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**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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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<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, 14 October 2020

Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Panel Member

[HLWS509]

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: My Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister has made the following statement:

The fire in Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017 was an unimaginable tragedy that should never have happened.

The Government set up the Grenfell Tower Inquiry to get to the truth about what happened and to deliver justice for victims, survivors, bereaved families and the wider community.

Ensuring that such a terrible tragedy can never happen again remains a priority for this Government.

In February this year, I announced my intention to appoint an additional panel member to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Section 7(1)(b) of the Inquiries Act 2005 allows me to appoint panel members to the Inquiry panel at any time during the Inquiry. In appointing a panel member, section 8(1)(a) and (b) of the Inquiries Act 2005 require me to ensure that the Inquiry panel (considered as a whole) has the necessary expertise to undertake the Inquiry, and to consider the need for balance (considered against the background of the terms of reference) in the composition of the panel.

Phase 2 of the Inquiry is the largest phase in terms of the number and range of issues to be considered, and given the diversity of issues, and the expertise already available to the Inquiry, I am pleased to appoint Ali Akbor OBE as the Inquiry's third panel member.

Ali is currently the CEO of Unity Homes and Enterprise, a leading housing association supporting sustainable and diverse neighbourhoods in West Yorkshire. Prior to his role at Unity, Ali was finance director for the Community and Social Services Directorate at the City of Salford. In December 2019, he was awarded an OBE for services to the community in Leeds. His knowledge of, and professional expertise in social housing, local government and community engagement are highly relevant skills and experience which will add great value to the Inquiry panel.

I am confident that Ali's appointment will ensure that the Inquiry panel has the diversity of skills and expertise necessary for the scope and complexity of issues to be addressed by Phase 2 of its work.

I wrote to the Chair of the Inquiry, Sir Martin Moore-Bick, on 12 October informing him of my decision and to seek his consent to the appointment in accordance with section 7(2)(b) of the Inquiries Act 2005. Sir Martin replied on 13 October consenting to the appointment.

Ali will read into the work of the Inquiry while he formally steps back from his role at Unity and will join the Inquiry panel on 2 November for the start of module 2 of its work. It is intended that Ali will sit for the duration

of the Inquiry and, alongside his two fellow panel members, will be jointly responsible for the whole of the Inquiry's Phase 2 work.

Our exchange of letters can be found on gov.uk.

International Vaccines Procurement Initiative (COVAX): UK Participation

[HLWS506]

Lord Callanan: My Right Honourable friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Alok Sharma has today made the following statement:

I am confirming that the United Kingdom has joined the global COVAX initiative to expedite the discovery, manufacture, and fair distribution of an effective coronavirus vaccine to one billion people globally.

The UK is a strong supporter and champion of COVAX and its mission to deliver fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines around the world. We are pleased that over 170 countries and territories have announced their intention to join COVAX. Through this initiative, countries are pooling resources to support 'at risk' investment in manufacturing and secure advance purchase agreements with manufacturers for the supply of their vaccines. COVAX will procure vaccines for both high-income and lower income countries and will distribute vaccines equitably.

The COVAX Facility is being run by the Vaccines Alliance (Gavi), with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). It has two parts:

- i) a Self-Financing Facility to allow upper-middle and high-income countries to pool investments in candidates in exchange for early access to vaccines; and
- ii) The Advance Market Commitment (AMC) fund, to support 92 low and lower-middle income countries to buy vaccines.

We have contributed £71 million to the Self-Financing Facility. This will give us an option to buy vaccines available through COVAX for up to 20% of the UK population (13.5 million people). Any vaccines secured through COVAX will be complementary to those the UK has already secured through its agreements with vaccine developers.

The Prime Minister announced at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that the UK will allocate £500 million of ODA funding for the procurement and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines in low and lower middle-income countries. This is in addition to the £48 million we allocated to the AMC at the Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020.

This new funding includes a commitment to match £1 for every \$4 committed by others, up to £250 million, encouraging other countries to fund the global effort to fairly distribute vaccines across the globe and leverage an additional \$1 billion for the AMC. Canada, Germany, Sweden and Japan have all made commitments of over

\$422 million. This means we have, so far, matched almost £106 million of this funding.

In addition, the UK has worked with the World Bank to develop an ambitious \$12 billion proposal for vaccine financing, which was also announced at UNGA. The World Bank will make up to \$6 billion of its financing available to middle-income countries and \$6 billion to low and lower-middle income countries, to help them secure access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Rough Sleeping

[HLWS505]

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:

Today, I have announced additional support for rough sleepers this winter, giving local areas the tools they need to protect people from life-threatening cold weather and risks posed by COVID-19.

During the pandemic, we have worked closely with local authorities and the sector to offer vulnerable people safe accommodation and support. That work is ongoing and in September we had successfully supported over 29,000 people, with over 10,000 in emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move on support.

These efforts have been backed by significant government support. We have given councils over £4.8 billion to help them to manage the impacts of COVID-19, which we have been clear includes their work to support rough sleepers. Over the summer we worked with every local authority to develop a local, tailored plan to support rough sleepers over the coming months. This has been supported by £91.5 million of funding from the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, allocated in September.

Today's announcement further builds on this existing package of support over winter, setting out a plan that gives local areas a range of levers to support vulnerable rough sleepers as we approach winter.

Firstly, there will be a new £10 million Cold Weather Fund for local authorities to bring forward COVID-secure accommodation this winter.

Secondly, we will be working intensively with the areas in greatest need, in recognition of the particular challenges they face.

Thirdly, recognising the vital role of the faith and communities' sector, we are establishing a new £2 million Transformation Fund to ensure the voluntary sector can bring forward COVID-secure accommodation.

Finally, we are publishing comprehensive guidance to the sector, produced with Public Health England, Homeless Link (the umbrella organisation for homelessness charities) and Housing Justice, to help them open shelters more safely, where not doing so would endanger lives. We know that some night shelters are

planning to re-open imminently and our operating principles and additional funding package will help shelter providers and local authorities make any additional winter provision safer from the spread of COVID-19.

Today's announcement is on top of the £112 million Rough Sleeping Initiative funding provided to local authorities in 2020/21, as well as the recently announced funding allocations to provide interim support and winter funding as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme. We will also be bringing forward 3,300 longer term units of accommodation this year. In total, the Government is spending over £700 million pounds to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping this year alone. We remain committed to transforming the lives of some of the most vulnerable in society, and to ending rough sleeping for good.

In addition, the Government has injected over £9 billion into the welfare system, including helping people with housing costs by increasing Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile – putting an average of £600 into people's pockets this year. We have taken action to protect tenants and support them to stay in their homes. Most recently, we have increased notice periods to six months meaning that anyone served notice today can stay in their home until mid-March in all but the most egregious cases, such as those involving antisocial behaviour.

We will set out further detail about how local areas can access this winter funding and support imminently and I encourage all relevant partners and local authorities to consider how they can best use this funding to save lives this winter.

Warm Home Discount Scheme: Pensioner Support

[HLWS508]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: My Right Honourable Friend, The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey MP) has made the following Written Statement.

The Warm Home Discount Scheme (WHDS) provides up to £350m per year to tackle fuel poverty and the pressure placed by energy prices on low income households.

Around 1.2 million pensioner households who receive the guarantee element of pension credit are automatically eligible for the WHDS and will receive a £140 discount off their energy bill. Thanks to DWP IT we have data matched nearly one million eligible claimants who will receive this discount automatically.

A further 220,000 pensioners will receive a letter encouraging them to check their eligibility and apply. Pensioners can call to check their eligibility on 0800 731 0214.

Where eligible, the deduction will be taken automatically from energy bills before March 2021, with

most pensioners receiving their discounts between now and January.

Up to a further 1.2m low income, working age households can also benefit from a £140 discount from their supplier. These customers must meet an individual energy supplier's criteria for the scheme to qualify, which will include being in receipt of certain means-tested benefits.

The WHDS also provides a range of initiatives to benefit fuel poor and vulnerable households, including debt assistance, benefit entitlement checks and energy advice to domestic customers in or at risk of fuel poverty.

More information on the Warm Home Discount Scheme is available at gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme.

Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee Meeting

[HLWS507]

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 next meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee will take place in London on 19 October 2020, 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 four items:

1. Introduction and opening remarks from co-chairs
 - 1.1. Stocktake of recent Specialised Committee meetings
 - 1.2. Future Specialised Committee meetings
2. Update on Withdrawal Agreement Implementation
 - 2.1. Citizens' rights
 - 2.1.1. Joint Implementation Report
 - 2.1.2. Progress on Joint Committee Decision on triangulation
 - 2.2. Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland
 - 2.2.1. Progress on Joint Committee Decisions foreseen by the Protocol
 - 2.2.2. Progress on Joint Committee Decision on correction of errors and omissions
 - 2.3. Dispute settlement – Discussion on progress on Joint Committee Decision on the establishment of a list of arbitrators
3. AOB
4. Concluding remarks

The UK delegation will include:

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

Written Answers

Wednesday, 14 October 2020

Afghanistan: Peace Negotiations

Asked by *The Marquess of Lothian*

To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the combat mission in Afghanistan, and the UK's continued presence as part of NATO's non-combat mission, what role they have in the Afghan peace talks, which began in Doha on 12 September. [HL8641]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK strongly supports the beginning of negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, currently taking place in Doha. I attended the virtual opening ceremony for the Afghan Peace Negotiations on 12 September and delivered remarks behalf of the UK. We hope this historic opportunity leads to progress, including an inclusive political settlement and an end to the violence in Afghanistan.

We are actively supporting the negotiations through diplomatic engagement in Doha, as well as in the region. Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), the UK's Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Programme provides capacity building support to the Afghan Government, in partnership with the European Institute of Peace and the UN Development Programme.

Animal Welfare: Crime

Asked by *Lord Jones of Cheltenham*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the merits of legislating to establish an animal offenders' register, which could be accessed by the police, animal welfare charities, and pet breeders in England and Wales. [HL8635]

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The Government takes the issue of animal welfare very seriously and supports increasing the maximum custodial penalty for animal cruelty offences from six months to five years.

The Police National Computer already records convictions for animal cruelty offences. Certain organisations have access to this information, where appropriate to fulfil their public function. This allows us to securely protect this important information from misuse, and also for it to be available for organisations with a justified need to access this information. If anyone, including animal welfare charities or pet breeders, has concerns about whether someone is keeping animals in contravention of a disqualification order they should report it to the police who can investigate.

Armed Conflict: Explosives

Asked by *Baroness Hodgson of Abinger*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to advocate for an implementation mechanism to give greater meaning and effect to the Draft Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from Humanitarian Harm arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. [HL8720]

Baroness Goldie: The UK will take a view on the merits of an implementation mechanism for the Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians in Urban Warfare once its final form is known.

Arms Trade: Turkey

Asked by *The Marquess of Lothian*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they plan to have with Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs during his proposed visit to Europe to discuss developments in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, particularly in Nagorno-Karabakh, following the government of Canada's decision to suspend export licences for drone technology equipment to Turkey while allegations of its use by Azerbaijan against Armenia are investigated; and what assessment they have made of the provision of UK defence export licences to Turkey in view of those allegations. [HL8869]

Baroness Sugg: We continue to monitor developments in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh closely. We have issued a number of joint statements with Canada, and we will continue to work closely with all partners to help facilitate a peaceful end to this conflict.

We consider all our export licence applications against a strict assessment framework, and keep all licences under careful and continual review. We comply with the OSCE arms embargo relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is considered a part of our export licensing process.

Army: Gambling

Asked by *The Lord Bishop of St Albans*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether there are gambling machines in any British Army installations in the UK; and if so, (1) which categories these machines fall into in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005, and (2) whether these machines are operated by the Ministry of Defence or external contractors. [HL8770]

Baroness Goldie: The requested information on whether there are any gambling machines on any British Army sites in the UK, which categories they fall into, and who operates them is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Gambling as an addiction has serious implications for Defence; as a security risk, financially, a mental health issue and as a wider welfare impact on Service personnel; families; veterans and their families. Gambling addiction is difficult to target and deal with effectively as most activity is carried out when Service personnel are off duty or at home. However, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is working to raise financial awareness among Service personnel; all three Services provide links on their welfare sites to several financial advisory sites including MoneyForce, Joining Forces Credit Union, the Services Insurance and Investment Advisory Panel and GamCare, a national charity and leading provider of information, advice and free counselling for the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

Every unit has a comprehensive welfare system, which is widely publicised. The network includes the Unit Welfare Officer, Chaplain, medical staff and Equality and Diversity Adviser. Personnel also have access to the secondary welfare support through the Army Welfare Service, plus the Army confidential helpline - SpeakOut - and the Samaritans helpline. Where welfare staff or the regimental medical group become aware of personnel displaying signs of gambling addiction, they will endeavour to provide the necessary welfare support and sign-post to specialist organisations such as the NHS Gambling Support.

Asylum

Asked by Lord Jones of Cheltenham

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) Steepholme, (2) Flatholme, (3) Canvey Island, (4) the Isle of Dogs, and, (5) Sark, as potential locations for asylum processing centres. [HL8633]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Illegal migration has been a complex issue for successive governments. For years people have risked their lives to enter our country illegally, like those crossing the Channel in dangerous small boats.

The Home Office will introduce a new system that is firm and fair, prosecuting criminals while protecting vulnerable individuals.

Officials have been looking at a whole host of measures other countries deploy to inform a plan for the UK and bring innovation into our system. As part of this they are consulting with stakeholders and ensuring those plans adhere to our Policy Assurance Framework, but no final proposals have been made and it would not be appropriate to comment on speculation.

Bipolar Disorder: Lithium

Asked by Lord Porter of Spalding

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that the NHS has secure access to Priadel for the treatment of bipolar disorder. [HL8760]

Lord Bethell: Supplies of Priadel (lithium carbonate) are currently available.

Ensuring patients have access to the medicines they need is vital. The Department brought the supply of Priadel to the attention of the Competition and Markets Authority which has now opened an investigation.

Essential Pharma has now agreed to continue supplying Priadel to the National Health Service whilst we work to agree a fair and appropriate price for this medicine.

We continue to work closely with the supplier and wholesalers to maintain the availability of Priadel and to ensure supply remains available for patients. We are aware that Essential Pharma have quotas in place with wholesalers to reduce the risk of stockpiling but have confirmed that ordering mechanisms are in place to ensure all prescriptions for Priadel can access this treatment.

We have also added lithium carbonate to the parallel export restriction list (8 September 2020) to ensure supplies remain available for the United Kingdom.

Blue Badge Scheme and Driving Licences

Asked by Lord Bowness

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord True on 16 September (HL7614), whether any agreements in principle have been reached with EU Member States regarding mutual recognition of drivers' licences and disabled blue badges. [HL8660]

Lord True: Constructive bilateral discussions with all 27 Member States are currently underway at official level. Announcements will be made in the usual way.

British Overseas Territories: Asylum

Asked by Lord Jones of Cheltenham

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with local authorities on Ascension and St Helena over the islands' suitability as asylum processing centres. [HL8636]

Baroness Sugg: As the Foreign Secretary told the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on 6 October 2020, the Government is developing plans to reform policies and laws around illegal migration and asylum to ensure we are able to provide protection to those who need it, while preventing abuse of the system and the criminality associated with it. As part of that work the Government has looked at what other countries do to inform a plan for the UK.

Cancer: Northern Ireland

Asked by Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to provide additional funding to the Northern

Ireland Executive for reducing the backlog in treatment of cancer patients. [HL8743]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The Government recognise the dedication and resolve of staff across the health and social care systems who have shown real determination to provide the best care possible to their patients during this challenging time.

The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically altered the functions of hospitals and as such the focus has led to a serious impact on waiting lists.

The lack of a functioning Executive in Northern Ireland in previous years, coupled with the impact on the health and social care system from the pandemic, exacerbated the need for the urgent reform of services. As a result, the Rebuilding Health & Social Care Strategic Framework was published by Minister Swann on 9 June. In addition to this, Minister Swann announced the launch of a new Covid-19 Surge Planning Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland on 6 October. One of the key initiatives in the framework is the establishment of a regional cancer reset cell to oversee the resumption of screening, diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients in clinically safe environments as quickly as possible, and to protect these services as much as possible in the event of further potential surges of Covid-19.

Beyond this, under the New Decade, New Approach deal, the Executive will introduce a new action plan on waiting times. The UK Government committed £2 billion over five years to facilitate NDNA commitments, which includes around £245m to support the transformation of public services, and £200 million over three years to deliver pay parity. The deal also responds to the increasing demand for doctors in Northern Ireland, providing £60m of capital and resource funding to deliver a Northern Ireland Graduate Entry Medical School in Derry/Londonderry, which has now been approved by the Executive.

Recognising the pressures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK Government has provided the Northern Ireland Executive with a guaranteed £2.4 billion in additional funding. The allocation of this funding within the health budget is a matter for the Executive.

China: Uighurs

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the response by Lord Grimstone of Boscobel on 29 September (HL Deb, cols GC49), whether they are examining supply chains that may be connected to the use of slave labour in Xinjiang; and what prosecutions for breaches of that Act, in connection with Uighur slave labour, are either under way or being prepared. [HL8617]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: On 25 September at the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Government set out our grave concerns about reports of forced labour in Xinjiang. We urge businesses involved in

investing in Xinjiang, with parts of their supply chains in Xinjiang, or with any other business involvement in the region to conduct appropriate due diligence to satisfy themselves that their activities do not support, or risk being seen to be supporting, any human rights violations or abuses.

Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires certain businesses with a turnover of £36m or more, equating to approximately 16,000 businesses, to report annually on the steps they have taken to prevent modern slavery in their operations and supply chains. The Government encourages companies to report transparently about how they are mitigating modern slavery risks and to use their modern slavery statements to demonstrate year on year progress.

The prevalence of modern slavery and complexity of global supply chains means that it is highly unlikely that any company is immune from the risks of modern slavery. Section 54 therefore does not require organisations to certify that their global supply chains are 'slavery free' or that the Government verifies the content of modern slavery statements.

The Government continues to strengthen its approach and following an Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act, the Home Office ran a public consultation on a range of proposals to strengthen Section 54. On 22 September 2020 the Government published its response to this consultation and announced plans to strengthen the Act and the transparency in thousands of business and public body supply chains by:

- harnessing the spending power of the public sector, which accounts for approximately £250bn annual spend and extending the reporting requirement to public bodies with a budget of £36 million or more;
- radically enhancing the transparency and accessibility of modern slavery statements by requiring organisations to publish their statements on the new Government digital reporting service;
- improving the quality of statements by requiring organisations to report against specific topics, including how they risk assess their supply chains and the due diligence they have undertaken, and to clearly state if they have omitted a topic;
- driving greater accountability by setting a single reporting deadline on which all modern slavery statements must be published; and
- Developing options for civil penalties for non-compliance in line with the ongoing development of the Single Enforcement Body for employment rights.

The Government has committed to implementing these changes when parliamentary time allows.

Coronavirus: Northern Ireland

Asked by Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent discussions they have had with the Northern Ireland Executive about COVID-19. [HL8738]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister of State for Northern Ireland are in regular contact with the First and deputy First Minister for Northern Ireland, as well as the Health minister, with the most recent discussions focusing on the recent restrictions across the UK, the concerning rise in cases, and how the UK government can provide continued support.

The First and deputy First Minister, are invited to attend a weekly Covid-19 Operations Committee meeting, hosted by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. This forum supports collaboration and helps ensure decisions taken across the four nations are aligned as far as is possible and appropriate.

Since the start of this pandemic, the UK Government has worked closely with the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the rest of the Executive to coordinate our response to coronavirus. We have also remained in close contact with the Irish government.

The government and devolved administrations will continue to work closely together to ensure a coordinated approach across the United Kingdom.

Coronavirus: Screening

Asked by Lord Lilley

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by the Secretary of State for Transport that "due to the incubation period of this disease, and even using highly accurate tests, the capture rate of those carrying COVID-19 may be as low as seven per cent" on 7 September (HC Deb, cols 366–7), what scientific evidence was used to calculate the capture rate; what is the period to which that capture rate applies; and what assessment they have made of the utility of using tests to identify potentially infected (1) staff, or (2) visitors, before they enter nursing homes. [HL8070]

Lord Bethell: The assessment of the capture rate was made from a mathematical model developed by Public Health England (PHE). The 7% capture is for those infections in asymptomatic travellers that were infected before travel and were incubating infection during travel.

This finding is for asymptomatic travellers irrespective of the prevalence of infections in the country that the traveller is arriving from and is independent of the period of the year that it is applied to. This is based on the high sensitivity and specificity of current laboratory-based Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and PHE has not identified any technology that has better detection rates that would change these findings.

Testing in care homes is an important part of keeping staff and residents safe in the COVID-19 response. It means those who test positive can be isolated, reducing the number of people who can spread the virus and protecting the most vulnerable.

PHE has conducted a number of prevalence studies in health care workers using reverse transcription-PCR

which informs assessment of potentially infected staff. The assessment of the risk posed by visitors to care-homes is part of the SAGE social-care sub-group's purview and will be reported in due course.

Asked by Baroness McGregor-Smith

To ask Her Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the percentage of COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction tests that have resulted in a false positive. [HL8420]

Lord Bethell: In June 2020 the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies published a briefing paper on the impact of false positives and false negatives in the United Kingdom's COVID-19 reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) testing programme. A copy of the briefing paper is attached.

The briefing paper states that the United Kingdom operational false positive rate is unknown, and an attempt has been made to estimate the likely false-positive rate of national COVID-19 testing programmes by examining data from published external quality assessments (EQAs) for RT-PCR assays for other ribonucleic acid viruses carried out between 2004–2019. Results of 43 EQAs were examined, giving a median false positive rate of 2.3%.

The Answer includes the following attached material:

SAGE paper [SAGE
paper_Impact_of_false_positives_and_negatives.pdf]

The material can be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-09-23/HL8420>

Coronavirus: Vaccination

Asked by Lord Moonie

To ask Her Majesty's Government how long it will take to achieve mass vaccination of the population against COVID-19. [HL8678]

Lord Bethell: Public Health England and NHS England and NHS Improvement are the health and social care delivery organisations responsible for ensuring that a COVID-19 vaccine is deployed and administered safely and efficiently to the public. The Government is working at pace for the delivery of any potential COVID-19 vaccination programme as quickly as possible, but the scale of what is rolled out and when will depend on a safe, effective vaccine being available. All plans we are making recognise that there are numerous potential vaccine candidates, meaning that we will need to remain flexible.

Coronavirus: Vitamin D

Asked by Lord Judd

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the efficacy of Vitamin D in promoting good health and resistance to COVID-19 and other infections. [HL8816]

Lord Bethell: In 2016, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) published a robust assessment of the evidence on vitamin D and a wide range of health outcomes. Current United Kingdom vitamin D advice is focused on musculoskeletal health and based on evidence from this report.

In 2020, Public Health England (PHE) commissioned SACN to examine new evidence on vitamin D supplementation and the risk of Acute Respiratory Tract Infections (ARTIs). SACN's rapid review concluded that evidence currently does not support vitamin D supplementation to prevent ARTIs in the general UK population.

In 2020, PHE supported the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to review emerging evidence on vitamin D for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. NICE's review concluded that there is currently no robust evidence to support taking vitamin D supplements to reduce the risk or severity of COVID-19.

Domestic Abuse: Coronavirus

Asked by Baroness Manzoor

To ask Her Majesty's Government what additional support they have provided to women affected by domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL8981]

Lord Greenhalgh: A key Government priority is to ensure victims of domestic abuse can get the right support when they need it during the pandemic.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has allocated £10 million in emergency funding for safe accommodation services. This fund is supporting 166 organisations to provide bed spaces for those affected by domestic abuse, ensuring that refuges remain open and more victims can access life-saving support during the pandemic. The Department also enabled local authorities to book additional rooms in temporary accommodation through a centralised service, helping more victims access safe accommodation. We have also provided £4.8 billion in additional funding to help local authorities respond to COVID-19 spending pressures, including support for domestic abuse services.

In addition, Home Office are providing £2 million for community-based domestic abuse services impacted by the outbreak and the Ministry of Justice are providing £25 million to help victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the community access support services during the coronavirus outbreak.

Driving under Influence: Accidents

Asked by Lord Risby

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many road fatalities and accidents were caused by driving under the influence of drugs over the past five years. [HL8949]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The number of fatalities and reported personal injury road accidents where a police officer attended the scene of the accident and allocated the contributory factor "Driver/Rider impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)" in Great Britain for the last 5 years can be found in the table below.

Reported road accidents and fatalities where the contributory factor "Driver/Rider impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)" was allocated, Great Britain, 2015-2019

Year	Fatalities	Personal injury road accidents
2015	67	881
2016	92	1,054
2017	105	1,151
2018	85	1,321
2019	92	1,469

Source: DfT, STATS19

i) to a driver involved in the accident by a police officer who attended the scene of the accident.

Elections: Internet

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to respond to the findings of the Electoral Reform Society's report, *Democracy in the Dark: Digital Campaigning in the 2019 General Election and Beyond*, published on 24 September, and in particular, the finding that online campaigning spend and non-party campaigning activity increased significantly, although in an undocumented manner, during the 2019 general election campaign. [HL8619]

Lord True: The Government is taking forward a programme of work that will strengthen and update the UK's electoral regulation to ensure it is fit for the modern age; provides a robust framework for campaign finance; and supports public confidence in our processes.

Political parties, registered third parties and candidates are already required to report expenses that qualify as electoral expenditure and this includes digital campaigning. We have launched a consultation on digital imprints which will require political parties, campaigners and others to clearly show who they are when promoting campaign content online.

Across all of this work the intention is to improve transparency to ensure voters can make informed choices, and to enforce spending rules.

Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Asked by Baroness Kennedy of Cradley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to increase the number of charging points for electric vehicles in England. [HL8856]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government has put in place a raft of grant funding schemes to assist with the cost of installing chargepoints across the UK in motorists' homes, at work places and on residential streets.

In May, the Government published an ambitious vision for rapid charging infrastructure along the strategic roads in England over the next decade. This vision sets out the number of rapid chargepoints that will be located across motorways and major A roads to meet the future demand for electric vehicles. Additional funding of £500 million over the next five years, announced in the March Budget, will help to support the delivery of this vision and the rollout of a fast-charging network for electric vehicles.

We have also consulted on proposals requiring chargepoint infrastructure to be installed in all newly built homes and non-residential buildings in England, where appropriate. These new regulations, alongside our grant schemes and our £400m public-private Charging Infrastructure Investment Fund, will see thousands more electric vehicle chargepoints installed across the UK.

Erasmus+ Programme

Asked by Baroness Garden of Frognal

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made in ensuring the continuation of the Erasmus programme after 31 December. [HL8670]

Asked by Baroness Garden of Frognal

To ask Her Majesty's Government what alternative provision has been put in place if association to the Erasmus programme after 31 December cannot be negotiated. [HL8671]

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: Under the Withdrawal Agreement negotiated with the EU, the UK will continue to participate fully in the current (2014–20) Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. This means that projects successfully bid for during the current programmes will continue to receive funding for the full duration of the project, including those where funding runs beyond 2020 and the end of the transition period.

The UK's participation in the next Erasmus+ programme (2021–27) is matter for our ongoing negotiations with the EU. The government remains open to considering participation in elements of the next Erasmus+ programme, provided that the terms are in the UK's interests. It would not be appropriate to pre-empt the outcome of those negotiations.

In parallel to our negotiations with the EU, the government is continuing to develop a domestic alternative to Erasmus+ to ensure that we are prepared for every eventuality. This is subject to decisions on funding at the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

Females: Labour Turnover

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of women who have left the workforce as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL8542]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: We do not have a current estimate however the latest published Office of National Statistics data in the three months to August 2020 shows that 15.5 million women are in employment. We know that some groups of people are more likely to have been affected than others, but the Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme and the plan for jobs will make sure that no person is left behind in our economic recovery.

Through our Plan for Jobs we are continuing to support people back into work by doubling the number of Work Coaches across our Jobcentres to 27,000, ensuring jobseekers have access to tailored and personalised support. We're also helping those made jobless by the pandemic through our newly launched Job Entry Targeted Support, accessible to all Universal Credit claimants out of work for at least three months.

Our £150 million investment in the Flexible Support Fund means our national network of Work Coaches can continue to enrol people on training helping to increase their employability and quickly move into work.

Homelessness: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Hay of Ballyore

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to address (1) homelessness, and (2) rough sleeping, during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL8631]

Lord Greenhalgh: Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of vulnerable people have been housed in emergency accommodation in England, thanks to the hard work of local councils and charities – saving hundreds of lives.

On 13 October, we announced a new £10 million Cold Weather Fund to support councils get rough sleepers off the streets during the winter by helping them to provide more self-contained accommodation. This is in addition to £2 million for faith and community groups to help them provide secure accommodation for rough sleepers. Alongside this, comprehensive guidance will be shared with the sector, produced with Public Health England, Homeless Link and Housing Justice, to help shelters open more safely, where not doing so would endanger lives.

On 18 July, we launched the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), making available the financial resources needed to support English local authorities and their partners to prevent people from returning to the streets. On 17 September we announced

local authority allocations for the short-term funding aspect of NSAP. £91.5m was allocated to 274 councils in England to help vulnerable people housed during the pandemic. The remaining £13.5 million of funding will be used to support local authority to tackle new and emerging challenges over the winter.

We are also supporting those at risk of homelessness, with an injection of over £9 billion into the welfare system. This includes increasing the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants so that they are set at the 30th percentile of market rents.

In addition, we have introduced legislation that means, from 29 August 2020, landlords must give tenants six months' notice before they can evict in most circumstances. This helps ensure those most at risk are protected and provides time for tenants to agree a solution with their landlord if they are unable to pay their rent. The Government is providing £4.8 billion to help councils to manage the impacts of COVID-19 which includes their work to support homeless people.

We will continue to focus on delivering support to those who are most vulnerable from this pandemic, and these measures further demonstrate our commitment to assist the most vulnerable in society.

Homelessness: Ethnic Groups

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address homelessness amongst BAME groups who are at greater risk from COVID-19. [HL8836]

Lord Greenhalgh: Our rapid response to the pandemic through 'Everyone In' has ensured that thousands of people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping have been housed in emergency accommodation since the start of the pandemic, to protect those at greater risk from COVID-19. The Next Steps Accommodation Programme is supporting local authorities and their partners to prevent people from returning to the streets. This is backed by over half a billion pounds to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping this year.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide accommodation for households that are homeless and defined as being in priority need, unintentionally homeless and eligible for assistance. They are obliged to secure temporary accommodation for the household in the first instance until suitable long-term accommodation can be secured.

The priority need category includes those who are vulnerable as a result of special reasons and local authorities should consider the impact COVID-19 is having on those with protected characteristics when carrying out their homelessness assessment and determining priority need.

House of Lords Composition

Asked by Lord Grocott

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the representation of the (1) Conservative, (2) Labour, and (3) Liberal Democrat, parties in the House of Lords; and what plans they have to take that level of representation into account in any future recommendations for life peerage appointments to the House. [HL8628]

Lord True: Members of the House of Lords are appointed from a wide range of backgrounds to ensure the House is able to carry out its scrutiny work effectively. In line with established convention, the number of nominations to be offered to individual political parties is a matter for the Prime Minister.

Human Trafficking

Asked by Lord McColl of Dulwich

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay on 7 September (HL Deb, cols 620–2), whether they will place in the Library of the House a copy of the analysis of which rights within the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU will have direct effect in the UK on 1 January 2021, notwithstanding any court judgments made before the end of the year. [HL8643]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The Government is committed to eradicating human trafficking and the scourge of modern slavery.

As Lord Parkinson rightly noted, the UK currently gives effect to obligations on modern slavery under Council of the Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT), Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive (2011/36), through the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and policy guidance.

At the end of the EU Exit transition period in December 2020, the UK will no longer be bound by EU law. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 and relevant policy guidance will be unaffected. The UK will remain bound by international obligations in relation to preventing and combatting human trafficking and modern slavery – most notably ECAT and Article 4 ECHR, neither of which have been impacted by our exit from the EU.

We are implementing a programme of work to transform how we identify and support victims of modern slavery, emphasising our continued commitment to a world-leading system having left the European Union.

Jamal Khashoggi

Asked by The Marquess of Lothian

To ask Her Majesty's Government what are their priorities at the G20 leaders' summit to be hosted by

Saudi Arabia in November; and what plans they have to use the occasion to reiterate to Saudi Arabia the statement before the UN Human Rights Council on 15 September, which called for "full accountability and transparent prosecution of those involved in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi". [[HL8638](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The G20 Leaders' Summit is an opportunity to address issues of global importance, and is particularly important in the context of COVID-19. The UK sees agreements on health, the economy, and climate as the priority. We want agreements to cover vaccine access, funding and debt financing for developing and middle income countries, and commitments on the Paris Agreement. These should be supported by continued commitments on free trade as the basis for a strong and sustainable recovery. Our close relationship with Saudi Arabia allows us to raise our concerns about human right in private and in public. The UN Human Rights Council statement on 15 September is an example of this, and ministerial colleagues and I regularly raise human rights with the Saudi authorities. The UK has always been clear that Khashoggi's murder was a terrible crime, and that Saudi Arabia must ensure such an atrocity can never happen again. The Foreign Secretary raised the issue during his visit to Riyadh in March this year. The UK has sanctioned twenty Saudi nationals involved in the murder under global human rights regime.

Lebanon: Politics and Government

Asked by The Marquess of Lothian

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the situation in Lebanon following the resignation of Prime Minister Mustapha Adib. [[HL8637](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The collapse of government negotiations following the resignation of Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib is disappointing, as well as damaging for the long-suffering people of Lebanon. Lebanon's leaders must act in the national interest and urgently form a new government and implement reforms. The UK will continue to support the Lebanese people.

Lifetime Skills Guarantee: Apprentices

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to support temporary apprentice workers as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. [[HL8645](#)]

Baroness Berridge: Apprenticeships will be more important than ever in helping businesses, in all sectors, to recruit the right people and develop the skills they need to recover and grow. We want to expand apprenticeship opportunities by promoting flexible models of training, making it easier to do an apprenticeship where work consists of successive work placements.

We will work closely with employers to explore how we can make apprenticeships work better for certain sectors, for example those with more flexible and short-term models of employment. In particular, we are working closely with the construction and digital sectors to develop solutions.

Lifetime Skills Guarantee: Disability

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure that the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is accessible to those with disabilities. [[HL8646](#)]

Baroness Berridge: Further education providers are autonomous organisations. They are responsible for arranging access to their education and training provision, which from next year will include the new level 3 entitlement announced by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. We would expect providers to ensure appropriate access to their education and training for people with disabilities by adhering to their obligations under the Equality Act.

Medical Equipment: Contracts

Asked by Lord Moonie

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many advance payments have been made to pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies contractors during the COVID-19 pandemic by (1) total value, and (2) number of recipients. [[HL8677](#)]

Lord Bethell: Advanced payments have been used on a number of contracts awarded to suppliers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our approach has been to take some managed risk in order to secure supplies in an exceptional and globally highly competitive market. Contracts have break clauses in them, meaning if the company supplies faulty products or misses delivery dates, we can cancel the contracts and reclaim our money.

Over 1,000 purchase orders have now been raised with suppliers for the delivery of goods and services related to the COVID-19 pandemic. To provide a validated assessment of whether an advanced payment has been agreed or not for each of these orders would involve disproportionate cost.

Mental Health: Young People

Asked by Baroness Eaton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the need to provide ongoing support for the mental health and resilience of young people; and what plans they have to increase councils' public health budgets to facilitate this. [[HL8442](#)]

Lord Bethell: Supporting children and young people's mental health and resilience is a priority for the Government. On 8 September, we launched a mental wellbeing campaign for children and young people. This

involves an extension of Public Health England's 'Every Mind Matters' with content specifically for children and young people and their parents and carers.

Our £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return programme will provide schools and colleges all over England with the knowledge and access to resources they need to support children and young people, teachers and parents.

The overall public health grant to local authorities in 2020/21 is £3.279 billion and this continues to be ring-fenced for health improvement. Funding beyond 2020/21 will be agreed in the Spending Review later this year. Local authorities make their own funding decisions based on their assessment of local population need.

Nagorno Karabakh: Armed Conflict

Asked by Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that foreign mercenaries and jihadist fighters have been deployed by Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh region; and what discussions they have had with the government of Azerbaijan about the presence and role of these groups in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. [HL9027]

Baroness Sugg: The UK is aware of media reporting that foreign fighters may be involved in fighting in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. External intervention in the conflict risks prolonging it and is not in anyone's interests. The UK continues to urge all actors to use their influence to ensure an end to the hostilities and a return to the negotiating table.

Nagorno Karabakh: Politics and Government

Asked by Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of proposals to give the Nagorno-Karabakh region independence; and what plans they have (1) to support these proposals, and (2) to ask the OSCE Minsk Group to take these proposals forward as a matter of urgency. [HL9026]

Baroness Sugg: The UK supports the OSCE Minsk Group Process and the Basic Principles which include a return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control and the acceptance of a free expression of will on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Political Parties: Finance

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to monitor (1) the level of political funding from companies and individuals associated with (a) the arms trade, (b) tobacco companies (c) private medical

companies, (d) pharmaceutical companies, and (e) the financial sector, and (2) the percentage, individually and collectively, that funding by companies and individuals constitutes of the total amount of political spending. [HL8620]

Lord True: Lawfully constituted UK companies may make permissible political donations. The Electoral Commission is responsible for regulating party financing. The Commission publishes information relating to donations and loans over £7,500, including the name of the donor and other appropriate such as their address and company registration number. Details are available online.

Prosecutions: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Robathan

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many successful prosecutions have taken place under the Coronavirus Act 2020 as a result of court proceedings. [HL8683]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: The main criminal offence under the Coronavirus Act relates to potentially infectious persons who refuse to co-operate with the police or public health officers, when they are required to be screened for COVID-19.

There have been no successful prosecutions of any offence created by the Coronavirus Act 2020. A review of completed prosecutions to the end of August 2020 show that 141 cases were incorrectly charged under the Act; because there was no evidence they applied to potentially infectious people, which is what this law covers.

However, data on prosecutions under the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 shows that under the Regulations there have been 227 prosecutions resulting in guilty pleas, and 6 prosecutions found guilty after trial to the end of August. Data released by the National Police Chiefs Council also shows that 18,912 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued under the Regulations between 27 March and 21 September by police forces across England and Wales.

Shipping: Employment

Asked by Lord Hay of Ballyore

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent steps they have taken to protect jobs in the UK maritime sector. [HL8632]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Since the beginning of this crisis the Department has engaged heavily with the maritime trade unions, representative bodies and industry to understand the scale of the issue, urging them to take steps to protect the maritime workforce and offering support where appropriate.

This has been alongside Government's Job Retention Scheme and will continue when the replacement Job Support Scheme comes into effect next month.

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Asked by *Baroness Sherlock*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many criminal gangs engaged in large-scale benefit fraud have been identified by the Department for Work and Pensions using artificial intelligence. [HL8774]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The Department is alert to organised threats to the benefit system and has measures in place to keep our systems secure.

We cannot disclose information about our counter-fraud activity as this would prejudice our ability to detect fraud and crime.

Suicide: Travellers

Asked by *Baroness Whitaker*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the answer by Lord Bethell on 8 September (HL Deb, cols 662–5), what assessment they have made of the findings of the report by Friends, Families and Travellers, published on 21 August, that the suicide rate of people from the Gypsy and Traveller community is six to seven times higher than the rest of the population; why Gypsies and Travellers are not included on the list of high risk groups in their National Suicide Prevention Plan; and what plans they have to discuss measures to tackle the prevalence of suicide among Gypsy and Traveller communities with Baroness Whitaker and representatives of Friends, Families and Travellers. [HL8568]

Lord Bethell: We have not made a formal assessment. We continue to explore ways of improving the quality and timeliness of suicide data to allow both national and local partners to continue to monitor rates, identify trends and develop effective prevention plans.

We know that there are certain groups that may be exposed to more risk factors for suicide, and we expect local agencies to work together to ensure that their plans are tailored to meet the needs of these groups. These groups include people from minority ethnic groups, such as Romany Gypsies or Irish Travellers.

We will consider any request from the noble Baroness for such a discussion.

Universal Credit

Asked by *Baroness Sherlock*

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the ruling by the Court of Appeal in *SSWP v Johnson & Others* [2020] EWCA Civ 778, handed down on 22 June, what plans they have (1) to change the algorithm used to calculate Universal Credit entitlements, and (2) to compensate claimants whose payments were affected by that algorithm. [HL8773]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: In its deliberations, the Court of Appeal recognised the complexity of the issue

which the Department is working towards resolving for claimants as soon as possible.

We intend to bring forward legislation to address the issues raised by the Court of Appeal so that in future, for cases affected by this issue, monthly earnings can be reallocated to another assessment period, which means that only one set of earnings should be taken into account rather than two.

Asked by *Baroness Altmann*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether an individual's pension contributions to a relief at source pension scheme reported to HMRC via Real Time Information are automatically deducted from the claimant's earned income figure when calculations are made regarding their Universal Credit entitlement. [HL8792]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Pension contributions made by a claimant to a relief at source pension scheme, reported via Real Time Information, are automatically deducted from the earnings used to calculate their Universal Credit award.

Universal Credit: Domestic Abuse

Asked by *Baroness Sherlock*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the portal through which joint claims for Universal Credit are made allows each partner to see all of the messages between the Department for Work and Pensions and either partner; and if so, what assessment they have made as to the potential impact of that access on the risk of domestic abuse. [HL8771]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The Department is committed to providing the best possible support for all our claimants, including those who are, or are at risk of becoming victims of domestic abuse. In such instances, our immediate priority is to ensure that claimants receive appropriate practical assistance through Universal Credit (UC).

The UC journal facilitates digital communication of routine information, allowing both the Department and claimants to communicate with one another. Although each partner can see the journal messages, to safeguard all our claimants, we ask that the journal is not used to share sensitive information.

All claimants have a named Case Manager or Work Coach which they can contact through the Freephone UC helpline or face to face in Jobcentres. These channels allow the Department to provide more immediate and bespoke support to the vulnerable partner without risk of the interaction being captured on the journal and viewed by the partner.

All UC staff receive training on complex needs, including on identifying and supporting victims of abuse and signposting to expert partner organisations, such as Women's Aid. They also have access to the latest guidance on domestic abuse and Alternative Payment

Arrangements, including how to instigate Split Payments, which allows UC payments to be divided between different people within the same claim.

Jobcentres across the country work closely with partner organisations and stakeholders and have escalation routes to provide local community based, joined up services. We will continue to maintain these strong relationships to ensure we continue to support our most vulnerable claimants.

Universities: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that universities remain operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL8647]

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: Higher education providers are autonomous institutions and will make their

own judgements based on the latest public health guidance, taking account of the need to minimise risk to staff and students.

On 10 September, we issued updated guidance for providers on reopening campuses, which takes account of the latest scientific advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies. The guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>.

We have worked with universities to ensure that they all have response plans in light of COVID-19, including issuing best practice guidance. All response plans have been, or are being, agreed with local Directors of Public Health. The plans cover a range of scenarios and ensure that providers are prepared to respond quickly to a COVID-19 outbreak in their university or wider community.

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