



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 14 April 2021 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:34 P.M., 14 April 2021). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

COP26

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Duncan Baker: [\[914049\]](#)

What assessment he has made of carbon pricing mechanisms in the run-up to COP26.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[914051\]](#)

What steps he is taking to secure an international carbon price that is sufficient to effect consumer behavioural change in the run-up to COP26.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

Carbon pricing has been shown to incentivise investment in renewable energy in a cost-effective manner. The UK has long been a supporter of carbon pricing and continues to lead the way with the new UK Emissions Trading System.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Football Index

Ben Lake: [\[174945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 24 March 2021 to Question 170705 on Football Index, whether his Department received an indication from the Gambling Commission on when that body will (a) conclude its investigation and (b) publish a report of its findings.

Ben Lake: [\[174946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions his Department has had with the Gambling Commission on the Football Index's presentation of its product as a football stock market.

Apsana Begum: [\[174978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will commission an independent investigation into the Gambling Commission's handling of the collapse of Football Index.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Gambling Commission has suspended the licence of BetIndex Ltd, the operators of Football Index, and a live investigation is ongoing. Further information, including an update on the status of customer funds, can be found on the Commission's website:

<https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/news-action-and-statistics/news/2021/BetIndex-update.aspx>

The government is taking the collapse of Football Index and the concerns of those affected by it very seriously, and the Secretary of State and I have met the Gambling

Commission to receive urgent updates. We are particularly keen to understand both how this situation came about and what lessons we can learn from these events.

It is a condition of a gambling operating licence that customers should be able to withdraw funds from their accounts. The Commission acted to suspend BetIndex's licence on learning that the operator planned to freeze access to funds. Operators who hold customer funds must tell customers whether funds are protected in event of insolvency and the level of the protection offered. Football Index provides a medium level of customer funds protection, which means customer funds are kept in accounts separate from business accounts, and arrangements are made to ensure assets in the customer accounts are distributed to customers in the event of insolvency.

The government has launched a Review of the Gambling Act 2005 and has called for evidence on a range of issues across the sector, including the powers and resources of the Gambling Commission. The call for evidence closes on 31 March, and we will be led by the evidence received.

■ **Football Index: Advertising**

Ben Lake:

[\[175979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether the Gambling Commission's investigation into BetIndex Ltd, the operators of Football Index, was initiated in response to rulings made by the Advertising Standards Authority regarding their breaches of Advertising Codes.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Gambling Commission requires operators to act in a way that meets the licensing objectives to be fair and open. They are also required to present their products in a way that is compliant with Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) rules regarding advertising and marketing. Where the ASA determines that an operator has breached these rules, the Commission can also consider whether further regulatory action is required as a result.

Following the rulings from the ASA in August and September 2019, Football Index was required to make clear both in a banner on each webpage and within the text that it was a betting product and should not be considered an investment vehicle. The Gambling Commission's formal review into the licence under section 116 of the Gambling Act commenced in May 2020, and looked wider than breaches of the advertising codes.

The Gambling Commission suspended the licence of BetIndex Ltd, the operator of Football Index, on 11 March after learning of BetIndex's plans to restrict customer access to account funds. Further information, including additional background to its regulatory action, is available at: <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/news-action-and-statistics/News/betindex-update>

EDUCATION

■ **Adult Education: Learning Disability**

Ellie Reeves:

[\[174942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to consult those with learning disabilities on the work that Adult Learning centres offer.

Gillian Keegan:

We recognise the importance of engaging all adults, particularly those with additional needs, to provide them with the skills and learning they need to equip them for work, an apprenticeship or further learning.

We are continuing to invest in education and skills training for adults through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) which fully funds, or co-funds, skills provision for eligible adults aged 19 and above from pre-entry to level 3, to help them gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning.

Community Learning within the AEB plays a particularly vital role in supporting those furthest from the workplace, and in improving the health and well-being of learners. Delivered in nearly every local authority area across England through adult education services, FE colleges, Institutes of Adult Learning, other training providers and voluntary sector organisations, this provision is an important stepping-stone for learners who are not ready for formal accredited learning, or who would benefit from learning in a more informal way particularly for (post-19) disadvantaged learners.

Community Learning is funded through the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the AEB, which requires providers to prioritise disadvantaged learners, particularly learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, learners with low basic skills, learners with mental health issues, and learners facing financial hardship. Colleges and training providers have the freedom and flexibility to determine how they use their Community Learning funding, to determine how best to meet their learners needs.

Currently, approximately half of the AEB has been devolved to seven Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the Mayor of London, acting where appropriate through the Greater London Authority (GLA). Devolving the AEB enables MCAs/GLA to directly support adults in developing the skills that local employers need, reducing skills shortages, boosting productivity and economic prosperity, and improving wellbeing in communities. The GLA is responsible for funding AEB learners resident in Lewisham West and Penge.

Any consultation with learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, on the local adult learning offer is the responsibility of local AEB funded providers, MCAs and the GLA.

■ Amey: Apprentices**Karin Smyth:**[\[174893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions he has had with Amey on increasing the number of apprenticeships at their central Bristol office.

Gillian Keegan:

Apprenticeships are more important than ever in helping businesses to recruit the right people and develop the skills they need. To help employers offer new apprenticeships we have increased the level of incentive payments. Employers will be able to claim £3,000 for each apprentice they take on as a new employee between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021 under the government's Plan for Jobs. It is encouraging that employers continue to see the value apprentices can bring to their businesses; as of 3 March employers had so far claimed incentive payments for 34,810 apprentices.

Officials engage regularly with Amey to support the growth of their apprenticeship programmes across all areas of their operations and to help them make the most of the wider Plan for Jobs offer.

From May, we will start to deliver the first ever rail traineeships, developed alongside the National Skills Academy for Rail, trade bodies and employers, which will provide a progression route into apprenticeships and jobs in the sector.

■ Apprentices: West Yorkshire**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[176113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department has taken to encourage the uptake of apprenticeships among teenagers and young people in (a) Wakefield and (b) West Yorkshire.

Gillian Keegan:

Apprenticeships provide young people with the opportunity to earn and learn the skills needed to start an exciting career in a wide range of industries, everything from artificial intelligence, archaeology, data science, business management, and banking. We want more young people across the country to benefit from high-quality apprenticeships. Since May 2010, there have been 36,640 apprenticeship starts in Wakefield (local authority).

To encourage more young people to consider apprenticeships, we are promoting apprenticeships in schools across the country through our Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge programme. This free service provides schools and teachers with resources and interventions to help better educate young people about apprenticeships. In the Skills for Jobs White Paper, published in January, we announced the introduction of a 3-point-plan to enforce the Baker Clause, our requirement that all maintained schools and academies provide opportunities for providers of technical education and apprenticeships to visit schools to talk to all year 8 to 13 pupils. This includes creating clear minimum legal requirements, specifying

who is to be given access to which pupils and when. This is an important step towards real choice for every pupil.

We are also working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to enable Kickstart placements to turn into apprenticeships where that is the right thing for the employer and the young person. We have made a special provision to allow employers taking on Kickstarters as apprentices to be eligible for the incentive payment, which will increase to £3000 from 1 April 2021 until September 2021, supporting a pathway between the schemes.

In addition, we are supporting the largest ever expansion of traineeships to ensure that more young people have access to high-quality training to develop the skills, experience, and confidence to obtain an apprenticeship. My right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, confirmed an additional £126 million at the Budget to fund a further 40,000 traineeship places in the 2021/22 academic year, and we have extended the £1000 incentive payments for employers who offer traineeship work placement opportunities to July 2022. We are taking several steps to raise awareness of traineeships among young people. We have created a new online collection of free resources for schools including factsheets, case studies and a guide for teachers. We are also working with the National Careers Service and DWP to ensure that young people across the country understand the different options available to them and are supported on the right path.

■ **Bodens Performing Arts: Coronavirus**

Theresa Villiers:

[174758]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will provide covid-19 tests for staff and students at Bodens Performing Arts School in Barnet.

Nick Gibb:

Dance and drama schools are considered Independent Training Providers (ITPs). As part of this, from 25 March home test kits for students and staff can be ordered from here: <https://request-testing.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/>.

Tests will be delivered based on student and staff numbers and will provide three and a half weeks' worth of testing. Once test kits have arrived on site and a collection point has been set up, students and staff can be offered home test kits for regular twice weekly testing. Testing remains voluntary but strongly encouraged.

Test kits can be reordered every 10 working days.

■ **Children: Numeracy**

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[176112]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department has taken to increase numeracy levels in children from low-income households.

Nick Gibb:

The Education Endowment Foundation highlights that “quality of teaching is the single most important driver of pupil attainment and a range of other positive outcomes”. The Department’s national network of 40 school-led Maths Hubs aims to help local schools improve the quality of their mathematics teaching based on best practice. The Maths Hubs programme aims to help improve attainment gaps, which may be associated with disadvantage or other factors.

Maths Hubs deliver our £100 million Teaching for Mastery programme, which is bringing mastery teaching methods to 11,000 primary and secondary schools across England by 2023, including throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. Mastery teaching focusses on depth of understanding and is based on best practice from East-Asian jurisdictions that perform highly in international mathematics tests. Mastery is characterised by whole-class teaching, where pupils work on the same content together, ensuring no one gets left behind. It encourages all pupils with the belief that by working hard at mathematics they can succeed and rejects the idea that some pupils “can’t do maths”. The programme also includes funding for approved maths textbooks, which is currently focussed on schools with the highest proportions of disadvantaged pupils.

Recent international testing results demonstrate our progress on mathematics. In PISA 2018 there was a significant improvement in maths scores for 15-year-olds, particularly for lower attaining pupils. Similarly, results from TIMSS 2019 show our Year 5 and Year 9 pupils continue to perform above the international average – with a significant improvement in attainment for our Year 5 pupils.

■ Children: Social Services**Jack Brereton:****[174952]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure (a) information about dangerous individuals who would be a risk to children are identified in the social service system and (b) that that information is shared amongst relevant authorities; and whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of a national database to record previous involvement of individuals with social services.

Vicky Ford:

Ensuring that vulnerable children remain protected is a top priority for the government.

The multi-agency statutory guidance document ‘Working Together (2018)’ sets out what professionals and organisations need to do to safeguard children, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>.

Working Together (2018), is clear that practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. Practitioners should be alert to

sharing important information about any adults with whom that child has contact, which may impact the child's safety or welfare.

Section 11 of the Children Act, 2004 places duties on a range of organisations, agencies and individuals to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Many of the agencies subject to the section 11 duty are members of the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), including the police, prison and probation services. MAPPA should work together with 'duty to co-operate agencies' to manage the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community in order to protect the public and should work closely with the safeguarding partners over services to commission locally.

The government is introducing measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 9 March 2021, to clarify the information sharing powers of those agencies subject to the duty to co-operate under MAPPA.

Furthermore, provisions in the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill, currently passing through parliament, will contribute further to the management of offenders. Perpetrators who are subject to a Domestic Abuse Protection Order are required to notify the police of their name and address and any changes to this information. Failure to notify constitutes a breach punishable by up to 5 years' imprisonment, a fine, or both.

The government has not conducted an assessment of the potential merits of a national database.

■ **Climate Change and Ecology: Education**

Navendu Mishra:

[174992]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make learning about the climate emergency and ecological crisis a compulsory part of teaching training courses.

Nick Gibb:

The Department know the biggest in-school influence on pupil outcomes is the quality of teaching. We are clear that high quality teaching is the surest way to raise standards overall and to close disadvantage gaps. This is more important than ever as we focus on recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The new ITT Core Content Framework is an ambitious core of mandatory content that must be included in the training curriculum by all ITT providers of courses that lead to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) from September 2020. The Framework is designed to cover the content required by trainee teachers irrespective of subject or phase. The Department expects providers and their partnerships to use the revised ITT Core Content Framework to craft a coherent and well-sequenced curriculum.

Further information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-core-content-framework>.

QTS will continue to be awarded at the end of ITT against the Teachers' Standards. The new ITT Core Content framework does not replace the Teachers' Standards and should not be used as an assessment framework. The Teachers' Standards are available to view here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>.

Courses must be designed so that teacher trainees can demonstrate that they meet all of the Teachers' Standards at the appropriate level, including Standard 3 'having a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas'.

■ Further Education: Coronavirus

Theresa Villiers: [\[174756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department will provide to same support to Further Education Colleges on covid-19 testing as is currently provided to secondary schools.

Theresa Villiers: [\[174757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what specific support the Government is providing to independent training providers for regular covid-19 testing of (a) staff and (b) students.

Gillian Keegan:

Since January, we have been delivering the same programme of rapid asymptomatic testing for the primary school, secondary school and further education college workforce and for children, young people and students in year 7 and above in all schools, including secondary schools, special schools, alternative provision, and colleges.

Testing is voluntary but staff, pupils and students are strongly encouraged to participate as testing regularly helps to reduce the spread in school and college settings through asymptomatic transmission.

It is important to continue to test pupils and staff to manage the spread of COVID-19 and encourage staff, pupil and students to get into a regular habit of testing themselves twice every week and 3 to 4 days apart. NHS Test and Trace will be supplying sufficient test kits to schools and colleges to enable this to happen.

From 25 March 2021, independent training providers and adult community learning providers have been able to order home test kits for their students and staff. Staff and students attending these providers should conduct testing at home, twice every week and 3 to 4 days apart.

Staff and students are strongly encouraged to participate in twice weekly testing, helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in education settings by identifying those that may be carrying the virus unknowingly. However, testing is voluntary and individuals should be allowed to attend school, college or work even if they decide not to take part in testing.

■ Pupils: Coronavirus

Thangam Debbonaire:

[\[174883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether a student who receives a positive result on a school-based lateral flow test may return to school and stop self-isolating, if they receive a negative result on a PCR test.

Nick Gibb:

In January, confirmatory PCR testing for pupils and students taking lateral flow tests in an assisted setting at school or college was paused. This was the same across all other sectors and NHS Test and Trace set out at the time that this was expected to be a temporary measure until prevalence was reduced. NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England have kept the changing clinical circumstances under review and have now advised that, due to the ability for PCR to now detect and track new variants and the lower prevalence of COVID-19, confirmatory PCR testing should now be reintroduced.

If you conduct a lateral flow test at home or receive a supervised school/college-based lateral flow test (LFT) as part of the rapid asymptomatic testing programme and it is positive then you, your close contacts, and other members of your household should self-isolate immediately in line with NHS Test and Trace guidance. All positive results from rapid tests, whether conducted at home or at a school or college, will then need to be confirmed with a PCR test within two days of the positive LFT. This should be booked immediately either online or by calling 119. Whilst awaiting the PCR result, you and your close contacts should continue to self-isolate. If the PCR test is negative, provided it was taken within two days of the positive LFT, it overrides the LFT and you can return to school or college and you, your close contacts, and other members of your household can stop self-isolating.

NHS Test and Trace guidance is available to view here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Naz Shah:

[\[175907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to shorten the school summer 2021 holidays to help students to catch up on learning missed as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Naz Shah:

[\[175908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to consult teachers and schools before further changes are made to the school year.

Nick Gibb:

The Government recognises the COVID-19 outbreak and associated education restrictions have had an impact on children and young people's education.

The Government has appointed Sir Kevan Collins as Education Recovery Commissioner to oversee the long-term plan. Sir Kevan will engage with parents,

pupils and teachers to develop this proposal and review how evidence-based interventions can be used to address the impact the COVID-19 outbreak has had on education. We are considering all options to address lost education to ensure the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is addressed as comprehensively as possible.

Term dates for the current and next academic year have already been set and published by local authorities, governing bodies, and academy trusts, but schools are free to offer summer activities to pupils should they so wish. We are making £200 million available to secondary schools to fund a short summer school, offering a blend of academic teaching and enrichment activities. We are recommending a focus on incoming Year 7 pupils, but schools are free to target those most in need of support.

■ Teachers: West Yorkshire

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[176111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to increase the number of teachers recruited from (a) Wakefield and (b) West Yorkshire.

Nick Gibb:

It is a top priority of the Government to ensure that we continue to attract, retain and develop the high-quality teachers we need to inspire the next generation. We are moving forward with delivery of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy that the Government published in January 2019.

The Early Career Framework (ECF), the biggest teaching reform in a generation, will provide newly-qualified teachers with a funded, two-year support package. Targeted early roll-out of the ECF is currently taking place for 1,900 newly qualified teachers in Bradford, the North East, Greater Manchester and Doncaster. Around 4,600 more newly qualified teachers were targeted and are benefiting from a one-year support package based on the ECF, including in disadvantaged areas.

We recognise that some schools and local areas face greater challenges with recruitment and retention than others. To supplement the national strategy, we are delivering targeted programmes to support recruitment and retention in these areas, including funding a range of regionally targeted initiatives. Wakefield, as well as Bradford, Calderdale, Leeds and Kirklees, are areas where eligible mathematics and physics teachers can claim a £2,000 retention payment in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Eligible mathematics, physics, chemistry and languages teachers in Bradford and Kirklees can apply for larger early-career payments of up to £7,500. Finally, Bradford is one of 25 local authorities where eligible languages, physics, chemistry, biology and computing teachers can claim back student loan repayments.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Africa: Democracy****Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[176102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department are taking to increase the level of democracy in countries in Africa categorised as Partly Free by the Freedom House index for 2020.

James Duddridge:

Promoting democracy and defending democratic freedoms is a fundamental part of the UK's foreign policy in Africa. We believe that strong democratic institutions and accountable governments, which uphold universal rights and the rule of law, are key building blocks for secure and prosperous states. The way we act to support democracy in each country is different and dependent on the context and needs of the country concerned. Our approach is principled but practical, based on an understanding of where and how we can affect positive change. The UK is a strong advocate for the promotion and defence of democracy in Africa. We support a wide range of democracy-building initiatives, including funding Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that increase citizen participation, promoting inclusion of marginalised groups, providing training for legal professionals, promoting freedom of expression, and strengthening political parties and parliaments.

■ Africa: Internet**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[176107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the level of internet freedom in countries in Africa categorised as Not Free by the Freedom House index for 2020.

Imran Ahmad Khan:[\[176108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the level of internet freedom in countries in Africa categorised as Partly Free by the Freedom House index for 2020.

James Duddridge:

Promoting and protecting media freedom is an important part of the UK's work to protect and defend human rights in Africa. The UK is committed to a free, open, peaceful and secure internet. It enables freedom of expression and provides a wide arena for human rights defenders and civil society to engage in democratic processes and to hold governments to account. The FCDO is supporting the NGO Access Now's #KeepItOn campaign, which brings together a coalition of over 100 countries to counter internet shutdowns. The UK also works to defend internet freedom through our membership of the Freedom Online Coalition, a coalition of 32 countries. Defending Media Freedom forms a key part of our commitment to supporting Open Societies and Human Rights, which was set out recently in the Integrated Review and

which forms one of the seven key priority areas set out by the Foreign Secretary for the aid budget this year.

■ Asia: Economic Situation

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[176115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Asian countries ranked in the bottom quartile of the Economic Freedom Rankings by the Fraser institution on liberalising their economies.

Nigel Adams:

As set out in the Integrated Review, the UK is committed to working in partnership to create open societies and open economies, and champion free trade and global economic cooperation.

My ministerial colleagues and I [Minister Adams] engage regularly with our counterparts to further this agenda, including with those countries in Asia ranked in the bottom quartile of the Economic Freedom Rankings. For example, in Vietnam, the Foreign Secretary recently renewed our Strategic Partnership Agreement, which includes cooperation on open trade and investment. In Bangladesh, Minister Jayawardena spoke to his counterpart in February to inaugurate the UK-Bangladesh Trade & Investment Dialogue and discuss trade and investment liberalisation.

■ Asia: Internet

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[176109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the level of internet freedom in countries in Asia categorised as Not Free by the Freedom House index for 2020.

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[176110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the level of internet freedom in countries in Asia categorised as Partly Free by the Freedom House index for 2020.

Nigel Adams:

Promoting and protecting media freedom is an important part of the UK's work to protect and defend human rights in Asia. The UK is committed to a free, open, peaceful and secure internet. It enables freedom of expression and provides a wide arena for human rights defenders and civil society to engage in democratic processes and to hold governments to account. The FCDO is supporting the NGO Access Now's #KeepItOn campaign, which brings together a coalition of over 100 countries to counter internet shutdowns. The UK also works to defend internet freedom through our membership of the Freedom Online Coalition, a coalition of 32 countries.

■ Central African Republic: Religious Freedom

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[175002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to support freedom of religion in the Central African Republic.

James Duddridge:

The UK is committed to supporting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious groups in the Central African Republic (CAR). We work through the UN General Assembly Third Committee, UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council to promote and protect these rights in CAR.

The UK contributes approximately £40 million annually to the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA) which continues to provide security across CAR. The mission works closely with the CAR government with the aim of protecting civilians and helping religious and non-religious groups and communities to co-exist peacefully. We also continue to monitor and report human rights abuses committed by armed groups in CAR, including violations of the 2019 Peace Agreement such as violent attacks on houses of worship, hospitals, and schools.

■ China: Religious Freedom

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[175018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the social credit system in China on freedom of religion or belief in that country.

Nigel Adams:

We remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others on the grounds of their religion or belief in China. The freedom to practise, change or share ones faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy. Alongside partners, we have expressed concerns to China's authorities that elements of its social credit system may infringe on the freedom of expression as set out in China's constitution and international instruments. We believe that societies which aim to guarantee freedom of religion or belief are more stable, prosperous and more resilient against violent extremism.

■ Indonesia: Religious Freedom

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[175005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to support freedom of religion in Indonesia.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities. Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and discuss practices and laws that discriminate on the basis of religion or belief. On a multilateral level, we work within the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance ('Alliance') and other international organisations and networks to promote and protect FoRB for all where it is threatened. On 20 December 2020, the Prime Minister reaffirmed his commitment to FoRB by appointing Fiona Bruce MP as his Special Envoy for FoRB. Mrs Bruce represents the UK at meetings of the Alliance who work to advocate for the rights of individuals being discriminated against or persecuted on the basis of their faith or belief.

In Indonesia, Embassy officials regularly meet with senior members of all six official faiths and also with Ahmadiyah and Shia communities. The British Ambassador to Indonesia met with the Indonesian Religious Affairs Minister on 19 January 2021 and discussed this issue.

■ Indo-Pacific Region: China**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[175019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on countering the influence of the China in the Indo-Pacific.

Nigel Adams:

The UK's ambition in the Indo-Pacific is to have a broad and integrated presence - with a long term commitment to closer and deeper partnerships, bilaterally and multilaterally. The Foreign Secretary has discussed the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt with his Indian counterpart and our shared vision of an inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region, including during his visit to India in December 2020 and his phone call with his Indian counterpart on 3 March.

■ Mozambique: Armed Conflict**Alexander Stafford:**[\[176125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he has taken to help tackle conflict in Mozambique following reports that children as young as 11 are being beheaded in the Cabo Delgado province of that country.

James Duddridge:

The UK is deeply concerned by the deteriorating security situation in northern Mozambique, and the increasing attacks by groups with links to Islamic extremism. As I [Minister Duddridge] set out publicly on 17 March, we are appalled by reports of beheadings of children in the Cabo Delgado province. We have been particularly

concerned by recent attacks in Palma, which we utterly condemn, and are in close contact with the local authorities in Cabo Delgado.

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

■ Myanmar: Army

Rushanara Ali: [\[174835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether there are outstanding loans from British banks to the Myanmar army.

Nigel Adams:

We are clear that British businesses should not be doing business with the Myanmar military or military owned entities. The Foreign Secretary and International Trade Secretary have written to UK businesses in Myanmar to make this expectation clear.

■ Myanmar: Food Supply

Andrew Rosindell: [\[174739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussion he has had with the leadership in Myanmar on support for people threatened by food shortages in that country.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is one of the largest humanitarian donors in Myanmar. UK aid provides life-saving humanitarian assistance to around 460,000 conflict affected and displaced people in Myanmar. We have carried out a review of our aid programme in Myanmar to ensure that we focus on the most vulnerable people. We are closely monitoring the ongoing impacts of the military coup with our partners, including ethnic civil society organisations, so that our support continues to reach those most in need and can respond to new needs.

The UN Security Council continues to call for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need, and highlights that the current situation has the potential to exacerbate existing challenges in Rakhine state and other regions.

■ Nigeria: Genocide

Alexander Stafford: [\[R\] \[175026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to implement the recommendations of the APPG for International

Freedom of Religion or Belief's 2020 report on violence in Nigeria entitled Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide.

James Duddridge:

I [Minister Duddridge] responded to the APPG's report 'Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide' by letter on 23 September 2020. In my response, I [Minister Duddridge] emphasised that the UK Government is supporting solutions that tackle the root causes of conflict in Nigeria. We recognise that insecurity and violence have been devastating for both Christian and Muslim communities across Nigeria.

We welcomed the report's provision of detailed analysis on acts of terrorism committed by Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa in North East Nigeria, as well as the complex issues of intercommunal violence across multiple states of Nigeria. The majority of the report's recommendations were not directed at the UK Government, however the APPG should be assured that we consistently raise the issues in their report directed at the Government of Nigeria with the relevant authorities. We continue to urge the Nigerian Government to uphold human rights and the rule of law, investigate any incidents of violence, and hold those responsible to account.

■ **Nigeria: Religious Freedom**

Alexander Stafford:

[\[176128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has prepared a written strategy for tackling freedom of religion or belief violations in Nigeria.

James Duddridge:

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the top priorities in our human rights strategy for Nigeria. Under this strategy the UK provides support to establish inter-communal dialogues to help build a more inclusive society across communities in Nigeria, including respect for individuals' freedom to practice their religion or belief.

The Minister responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, underlined the UK's global commitment to FoRB for all in November 2020 at the Ministerial to Advance FoRB. This meeting convened international leaders and ministers to discuss and progress issues of FoRB. On 20 December 2020, the Prime Minister reaffirmed his global commitment to FoRB by appointing Fiona Bruce MP as his Special Envoy. We use our membership of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance ('Alliance') and other international organisations and networks to promote and protect FoRB for all, including in Nigeria.

■ Overseas Aid: Fossil Fuels

Anna McMorrin:

[\[175991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans for the new overseas fossil fuel policy outlined in the Government's response to the Aligning UK International Support for Energy Transition consultation to replace CDC Group's fossil fuel policy adopted in December 2020.

James Duddridge:

The Prime Minister announced at the Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December 2020 that the Government will no longer provide any new direct financial or promotional support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas, with very limited exemptions. On the same day, CDC Group announced its fossil fuel policy which is fully aligned with HMG's fossil fuel policy.

■ Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon:

[\[175847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the findings of the report published in 2020 by the APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief entitled Commentary on the current state of freedom of religion or belief.

Nigel Adams:

We have taken note of the APPG's recently published report. The UK is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all, and to promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. We remain deeply concerned about violations and abuses of FoRB in many parts of the world. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with governments, including at ministerial level. The Minister responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, underlined the UK's commitment to FoRB for all in a number of international meetings in November 2020, speaking at the Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Ministers' Forum of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

On 20 December 2020, the Prime Minister reaffirmed his commitment to FoRB by appointing Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton, as his Special Envoy for FoRB. Mrs Bruce works with ministers, officials, and others to deliver the Government's goal of seeing everyone, everywhere able to have and practise a faith, belief, or no religious belief, in accordance with their conscience. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon works alongside her to drive forward the implementation of the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's report on FCDO support for persecuted Christians in a way that improves the lives of those persecuted for their faith, or belief, or for not holding a religion.

■ Russia: Corruption and Money Laundering**Rushanara Ali:**[\[174836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to introduce new measures under the UK's Magnitsky Act to target corruption and illicit finance as outlined in the Integrated Review.

Nigel Adams:

On 6 July 2020 the UK Government established the Global Human Rights ('Magnitsky') sanctions regime by laying regulations in Parliament under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. This sanctions regime enables the UK to hold to account those involved in serious human rights violations or abuses.

As the Foreign Secretary announced to the House, work is underway to consider how an anti-corruption sanctions regime could be added to our armoury. Sanctions are powerful tools, capable of having a significant impact, and are complex to design. We are taking the time to ensure we get them right and will update Parliament in due course.

■ Sahel: Armed Conflict**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[175006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts for countries in the Sahel on insurgents in that territory.

James Duddridge:

The UK is deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel. At the G5 Sahel Summit on 16 February, attended by all Sahelian governments and international partners, the Foreign Secretary set out the need to address impunity for human rights abuses and violations, strengthen civil-military coordination, and improve efforts to enhance stability in the region.

■ Tibet and Xinjiang: Electronic Surveillance**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[175015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to challenge the spread of technological surveillance in (a) Tibet and (b) Xinjiang.

Nigel Adams:

We regularly raise our deep concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet and Xinjiang bilaterally with the Chinese authorities and at the UN. There is a growing body of evidence of extensive and invasive surveillance targeting minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang. The UK is committed to promoting the ethical development and deployment of technology in the UK and overseas.

■ Travel Information

Steve Double:

[\[174894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what factors he will assess to reach a decision on whether to remove travel advice relating specifically to cruises in order to bring cruises under global travel advice in line with other types of transport.

Nigel Adams:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) advises against international cruising informed by public health risk assessments. This advice is kept under continuous review. The risk assessments to inform travel advice from Public Health England and the Department of Health and Social Care are not published separately.

National restrictions on international travel remain in place, including only permitting travel abroad for a limited number of reasons set out in law. Holiday travel is not included.

The FCDO remains fully committed to working closely with the Department for Transport and key industry leaders, informed by the changing public health situation during this pandemic to agree on the steps required to restart international cruises safely.

■ USA: Tibet

Imran Ahmad Khan:

[\[175013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the US Tibet Policy Support Act 2020.

Nigel Adams:

We are aware of the US Tibet Policy Support Act 2020, which calls for reciprocal access to Tibet and makes it official US policy that the succession of the Dalai Lama should be left solely to Tibetan Buddhists to decide. The UK continues to call for unfettered access to the Tibet Autonomous Region, and seeks a reciprocal, fair and transparent system of access for our diplomats and citizens. British diplomats last visited the Tibet Autonomous Region in July 2019, following a request for access by our Embassy in Beijing. We periodically request access to the Tibet Autonomous Region, but did not do so in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. We continue to raise our concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet with the Chinese authorities, including through joint statements in the UN's human rights bodies, and call on them to uphold the rights of all citizens guaranteed in international law and China's own constitution.

■ Vietnam: Religious Freedom**Imran Ahmad Khan:**[\[175001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to support freedom of religion in Vietnam.

Nigel Adams:

The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. Promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities.

In Vietnam we have publicly confirmed our position that members of religious groups and organisations, both recognised and unrecognised, should be allowed to worship and practise their beliefs peacefully. The UK works alongside likeminded diplomatic missions and organisations to coordinate activity on FoRB of religious communities. The UK-Vietnam Strategic Partnership Agreement commits to cooperation on human rights and we raise concerns on policy and individual cases during our annual Strategic Dialogue with Vietnamese Ministers.

The Minister responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, made the UK's commitment to FoRB for all clear in a number of international meetings in November 2020. On 16 November 2020, he virtually attended the Ministerial meeting to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief in Warsaw and reaffirmed the UK's commitment to promoting FoRB, particularly during the pandemic. He also reaffirmed the UK's commitment to promoting FoRB for all at the Ministers' Forum of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance in the same month. On 20 December 2020, the Prime Minister appointed Fiona Bruce MP as his special envoy for FoRB. Mrs Bruce represents the UK at meetings of the alliance, who work to advocate for the rights of individuals being discriminated against or persecuted on the basis of their faith or belief.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Breast Cancer: Health Services****Olivia Blake:**[\[173235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2021 to Question 157164 on Breast Cancer: Health Services, what data his Department plans to use to make an assessment of the effect of pausing treatment as a result of the covid-19 outbreak on the outcomes of patients suffering from metastatic breast cancer.

Olivia Blake:[\[173236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2021 to Question 157164 on Breast Cancer: Health Services, when his Department plans to make that assessment.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 25 March 2021]: The National Health Service Cancer Programme is currently establishing a Task and Finish group to review alterations and/or disruptions to care pathways, including services for those with secondary breast cancer, during the pandemic. A timeline for an assessment will be determined once this group has been established. Once a Task and Finish group has been established the group will consider the most appropriate data sources with which to make this assessment.

■ Care Homes: Visits**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[174741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of covid-19 safety measures put in place to allow visitors to care homes.

Helen Whately:

The decision to resume regular indoor care home visiting was a clinically-led approach taking into account the surveillance of COVID-19 and the risks of transmission and infection. The COVID-19 safety measures in place represent a balance between the risk of infections and the importance of visiting for the physical and mental wellbeing of residents and their families. Our priority has been and continues to be the prevention of infection in care homes to protect staff and residents.

Enhanced data collection has been put in place to monitor the impact of visits and to ensure that any adverse impacts across the system are rapidly detected. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies' Social Care Working Group will also be undertaking an assessment of how well the overall suite of safety measures have worked. The Department will use this to inform future policy.

■ Coronavirus: Schools**Justin Madders:**[\[165582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's operational guidance Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) dated February 2021, who undertook the research or evidence gathering regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings; and whether that research or evidence gathering was specific to educational settings.

Justin Madders:[\[165583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Department for Education's document, Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance, published in February 2021, if he will publish the evidence his Department holds on the effectiveness and covid-safety of transparent face coverings.

Jo Churchill:

The Department for Education's 'Schools coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance', sets out the educational settings in which face coverings should be worn.

Their guidance states that transparent face coverings may also be worn as an alternative to cloth face coverings.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and Public Health England (PHE) regularly monitor and review the international evidence on the effectiveness of face coverings. Their most recent consideration of the science around face coverings was concluded in January. Copies of the rapid reviews undertaken by PHE 'Face coverings in the community and COVID-19: a rapid review' and 'Face coverings in the community and COVID-19 A rapid review (update 1)' are attached. Both reviews contain references to the scientific literature as part of the study.

Although the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control suggest that transparent face coverings would be expected to work similarly to other non-medical face coverings if properly fitted, there is currently limited evidence regarding their effectiveness or safety but along with other measures such as social distancing and good hand hygiene, they may help reduce the spread of COVID-19. There is a stronger evidence base for the use of fabric face coverings in reducing the respiratory particles emitted from the mouth and nose of someone who is infected. SAGE has advised that using a cloth face covering is an important mitigation.

Attachments:

1. Face coverings in the community and COVID-19 [PHECOVID19EvidenceReviewFaceCoverings.pdf]
2. Face coverings in the community: update 1 [ER-031 Face coverings Rapid Review Update1 2021 01 28.pdf]

■ **Coronavirus: Screening**

Imran Ahmad Khan: [\[173196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much the NHS has spent on lateral flow covid-19 testing to date.

Helen Whately:

Lateral flow device testing is provided by NHS Test and Trace using a separate budget administered through the Department. The final audited NHS Test and Trace expenditure will be published as part of the Department's 2020-21 Annual Report and Accounts.

Apsana Begum: [\[174971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason the covid-19 testing centre in Popular and Limehouse constituency was situated in Jack Dash House.

Apsana Begum: [\[174972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what consultation his Department undertook with (a) local residents, (b) local shop owners, (c) representatives of the Magic Roundabout Nursery and (d) representatives of the local authority prior to the opening of the covid-19 testing centre in Jack Dash House, Isle of Dogs, London.

Apsana Begum:

[\[174973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance his Department has issued to (a) local residents, (b) local shop owners, (c) representatives of the Magic Roundabout Nursery and (d) representatives of the local authority on the functioning of the covid-19 testing centre situated in Jack Dash House, Isle of Dogs, London.

Apsana Begum:

[\[174974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the effect on (a) local residents, (b) local shop owners and (c) the Magic Roundabout Nursery of the covid-19 testing centre being situated in Jack Dash House, Isle of Dogs, London.

Apsana Begum:

[\[176067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department made prior to taking the decision to locate the covid-19 testing centre in Jack Dash House of the risks to public health of locating that test centre in proximity to (a) Magic Roundabout Nursery, (b) other businesses occupying the building and (c) operational working area of the local area.

Helen Whately:

All local test sites are provided by the relevant local authority as they are best placed to make considerations upon where testing would be most beneficial. The local authority is responsible for engaging with all local residents and businesses.

All local authorities utilising local test sites are provided with a National Health Service Test and Trace site criteria guide to consider the location of the site, the demand, ownership, the duration that the site might be in use for and surrounding uses.

■ Coronavirus: Travel

Fleur Anderson:

[\[159046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce the financial costs of covid-19 testing for UK arrivals who have had to travel abroad for essential reasons.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 2 March 2021]: For those facing significant financial hardship as a result of these costs there is an opportunity to apply for a deferred repayment plan when booking, in particular for individuals who receive income related benefits. We have set out how to apply for this on GOV.UK. We keep all our measures under constant review.

■ Coronavirus: Universities

Dan Jarvis:

[\[105371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to (a) increase covid-19 testing capacity and (b) reduce waiting times for results for (i) students and (ii) staff at universities.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 22 October 2020]: NHS Test and Trace has capacity to respond to increases in demand. As of 26 March over 8.5 million lateral flow device (LFD) and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests have been conducted. We also have the capacity to conduct over 750,000 PCR tests every day in over 1,100 test sites.

Since November 2020 we have assisted universities in setting up asymptomatic test sites (ATS) and the majority have one or multiple test sites and engaged in the regular testing of their staff and students with LFDs. For those who have been unable to set up their own ATS, we are working with the Department for Education to ensure there is a solution, either through partnering with a larger higher education institution or making use of community test sites. Between 2 January and 6 April, the overall average turnaround time at ATS across the United Kingdom is 36 minutes.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Mohammad Yasin:

[\[144789\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the timescale is for (a) notifying and (b) deploying people who have made successful applications to work on the covid-19 vaccine delivery programme.

Nadhim Zahawi:

The timescales will vary due to differences in training programmes for returners, those who are still registered in their profession and those who are no longer registered.

Returners who are still registered in their profession, including the temporary register, are no longer required to complete the full statutory and mandatory package.

However, those who are not registered healthcare professionals and are applying through the national recruitment process are required to complete the full core knowledge on statutory and mandatory training as part of their application process. They may also need to complete local training which will be decided by the relevant trust.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Written Questions

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[178677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to answer Questions 126847 and 132867 tabled by the hon. Member for Hendon in December 2020.

Edward Argar:

I refer the hon. Member to the answers to Questions [126847](#) and [132867](#).

■ **General Practitioners: Stockport****Navendu Mishra:**[\[176092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many GP appointments there have been in Stockport constituency in each of the last five years.

Jo Churchill:

The following table shows the number of appointments in general practice in Stockport Clinical Commissioning Group in each year since 2018. General practitioner appointment data was first collected in 2018. Data by constituency is not available.

2018	1,327,673
2019	1,478,492
2020	1,449,255
2021 (January and February)	255,548

Source: NHS Digital

■ **Members: Correspondence****Paul Maynard:**[\[152458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to reply to the letter of 28 October 2020 from the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys on NHS test and trace.

Edward Argar:

We are working to provide all Members and external correspondents with accurate answers to their correspondence, as well as supporting the Government's response to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The hon. Member's letter will be answered as soon as possible.

■ **NHS Test and Trace****Steve Reed:**[\[146901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) external consultants and (b) arms-length bodies his Department has employed to work on the NHS Test and Trace programme in each month since the inception of that programme; and what the cost of their employment is each month.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 4 February 2021]: Figures on how many consultants are employed each month on the Test and Trace programme is not collected as the number is subject to continual week on week change. Audited information for the monthly costs of consultants is not currently available.

■ **NHS: Finance****Catherine West:**[\[174209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the effects of financial constraints on (a) face-to-face community translation services and (b) other non-clinical NHS services.

Edward Argar:

[Holding answer 13 April 2021]: We have made no specific assessment. Local commissioners are responsible for putting services in place from local budgets.

■ **Speech and Language Therapy****Geraint Davies:**[\[151588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to allow speech and language therapists to train to be Approved Mental Health Professionals.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

There are no current plans to allow speech and language therapists to train to be Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP). AMHPs are highly trained and experienced mental health professionals, who have responsibilities outlined within the Mental Health Act 1983. The Mental Health (Approved Mental Health Professionals) (Approval) (England) Regulations 2008 state that social workers, psychiatric nurses, occupational therapists and clinical psychologists can train to be AMHPs and be authorised by their local authority.

TRANSPORT■ **Eurostar: Coronavirus****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[174951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the financial effect on Eurostar in the event of France being added to the red list for travel during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Following my previous answers in response to the honourable member regarding Eurostar's situation, we are very much aware of the severe and ongoing impact COVID-19 is having on the company, particularly given the continuing restrictions to international travel. We continue to have extensive engagement with international rail operators, including Eurostar, on the impact of border measures on their companies.

Further measures, including additions to the 'red list' are kept under constant review and will only be used for as long as is necessary to manage the risk of imported variants.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[176004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 17 March 2021 to Question 167937 on Eurostar: Coronavirus, what was discussed in his recent engagements with Eurostar and the French authorities.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Government continue to hold discussions on Eurostar's financial situation with the French Government.

■ **Great Western Railway: Apprentices**

Karin Smyth:

[\[174892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with Great Western Rail on increasing the number of apprenticeships at their St Philip's Marsh depot.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Great Western Railway's (GWR) Franchise Agreement includes targets to ensure opportunities for apprentices. Despite the pandemic, GWR recruited thirty apprentices in September 2020 which is a significant increase from the nineteen taken on in 2019. GWR plans to recruit the same number of apprentices again in 2021, with six of the thirty apprenticeships available in the engineering profession. Currently, GWR's intention is that two apprentices will be placed in St Philip's Marsh depot.

■ **High Speed 2 Railway Line: Standards**

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[174785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of skills shortages in the transport sector on the effectiveness of High Speed Rail Two.

Andrew Stephenson:

The Department commissioned the National Skills Academy for Rail in January 2021 to provide data on skills shortages across transport modes. Skills shortages were identified in infrastructure construction, rail, freight and logistics. The Department is now working, in collaboration with industry partners, stakeholders, other Government departments and public bodies (including HS2 Ltd), to identify mitigations and ensure it addresses the challenges facing both the transport industry and the wider economy.

HS2 Ltd has also developed a [Skills, Employment and Education strategy](#), that focuses on securing the skills and labour required to build HS2, and leave a legacy of a highly-skilled and diverse workforce. Underlying this strategy are labour and skills forecasting data and analysis which provide an assessment of potential mismatches

between HS2 labour and skills requirements and their availability. Reforecast data is expected to be published later this year.

■ High Speed Two: Staff

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[176139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many and what proportion of (a) jobs and (b) apprenticeships supported by High Speed Two are located in Wales.

Andrew Stephenson:

Whilst HS2 presents a significant opportunity for businesses of all sizes across the UK, HS2 Ltd does not track the proportion of HS2 jobs and apprenticeships that are located in Wales. As HS2 Ltd's supply chain will consist of up to 400,000 contract opportunities, a smaller number of critical contracts are monitored and so far, there are 27 suppliers based in Wales delivering work on critical contracts. It is likely there will be many more jobs and apprenticeships created in factories and businesses in Wales from the HS2 project within the supply chain.

■ Hitachi Rail Europe: Apprentices

Karin Smyth: [\[174891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with Hitachi Rail on increasing the number of apprenticeships at their Filton depot near Bristol.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Hitachi Rail Europe Ltd currently has six apprentice roles at Stoke Gifford, Bristol, four Level 3 and two Level 4 in Rolling Stock Engineering. The Department understands that Hitachi Rail Europe has a full programme currently, but would look to increase with any new orders that they receive.

■ Lighting: Greater London

Andrew Rosindell: [\[174746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to encourage the provision of greater street lighting in London boroughs.

Rachel Maclean:

The UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG), chaired by the DfT and with TfL representation, provides guidance - including on street lighting - to all local authorities in the UK, through the *Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice*. Further guidance can be found on the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) website.

■ Railways: Electrification

Karin Smyth: [\[174890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of (a) electrifying the main railway line between Bristol and Birmingham

and (b) connecting Britsol to the HS2 terminus under construction at Birmingham Curzon Street.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

a) Further electrification of the rail network will play an important role in achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Electrification schemes will be developed through the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) to ensure that they represent value for money and can be delivered in a sustainable way.

b) The Midlands Rail Hub programme, currently under development, maximises the opportunities of HS2 by allowing trains from the southwest of Birmingham (including Bristol) to use Moor Street Station.

Moor Street Station is adjacent to the HS2 Birmingham Station at Curzon Street and convenient interchange is proposed between the two.

■ **Railways: Repairs and Maintenance**

Paul Maynard:

[\[175794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the (a) number and (b) period of time of track possessions undertaken by Network Rail consequential to the reduced passenger timetable as a result of the covid-19 outbreak; and what assessment he has made of the effect that those track possessions have had on the (i) Public Performance Measure and (ii) volume of delay minutes in the most recent quarter for which those figures are available.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

While no estimate had been made, as part of Network Rail's business as usual monitoring of the progress of its engineering work, of the number and period of time of track possessions undertaken consequential to the reduced passenger timetable as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak prior to this point, Network Rail has so far undertaken 38 additional possessions of various lengths, from single nights to two-week blocks. Opportunities to extend possessions have also been taken advantage of, such as the cancellation of first or last trains, or where services were thinned. The independent rail regulator, the Office for Rail and Road, has assessed Network Rail as having shown a strong response to the pandemic and that it has responded well to its challenges, in particular re-planning work to ensure continued and effective delivery throughout the past 12 months.

We do not hold information on the effect of track possessions on performance. The latest national public performance measure for the period 7 February to 6 March 2021 is 92.6%, compared with 83.9% for the same period last year.

■ **Railways: Tickets**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[176009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 25 March 2021 to Question 171701 on Railways: Tickets, if he will ensure that it is possible for customers to

purchase tickets from a member of staff if they are unable to use or cannot access (a) ticket machines, (b) smartphones and (c) the internet.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

We recognise the importance that passengers place on station staff being available to assist them with their journeys and the work that they undertake to promote the accessibility of the network.

While it is for train operators to ensure staff are deployed in a way that best meets the needs of their passengers, we will work with them to ensure passengers who are unable to use or access ticket machines, smartphones or the internet can continue to purchase train tickets as readily as they can do today.

■ **Road Traffic Control: Bolton**

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[175793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding his Department has provided to Bolton Council to support low traffic neighbourhood initiatives in the last three years.

Rachel Maclean:

In the financial years 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 the Department provided £2,459,000 to Bolton Council through the Integrated Transport Block for small scale transport schemes, including road safety and traffic management measures. The Integrated Transport Block is not ring-fenced, allowing authorities to spend their allocations according to their own priorities.

To help local authorities make safe provision for cyclists and pedestrians during Covid-19, the Department launched a new £225 million Active Travel Fund (ATF). Bolton Council is a constituent member of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which received £3,174,000 in Tranche 1 and £15,871,250 in Tranche 2 of the ATF. LTNs were one of the measures included in the additional Network Management Duty guidance for local authorities, which accompanied the ATF.

■ **Transport for the North**

Dame Diana Johnson:

[\[175757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will publish minutes of meetings between the Minister of State in his Department and representatives of Transport for the North in each of the last 12 months.

Andrew Stephenson:

There has been regular engagement between ministers and Transport for the North over the last year. No formal minutes of these meetings were recorded to allow for a free and open exchange of views on key issues. However, issues raised by stakeholders are followed up and, where necessary, further meetings are held with officials.

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Maternity Allowance and Universal Credit: Low Incomes****Navendu Mishra:**[\[174982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what additional financial support is available for low-paid women who are in receipt of maternity allowance and universal credit.

Guy Opperman:

There is information on Gov.UK "Financial help if you have children" about the range of assistance available, including but not limited to, Maternity Allowance.

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/financial-help-children>

This includes the Sure Start Maternity Grant of £500 to provide help with the costs associated with the expenses of a baby (or babies in the event of a multiple birth) expected, born, adopted, or the subject of a parental or residence order or other similar arrangements if there are no other children under the age of 16 in the claimant's family in most cases. The grant is available to people on Universal Credit.

■ Members: Correspondence**Dave Doogan:**[\[174965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when she plans to respond to the correspondence from the hon. Member for Angus of 14 December 2020, 28 January 2021 and 18 February 2021 on the Child Maintenance Service.

Guy Opperman:

The Department responded by email to Dave Doogan MP, Scottish National Party Angus, on 26 March 2021.

■ Social Security Benefits: Standards**Navendu Mishra:**[\[174993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what mechanisms are in place to prevent incorrect payments being made.

Navendu Mishra:[\[174994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department takes to ensure benefits are paid to the correct recipients.

Navendu Mishra:[\[174995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data her Department holds on the level of incorrect payments made by her Department.

Guy Opperman:

The Department takes every care to prevent incorrect payments being made and to ensure that benefits are paid to the correct recipient; we are focused on paying people their correct entitlement from the outset of a claim.

The Department has a clear strategy for tackling fraud, error and debt in the benefits system, which increasingly focuses on the prevention of fraud and error.

Various mechanisms help ensure that monies are paid to the right people. These include the verification of claimants' information, clear customer communications to ensure benefit claimants provide full and correct claim details and a robust quality checking regime. This Quality Assurance approach includes pre-payment checks on a selection of claims. Outcomes from these and other checks inform on-going training and help prevent the repetition of errors.

The Department continues to make use of its digital capability, including the use of real time information and other data, which helps identify any potential discrepancies in claims.

The Department's latest estimates of Fraud and Error in the Benefits system were published on 14th May 2020 and show that estimated losses from official error in 2019/20 accounted for 0.4% of total benefit expenditure.

These statistics can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fraud-and-error-in-the-benefit-system-financial-year-2019-to-2020-estimates>

■ Universal Credit: Maternity Allowance

Navendu Mishra:

[174981]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will (a) increase the rate of maternity allowance or (b) exclude maternity allowance as unearned income when claiming universal credit.

Guy Opperman:

The Government has no plans to review the rate of Maternity Allowance. Maternity Allowance is intended to enable eligible pregnant women and new mothers, who cannot get Statutory Maternity Pay, such as the low paid and the self-employed to prepare for, and recover from birth and to bond with their child. We believe that the rate of Maternity Allowance available allows most mothers to do this.

There are no plans to change the way that Maternity Allowance is treated in Universal Credit. Universal Credit is a means tested system of support, and where an individual claims Universal Credit, their award is adjusted to take account of any other financial support that the claimant is already receiving – including earnings, other income and benefits. Maternity Allowance is a benefit paid by the State which is unearned income. Unearned income that is available to help meet daily living costs is taken fully into account in determining the amount of Universal Credit that an individual is entitled to. As such, in determining the entitlement to Universal Credit, Maternity Allowance is deducted pound for pound from the total value of the award. This principle applies to other benefits.

Navendu Mishra:

[174983]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential effect of maternity allowance deductions from universal credit on the (a) standard of living and (b) decision to return to work earlier of claimants affected by that deduction.

Guy Opperman:

There are no plans to change the way that Maternity Allowance is treated in Universal Credit, the impact of which has already been considered.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Reporting contingent liabilities in relation to cancellation compensation for event organisers participating in phase one of the Events Research Programme

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden):
[\[HCWS916\]](#)

I am tabling this statement for the benefit of all members of this House to bring to their attention the Departmental Minute issued today that provides the House with notice of a series of small contingent liabilities created by my Department. This is in relation to a policy to compensate event organisers participating in phase one of the Events Research Programme in the event of their cancellation if public health concerns were to give rise.

The Events Research Programme is running its first phase of 10-15 pilots in April and May to inform decisions around the safe removal of social distancing at Step 4 of the Roadmap. The pilots will be run across a range of settings, venues, and activities so that findings will support the full reopening of similar settings across multiple sectors.

The government will provide compensation on a discretionary basis to event organisers should a pilot event be cancelled due to public health reasons.

This compensation will be capped at £300,000 per event and will cover costs incurred in relation to participation in the programme only (e.g. admission of spectators), recognising the fact that these events would have taken place in line with roadmap restrictions should the programme not exist. In the case of the Liverpool events, as these have been put on specifically as part of the programme, the government will compensate organisers in full should an event be cancelled, but this will be capped at £300,000 in total across the Liverpool events.

The government does not intend to cancel any event in the programme, however public safety comes first and therefore it is prudent to provide this assurance to the organisers assisting the government in reopening the economy.

A copy of the Departmental Minute is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ COVID-19 Vaccination Update

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): [\[HCWS917\]](#)

I wish to inform the House of actions we are taking to improve uptake of vaccines across the adult social care sector.

In February 2021, we published the UK COVID-19 Vaccines Delivery Plan setting out the significant programme of work underway to drive vaccine uptake, including actions to

improve access and to address the concerns of those who may be hesitant to receive the vaccine.

We have been working to make the vaccination accessible to people living and working in care homes. Vaccination teams have visited all older age care homes in England and are running a minimum four-visit schedule for each. For those workers who may not have been present when the vaccination team visited the home, access via other vaccination services has been available. We also opened the National Booking Service for seven weeks so that frontline social care workers could book their own appointments, and care home workers can now arrange vaccination directly through their GP.

We have worked hard to address concerns among the adult social care workforce by delivering an extensive communications programme, running targeted advertisements and issuing a stakeholder toolkit containing regularly updated Q&As, guidance and communications materials. Positive messaging using influencers, leaders and care home workers who have already been vaccinated has boosted confidence and tackled misinformation, as have briefings with different faith groups who have become ambassadors for getting a vaccine.

We continue to do everything we can to increase vaccine uptake. We have targeted support at older adult care homes where vaccine uptake is low, such as in London. As of 4 April 2021, vaccine uptake among eligible workers in older adult care homes in London is 68%, compared to 82% in the South West. Local efforts, by employers, local authorities, public health teams and others, supplement this government's support.

Despite efforts, vaccine uptake amongst care home workers is not consistently at the level we know from SAGE advice is needed to minimise the risk of outbreak, which is a minimum vaccination rate of 80% staff, and 90% of residents within each home and this level must be maintained. Only 53% of older adult homes in England are currently meeting this recommendation.

It is imperative that together we now take every step necessary to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to those most at risk from COVID-19 and those who care for them. We must protect people living in care homes, and we must protect the workforce who perform such a vital role.

Vaccination is a safe, effective way of preventing the spread of COVID-19. It is therefore right that the Government acts now to ensure that those working and assisting in older adult care homes are vaccinated to protect everyone in these settings.

From today, we are consulting on taking steps to require care providers to deploy only staff who have been vaccinated within older adult care homes. This measure would be intended to protect the people most at risk in our society - around 90% of those who died from COVID-19 were people over 70.

Making vaccination a condition of deployment in older adult care home provider in this way, would help to further protect older people living in care homes, who are among the most vulnerable to Covid-19, and ultimately save lives. A five-week consultation launches today to help inform decision-making around how the change could be implemented and

whether respondents think it will be beneficial. This will include areas such as potential impact on staff, safety and who could be exempt. Staff, providers, stakeholders, residents and their families are being urged to take part to have their views heard with an outcome expected by this summer.

I will provide an update to the House, following the completion of the consultation.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Building Safety Monthly Update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [\[HCWS913\]](#)

I have undertaken to provide the House with a monthly building safety update.

On 10 February I announced my five-point plan to bring an end to unsafe cladding and my officials are working at pace to develop and deliver the products, systems and legislation associated with these:

1. Government will pay for the removal of unsafe cladding for leaseholders in all residential buildings 18 metres and over in England
2. A generous finance scheme to provide reassurance for leaseholders in buildings between 11 and 18 metres, ensuring they never pay more than £50 a month for cladding removal
3. An industry levy and tax to ensure developers play their part
4. A world-class new safety regime to ensure a tragedy like Grenfell never happens again
5. Providing confidence to this part of the housing market including lenders and surveyors

We have now committed an unprecedented £5 billion investment in building safety. This will ensure taxpayer funding is targeted at the highest risk buildings in line with longstanding independent expert advice.

Remediation statistics

We continue to make good progress on the remediation of unsafe cladding, with around 95% of all high-rise residential buildings with unsafe ACM cladding identified by the beginning of last year now either remediated or started on site.

Our expectation is that unsafe ACM remediation should be completed as soon as possible and by the end of 2021 at the latest.

Full details of our progress with ACM cladding remediation can be found in the Department's monthly Building Safety Data Release, which will next be published on 15 April on the Government's website.

Previous monthly Building Safety Data Releases can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/aluminium-composite-material-cladding#acm-remediation-data>

As at 31 March 2021, the Building Safety Fund Registration Statistics show that **1,075** decisions have been made on the basis that sufficient supporting information has now been received. Of these, **668** registered buildings are proceeding with a full application and **407** have been shown to be ineligible, mostly on grounds of not meeting the published criteria or because they do not have unsafe cladding systems in place. The total amount of funding allocated is **£319.2 million** (including social sector) correct at **31/03/2021**. Full details can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remediation-of-non-acm-buildings#building-safety-fund-registration-statistics>

TREASURY

■ Notification of contingent liability – mortgage guarantee scheme

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

[HCWS915]

It is normal practice when a government department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 and for which there is no statutory authority, for the Minister concerned:

- to present a departmental Minute to parliament, giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and
- to refrain from incurring the liability until fourteen parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the Minute, except in cases of special urgency.

I am writing to notify Parliament of a contingent liability that has been created by the government from the introduction of the new mortgage guarantee scheme. The scheme will be open to new mortgages submitted by participating lenders from 19 April 2021, but the liability will not be incurred until lenders start to submit mortgages to the scheme, which is not expected until May at the earliest.

By way of background, the mortgage guarantee scheme was announced at the Budget on 3 March 2021. The scheme will provide a guarantee to lenders across the UK who offer mortgages to people with a deposit of 5% on homes with a value of up to £600,000. Under the scheme all buyers will have the opportunity to fix their initial mortgage rate for at least five years should they wish to. The scheme, which will be available for new mortgages up to 31 December 2022, will increase the availability of mortgages on new or existing properties for those with small deposits. The guarantee will be valid for up to seven years after the mortgage is originated.

Exposure against this contingent liability would take place in the event that the sum of commercial fees paid by lenders would not be sufficient to cover calls on the guarantee. There will be a cap on the size of the government's contingent liability under the scheme of £3.9 billion.

Authority for any expenditure required under this liability will be sought through the normal procedure. HM Treasury have approved this proposal.

I will also lay a minute today on this matter.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Extending COVID Local Support Measures

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

[\[HCWS914\]](#)

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme has enabled Local Authorities in England to provide targeted support to families and individuals, keeping them warm and well fed over the winter period, with the principal focus being on disadvantaged children.

The initial scheme was issued at £170 million and was due to conclude at the end of March 2021. In the first two months of the scheme, covering December 2020 and January 2021, Local Authorities spent over £86 million, with 94% awarded to support families with children and 96% used on the provision of food and support with utility bills. In the same period, nearly 2.4 million awards had been made to vulnerable households through the scheme. The scheme was subsequently extended with an additional £59.1 million of support and was due to conclude this Friday 16th April.

Recognising that some restrictions on the economy continue, we are extending the scheme until the 20th June 2021 with funding of £40 million and re-naming it the Covid Local Support Grant. This brings the scheme in line with the Prime Minister's roadmap out of lockdown as on the 21 June, provided we continue to pass the four steps needed to progress through the roadmap, most of the remaining restrictions will be lifted.

All conditions of the grant continue, as does the allocation methodology.