Government believes that any dispute arising between banks and their customers is usually best resolved by the parties involved. If a customer wishes to pursue a complaint, their first recourse is through the bank's official customer complaints procedure. The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) requires banks to properly investigate all complaints and, through ongoing supervision, it continues to monitor the banks' complaint handling processes.

If a customer is not satisfied with their bank's response to their complaint, then they may wish to consider an approach to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS). The FOS provides a free, independent dispute resolution service for bank customers, including eligible small businesses.

Navy: Reserve Forces

Asked by Lord West of Spithead

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Goldie on 14 September (HL7741), whether the Merchant Navy Reserve was disbanded on (1) 15 December 2003 upon the implementation of SI 2003/2861, or (2) another date. [HL8174]

Baroness Goldie: The Explanatory Note to The Merchant Shipping (Merchant Navy Reserve) (Revocation) Regulations 2003 (SI 2003/2861), that came into force on 15 December 2003, states that, following a series of Ministry of Defence reviews, the Merchant Navy Reserve scheme was disbanded on 23 May 2000.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the advice provided in my earlier answer. All Merchant Navy Reservists would have had the opportunity to apply to join the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR). However, the Merchant Navy Reserve did not fold, as an organisation, in to the RNR.

Offenders: Foreign Nationals

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure (1) that removal planning starts at the beginning of sentences of imprisonment in cases where foreign offenders are recommended for removal by sentencing courts, and (2) that the removal of such offenders takes place at the end of imprisonment. [HL7971]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: This Government puts the rights of the British public before those of criminals, and we are clear that foreign criminals should be deported from the UK wherever it is legal and practical to do so.

Foreign national offenders (FNOs) who abuse our hospitality should be in no doubt of our determination to deport them and since 2010 we have removed over 55,000.

In the period April 2019 to March 2020, we removed over 2,000 FNOs direct from prison under the Early Removal Scheme (ERS) many of whom were identified as FNOs who wanted to leave the UK. Those who wish to return home voluntarily are now fast tracked through the system to ensure a speedy removal.

We make every effort to ensure that an FNO's deportation coincides, as far as possible, with their release from prison however the deportation of FNOs is complex. We are working with the Ministry of Justice on options to maximise the opportunities for early removal of FNOs under ERS.

All FNOs are referred to the Home Office by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service within ten days of being sentenced and five days when they have received a short prison sentence, so that deportation action can be considered and progressed. If an FNO meets the criteria for deportation, a notification of liability to deportation is served and deportation proceedings commence. The Home Office is now serving FNOs with notices of liability to deportation earlier in their sentence. This allows time to progress the case and remove barriers so that FNOs can be removed more quickly.

Olympic Games: China

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much public funding has been allocated for UK participation in the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing; whether, in the light of reports of serious human rights violations against Uighurs and others, they have made representations to the International Olympic Committee about reconsidering the suitability of Beijing as a host city; and what plans they have to reconsider UK participation if any such violations continue and the host city remains unchanged. [HL8103]

Baroness Barran: The Government, through UK Sport, is investing £20m into Winter Olympic sports

during the current Beijing 2022 funding cycle. UK Sport's current funding figures for Summer and Winter Olympic Paralympic sports can be found here: <https://www.uk sport.gov.uk/our-work/investing-in-sport/current-funding-figures>

Decisions on which cities should host Summer and Winter Olympic Games are matters for the International Olympic Committee.

The British Olympic Association (BOA), a privately funded organisation independent of Government, is responsible for Team GB's participation at Summer and Winter Olympic Games. As the National Olympic Committee (NOC) for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the BOA may cooperate with governments, but rule 27.6 of the Olympic Charter states "The NOCs must preserve their autonomy and resist all pressures of any kind, including but not limited to political, legal, religious or economic pressures which may prevent them from complying with the Olympic Charter."

Pensions: Gender

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to reduce the gender pension gap. [HL8213]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Automatic enrolment has reversed the decline in workplace pension saving. Latest figures show that over 10 million workers have been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension by more than 1.7 million employers. By 2019/20 an estimated extra £18.6 billion a year is estimated to go into workplace pensions as a result of this policy.

Automatic enrolment was designed to help groups who historically were poorly served or excluded from workplace pension saving, such as women and lower earners. These reforms have helped millions more women save into a workplace pension, many for the first time. Workplace pension participation among eligible women working in the private sector has risen from 40 per cent in 2012 to 86 per cent in 2019 – which is equal to men.

Reforms to the State Pension have improved State Pension outcomes. Over three million women stand to receive an average of £550 more per year by 2030 as a result of the recent reforms. There are currently still inequalities, based on historic factors, but in time, these will reduce, helped by the reforms of the new State Pension.

In private pensions, the most important factors driving the gap are related to the labour market with inequalities in pay and working patterns. Women are more likely to take career breaks than men and to work part-time in lower-paid jobs because of caring responsibilities. We have put in place practical support to help people with caring responsibilities return to work, and to support families to share caring responsibilities more evenly. This includes doubling the free childcare available in England for eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds to 30 hours per week, and consulting on increasing the

transparency of employers' flexible working and parental leave policies, and on high-level options for reforming parental leave and pay, to allow both parents to play a greater role in childcare.

Police: Racial Discrimination

Asked by Lord Pendry

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address inequality in the treatment of black people by the police. [HL7982]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The strength of policing in England & Wales lies in its relationships with the communities it serves. The measures being introduced by this Government to support officers, broaden representation and enhance accountability will help the police make these relationships even stronger.

We have put in place measures to ensure that policing is subject to appropriate levels of transparency and accountability – with regular inspections of the way forces engage with communities, frequent publication of data on use of police powers and strengthening the police complaints system. The public rightly expect police officers to meet high standards of professional conduct and the vast majority of officers do so.

We know that black people, particularly black men, are over-represented in the criminal justice system, and this Government is tackling the broader structural inequalities that lead to this.

Private Equity

Asked by Lord Myners

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the potential competitive threat to the UK economy of treating carried interest arising from the management of private equity funds as income rather than capital; and what plans the Office for Tax Simplification has to investigate this issue. [HL7977]

Lord Agnew of Oulton: The Government recognises that a competitive financial services sector in the UK, which includes the management of private equity funds, is an important part of attracting investment and driving growth.

The UK's approach to the taxation of carried interest remains in line with most other G7 countries. It seeks to ensure that returns are taxed in line with their character and taxed at rates which appropriately balance the need to raise revenue with the importance of maintaining the UK's competitiveness for fund management.

The OTS is undertaking a review of CGT and aspects of the taxation of chargeable gains. The review will recommend ways to simplify the tax system in line with the statutory role of the OTS.

Questions for Short Debate

Asked by Lord Truscott

To ask the Leader of the House when Questions for Short Debate will be re-introduced as an item of business in the House. [HL7901]

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: Subject to the progress of legislative business, it is expected that questions for short debate will be re-introduced during October.

Road Traffic Control: Kent

Asked by Lord Pendry

To ask Her Majesty's Government what the estimated costs are to date for the preparations of (1) Operation Stack, and (2) Operation Brock, to minimise any traffic disruption at the Port of Dover following the end of the Brexit transition period, including the costs of any exercises held. [HL8143]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Operation Stack is a long-standing approach to managing disruption caused by delays at the Channel ports. It involves partial or complete closure of parts of the M20. The Government has incurred no additional costs in relation to Operation Stack in preparing for the end of the EU transition period.

In view of the traffic management issues experienced in Kent when Operation Stack is invoked, the Kent Resilience Forum – with the Government's assistance – has developed Operation Brock which includes a contraflow on the M20 to be available at the end of the transition period onwards. Highways England is spending £60.1 million in developing a Quick Moveable Barrier which can be installed within a few hours. In addition, the Government is putting in place additional temporary lorry holding capacity to enable the Kent Resilience Forum to manage disruption. These costs are subject to ongoing commercial discussions, so we are unable to disclose them at this time.

Schools: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Watson of Invergowrie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the additional costs facing schools in ensuring that gym and sports equipment is cleaned and maintained to a sufficient standard to prevent the spread of COVID-19. [HL7913]

Baroness Berridge: Schools have the flexibility to decide how physical education, sport and physical activity will be provided whilst following the measures in their system of controls. Pupils should be kept in consistent groups, sports equipment thoroughly cleaned between each use by different individual groups. The government's guidance for the full opening of schools includes guidance on physical activity and provides links

to additional advice that is available to support schools with the safe use of equipment from organisations such as the Association for PE, the Youth Sport Trust, Swim England and Sport England. The guidance can be found here:

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

As stated in our reopening guidance, schools should use their existing resources when making arrangements to welcome all children back for the autumn. Schools have also continued to receive their core funding allocations throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. Following last year's Spending Round, school budgets are rising by £2.6 billion in 2020-21, £4.8 billion in 2021-22 and £7.1 billion in 2022-23, compared to 2019-20.

Shipping: Carbon Emissions

Asked by Lord Teverson

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with industry and other sector bodies about the role that decarbonising the maritime sector can play in achieving the UK's target to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. [HL8093]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The domestic maritime sector falls under the UK's national net zero target, and in common with the wider economy will need to be decarbonised by 2050 in order to achieve net zero.

The Department has regular meetings with industry and civil society representatives on the issue of decarbonisation, to discuss both domestic Net Zero and the international work to address greenhouse gas emissions being undertaken at the International Maritime Organization.

The Department has also established the Clean Maritime Council, a grouping of senior UK stakeholders who engage on environmental issues. This forms part of the Department's Clean Maritime Plan.

Council members have provided input to the Department's plans on green recovery and decarbonisation and hope to be able to meet again soon.

SS Richard Montgomery: Wrecks

Asked by Viscount Waverley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their latest safety assessment of the wreckage of the SS Richard Montgomery; and what action they are taking to protect the Thames Estuary and Kent Coast from the threat posed by the unexploded ordnances. [HL8171]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government's view is that the wreck is in a relatively stable condition. It is however considered prudent to take sensible steps to

mitigate the risk. As part of our ongoing assessment of the wreck and long-term management of the risk, a decision has been taken to explore the potential to reduce the height of the masts. The Ministry of Defence is managing that project on behalf of the Department for Transport.

Whilst the condition of the masts is not believed to have seriously deteriorated over time, the decision to explore reducing the height of the masts was informed by the regular surveys conducted by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency. These surveys can be found on Gov.uk.

Suicide

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many deaths (1) of men, (2) of women, and (3) in total, were recorded as suicide in England in each of the past ten years. [HL8003]

Asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many deaths (1) of men, (2) of women, and (3) in total, were recorded as suicide in each region of England in each of the past ten years. [HL8004]

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

Dear Lord Willis,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am responding to your Parliamentary Question asking how many deaths (1) of men, (2) of women, and (3) in total, were recorded as suicide in England in each of the past ten years (HL8003); and in each region of England in each of the past ten years (HL8004).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes annual suicide death registration statistics for England as part of our annual statistical release for the UK[1][2]. The latest available figures were published by the ONS in September 2020 and covered calendar years up to 2019 providing break downs by sex, age, and place of residence, including region.

Table 1 provides the number of suicides registered between 2010 to 2019 for males, females and all persons in England.

Table 2 provides the number of suicides registered between 2010 to 2019 for males, females and all persons in each region of England.

In England and Wales, deaths caused by suicide are investigated by coroners. Due to the length of time it takes to hold a coroner's inquest, around half of the deaths registered in a given year occurred in the same year, with the remaining deaths occurring in previous years.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sir Ian Diamond

Table 1: Number of suicides by sex registered between 2010 and 2019 in England

Year	Males	Females	Persons
2010	3,166	1,036	4,202
2011	3,420	1,098	4,518
2012	3,488	1,025	4,513
2013	3,688	1,039	4,727
2014	3,701	1,181	4,882
2015	3,600	1,220	4,820
2016	3,464	1,111	4,575
2017	3,328	1,123	4,451
2018	3,800	1,221	5,021
2019	4,017	1,299	5,316

Source:ONS

Table 2: Number of suicides by sex and English region registered between 2010 to 2019[3][4][5]

		2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Persons	North East	266	287	248	244	247	305	295	246	273	235
	North West	709	682	634	661	674	727	716	704	675	616
	Yorkshire & The Humber	660	577	462	469	544	451	502	482	464	380
	East Midlands	456	400	341	352	399	426	385	376	365	323
	West Midlands	534	514	500	446	477	571	477	453	433	450
	East of England	626	614	468	526	494	520	456	440	483	445
	London	616	661	568	580	735	552	516	577	585	574
	South East	859	720	720	754	756	794	820	716	724	683
	South West	590	566	510	543	494	536	560	519	516	496
Males	North East	218	226	198	179	185	242	229	198	218	172
	North West	540	529	480	498	498	542	568	552	527	479
	Yorkshire & The Humber	482	440	353	369	412	354	407	382	360	286
	East Midlands	345	300	254	276	305	324	308	304	281	239
	West Midlands	411	387	382	340	373	446	386	357	325	334
	East of England	462	465	346	395	374	390	353	330	364	352
	London	437	503	419	447	543	424	395	435	427	434
	South East	657	526	524	556	563	604	627	538	526	501
	South West	465	424	372	404	347	375	415	392	392	369

		2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Females	North East	48	61	50	65	62	63	66	48	55	63
	North West	169	153	154	163	176	185	148	152	148	137
	Yorkshire & The Humber	178	137	109	100	132	97	95	100	104	94
	East Midlands	111	100	87	76	94	102	77	72	84	84
	West Midlands	123	127	118	106	104	125	91	96	108	116
	East of England	164	149	122	131	120	130	103	110	119	93
	London	179	158	149	133	192	128	121	142	158	140
	South East	202	194	196	198	193	190	193	178	198	182
	South West	125	142	138	139	147	161	145	127	124	127

Source: ONS

[1]

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/latest>

[2] Due to operational difficulties, suicides registered in 2019 in Northern Ireland and Scotland were unavailable at the time of analysis, and so this year's annual release is for England and Wales only. The ONS will update the UK figures at a later stage.

[3] Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). This includes all deaths from intentional self-harm for persons aged 10 years and over, and deaths where the intent was undetermined for those aged 15 years and over. The ICD codes used to select the deaths are shown in Box 1.

ICD-10 codes	Description
X60-X84	Intentional self-harm
Y10-Y34	Injury/poisoning of undetermined intent

[4] Figures are for persons usually resident in each area, based on postcode boundaries as of May 2020.

[5] Figures are for deaths registered, rather than deaths occurring in each calendar year. Due to the length of time it takes to complete a coroner's inquest, it can take months or even years for a suicide to be registered. More details can be found in the 'Suicide Registrations in the UK' statistical bulletin.

Supply Teachers: Coronavirus

Asked by **Lord Storey**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what financial support they have made available for supply teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL7993]

Baroness Berridge: State funded schools continued to receive their budgets last year, as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure. This ensured that

they were able to continue to pay their staff and meet their other regular financial commitments.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, the guidance made clear that schools should continue to pay any directly hired staff, including supply staff, as normal.

Schools were also advised to support financially at-risk employment agencies, with whom they had existing agreements, to ensure these agencies could continue to pay their workers where assignments had been curtailed. Supply teachers employed by private agencies who were not on a live assignment, or who were unable to source new assignments, were able to access financial support through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

As schools begin to fully reopen for all pupils, from the beginning of the autumn term, we anticipate the demand for supply teachers to return to normal.

Details of a broad range of specific COVID-19 financial support for all educational settings including early years, schools, further education colleges and universities is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care>.

Teachers: Recruitment

Asked by **Lord Lexden**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of teachers recruited by maintained schools after participating in school-centred initial teacher training programmes in independent schools. [HL7972]

Baroness Berridge: The information requested is not held centrally on the number of teachers recruited by maintained schools after participating in school-centred initial teacher training programmes in independent schools.

Terrorism: Northern Ireland

Asked by *Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much funding they have allocated to the Northern Ireland Troubles-related incident victims payments scheme. [HL8154]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The UK Government made legislation establishing a victims' payments scheme in January. It did so both to fulfil its legal obligation and because it is committed to doing what it can to progress a scheme that has been delayed by political disagreements for too long.

The Regulations provide for the Executive Office to be able to provide funding to the Department responsible for supporting the Victims' Payments Board. The devolved funding settlement means that the Executive is funded through the Block Grant together with its own revenue raising capabilities to fund its statutory responsibilities, including this scheme.

Asked by *Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what engagements they have had with victims' groups on the proposals to address the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. [HL8205]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The Government remains committed to making progress on legacy issues and recognises the importance of engaging with victims groups as part of this process. There have been a number of ministerial and official level engagements with groups funded under the Victims and Survivors Service's Victims Support Programme. We have also engaged with the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, the Victims and Survivors Service Board as well as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and other key stakeholders.

Asked by *Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the compliance of the proposals to address the legacy of the Troubles with the obligation to carry out an effective investigation in line with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. [HL8206]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is committed to introducing legislation to address the legacy of Northern Ireland's past as soon as possible and will provide further detail on those proposals in due course. We want information recovery and reconciliation to be at the heart of a revised legacy system that is fair and proportionate, helps families to find out what happened to their loved ones and is in line with our Article 2 obligations.

Trade Agreements

Asked by *Lord Allen of Kensington*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have held with the governments of (1) Canada, (2) Australia, and (3) New Zealand, about establishing a trading bloc with those nations. [HL7954]

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel: The Department for International Trade (DIT) has not had discussions about establishing a trading bloc with Canada, Australia or New Zealand. However, we are committed to negotiating and securing ambitious free trade deals with Australia and New Zealand as soon as possible, harnessing the opportunity to negotiate a high-quality agreement with like-minded, liberal trading nations.

Similarly, both Britain and Canada agree on the importance of protecting and strengthening our trading relationship now that we have left the EU and we are engaging constructively with HM Government of Canada on a seamless transition of our trading relationship beyond 2020, so that British and Canadian businesses can continue to benefit from liberalised trade.

In addition, the United Kingdom is also considering accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which Canada, Australia and New Zealand are three members.

Transport: Safety

Asked by *Baroness Randerson*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the respective risks of travel by (1) public transport, and (2) car. [HL8152]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Department has not made an assessment of the risks of travel by public transport or car. The Department publishes statistics on casualty numbers and rates by modes of travel in the annual Transport Statistics Great Britain publication. Comparing risks between transport modes is not straightforward as the types of journeys people make with each mode are different, so a simple comparison of casualty numbers or rate (casualties per billion passenger miles) may not be a fair one.

Uighurs: China

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to prevent the import of items manufactured in factories which use forced labour of Uyghurs in China. [HL7967]

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel: HM Government have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, with credible reports of the use of forced labour. It has always been the case that, where we have concerns, we raise them, as we did on this issue at the UN Human Rights Council in March. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

HM Government is committed to eliminating modern slavery. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 made Britain the first country in the world to require businesses to report on how they are tackling modern slavery, including forced labour, in their operations and supply chains. Section 54 of the Act was designed to empower consumers, investors, civil society and others to scrutinise the action that businesses are taking to identify and address modern slavery in their operations and supply chains.

UK Trade with EU

Asked by *Baroness Randerson*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the letter sent by senior representatives of the logistics industry to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 2 September, in particular those representatives' (1) request for an urgent roundtable meeting to discuss their preparedness for the UK's transition from EU trade regulations at the end of this year, and (2) concerns that the supply chain may be "severely disrupted" if issues are not addressed. [HL7878]

Lord True: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has responded to the letter and hosted a roundtable alongside the Transport Secretary, other Ministers and senior officials on 17 September.

The Government agrees with the need for public authorities, businesses and individuals to take action now to prepare for the end of the transition and have set out extensive guidance on GOV.uk/transition.

UK Trade with EU: Northern Ireland

Asked by *Viscount Waverley*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 8 September that provisions of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill do "break international law in a very specific and limited way" (HC Deb, col 509), whether that statement reflects their position; and if so, what assessment they have made of the impact of such an approach on international relations. [HL7999]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: The government's legal position on the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill and Northern Ireland Protocol was set out in a statement published on 10 September, and remains unchanged. That statement makes clear that clauses 42 and 43 of the Bill may be exercised in a way which is incompatible with the

provisions of the Withdrawal Agreement, and that the 'notwithstanding provision' in clause 45 partially disapplies Article 4 of the Withdrawal Agreement, regardless of whether any regulations made under clause 42 or 43 of the Bill are in fact compatible with the Withdrawal Agreement. The statement of 10 September also makes clear that it is an established principle of international law that a State is obliged to discharge its treaty obligations in good faith, and that this is, and will remain, the key principle in informing the UK's approach to international relations. However, in the difficult and highly exceptional circumstances in which we find ourselves it is important to remember the fundamental principle of Parliamentary sovereignty.

Universal Credit

Asked by *Baroness Lister of Burtersett*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many declarations for Universal Credit were made between 16 March and 1 September; and how many of those were claims from couples. [HL7973]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The Department publishes monthly statistics on the number of households, by family type, on Universal Credit. The latest available information is for May 2020, and is provided below:

Total number of households on Universal Credit as of May 2020 was 4,239,779. Of these, the number of couple households stood at 866,056

Further breakdowns are provided in the accompanying tables. This information is published here: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>.

The next update will be on Tuesday 10th November 2020 at 9:30am.

Guidance on how to extract the information required can be found at:

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

The Answer includes the following attached material:

HL7973 table 1 [HL7973 Table 1.xlsx]

HL7973 table 2 [HL7973 Table 2.xlsx]

The material can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-09-09/HL7973>

Universities: Coronavirus

Asked by *Lord Taylor of Warwick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with universities about the steps which can be taken to prevent new outbreaks of COVID-19 when students return home. [HL7997]

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: The government is doing all that it can to minimise the risks to higher education staff and students and the wider community.

The Department for Education is in frequent contact with representatives of the higher education sector, having regular interactions at both official and ministerial level with key parties, including Universities UK and the Office for Students.

In August, we established a higher education taskforce comprising sector representatives including Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, Universities UK, and vice-chancellors, and chaired by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities. We have been able to use these discussions to ensure that feedback from the sector has been included in both our higher education guidance and our communications campaign, helping to ensure that students can return and remain on campuses in a secure environment.

Universities have been working very hard to ensure that students can return safely, and they have put in place a wide range of measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. This includes considering ways to relieve pressure on public transport, adopting staggered openings, timetabling changes, and a blended mix of online and face-to-face teaching in smaller groups, following basic guidance on social distancing while living and moving round and maintaining good hand and respiratory hygiene.

To help higher education providers make informed decisions about their provision, we have updated our guidance on reopening higher education buildings and campuses to reflect the latest public health advice, including on face coverings, local lockdowns, and test and trace.

We will continue to work closely with the sector, with Public Health England, and across the government to help minimise the risk of COVID-19 and to help higher education providers put in place measures that apply in their particular circumstances.

Veterans

*Asked by **Baroness Greengross***

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support older veterans who are facing social isolation and loneliness; and how they plan to ensure that such veterans are treated equitably with those of working age. [[HL8025](#)]

Lord True: In the Strategy for our Veterans Consultation Response published in January 2020, we committed to exploring how veterans could benefit from initiatives developed and invested in through the cross-Government Tackling Loneliness agenda. The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) is working with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives to support veterans of all ages who are facing social isolation.

The Government recognises the important role that the charity sector plays in supporting and connecting with vulnerable and isolated veterans on the ground. In light of COVID-19, the Government awarded £6 million in emergency COVID-19 funding to 100 Service charities, to ensure that they could continue to provide vital services to the Armed Forces community throughout the pandemic. This is in addition to £10 million awarded yearly through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, which provides specific funding to organisations through grants programmes. This includes a current grant programme to identify and support charities working to tackle loneliness in the Armed Forces community. Previous recipients of grant funding include Veterans Breakfast Clubs, Age UK and a number of other organisations who support older and socially isolated veterans.

The OVA has also commissioned new research looking at the specific impact of COVID-19 on the veteran community, including in terms of isolation and loneliness. This will allow policy makers to understand how the pandemic has affected the veteran community and respond with evidence-based and targeted interventions.

Visas: Africa

*Asked by **Lord Oates***

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to respond to the report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Africa Visa problems for African visitors to the UK, published on 16 July 2019. [[HL8029](#)]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The Home Office continues to plan to respond to the report and will do so before the conclusion of the current parliamentary session.

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