

**Daily Report****Friday, 7 January 2022**

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 7 January 2022 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:52 P.M., 07 January 2022). 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

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Digital Technology: Disadvantaged

Nadia Whittome:

[94577]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to tackle digital exclusion in the context of the Plan B restrictions announced by the Government on 8 December 2021.

Chris Philp:

The Government's 10 Tech Priorities include building a tech-savvy nation where no-one is left behind by the digital revolution. For this reason, the government is working to ensure that everyone has digital access to further their training and improve employment prospects.

The pandemic and the ongoing measures, including those implemented under Plan B, continue to highlight the importance of supporting digitally excluded people.

Throughout the pandemic, DCMS has supported initiatives that help address digital exclusion. These include the Digital Lifeline fund, which provided tablets, data and free digital support to over 5,000 people with learning disabilities who would otherwise find it difficult to get online.

Additionally, in September 2021, the Inclusive Economy Partnership (IEP), partnered with industry leaders to launch the Digital Inclusion Impact Group focused on tackling digital exclusion. One of the pilot programmes is [Dell Donate to Educate](#), which will support children across England with the right access to technology at school and at home.

■ Music and Theatres: Coronavirus

Fleur Anderson:

[94557]

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with representatives of (a) live music venues and (b) theatres on Government support since the publication of Government guidance on the transmission of the Omicron covid-19 variant on 8 December 2021.

Julia Lopez:

The Government remains committed to working closely and collaboratively with all our sectors whilst we mitigate the risks of the coronavirus pandemic. Ministers meet regularly with representatives from the music and performance arts sectors to discuss the impacts of Covid-19. A ministerial roundtable was held on 17 December, which included attendees from HM Treasury, to listen to and understand the challenges faced by our sectors at this time.

■ Telecommunications: Infrastructure**Bob Blackman:** [\[96849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether she or her officials have met with telecommunications companies to discuss changes to the Electronic Communications Code.

Bob Blackman: [\[96850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether she or her officials have met with representatives of the Protect and Connect campaign to discuss changes to the Electronic Communications Code.

Julia Lopez:

My department's response to the consultation on changes to the Electronic Communications Code was published on 24 November 2021.

Following publication of that document my officials have met with a number of stakeholders, including telecommunications companies and representatives of the site provider community, including those supported by the Protect and Connect Campaign. We will continue to engage with stakeholders as necessary during the passage of the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill.

EDUCATION**■ Department for Education: Telephone Services****Stephen Morgan:** [\[94502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many staff are responding to calls on his Department's Coronavirus Helpline.

Stephen Morgan: [\[94503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, who is responsible for running his Department's Coronavirus Helpline; and whether that responsibility is outsourced to a private contractor.

Stephen Morgan: [\[94504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department runs a private advice phoneline, separate to his Department's Coronavirus Helpline.

Stephen Morgan: [\[94505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many calls to the Department for Education's Coronavirus Helpline have been received in each month this year.

Michelle Donelan:

There are currently 27 call agents dedicated to the COVID-19 helpline. The Department for Education keeps call volumes and call wait times under continuous review. This enables us to adjust various aspects of the service, including opening hours and the number of call agents needed to meet demand.

The COVID-19 helpline is run by the Department for Education. It is a service delivered through a wider Customer Experience Centre contract overseen by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. Call handling is provided by Arvato, an outsourced service provider.

The Department for Education does not run a private helpline separate to the COVID-19 helpline. The department has another helpline for non-COVID specific matters, available by dialling 0370 000 2288 Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 5pm.

The COVID-19 helpline has received 88,149 calls from the beginning of December 2020 to the end of November 2021. The attached table gives the monthly breakdown of volumes.

Attachments:

1. 94502_93503_94504_94505_table [94502_94503_94504_94505_covid19_helpline.xls]

■ Higher Education

Matt Western:

[93868]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the levels of demand for modular provision within higher education.

Michelle Donelan:

Many learners need to access courses in a more flexible way, to fit study around work, family and personal commitments, and to retrain as both their circumstances and the economy change. There is research available which makes a case for modular provision. A joint Universities UK (UUK)-CBI study using research with learners, as well as reviewing the flexible learning opportunities offered by higher education (HE) providers, concluded that there was a strong case for modular or credit based system for undergraduate provision in the longer-term.

The introduction of a Lifelong Loan Entitlement was also a key recommendation from the 'Post-18 Review of Education and Funding: Independent Panel' report (the Augar report) and endorsed in a House of Lords report which recommended 'funding for modules or credit where a full degree is not required', stating that proposals 'should facilitate transfer between different institutions'.

As such, the government sees the case for change, and has set out our ambition to make progress through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

As part of the pathway to the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, the Higher Education Short Course trial will test part-time, short course provision at levels 4-6, delivered flexibly to offer the learner choice around how they choose to study. We will use the trial to test learner and provider demand and behaviours as we learn lessons from this ahead of the full rollout of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.

A survey by UUK found around 24% of the population had considered part-time HE in the last 10 years but had not enrolled. The current system is not meeting these needs and, as a result, fewer entrants at levels 4 and 5 fund their tuition fees with student loans than entrants at level 6.

■ Higher Education: Admissions

Matt Western:

[93872]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of an introduction of minimum entry requirements of GCSE English and Maths (Level 4) for students seeking to study in Higher Education.

Michelle Donelan:

We are considering the recommendations made by the Augar report regarding minimum entry requirements and we plan to set out a full response to the review of post-18 education and funding in due course.

■ Higher Education: Coronavirus

Matt Western:

[93864]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data his Department has collated on the number of cases of covid-19 recorded across campuses in England and Wales.

Michelle Donelan:

Numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases for those reporting 'attending university' in the contact tracing process are published weekly by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), this information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-flu-and-covid-19-surveillance-reports-2021-to-2022-season>.

The most recent release (6 January) covers the period from 23 October 2020 to 2 January 2022. UKHSA note that "If a case reports being in education, this does not specify that they attended the setting in person during the time that they were exposed/infectious (for example they may have been remote learning). In addition, cases that did attend in person may have been exposed in other settings, such as their household or while doing other activities. This data cannot be used to directly infer that these cases acquired their infection, or that they exposed others, in the education setting."

■ Higher Education: Freedom of Expression

Matt Western:

[93854]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of provisions in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill on the protection by higher education providers of academics' freedom of speech.

Michelle Donelan:

This Bill includes a range of measures aimed at strengthening existing legislation on freedom of speech and academic freedom for academic staff in higher education in England.

The Bill is also clear that the job security of university staff should not be undermined by the expression of lawful speech, including where they may question and test received wisdom, and put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions.

The Bill does not amend existing employment law. However, it does provide a route to redress where an individual may not have clear contractual protections in place in respect of freedom of speech and academic freedom. Rather than having to rely on contractual protections in an employment tribunal, an academic member of staff will now have access to the Office for Students (OfS) complaints scheme, as well as the right to bring a claim in the courts via the new statutory tort.

The new complaints scheme will be overseen by a Director of Free Speech and Academic Freedom, who will also be responsible for overseeing the performance of all the OfS's new functions. This includes promoting the importance of freedom of speech within the law and academic freedom for academic staff, as well as the monitoring and enforcement of freedom of speech registration conditions and the new duties on students' unions of Approved (fee cap) providers.

The OfS will also issue guidance for providers and students' unions to as they develop the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, thereby helping them to comply with their duties.

■ Higher Education: Students

Matt Western:

[93871]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the proportion of higher education students who transfer between higher education institutions in any given year; and what assessment he has made of the socio-economic backgrounds of those students.

Michelle Donelan:

The Office for Students published experimental statistics on student transfers on 30 November 2021, available here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/>.

The statistics show that 2.9% of students who entered the first year of a full-time first degree in England in the 2018/19 academic year had transferred to a different provider one year after entry.

The statistics are disaggregated by student characteristics, including two measures of disadvantage. These show that:

- 3.4% of students from Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4) [1] quintile 1 (lowest higher education participation) backgrounds had transferred to a different provider one year after entry, compared to 3.0% for those from quintile 5 (highest higher education participation).
- 3.8% of students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[2] quintile 1 (most deprived) backgrounds had transferred to a different provider one year after entry, compared to 2.5% for those from quintile 5 (least deprived).

[1] POLAR4 is a measure of how likely young people are to participate in higher education.

[2] IMD measures relative deprivation in small areas through factors such as income, employment, education and health.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Coronavirus**

Helen Hayes:

[93819]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the spread of the omicron variant of covid-19, what (b) assessment he has made of the potential effect of the spread of the variant on absences from special schools and (b) steps is he taking to ensure students who attend those schools required to isolate are able to access continued learning and support.

Will Quince:

We know that the Omicron variant is spreading quickly, and studies are underway to collect data to help us understand the impact, including for children and young people.

On 9 December, 4.9% of all pupils were absent in all state-funded special schools for reasons related to COVID-19. This represents the total proportion of pupils absent due to all variants of COVID-19. Among those pupils, 0.1% were absent because they were isolating in line with government guidance at the time, including due to being identified as a close contact of a suspected Omicron case.

Since the emergence of Omicron, we have updated the operational guidance for special schools and other specialist settings, which sets out how settings should ensure that pupils and students who are required to isolate are able to access continued learning and support. The guidance is clear that whilst our priority is face-to-face, high quality education for all pupils and students, if they are unable to attend then we expect their education setting to be able to offer them access to high quality remote education.

We recognise that some pupils and students with special needs may need support to access remote education, and so expect schools and colleges to work collaboratively with families so that they can successfully access remote education appropriate for their level of need. Settings should keep in regular contact with children and young people to assess the effectiveness of any remote education.

■ **Students: Coronavirus**

Matt Western:

[93014]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help ensure that the mass movement of students at the end of the Christmas term does not contribute to the spread of covid-19 in the context of the Omicron variant.

Matt Western:

[93015]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the potential effect of the mass movement of students at the end of the Christmas term on the spread of covid-19.

Michelle Donelan:

The safety of students, staff and wider communities is the government's priority.

As outlined in our guidance to the sector, students were advised to take a test before they travelled home for the Christmas break:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>. We advised students to continue to test at home and to test before they travel back to their term time accommodation in January, using test kits issued by their university before the Christmas break, ordered online, or collected from their local pharmacy.

For those who are returning from abroad, the government has set out specific measures for people entering England with a test 2 days beforehand for those who are not considered fully vaccinated as well as testing on arrival for all. This includes measures for those who are not considered fully vaccinated, which would require quarantining at their place of residence for 10 days.

It has been impressive to see so many students playing their part by getting vaccinated. We strongly encourage all students to get both doses of the vaccine and the booster jab as soon as possible, unless they are medically exempt, to protect themselves and others from the spread of COVID-19.

All higher education (HE) providers have plans for managing and controlling outbreaks. These have been agreed with local directors of public health and continue to be reviewed and updated based on emerging lessons and local situations. We expect HE providers to continue to prioritise the health and safety of their staff, students, and local community by putting in place measures that apply to their individual circumstances.

■ Students: Loans**Matt Western:****[93857]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made the number of fraudulent loans given out by the Student Loans Company.

Michelle Donelan:

The Student Loans Company (SLC) provide quarterly fraud reporting figures to the department, which are then reported to the Cabinet Office as part of the GOV-13 Counter Fraud Functional Standard. In the 2020/21 financial year SLC identified 136 cases of a full or partial loss to fraud relating to a loan in the same year, paid through Student Finance England.

Matt Western:**[93858]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made through financial modelling of the effect of different interest rates on (a) the size of future debt, (b) students' ability to repay and (c) the size of the total loan debt arising from student loans.

Matt Western: [93860]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the sustainability of the student loan system and its effect on the public finances under the current repayment thresholds.

Matt Western: [93861]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the impact on BAME students of any changes to the student loan repayment threshold.

Matt Western: [93862]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the impact on BAME students of the current student loan repayment conditions.

Michelle Donelan:

The student loan system in England removes financial barriers for those hoping to study higher education while sharing its costs between learners and the general taxpayer. The loans offer unique protections to borrowers. During and after study, interest rates are capped so that they do not exceed the prevailing market rate for comparable personal loans. After finishing study, monthly repayments are only required when a borrower is earning over the repayment threshold, currently £27,295 per year, or its weekly or monthly equivalent for Plan 2 (post-2012) loans and do not change based on rates or the amount borrowed. Any outstanding debt is written off after the loan term ends at no detriment to the borrower.

As student loan repayments are income contingent, the impact of the repayment threshold and repayment conditions on students with particular protected characteristics depends on the earnings of those borrowers in each year over the loan term. The department publishes annual data on graduate employment and earnings by years after graduation, including by ethnicity, through the Graduate Outcomes publication which can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-outcomes-leo/2018-19>.

Regular assessments of the student finance system, including forecasts of future loan outlay, repayments and the size of the loan book, are made and published annually. The most recent publication can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/student-loan-forecasts-england-2020-to-2021>. This publication notes that the Resource Accounting and Budget (RAB) charge the proportion of loan outlay that is expected to not be repaid when future repayments are valued in present terms, was estimated to be 53% for loans issued to full-time undergraduates in the 2020-21 financial year. The interest rate adds to the total amount of repayments received, and for the 2020-21 loans, the department estimates that repayments due to interest reduces the RAB charge by 4 percentage points.

Potential reforms to student loan terms, with the goal of decreasing the public subsidy on student loans while preserving the income-contingent nature of the current system, were modelled as part of the work done by the independent panel which

reported to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding. We are carefully considering a range of options to ensure that student finance continues to deliver value for money for both students and the taxpayer as we continue to consider the recommendations made by the independent panel. The interim conclusion was published on 21 January 2021, and we plan to set out a conclusion to the review in due course.

■ T-levels

Mr Toby Perkins:

[94322]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students began T level courses at the start of the (a) 2020-21 and (b) 2021-22 academic year, by learning institution and subject.

Alex Burghart:

Early data suggests that the number of T Level student enrolments for 2020 was around 1,300 – and for 2021 around 5,450. These figures were published in the 2020 and 2021 T Level Action Plans, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-action-plan>.

The number of 2020 T Level starts in England were included in the 16-18 participation statistical data release in June 2021. T Level student numbers by institution will be published alongside T Level results. This is to match the approach we take with other qualifications such as BTECs or A levels. There is information on the funding provided to each institution for T Levels which includes the student numbers that this is based on, but these are predicted not actual student numbers. This is published as part of allocations data which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-allocation-data-2020-to-2021-academic-year>.

We do not yet have the official data for 2021 T Level student enrolments. We are looking at what other data we might publish, as an addendum to the 2021 T Level Action Plan, in spring 2022.

■ UK School Games: Finance

Kate Osborne:

[93908]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what progress his Department has made, in discussion with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in agreeing funding for the School Games Organiser network beyond March 2022.

Will Quince:

The government can confirm that funding for the School Games Organisers will be available for the full 2021/22 academic year. The government is considering arrangements for the School Games Organiser network for the 2022/23 academic year and beyond, and will confirm the position in 2022.

We are also working to deliver on the nearly £30 million announced in October 2021 towards opening up school sport facilities in England, as well as to improve the teaching of Physical Education at primary school. We will continue to work closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport and the Department of Health and Social Care to deliver on the aims of the School Sport and Activity Action Plan which we will be updating in 2022.

■ Uni Connect Programme: Finance

Matt Western:

[93869]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the reduction in funding to UniConnect for 2021-22 on access to higher education.

Michelle Donelan:

The Uni Connect programme, operated by the Office for Students (OfS), is a 4 year investment programme established to support the creation of a strong and versatile network of local partnerships with cross-England coverage and aims to provide sustained outreach to young people in schools and colleges in areas with low or unexplained gaps in higher education (HE) participation.

The programme's annual funding allocation is made within the available Strategic Priorities Grant, and as such is subject to annual review and decision making, with due regard for general duties, the Public Sector Equality Duty, and statutory guidance.

The former Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend for South Staffordshire, wrote to the OfS on 19 January 2021, providing guidance under section 2(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This set out the funding allocation for the 2021-22 financial year and the government's priorities to ensure that more of taxpayers' money is spent on supporting HE provision which aligns with national priorities, including targeting funds to support students and prioritise the most disadvantaged learners.

This guidance detailed that the OfS should reduce its allocation to Uni Connect from £60 million to £40 million, allowing it to continue to deliver and maintain its core infrastructure, with savings reallocated to fund support for student mental health and student hardship.

The OfS consulted with the sector on recurrent funding in March 2021 and sought views on reductions to the fundings levels of the Uni Connect programme. The outcomes of this consultation were published in July 2021 and are available to view here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/recurrent-funding-for-2021-22-outcomes-of-consultation/>. The OfS's consultation response concluded that the Uni Connect partnerships could continue to meet the OfS's goals through a combination of increased efficiency and a focus on the most effective interventions and that they did not anticipate a reduction in the number of targeted learners.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Imports: Small Businesses****Seema Malhotra:**[\[93760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment she has made of the level of awareness amongst small and medium sized enterprises of the changes to import processes effective from 1 January 2022; and if she will make a statement.

Seema Malhotra:[\[93761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with the (a) Federation of Small Businesses and (b) British Chambers of Commerce on the level of preparedness of small and occasional importers of the changes to import processes effective from 1 January 2022; and if she will make a statement.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

Ministers and officials regularly meet with organisations that represent SMEs, such as the Federation of Small Businesses and British Chambers of Commerce, to discuss a wide range of issues including the readiness of their members for the introduction of border import processes.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Autism: Carers****Daisy Cooper:**[\[97129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will update the Survey of Adult Carers in England form to include a separate option of autism under the conditions listed under the Does the person you care for have question in recognition of learning disabilities and difficulties not being a defining feature of autism.

Gillian Keegan:

The Department and NHS Digital intend to review the Survey of Adult Care in England in 2022/23. The review will include both the content and the method of delivery and we will consider this within the review.

■ Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder**Mark Pritchard:**[\[96831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with NICE on including avoidant restrictive food intake disorder in NICE guidelines on the recognition and treatment of eating disorders.

Edward Argar:

The Department has had no such discussions. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an independent body responsible for developing guidelines in line with its established methods and processes.

When developing its updated guideline on the recognition and treatment of eating disorders, NICE concluded following consultation that avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) is a relatively new diagnostic category, for which there is little evidence on which to make recommendations. NICE currently has no plans to extend the scope of the guideline to include ARFID.

■ Dementia

Rachael Maskell: [\[96958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress has been made on the dementia strategy over the last six months.

Rachael Maskell: [\[96959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many full time equivalent civil servants in his Department are working on the dementia strategy.

Rachael Maskell: [\[96960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department's budget is for the dementia strategy.

Rachael Maskell: [\[96961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will integrate his White Paper on Social Care with the dementia strategy.

Gillian Keegan:

We are committed to delivering a standalone dementia strategy later this year. Although separate from the white paper on social care, the dementia strategy will take account of this and other relevant strategies. Our priority is for the strategy to be credible and shaped by a range of experts, including people living with dementia and their carers. We updated the Dementia Programme Board in September 2021 and established task and finish groups in October 2021 to develop the strategy with stakeholders. We are currently reviewing the output of these groups and will review the proposals with people living with dementia and their carers.

The information on the number of civil servants working on the strategy and the associated budgets is not available in the format requested. This involves staffing and budgets across multiple teams within the Department, including those focused on dementia policy, research and prevention. We will consider the funding implications as part of forthcoming business planning for the next financial year.

■ Dentistry: Hendon**Dr Matthew Offord:**[\[96856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) private and (b) NHS dentists there were in Hendon constituency in each of the last five years.

Maria Caulfield:

This information is not held as data on the number of private dentists and National Health Service dentists at constituency level is not collected.

■ Home Care Services: Vulnerable Adults**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[96814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the (a) adequacy of the provision of support for vulnerable adult patients who require assistance with medical administration in the home when having had an early discharge and (b) associated costs of that assistance for the individual.

Gillian Keegan:

No specific assessment has been made. However, no patient should be discharged until it is safe to do so. Existing guidance states that hospitals should determine the level of support individuals need to ensure they are discharged onto the most appropriate care pathway. Those who are clinically ready should be supported to return to their place of residence, where possible, where an assessment of longer-term needs takes place. New or extended health and care support is funded for up to four weeks until the end of March 2022. During the four week period, a comprehensive care and health assessment for any ongoing care needs, including determining funding eligibility, should take place.

JUSTICE**■ Chartered Institute of Legal Executives: Crown Prosecution Service****Alex Cunningham:**[\[94348\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what his policy is on amending the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 to enable CILEX lawyers to become Crown Prosecutors.

James Cartlidge:

The government values the important role played by CILEX lawyers. As part of the Judicial Diversity Forum priorities for 2021/22, the government will explore fuller opportunities for Chartered Legal Executives to gain court experience, including advocacy.

■ HM Courts and Tribunals Service: ICT**Alex Cunningham:**[\[91958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Common Platform roll-out on staff (a) workload, (b) stress levels, and (c) morale.

James Cartlidge:

HMCTS has embarked upon a transformative change agenda, with a view to modernise and improve the outcomes significantly for the users who rely on courts/tribunals, and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. Insofar as workload is concerned, the point of the system is to automate more, and make staff (and professional partner/user) lives easier, providing a more efficient and consistent service.

For stress and morale, the implementation of change always needs to be effectively managed. We are committed with supporting our workforce through this process, our longstanding daily team meetings across our courts provides a manager with a temperature check on how teams are feeling about change. Where stress indicators are apparent, a member of staff or their line manager will use an individual stress risk assessment to discuss, define and mitigate stress. Alongside that, our annual staff survey provides us with a real understanding of the impact change has on our staff.

Ministry of Justice: Public Consultation**Anna McMorris:**[\[94497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to make accessible versions of consultation documents immediately available instead of people having to request large font and easy read formats.

James Cartlidge:

For all consultations, the Department gives due consideration to the needs of the audience group and we take whatever action we can to improve reach and accessibility, including by following best practice through provision of accessible formats for consultation documents.

We have worked to ensure that the recently published Victims' Bill Consultation is as accessible as possible and that we enable the voices of stakeholders and victims to be heard. This has included making a large print version of the document available from launch (upon request), which we also shared with our key partners in the victims sector in December to strengthen availability further. We are also directly engaging with victims and specialist victim support organisations during the consultation period to overcome any issues of accessibility and maximize the opportunity for engagement.

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES**Regional Planning and Development: Northern Ireland****Stephen Farry:**[\[94568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will set out any differences in assessment criteria for bids to the different Levelling Up funds in Northern Ireland compared to elsewhere in the UK.

Neil O'Brien:

At Autumn Budget 2021, the Government awarded nearly £50 million in funding to Northern Ireland as part of the first round of the Levelling Up Fund and a further £300k in funding from the Community Ownership Fund

The following week we announced 31 successful Community Renewal Fund projects in Northern Ireland, totalling nearly £12.4 million.

Community Ownership Fund assessment criteria was the same in every country of the UK. The assessment criteria for Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund, including the different criteria used in Northern Ireland, are published on gov.uk.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972992/UKCRF_assessment_criteria_v1.1.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/992647/technical-note-for-application-form.pdf

TRANSPORT**■ Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Correspondence**

Sir Mark Hendrick: [93711]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the DVLA's average response time for correspondence received from (a) members of the public and (b) Members of Parliament writing on behalf of constituents.

Sir Mark Hendrick: [93712]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department are taking to help tackle the backlog of licence applications at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Sir Mark Hendrick: [93713]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure calls made by the public to DVLA's phone lines are answered.

Sir Mark Hendrick: [93714]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will investigate his Department's delayed response time in replying to cases brought forward to DVLA by (a) constituents and (b) Members of Parliament writing on behalf of constituents.

Trudy Harrison:

Information on the average time taken to respond to correspondence received from members of the public and Members of Parliament writing on behalf of constituents is not recorded. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) is working hard to answer correspondence as quickly as possible and has also added extra resource to the team that deals with enquiries from honourable members.

The quickest and easiest way to make an application to the DVLA is to use its extensive suite of online services. There are no delays in successful online applications and customers should receive their documents within a few days.

However, many people still choose or have to make a paper application and the DVLA receives around 60,000 items of mail every day. To help reduce waiting times for paper applications, the DVLA has introduced additional online services, recruited more staff, increased overtime working and has secured extra office space in Swansea and Birmingham. The DVLA has reconfigured its accommodation to safely maximise the number of staff on site and is working hard to process paper applications as quickly as possible.

Throughout the pandemic the DVLA's contact centre has actively managed its operation and flexed the services for customers in line with the available resources. This has included procuring the use of an additional building to increase the number of staff able to take calls within the social distancing guidelines. Remote working has been increased and additional staff are being recruited.

■ Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Facilities

John Spellar:

[\[96762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps his Department is taking to improve roadside facilities for HGV drivers.

Trudy Harrison:

The Government recognises the need to ensure hauliers have access to appropriate services and facilities.

We will be investing £32.5 million in roadside facilities for HGV drivers on the road.

The Department continues to engage with key stakeholders to encourage the development of more safe, secure, and high-quality lorry parking to improve driver welfare.

■ Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Vacancies

Fleur Anderson:

[\[94561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Transport, what recent steps he has taken to tackle the shortage of heavy goods vehicle drivers.

Trudy Harrison:

The Government has taken 32 specific measures to deal with the shortage of HGV drivers. These include funding for apprenticeships, 11,000 places on Skills Bootcamp training backed by £34 million, increasing the supply of vocational driving tests, prioritising vocational driving licence applications, and investing £32.5 million in roadside facilities for HGV drivers. These are listed on gov.uk.

Our measures are working. The number of available HGV driving tests has increased by 90% compared to pre-pandemic levels and currently stands at 3,200 tests per week. Test capacity now exceeds demand and the provision of vocational tests is not

a barrier to people becoming HGV drivers. Despite the increase in vocational driving licence applications and licence renewals, there are no delays in processing and all new applications are being processed within five working days, unless further medical checks are required. Recent assessments by industry bodies such as Logistics UK suggest that the shortfall in drivers has started to reduce.

■ Road Traffic Control

Damien Moore:

[94518]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment his Department has made of the short-term impact on congestion levels in areas where Active Travel Fund projects have been implemented.

Trudy Harrison:

None. It is for local authorities to manage their road networks appropriately, including by ensuring that changes to their road layouts are not having unintended impacts. As a condition of funding active travel schemes, the Department requires all local authorities to monitor and evaluate their impacts. The Government recently updated its Network Management Duty Guidance for local authorities, which includes advice to authorities on monitoring the traffic impacts of active travel schemes. The guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities/traffic-management-act-2004-network-management-in-response-to-covid-19>

■ Travel: Coronavirus

Justin Madders:

[93778]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of omicron covid-19 variant on the travel sector; and whether he has had discussions with (a) officials in his Department and (b) Cabinet colleagues on sector specific economic support measures.

Robert Courts:

The Government recognises the challenging times facing the international travel sectors due to COVID-19. Additional temporary testing measures introduced in response to the Omicron variant have helped prevent additional cases of Omicron from entering the UK. Government recognises the impact these temporary health measures have had on the travel and aviation industry, and they were updated on 5 January.

Since the start of the pandemic, we estimate that the air transport sector (airlines, airport and related services) will have benefitted from around £8bn of government support.

■ Travel: Finance

Simon Jupp: [\[97180\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he plans to announce the successful local authority bids in the third tranche of the Active Travel Fund.

Trudy Harrison:

The Department intends to make an announcement on this matter very shortly.

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Work Capability Assessment**

Paul Blomfield: [\[93754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people are awaiting a work capability assessment as of 15 December 2021; and what the average waiting time is for a claimant in the latest period for which that data is available.

Chloe Smith:

The number of outstanding Work Capability Assessment (WCA) referrals as of 15 December 2021 is 335,500. This includes claimants who have been asked to return a Capability for Work questionnaire and have yet to do so. Not all these cases will require the claimant to attend an assessment and where there is sufficient evidence, claims will be assessed on a paper basis. DWP closely monitors the levels of outstanding referrals.

DWP publishes Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) WCA processing times for initial claims on gov.uk, which can be found [here](#). We are currently unable to provide Universal Credit (UC) WCA statistics as these could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

DWP is committed to assessing people as quickly as possible in order that they receive the benefit(s) and support they are entitled to in a timely manner. It is important to remember that claimants will receive the Assessment Rate of ESA/Standard Rate of UC whilst they are awaiting their WCA. Any additional amounts the claimant may qualify for after their assessment, will be backdated where appropriate.

Please note

Figure has been rounded to the nearest 100.

The above data is derived from contractual management information produced by the assessment providers.

The above data is derived from unpublished management information which is collected for internal departmental use only and has not been quality assured to Official Statistics Publication standards.