



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 23 February 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:45 P.M., 23 February 2024). 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

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Attorney General: Health and Safety

Chris Stephens:

[R] [\[13742\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, whether all (a) buildings and (b) workplaces staff from their Department occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Robert Courts:

The Attorney General's Office is based in one office which is managed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Under section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the MoJ have a Health and Safety policy and Occupational Health and Safety Management system in place, which require suitable and sufficient risk assessments to ensure all occupational health and safety hazards and risks are adequately identified, assessed, controlled, and monitored.

■ Attorney General: Information Officers

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[14020\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how many posts there are for (a) press, (b) media and (c) other communications staff in her Department; and what the salary band is for each post.

Robert Courts:

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) press and media team is made up of five employees. Roles range from Higher Executive Officer (HEO) to Grade 6 and have salaries between £33,309 (the lower limit of HEO) and £77,456 (the upper limit of Grade 6).

As announced by the Government last year, departments are submitting productivity plans to modernise the Civil Service and reduce the size of the state to pre-pandemic levels.

Other communication roles (correspondence) in the AGO are covered by two employees in the corporate services team.

■ Legal Profession: Accountability

Mr Barry Sheerman:

[\[14469\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, whether she is taking steps to encourage the legal sector to engage in corporate social responsibility.

Robert Courts:

The Attorney General and I are champions of pro bono legal work in Government. Pro bono publico is undertaken for the public good and supports corporate social

responsibility. As Solicitor General, I chair the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee, which meets twice annually and brings together professional representative bodies, and those from the public and the private sectors to share ideas and encourage greater cross-sector collaboration.

■ Prosecutions

Sir Paul Beresford:

[\[13855\]](#)

To ask the Attorney General, how many prosecutions under section 44 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 there have been in each of the last two years; and how many and what proportion of those cases involved a child being encouraged to commit an offence.

Robert Courts:

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not have a central record showing the number of defendants prosecuted under section 44 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 (the Act) or how many involved a child being encouraged to commit an offence. To obtain this information would involve a manual examination of CPS case files at disproportionate cost.

However, management information is held showing the number of offences charged by way of section 44 of the Act in which a prosecution commenced in the magistrates' courts. The table below shows the number of these offences in each of the last two years.

	2021-2022	2022-2023
Section 44 of the Serious Crime Act 2007	93	60

Data Source: CPS Case Management Information System

The figures relate to the number of offences and not the number of individual defendants. It is often the case that an individual defendant is charged with more than one offence against the same complainant. No data is held showing the final outcome or if the charged offence was the substantive charge at finalisation.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Counterfeit Manufacturing and Electric Bicycles: Safety

Neil Coyle:

[\[14882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps she is taking to promote public safety messages on (a) dangerous, (b) counterfeit products and (c) e-bikes.

Kevin Hollinrake:

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) provides consumers with safety information where products pose risk of harm including through publication of product recalls, alerts and important safety messages on gov.uk. The Intellectual Property Office, part of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, delivers consumer awareness campaigns on counterfeit goods.

OPSS is working across Government and with business, consumer bodies and fire and rescue services to amplify public safety messages on the safety of consumer products, including e-bikes. This includes guidance published in December on the safe purchasing, use and charging of e-bikes.

■ Employment: Surveys

Alistair Strathern: [\[13655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make it her policy to conduct a new Workplace Employment Relations Study.

Alistair Strathern: [\[13656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the cost to the public purse was of conducting the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study.

Kevin Hollinrake:

There are currently no plans to undertake a new Workplace Employee Relations Study (WERS). The previous survey methodology is challenging to replicate as it relies on sampling via the employer which is harder to obtain due to the increased salience of privacy-related issues in recent years.

The 2011 WERS was co-sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Acas, the Economic and Social Research Council, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. The fieldwork costs totalled around £2m and required a considerable amount of staff resource.

The Department undertook the Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey in 2018/19 which provides evidence on employment relations and management practices in British workplaces.

■ Horizon IT System

Mr Kevan Jones: [\[14817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when the Government received the review by Jonathan Swift KC entitled A review on behalf of the Chairman of Post Office Limited concerning the steps taken in response to various complaints made by sub-postmasters, published on 8 February 2016.

Kevin Hollinrake:

Mr Swift's report was written in February 2016, and the Department first received a copy of it when preparing for a Select Committee hearing in March 2020. The Department released it publicly in August 2022.

CABINET OFFICE■ **Boris Johnson****Emily Thornberry:**[\[13700\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish the minutes of the Prime Minister's (a) meetings and (b) other discussions with his predecessor Mr Boris Johnson in the last nine months.

John Glen:

I refer the Rt Hon Member to the answer of 15 January 2024, Official Report, PQ 7804.

■ **Cabinet Office: Correspondence****Chris Stephens:**[\[R\] \[14900\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November to Question 289 on Cabinet Office: Correspondence, when he plans to respond to the letter of 22 August 2023 from the Public and Commercial Services Union on the ruling in *Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council v Willetts & Ors*.

John Glen:

I apologise for the delay in responding fully to this letter. My officials are working closely with our shared services provider (SSCL) to implement a solution. I will write to the Public and Commercial Services Union with an update in due course.

■ **Cabinet Office: Staff****Neil O'Brien:**[\[13812\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many staff in his Department have job titles which include the words (a) equality, (b) diversity, (c) inclusion, (d) gender, (e) LGBT or (f) race.

John Glen:

As at 31st December 2023, 28 staff in the Cabinet Office had roles with equality, diversity, inclusion, gender, LGBT or race in their job title. This answer includes data for the Equality Hub which sits within Cabinet Office (16 of the 28 roles). The Equality Hub is responsible for external Government policy and the overall framework of equality legislation for the UK.

■ Civil Servants: Vetting**Andrew Gwynne:** [\[13520\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the average waiting time is for processing (a) baseline personnel security standard, (b) accreditation check, (c) counter terrorist check, (d) security check, (e) enhanced security check, (f) developed vetting and (g) enhanced developed vetting as of 7 February 2024.

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13521\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the average waiting time was for processing (a) baseline personnel security standard, (b) accreditation check, (c) counter terrorist check, (d) security check, (e) enhanced security check, (f) developed vetting and (g) enhanced developed vetting on 1 February in each year since 2015.

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13522\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of applicants failed (a) baseline personnel security standard, (b) accreditation check, (c) counter terrorist check, (d) security check, (e) enhanced security check, (f) developed vetting and (g) enhanced developed vetting in each year since 2015.

John Glen:

The Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) is conducted locally by departments as a pre-employment check. Although a personnel security control employed within His Majesty's Government (HMG), it is not a level of National Security Vetting (NSV) administered by United Kingdom Security Vetting (UKSV). As this is a localised departmental element, no central record of data for BPSS is held within HMG at this time.

I can confirm that on average Accreditation Checks (AC), a level of NSV, primarily used by the aviation industry, are being completed in five days or less.

I am unable to reveal the average processing time of other NSV checks as this is likely to prejudice national security. It would also impact the protective measures employed in safeguarding HMG. However, I am able to report sustained and stable improvements in performance against Key Performance Indicators (KPI) across all service levels of National Security Vetting clearances which includes Counter Terrorist Check (CTC), Security Check (SC) and Developed Vetting (DV).

- The KPIs for both CTC and SC are 25 days, on 7 February 2024 96.78% of cases were being processed within that timeframe. This has improved from 38.7% performance in February 2023.
- The KPI for DV is 95 days; on 7 February 2024 92.74% of initial DV cases were being processed within that timeframe. This has improved from 66.4% performance in February 2023.
- The Performance Indicator (PI) for DV renewals is 95 days; on 7 February 2024 10.52% of cases were being processed within that timeframe. This has improved from 7.15% in February 2023.

In 2023, UKSV implemented a stabilisation programme, prioritising the recovery of initial DV processing times, followed by SC and CTC processing times.

For enhanced security check (eSC) and enhanced developed vetting (eDV) respectively these are not NSV clearance levels but are additional safeguards and therefore are not measured in the same way as clearance levels.

In line with the practice followed by successive administrations, the Government does not otherwise comment on security matters.

■ **Darlington Economic Campus: Contracts**

Mr Kevan Jones:

[\[14815\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 19 February 2024 to Question 13508, what the (a) duration and (b) value of the contract awarded to ISS Mediclean Ltd for facilities management services at Darlington Economic Campus is.

Alex Burghart:

Following an open competition run by Crown Commercial Services, the contract which services Darlington Economic Campus and managed by the Government Property Agency, and was awarded to ISS, commencing on 06-04-2022. The contract has an initial term of 3 years with the option of a further one year extension. The total overall value of the contract for Darlington Economic Campus is circa £900k per annum. This includes all repairs and maintenance, cleaning and security services for the building.

■ **Emigration**

Alison Thewliss:

[\[13581\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many UK citizens emigrated in each year since 2010.

Alison Thewliss:

[\[13584\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many people under the age of 25 emigrated in each year since 2010.

Alison Thewliss:

[\[13585\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what information his Department holds on the number of people under the age of 25 that emigrated to Australia in each year since 2010.

John Glen:

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority.

A response to the Hon lady's Parliamentary Questions of 7th February is attached.

Attachments:

1. Dataset [PQ15381_ 13584_ 13585 dataset.xlsx]
2. UK Statistics Authority [PQ13581_ 13584_ 13585.pdf]

■ Veterans: Employment Schemes

Steve McCabe:

[\[13226\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to increase the uptake of job training programmes by ethnic minority veterans.

Johnny Mercer:

This Government is committed to ensuring that all veterans have equity of opportunity and access into valuable, sustainable careers after they leave the Armed Forces.

That is why, we recently launched a £700,000 Career Development Fund, which will make funding available for qualifications, training and skills development to veterans and their families across the UK. Whilst this funding aims to support veterans of all backgrounds, the grant specifically encourages applications from groups and organisations which seek to engage with and support veterans of ethnic minority backgrounds.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Arts: Disadvantaged

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[13803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with Arts Council England on funding for art and cultural activities in deprived areas not identified as priority places.

Julia Lopez:

The arts are for everyone, and His Majesty's Government has made it a priority to ensure that funding for the arts is fairly distributed across the country. Through Arts Council England's 2023–26 National Portfolio, increased funding of £444.6 million per annum will fund a record 985 organisations in more parts of the country than ever before. This is an increase from the £410 million per annum going to 828 organisations under the previous portfolio. Of the 275 new organisations joining the funding portfolio, 214 are outside London.

The Secretary of State, other Ministers, and officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport all regularly meet Arts Council England to discuss all aspects of its work. As well as the Arts Council's existing Priority Places, DCMS and the Arts Council also agreed 109 Levelling Up for Culture Places, which partially overlap with the Priority Places, and which were identified as places of historically low investment and engagement in arts and culture. These places are targeted for additional engagement and investment.

In the Cheshire East local authority area, Arts Council England is providing £160,000 per annum of funding through the 2023–26 National Portfolio programme. The Arts Council's National Lottery Project Grants programme has also made awards totalling over £85,000 in the Cheshire East local authority area in 2022/23, which includes support for the Lindow Ensemble, and funding for Luminare, a project in Cheshire

East libraries. In 2023/24, so far project grants totalling £113,982 have been awarded in Cheshire East, including for the LY2 – a project to transform Lyceum Square in Crewe.

In addition, in February DCMS launched the fourth round of the Cultural Development Fund, which is open to every part of England, and not just Priority Places. In this round we are particularly keen to fund activity in areas of low cultural investment. To date, the Cultural Development Fund has provided £76 million of capital investment to 20 transformative, place-based creative and cultural initiatives across the country.

■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Health and Safety

Chris Stephens:

[R] [[13745](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether all (a) buildings and (b) workplaces staff from their Department occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Julia Lopez:

Current workplaces that the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) utilise are within multi-occupancy buildings, owned and/or operated by other organisations. As a condition of occupancy, all locations must have a sufficient building wide Risk Assessment in place which is routinely audited by DCMS.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Coastal Areas and Rural Areas

Jim Shannon:

[[13576](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of traditional short-term lets on the local economies of (a) rural and (b) coastal communities.

Julia Lopez:

Traditional short-term lets have long provided visitor accommodation to rural and coastal locations, supporting jobs and the local economy. However, it has been highlighted that there is no single, definitive source of data on short-term lets in England with which to make a more detailed assessment on local economies.

The Government has committed to introducing a registration scheme for short-term lets in order to better understand the size of the market and help local authorities identify the impact of high numbers of short-term lets.

■ Lotteries: Sales

Neale Hanvey:

[[13628](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential impact of (a) removing and (b) raising the annual sales limit for society lotteries on their ability to raise money.

Neale Harvey: [\[13629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has received recent representations on the potential impact of (a) removing and (b) raising the annual sales limit for society lotteries on their ability to raise money.

Neale Harvey: [\[13630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if her Department will commission independent research into the potential impact of (a) removing and (b) raising the annual sales limit for society lotteries on their ability to raise money.

Stuart Andrew:

As set out in the response to WPQ 203179, the annual sales limits for charity lotteries were reviewed 12 months after the reforms were implemented in 2020. The review concluded it was too soon to reach any firm view on the impact of the reforms, and that more data on the growth of the sector was needed before considering any further changes.

The department will continue to look closely at this, and work closely with the Gambling Commission to keep the sector and research regarding charity lottery sales and prize limits under review.

I have committed to commissioning independent research, and we are currently considering a range of options in discussion with the Gambling Commission.

DEFENCE

■ Antitank Missiles

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Javelin missiles have been fired during operational deployments in each year since 2015.

James Heapey:

For operational security reasons, the Ministry of Defence does not disclose details of munitions used on operations.

■ Armed Forces: Housing

Luke Pollard: [\[14393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2024 to Question 9639 on Armed Forces: Housing, if he will provide an update on how many homes undergoing repair and maintenance have been completed.

James Cartlidge:

The additional funding to bring circa 1,000 void homes back online through a nationwide programme of high-quality refurbishment works, was allocated at the end of July 2023.

To date, 202 refurbishments have been completed. The majority of the work for the remaining homes has been instructed and the refurbishment programme is well underway. A refurbishment will only be counted as complete once all works are complete, work has been assured, and any snags have been rectified.

■ Armed Forces: Parachuting

Andrew Gwynne:

[\[13532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many service personnel sustained injuries from parachuting in each of the last eight years.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

From 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2023, a total of 527 Service personnel sustained injuries from parachuting. This has been broken down per year in Table 1 below.

To compile this information, a search was performed on Ministry of Defence (MOD) Health and Safety datasets. MOD safety systems are live databases and can be updated and have additional information recorded throughout an investigation. Records can also be removed if identified as duplicates. Therefore, figures are subject to change and revisions.

Table 1 : UK armed forces personnel injured in a parachuting incident by year

1 January 2016 to 31 December 2023

CALENDAR YEAR	TOTAL
All	527
2016	58
2017	64
2018	71
2019	71
2020	24
2021	72
2022	76
2023	91

■ Armed Forces: Recruitment

John Healey: [\[14802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applications to join full time the (a) Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) RAF were made in each year since 2010.

John Healey: [\[14803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many new full time recruits began basic training with the (a) Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) RAF in each year since 2010.

John Healey: [\[14806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many new recruits to the Reserves began basic training for the (a) Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) RAF in each year since 2010.

John Healey: [\[14807\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applications to join the Reserves for the (a) Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) RAF were made in each year since 2010.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The requested information is provided in the attached Excel Workbook.

Attachments:

1. Applications to the Armed Forces [20240221 Applications and Untrained Intake - Final Tables - SUBMITTED1.xlsx]

John Healey: [\[14804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applicants to join the (a) Army, (b) Royal Navy and (c) RAF were rejected on medical grounds in each year since 2010.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The data below is provided for candidates assessed as Permanently Medically Unfit (PMU) at Pre-Service Medical Assessment for the Army and Full Medical Assessment for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force and provided by calendar year.

The data from 2010 is not held centrally and cannot be provided within a reasonable timeframe and cost. For this reason, the requested data has been provided from 2018.

The number of applicants to the Army found unfit by medical professionals is presented in the table below:

YEAR	TOTAL ASSESSED AS PMU
2018	759
2019	976
2020	663
2021	1229

YEAR	TOTAL ASSESSED AS PMU
2022	734
2023	936

The number of applicants to the Royal Navy found unfit by medical professionals is presented in the table below:

YEAR	TOTAL ASSESSED AS PMU
2018	239
2019	451
2020	188
2021	174
2022	102
2023	142

The number of applicants to the Royal Air Force found unfit by medical professionals is presented in the table below:

YEAR	TOTAL ASSESSED AS PMU
2018	347
2019	636
2020	911
2021	318
2022	289
2023	209

■ **Armed Forces: Surveys**

Sir Desmond Swayne:

[\[13487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will publish data from the UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey illustrating the Impact of Service life on family and personal life as a factor influencing intentions to leave, by (a) service and (b) rank.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) includes a breakdown of this factor by Service and split into Officers and Other Ranks/Rates in Section 12, Table 8 of the Annex B Reference tables: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2023>

Responses are weighted by rank and Service. This accounts for bias caused by disproportionate stratified sampling and differing levels of response so results are representative of our Regular Armed Forces. We do not currently provide a breakdown of AFCAS results by the specific ranks in the Armed Forces. This is due, in part, to smaller response numbers being potentially less robust and disclosive.

■ Army: Pay

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) mean, (b) median and (c) mode average salary was for personnel in the Army in each year since 2010, by rank.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The attached table, details by year and rank, the mean, median and modal average salary for personnel in the Army.

Attachments:

1. Army [20240212-PQW_23-24_2024_02510 (13695)-Gwynne-Supporting Table3.xlsx]

■ Defence Reform Review

John Healey: [\[12255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department completed the review of the Levene Framework set as a condition by HM Treasury in the Spring 2023 Settlement Letter.

James Cartlidge:

To meet a condition set by His Majesty's Treasury in the Spring 2023 Settlement Letter, we are undertaking a complete review of how we work as a Department, seeking to ensure we are a coherent system. 'Defence Design' is a top-down initiative seeking to develop the most efficient and effective way for Defence to operate and successfully achieve our outcomes in an ever more volatile world.

The work started in Spring 2023 and is anticipated to last between 18 and 24 months.

■ Global Combat Air Programme: Procurement

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[13911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to meet the Global Combat Air Programme's trilateral partners to discuss delivery of the next stage of the programme.

James Cartlidge:

The Secretary of State for Defence speaks regularly with his Global Combat Air Programme partners. The next in person meeting will take place when key programme milestones require it.

Previously in December 2023, the Secretary of State met with his Japanese and Italian counterparts in Tokyo to sign the GCAP Treaty, signifying a landmark milestone in the Global Combat Air Programme.

■ Guided Weapons**Andrew Gwynne:**[\[13534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System rockets have been fired during operational deployments in each year since 2015.

James Heappey:

For operational security reasons, the Ministry of Defence does not disclose details of munitions used on operations.

■ Littoral Warfare: HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[13246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 26 January 2024 to Question 10415 on Amphibious Forces, what role HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark will have until 2034.

James Cartlidge:

As stated by the Secretary of State on Friday 2 February during his visit to His Majesty's Naval Base Devonport, HMS BULWARK will be regenerated after her planned maintenance period while HMS ALBION, in line with longstanding departmental policy, will be kept at extended readiness so that it can be regenerated if required.

■ Ministry of Defence: Health and Safety**Chris Stephens:**[\[R\] \[13757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether all (a) buildings and (b) workplaces staff from their Department occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

All activities across Defence are conducted within the elements of a Safe System of Work. Defence health and safety policy sets clear responsibilities for Commanding Officers, Heads of Establishment and managers with regards to the identification and management of hazards and the control of potential risks including a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

■ Navy: Pay

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) mean, (b) median and (c) mode average salary for personnel in the Royal Navy was in each year since 2010 by rank.

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) mean, (b) median and (c) mode average salary for personnel in the Royal Air Force was in each year since 2010 by rank.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The first attached table details the mean, median and modal average salary for personnel in the Royal Navy.

The second attached table details the mean, median and modal average salary for personnel in the Royal Air Force in each year since 2010 by rank.

Attachments:

1. Royal Air Force [20240208-PQW-23-24-2024-02443-(13536)-Supporting Table (1)2.xlsx]
2. Royal Navy [20240208-PQW-23-24-2024-02443-(13535)-Supporting Table (1)1.xlsx]

■ Royal Navy Careers Service: Vacancies

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many vacancies there were in the Naval Careers Service on 1 February in each year since 2017.

Andrew Gwynne: [\[13531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the leaving rate from Royal Navy Careers Service was in each year since 2017.

Dr Andrew Murrison:

The following table shows the outflow rate from the Royal Navy Careers Service for each year since 2017:

12 MONTHS TO:	01-FEB-17	01-FEB-18	01-FEB-19	01-FEB-20	01-FEB-21	01-FEB-22	01-FEB-23	01-OCT-23
Outflow	40	64	25	21	33	37	56	57
Average Strength	166	176	172	179	183	182	177	165
Outflow Rate	24.2%	36.5%	14.5%	11.7%	18.0%	20.3%	31.6%	34.6%

Source: Analysis (Navy)

1. Outflow Rates are calculated as the total VO in each year divided by a 13 month average strength.
2. Total Outflow includes VO, Time Expiry, Medical, Death, Administrative, Discipline and Did not serve.

As at 2 February 2024, there were 44 vacancies within the Royal Navy Careers Service. This information is not available for previous years.

EDUCATION

■ Children: Hearing Impairment

Andrew Rosindell: [\[14495\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that (a) deaf children and (b) their families receive the support necessary from specialist teachers of the deaf in (i) education settings and (ii) early years development.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[14496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure recruitment of qualified specialist teachers of the deaf.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[14497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time, published on 2 March 2023, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of other options to help ensure the supply of specialist sensory impairment teachers.

David Johnston:

I refer my hon. Friend, the Member for Romford, to the answer of 13 February 2024 to Question [12002](#).

■ English Language and Mathematics: GCSE

Munira Wilson: [\[14763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2024 to Question 11876 on English Language and Mathematics: GCSE, how many and what proportion of young people from a disadvantaged background achieved a pass in GCSE (a) English and (b) maths in 16-19 education by their prior grade at age 16 in the corresponding qualification only in the 2022-23 academic year.

Damian Hinds:

The data required to produce post-16 English and mathematics GCSE attainment by prior attainment in those subjects by disadvantage status is not yet published for 2022/23. It is scheduled for publication in the National Statistics release 'Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25' at the end of April 2024, which will be found here:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19>.

■ Mobile Phones: Pupils

Mike Amesbury:

[14934]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of removing mobile phones from children during school.

Damian Hinds:

The department will continue to assess the different approaches that schools have taken to managing mobile phone use in schools through surveying school leaders and pupils via the department's school and college panel and parent, pupil and learner panel omnibus surveys. The latest survey data has shown that 49% of secondary schools reported that they had a strict policy prohibiting the use of mobile phones and 48% of secondary schools reported they had a policy permitting regulated use of mobile phones. The survey also showed that as many a 76% of primary schools had a strict policy where mobile phones could not be used during the school day. More information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-snapshot-survey-winter-2019>.

To assess the potential impact of removing mobile phones from pupils throughout the school day, the department has consulted head teachers from across the sector to learn from their experience of implementing effective policies prohibiting the use of mobile phones in their schools. Head teachers and leaders, including leaders involved in the Behaviour Hubs programme, reported that after removing mobile phones from the school day, the whole culture of their school changed for the better. This helped inform an assessment that the guidance is likely to support schools create environments that are safer places for pupils, where the distraction caused by the use of mobile phones is reduced, and which have a positive impact on learning.

Stakeholder engagement with young people, parents and representative bodies ensured that the department could make an assessment of the impact of guidance on individual pupils and informed the development of guidance regarding adaptations and reasonable adjustments for specific pupils, and the use of mobile phones on the way to and from school.

■ Nurseries: Special Educational Needs and Disability

Sarah Dyke:

[14704]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of funding provided to nurseries for infants and toddlers diagnosed as having special educational needs and disabilities.

David Johnston:

The department recognises the challenges faced by the early years sector in meeting the needs of children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). The department has already committed to working with stakeholders across the sector to

understand whether changes may be required to the special educational needs inclusion fund (SENIF), and other associated elements of the wider current early years funding system, as part of the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan.

The department is conducting a review of SENIF funding arrangements, as confirmed in the government's response to the consultation on expanding the early education entitlements on 20 September 2023. This is so that the department can better support parents, providers and local authorities, as the expanded entitlements are rolled out.

At the completion of this review, the department will consider what information is most appropriate and helpful for the sector in their delivery of SENIFs. The department will look to draw examples of best practice together with a view to sector-wide dissemination.

The department has increased the rate of disability access funding in 2024/25 to £910 per eligible child per year, having increased in September 2023 from £828 to an annual equivalent of £881 per year per eligible child. The department is also increasing high needs funding by £440 million in 2024/25, compared to the high needs funding allocations for 2023/24. The total high needs budget for 2024/25 will be £10.5 billion.

The Early Years National Funding Formula also contains an additional needs element to take account of the number of 3 and 4 year old children with additional needs in an area.

■ Primary Education: Free School Meals

Mary Glendon:

[\[14575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure primary schools in England are fulfilling their legal requirement to provide free milk for children as part of their free school meals entitlement.

Damian Hinds:

Milk is an excellent food for children's growth and development. This is why, as part of the School Food Standards, schools must ensure it is available to all pupils who want it during school hours.

Providing milk free of charge to pupils who meet the free school milk criteria is a legislative requirement set out in s512ZB (3) of the Education Act 1996. Schools may offer milk as many times as they wish. Under these regulations, free milk must be provided to those pupils who are also registered for benefits-related free school meals, both when it is offered as part of their school meal and at all other times. This provision ensures that disadvantaged children can benefit from free milk during school hours in addition to a free school meal.

Compliance with the School Food Regulations 2014 is mandatory for all maintained schools, academies and free schools. These regulations are mandatory in order to

ensure that food provided to pupils in school is nutritious and of high-quality and to protect those who are nutritionally vulnerable. The regulations also promote good nutritional health in all pupils, as well as promoting good eating behaviour.

School Governors have a responsibility to ensure compliance and should appropriately challenge the headteacher and the senior leadership team to ensure the school is meeting its obligations.

■ Pupils: Absenteeism

Sarah Dyke: [\[14705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of listing school absence as illness without more detail.

Damian Hinds:

Schools must record absences as authorised where pupils cannot attend school due to illness, regardless of whether the illness is physical or mental health related. The government recognises the importance of understanding what is driving absence to illness. However, it would be unreasonable to expect teachers, at the point of taking the register, to determine and provide additional detail on each instance of illness for pupils as this would be a considerable additional burden on the workforce.

The government acknowledges that some young people are facing difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing and providing them with support remains a priority. The government is putting in record levels of investment, including an additional £2.3 billion of funding a year by March 2024 for all NHS mental health services. This will help an extra 345,000 children and young people receive NHS-funded mental health support, compared to 2018. The department expects schools to ensure data is regularly monitored for pupils with long term illnesses and/or Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, including at board and governing body meetings and in targeting support meetings with the local authority so that additional support from other partners is accessed where necessary.

■ Pupils: Transgender People

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[14143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether training is being developed for (a) teachers and (b) other school staff on the needs of transgender pupils.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[14144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what resources will be provided to schools for the implementation of guidance on transgender pupils.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[14145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the timetable for publication of guidance for schools on transgender pupils on student welfare.

Damian Hinds:

In December 2023 the department published a consultation on the draft guidance for schools and colleges in relation to children questioning their gender. The department has committed to a 12-week consultation period in order to seek views from everyone, including schools, colleges, parents and young people, on the approach it sets out and its potential impact. The consultation closes on 12 March 2024, and the department will publish final guidance after analysing the consultation responses.

The guidance reflects current legal frameworks and will support schools in making decisions that are in the best interests of their pupils. The department will expect schools to follow the final guidance. The department will consider whether any further support or training is required in the light of the consultation responses.

■ **Schools: Cadets****John Healey:**[\[13882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which Minister in her Department is responsible for the delivery of the Cadet Expansion Programme.

John Healey:[\[13883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her Department's annual budget for the Cadet Expansion Programme was for for each year since 2010.

Damian Hinds:

The Cadet Expansion Programme (CEP) is a joint Department for Education and Ministry of Defence (MOD) programme. I share responsibility for this programme with my right hon. Friend, Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Minister for Defence People and Families.

Phase 1 of the Cadet Expansion Programme (CEP) was launched in June 2012 with a budget of £10.85 million, provided by the department and MOD. The department provided £8.35 million and MOD provided £2.5 million.

Phase 2 of the CEP (Cadet 500) commenced in July 2015 and the Government committed an extra £50 million from London Inter-Bank Offered Rate (LIBOR) fines to MOD and the department to fund the programme.

Phase 3 commenced in 2020. The department has contributed up to £1.1 million annually to CEP in England only. This funding is committed up to the end of the 2023/24 financial year. MOD's annual funding contributions are shown in the below table, and cover CEP across the UK.

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
£1.4 million	£2.1 million	£2.8 million	£3.6 million

■ Special Educational Needs: Cerebral Palsy

Feryal Clark: [\[14406\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of children with cerebral palsy have been assigned education, health and care plans in (a) Enfield North constituency, (b) the London Borough of Enfield and (c) London.

David Johnston:

The department publishes figures on the number of Education, Health and Care plans at local authority and regional level here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>.

The statistics are not published at the level of parliamentary constituency. The statistics do not include information about diagnosis and the department does not hold the information requested about children or young people who have cerebral palsy.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Boilers: Heat Pumps

Helen Morgan: [\[14991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment she has made of the impact of the clean heat market mechanism on the price of boilers.

Amanda Solloway:

There is no requirement in the Clean Heat Market Mechanism for manufacturers to increase the price of boilers and not all manufacturers have done so. The scheme targets for heat pump deployment are realistic and achievable, not least as a result of the substantial wider support from schemes like the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

■ Boilers: Prices

Helen Morgan: [\[14992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps she is taking to encourage competitive pricing by boiler manufacturers.

Amanda Solloway:

All companies, including boiler manufacturers, have obligations in law not to act in ways which prevent, restrict or distort competition. Vigorous competition is important for ensuring that consumers can benefit from the most efficient prices. The Government regularly considers how competition is functioning in a range of markets and whether there may be value in a closer review in certain cases.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Domicil

Jonathan Ashworth:

[\[14875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether any non-executive directors employed in her Department are non-domiciled.

Graham Stuart:

Non-executives' personal data, including that relating to personal taxation or status, is protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Personal data on non-dom status is not routinely collected and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held it could only be published if doing so was in compliance with data protection law.

Non-executive board members are not employees of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and act in an advisory capacity.

Data relating to public appointments are covered by the Public Appointments Privacy Statement found here <https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/privacy>.

■ Energy Bills Rebate

Kenny MacAskill:

[\[14365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will make it her policy to provide energy bill support to households with the most need.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government continues to provide support through the Warm Home Discount, which provides low-income households with an annual £150 rebate off their energy bill every winter.

This winter, millions of vulnerable households are receiving up to £900 in further Cost of Living Payments, with an extra £150 to those on eligible disability benefits. These payments are in addition to established financial support which is available for low income and vulnerable households this winter through the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment which provides £25 during very cold weather. This comes as part of a package of support to assist households and individuals with rising costs of living that will total over £104 billion, or £3,700 per household on average, over 2022-2025.

■ Energy Charter Treaty

Beth Winter:

[\[13676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 1 February 2024 to Question 11418 on Energy Charter Treaty, how her Department is consulting stakeholders in (a) business, (b) civil society, and (c) Parliament on membership of the Energy Charter Treaty.

Graham Stuart:

On 22 February 2024, the UK announced it is withdrawing from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). The UK will now initiate the process to withdraw from the ECT. The UK is required to give a one-year notification of withdrawal, removing Treaty protections for new investments made after this period.

■ **Energy: Costs****Alexander Stafford:**[\[14442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will work with industry stakeholders to create a permanent targeted support system to help people with energy costs in winter 2024-25.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government has already announced plans to support households past April 2024. In the Autumn Statement we announced the biggest increase to the National Living Wage, worth £1,800 to a full-time worker, benefitting around 2.7 million workers. We also announced an increase to benefits of 6.7% which will further support those most in need with their cost of living.

The Warm Home Discount continues to provide a £150 rebate off energy bill costs for low-income families next winter.

■ **Energy: Prices****Kenny MacAskill:**[\[14366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the reports from the Social Market Foundation entitled Fairer, warmer, cheaper: New energy bill support policies to support British households in an age of high prices, published on 8 March 2023, and Bare necessities: Towards an improved framework for social tariffs in the UK, published on 29 September 2023.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government is continuing to support those most in need with millions of vulnerable households receiving up to £900 in further cost-of-living payments this winter, with an extra £150 to those on eligible disability benefits. This is in addition to the established support of the Winter Fuel Payment worth between £250-£600 and the £150 Warm Home Discount.

In the Autumn Statement we also announced the biggest increase to the National Living Wage, worth around £1,800 to a full-time worker, and an increase to benefits of 6.7% to further support households past April 2024.

■ Heat Pumps: Rural Areas

Helen Morgan:

[\[14994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps she is taking to increase the uptake of heat pumps in rural homes.

Amanda Solloway:

£630 million of grant funding is available for successful local authorities to help them deliver Home Upgrade Grant phase 2 (HUG2) from April 2023 until March 2025. HUG2 ringfenced 60% of funding allocated for Local Authorities defined by DEFRA as 'Largely Rural', 'Mainly Rural' and 'Urban with Significant Rural' to transition to low carbon heating

Additionally, the £450 million Boiler Upgrade Scheme is available, including to owners of rural homes, with grants of up to £7,500 for both ground and air source heat pumps, with an extra £1.5 billion committed until 2028.

■ Heating: Rural Areas

Helen Morgan:

[\[14995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps she is taking to reduce the long-term heating costs of rural homes.

Amanda Solloway:

The Department allocated £500 million funding to support the energy efficiency upgrades of low-income households across England under the Local Authority Delivery Scheme. This funding was focused on the worst EPC rated homes, including those off the gas grid in Phases 1 and 2.

The Homes Upgrade Grant (HUG) ringfenced 60% of funding allocated for rural housing. Eligible households must be on low income and live in an off-gas grid home with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of band D, E, F or G.

■ Wind Power: Seas and Oceans

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[14127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if she will publish the supply chain plans for (a) fixed and (b) floating offshore wind farms submitted by developers in the sixth Contracts for Difference Allocation Round; and how many of those plans have been (i) approved and (ii) rejected.

Andrew Bowie:

Supply Chain Plans for those projects which successfully receive a Contract for Difference in the sixth Contracts for Difference Allocation Round (AR6) will be published in due course, subject to redactions for commercial sensitivities. The assessment of Supply Chain Plans for AR6 is still ongoing so I cannot comment on which ones were successful.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Agriculture: Government Assistance****Steven Bonnar:**[\[14186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he has taken to support the agriculture sector in the context of changing immigration rules.

Mark Spencer:

Defra continues to speak regularly with the agriculture sector and other Government departments to understand labour supply and demand, including both seasonal and permanent workforce requirements.

To reduce the risk of seasonal labour shortages in horticulture and the poultry sector, the Government announced last May that there would be 45,000 Seasonal Worker visas for the horticulture sector in 2024, with a further 2,000 for seasonal poultry workers in the autumn, ensuring these sectors can plan their workforce needs for the year ahead with confidence. This provides sufficient visas for growers to access all the workers they need, and if more visas are necessary within the year an additional 10,000 could be released.

The Skilled Worker route remains open to all nationals who wish to come to the UK for a skilled job they have been offered. We have broadened the skill and salary thresholds to include medium skilled jobs and the route now covers 60% of jobs in the economy. This strikes an appropriate balance between allowing employers access to the skills our economy needs and encouraging investment in the resident workforce. In addition, the agricultural sector can continue to draw on EU nationals living in the UK with settled or pre-settled status, and EU nationals who have settled status can continue to travel to the UK to work in the agriculture sector.

To help inform future decisions on labour, Defra commissioned John Shropshire to carry out an Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain, considering how automation, domestic labour and migrant labour could contribute to tackling labour shortages in our sectors. This report was published on 30 June 2023 and the Government response is expected to be published shortly.

At the same time as the response, the Government will set out how it will support the sector to access the labour it needs alongside actions to reduce the sector's reliance on migrant labour including via our work on automation and promoting domestic labour procurement and training.

■ Agriculture: Subsidies**Steven Bonnar:**[\[14188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that future multi-annual farming support funding is given in seven-year blocks.

Mark Spencer:

The farming budget is set through UK government funding settlements which typically cover 3-5 year period.

Environmental land management agreements are funded over different time periods, retaining flexibility for farmers within our offers, with options for longer agreements where farmers want or need those.

Steven Bonnar:[\[14189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will guarantee funding for farming subsidies after 2025.

Mark Spencer:

Defra has guaranteed the annual budget for the farming sector for the life of this Parliament. Future budgets will be decided by future governments.

■ **Cats: Sales****Bob Blackman:**[\[14006\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many licensed cat sellers there are in England.

Mark Spencer:

Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (“the 2018 Regulations”), anyone selling animals as pets in the course of a business, including kittens and cats, needs to hold a valid license issued by their local authority. Information provided by local authorities indicates that 2169 licenses to sell animals as pets were in force in England on 1 April 2023. The data can be found here: [Local Authority Licensing of Activities Involving Animals returns - Dataset - data.gov.uk \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/publishing.service.gov.uk).

■ **Dangerous Dogs****Sarah Champion:**[\[13712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much revenue was raised from charging for an exemption certificate as part of the American XL Bully ban; and whether this money has been ring-fenced for dog control initiatives.

Mark Spencer:

To apply for a certificate of exemption, owners were required to pay an application fee of £92.40. This fee is not intended to generate a profit and covers the administrative costs for the life of the dog, including processing the application and lifetime record management.

■ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Domicil****Jonathan Ashworth:**[\[14876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether any non-executive directors employed in his Department are non-domiciled.

Mark Spencer:

Non-executive directors' personal data, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Collection of personal data on non-dom status is not routinely collected and is generally not required for making public appointments. If any such data was held it could only be published if doing so was in compliance with data protection law. Non-executive board members are not employees of Defra and act in an advisory capacity. Data relating to public appointments are covered by the Public Appointments Privacy Statement found here <https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/privacy>. A register of Defra board members' interests is published on gov.uk and is updated regularly, this can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defra-register-of-board-members-interests/defra-register-of-board-members-interests-2023>.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Health and Safety**Chris Stephens:****[R] [13748]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether all (a) buildings and (b) workplaces staff from their Department occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Mark Spencer:

Yes, all buildings and workplaces which staff from Defra occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: ICT**Samantha Dixon:****[10354]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, With reference to the Fifty-first Report of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 2022-23 on Tackling Defra's ageing digital services, HC 737, published on 10 May 2023, how much of the £366 million allocated to his Department to (a) address legacy IT issues and (b) bring systems up to the necessary standard has been spent.

Mark Spencer:

The £366 million figure referred to in the National Audit Office report covered a specific set of activities within Defra's overall 2021 Spending Review digital investment. At least £149.3 million has been spent on these activities as of 31 December 2023, alongside other digital investment.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Ministers' Private Offices**Sarah Olney:****[13029]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 1 February 2024 to Question 11394 on Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Ministers' Private Offices, what the cost of each refurbishment was.

Mark Spencer:

[Holding answer 9 February 2024]: The creation of a Minister's office for an additional appointment in January 2022 cost a total of £635 exclusive of VAT.

The provision of an ergonomic chair for a health and safety workplace adjustment in September 2022 cost a total of £1,000 exclusive of VAT.

The provision and installation of three whiteboards in November 2022 came to £2,139.42 exclusive of VAT.

In January 2023 the creation, including outfitting, of a new Departmental media suite came to £22,075.99 exclusive of VAT.

For the repair and replacement of upholstery of 14 meeting room chairs which had significant wear since their original purchase in 1997 cost a total of £3,450 exclusive of VAT.

The creation of a Minister's office for an additional appointment in December 2023 cost a total of £655.89 exclusive of VAT.

Limited remedial work, including a localised repaint and filling on of screw holes, on an office wall due to the removal of a pre-existing whiteboard in December 2023 was not charged as those works were covered under the landlord's Life Cycle Fund.

■ Farmers: Mental Health**Sarah Dyke:**[\[13841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of his Department's guidance to officials visiting farms about (a) farmers' mental health, (b) signs of concern, (c) early intervention and (d) avenues of support.

Mark Spencer:

Mental health provision is a matter for the Department for Health and Social Care. In working with farmers Defra takes very seriously the need to support farmers' health.

We recognise the importance of giving field officers the appropriate tools to be able to support farmers. There are processes in place across Defra to ensure officials visiting farms have adequate guidance about farmers' mental health, signs of concern, early intervention and avenues of support.

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has rolled out mental health training for new and existing field officers and visit support staff, which all staff in RPA will have completed by the end of March 2024. Alongside this, staff are also having training on customer vulnerability which will help them to be able to effectively signpost to farming welfare organisations. RPA helpline staff have all undertaken mental health training which is in the process of being refreshed in close collaboration with the Farming Community Network (FCN). Similar training is in place for all Environment Agency officers who are engaged in regulatory inspections of farms, and Animal and Plant Health Agency staff are also engaging with local FCN representatives to share best practice.

We think we can do even more to make sure that we provide the right help and support to farmers when they need it. The Secretary of State has announced that work will be taken forward across all of Defra group to improve the relationships with farmers. As part of this work, we will explore opportunities to make our processes and training more consistent.

■ Food: Prices

Alyn Smith:

[\[11866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Border Target Operating Model on the cost of food for households in the next (a) 12 months, (b) five years and (c) 10 years.

Mark Spencer:

The BTOM minimises additional costs for importers by taking a risk-based approach to controls and will have a negligible impact on the cost of food. Fruit and vegetable imports have been classified as low-risk meaning they will not require any additional paperwork or checks. A limited number of meat and dairy products have been categorised as medium-risk. For these simplified and streamlined certification will be available to minimise additional costs.

Now that we have moved away from the EU's rigid biosecurity surveillance and reporting systems, we are responsible for mitigating our own biosecurity risks, which otherwise could devastate UK industries and our ability to export food, as well as posing risks to the environment, public health and the wider economy.

For example:

- An outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF), would be a fundamental threat to the viability of our pig industry.
- Foot and Mouth cost the British businesses c.£12.8 billion (at 2022 prices) in 2001.
- The cost of ash dieback is forecast to be £15 billion to the UK.
- With an unprecedented outbreak of avian flu all effort should be made to mitigate the risk of concurrent outbreaks.

The BTOM will strike the appropriate balance between protecting the UK's public health, food supply chains and farming industries and natural environment, and setting a pragmatic, proportionate controls regime. For example, by taking a risk-based approach our controls will be focused on consignments proven to cause the most significant biosecurity risk.

To further reduces costs, the Government will put in a Trusted Trader Scheme which aims to minimise burdens and costs to industry. The scheme will be accessible to as many sizes and types of businesses as possible, including small and medium enterprises Overall, the implementation of the BTOM should have minimal impact on food price inflation for consumers. Initial analysis has indicated that the policies introduced under the BTOM would lead to an approximate increase in consumer food

price inflation of less than 0.2% over a 3-year period, with around half of this- around 0.1%- in the first year. Beyond year 3, all else being equal, we would not expect the TOM to have any further impacts on food price inflation.

■ Hill Farming

Tim Farron: [\[13958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many upland farms have closed in each year since 2015 by region.

Mark Spencer:

Defra does not hold any data on the number of farms that have ceased farming in any particular year. We produce statistical estimates of national crop areas and livestock populations each year, but we do not track changes in individual farms. Changes in national/regional activity can be seen in our annual publications and this includes the number of agricultural holdings with significant levels of farming activity* in England. Changes in the number of holdings could be for a number of reasons, in addition to ceasing trading.

* Data only covers holdings which are registered with the Rural Payments Agency for payments or livestock purposes and have significant levels of farming activity (as recorded in responses to the Defra June Survey of Agriculture or the Cattle Tracing System). Holdings are only included if they have more than five hectares of agricultural land, one hectare of orchards, 0.5 hectares of vegetables or 0.1 hectares of protected crops, or more than 10 cows, 50 pigs, 20 sheep, 20 goats or 1,000 poultry.

Number of holdings by region are available [here](#).

Number of holdings in the uplands (less favoured areas) are available [here](#).

Number of holdings by farm type are available [here](#).

■ Honey: Labelling

Scott Benton: [\[14251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will require food labelling for honey to display the proportion of honey contained.

Mark Spencer:

This is a devolved matter and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

A person must not use "honey" in trade as the name of a product if the product is not honey.

Consequently, for a product to be called "Honey" it must be 100% honey and comply with the appropriate compositional criteria for "honey" specified in Schedule 1 of The Honey (England) Regulations 2015.

■ Hornets

Scott Benton:

[\[14247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) beekeepers and (b) the wider beekeeping industry in the context of the threat of Asian hornet.

Rebecca Pow:

The Government recognises that honey bees and wild pollinators are an essential part of our environment and play a crucial role in food production. All pollinators contribute the equivalent of more than £500 million a year to UK agriculture and food production, by improving crop quality and quantity. Pollinators are also beneficial to our wider, natural ecosystems.

Recognising the potential impact that Asian hornet would have on honey bees and wild pollinators, Defra, in collaboration with Welsh Government, developed the Asian hornet contingency plan which details the response to Asian hornet and is regularly reviewed. The operational response is carried out by the National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Our most effective way of supporting beekeepers and the wider beekeeping industry against the threat of Asian hornet is through our continued eradication response, with the aim of preventing Asian hornet from establishing. This involves the NBU responding to credible sightings to locate and destroy any nests. Evidence from the response to Asian hornet is reviewed at the end of each season to determine if any changes to the approach are required for the following year.

The NBU has now fine-tuned their response and enhanced their preparedness, and they can frequently find a nest within a day of an initial sighting being reported. In 2023 the NBU located and destroyed 72 nests in 56 locations.

Accurate and timely reporting is critical to the response so raising awareness and reporting possible sightings is key. We appreciate the role that beekeepers take in the response to Asian hornet through helping raise awareness of the threat, educating people in identifying these insects, encouraging them to report any suspected sightings and monitoring traps. To support accurate and timely reporting Defra funded development of the Asian hornet watch app. The NBU keep beekeepers informed of the response through updates published on [BeeBase](#) and also carry out other awareness raising activity. The Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) works with over 50 local actions groups and other organisations to raise awareness of Asian hornet, in 2023 they sent out 3400 alert posters and 11,200 ID sheets.

■ Hornets and Non-native Species

Scott Benton:

[\[14248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what funding his Department plans to provide to tackle (a) Asian hornet and (b) other non-native invasive

species that impact the natural ecosystem in the next three years; and whether he plans to review that funding.

Rebecca Pow:

(a) Asian hornet

The National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), has a long-standing relationship with Defra to deliver the Bee Health Programme which includes management and control of honey bee pests and diseases.

As Asian hornet is of particular concern to beekeepers, the NBU has taken action since 2016 to locate and destroy any Asian hornet nests with the aim of preventing this insect species from establishing.

APHA receives a total budget from Defra and, from that, the NBU budget is set to cover the range of essential work that the NBU delivers including taking action against Asian hornet. The NBU can draw on resources within wider APHA including in the response to Asian hornet. There isn't a separate budget for action against Asian hornet.

(b) Other invasive non-native species (INNS)

Action to tackle INNS is taken as part of a wide number of programmes across Defra, for example woodland management, management of our sites of special scientific interest or of our waterways. This includes actions by both Defra and its arm's length bodies, including Natural England, the Environment Agency, APHA and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. It also includes options within Countryside Stewardship and now Environmental Land Management to support control of INNS. As such it is not possible to provide a single figure for the budget allocated to tackling INNS.

Departmental budgets beyond 2024-25 will be agreed as part of the next Spending Review. The Secretary of State will set out funding plans following that process.

■ **Inland Border Facilities: Ashford**

Emma Hardy:

[\[10517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the average daily operational costs for Sevington Internal Border Facility were in 2023; and what the average daily costs for (a) site security staff, (b) site operational staff, (c) running on-site equipment and machinery, (d) services and amenities, (e) maintenance and (f) all other costs were in 2023.

Mark Spencer:

The Department considers that this information is commercially sensitive and should be withheld.

■ Land Use

Selaine Saxby: [\[14152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timetable is for the publication of the Land Use Framework.

Rebecca Pow:

The Land Use Framework will be published in 2024. The Framework will build on the insight from the House of Lords Land Use in England Committee's inquiry and support delivery of the full range of Government commitments through multifunctional, resilient, and productive landscapes. The Secretary of State for Defra has written to Lord Cameron of Dillington to explain the decision to delay publishing and to reiterate the Government's commitment to a Land Use Framework for England.

The Government has made significant progress over the past year in the areas that the Committee identified as policy priorities in their 'Making the most out of England's land' report. We have launched the 2023 Sustainable Farming Incentive, a further round of Landscape Recovery, and legislated to require plan makers to take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. The Government has also invested in the "Land Use for Net Zero, Nature and People" Hub in collaboration with UK Research and Innovation and the devolved governments, to support us to meet legal commitments on net zero and the environment, increasing food security and economic growth.

We continue to work with other Government departments to understand and take account of their land use expectations as well as those within Defra. This includes the Geospatial Commission at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, following their 'Finding common ground' report.

■ Members: Correspondence

Alyn Smith: [\[14172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Stirling of 13 September 2023 on a shock collar ban.

Mark Spencer:

I apologise for the delay in responding to the hon. Member. A reply will be sent in due course.

■ Sustainable Farming Incentive: Suffolk Coastal

Dr Thérèse Coffey: [\[14858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many applications to the Sustainable Farming Incentive were (a) made and (b) approved in Suffolk Coastal constituency in 2023.

Mark Spencer:

The Sustainable Farming Incentive has a rolling application window and as of 21 February the RPA has received 55 applications of which 39 agreements have been offered and 34 accepted for the Suffolk Coastal Constituency.

The SFI23 application window opened in mid-September and there is a rolling window to apply which allows farm businesses to apply when they are ready to do so. We have a number of farm businesses that have started an application but not yet submitted.

■ Timber in Construction Innovation Fund**Kerry McCarthy:****[14825]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many applications have been received for the Timber in Construction Innovation Fund; and what assessment he has made of the impact of that fund on the volume of carbon stored in the built environment.

Rebecca Pow:

The Timber in Construction Innovation Fund received 26 applications over two application rounds. In total, 15 projects have been awarded funding. 14 of these projects are still ongoing, with the majority scheduled to complete by March 2025. A summary of funded projects is available at: [Woods into Management Forestry Innovation Funds: successful projects 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/woods-into-management-forestry-innovation-funds-successful-projects-2022) and [Woods into Management Forestry Innovation Funds: successful projects 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/woods-into-management-forestry-innovation-funds-successful-projects-2023). Impacts of the fund will be realised in the medium to long term as projects complete and outputs are realised/ brought to market.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Asylum****Stephen Kinnock:****[14599]**

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps the Government is taking to safeguard asylum seekers in the British Indian Ocean Territory at risk of (a) sexual assault, (b) harassment, (c) self-harm, (d) suicide and (e) other threats identified by inspectors from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

David Rutley:

The welfare and safety of migrants on British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) is paramount. They receive dedicated 24-hour-a day medical care from a medical team formed of doctors, paramedics, registered nurses and mental health practitioners. The BIOT Administration introduced a robust multi-layered and multi-agency safeguarding policy in July 2023, which codified and clarified safeguarding arrangements that had developed over time since the camp was first set up.

All allegations of mistreatment or criminality are taken seriously and fully investigated. Criminal charges have been brought against certain individuals, including charges of sexual assault, and are being taken forward in line with BIOT law.

■ China: Foreign Relations

Tim Loughton: [\[14772\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he made representations to his Chinese counterpart on the (a) repeal of the Beijing-imposed National Security Law and (b) the release of (i) Jimmy Lai and (ii) other political prisoners at the Munich Security Conference in February 2024.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

On 16 February the Foreign Secretary met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Munich Security Conference. In line with the Government's "protect, align, and engage" approach to China, as set out in the Integrated Review Refresh, the Foreign Secretary raised a number of issues important to the UK national interest. The Foreign Secretary reiterated his call for the release of British national Jimmy Lai and unambiguously set out the UK's position across a number of areas of disagreement, including on Hong Kong.

Neil Coyle: [\[14884\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he made representations on (a) repeal of the National Security Law and (b) release of all political prisoners in Hong Kong during his meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister at the Munich Security Conference.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan:

On 16 February the Foreign Secretary met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Munich Security Conference. In line with the Government's "protect, align, and engage" approach to China, as set out in the Integrated Review Refresh, the Foreign Secretary raised a number of issues important to the UK national interest. The Foreign Secretary reiterated his call for the release of British national Jimmy Lai and set out unambiguously the UK's position across a number of areas of disagreement, including on Hong Kong.

■ Developing Countries: Genito-urinary Medicine

Mr Virendra Sharma: [\[14830\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to his announcement of £16 million funding for integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and climate resilience on 8 December 2023, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that that funding is used by the Global Financing Facility for its intended purpose.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

At COP28, the UK reaffirmed its commitment of £80 million to the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF) from 2025 to 2030. For the first

time, the UK identified support for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights as International Climate Finance.

£20 million of this new phase of support to the GFF will help countries identify and address the impacts of climate change to reproductive, maternal and child health. We are working with the GFF on developing their new climate and health strategy and will report annually against the UK's International Climate Finance Framework.

■ **Egypt: Elections**

Kenny MacAskill:

[\[14963\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the sentencing of Ahmed Tantawy following his attempted candidacy in Egypt's 2023 presidential elections.

David Rutley:

The UK continues to advocate for free and fair elections as critical elements of a democratic process, as we also did ahead of the Egyptian elections in December 2023. The UK also regularly calls on the Egyptian authorities to open up civil and political space, and media freedoms. The UK is clear that all Egyptians - including election candidates - should be able to fully benefit from their rights under the Egyptian Constitution.

■ **Gaza: Israel**

Chris Law:

[\[14351\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the implications for the UK's obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of the International Court of Justice's order relating to the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), published on 26 January 2024.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

We have stated that we have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Law, as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative.

The court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza is a position we have long advocated.

We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting.

Dan Carden:

[\[14682\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment the Government has made of the potential implications for the Government's policies of the statement on Gaza by the Prime Ministers of Australia, Canada and New Zealand issued on 15 February 2024.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it. The Prime Minister pressed this in his engagement with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 15 February.

The immediate priority must be a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting.

The vital elements for a lasting peace are the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

■ **Palestinians: Detainees**

Fleur Anderson:

[\[15002\]](#)

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made representations to his Israeli counterpart on the (a) location and (b) manner of the detention of Palestinians in Gaza.

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

The Government is clear that administrative detention should only be used when it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. This has been repeatedly raised with Israeli counterparts.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder**

Lisa Nandy:

[\[14561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has had discussions with NHS England on updated guidance for Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder in (a) children and (b) adults.

Maria Caulfield:

[Holding answer 22 February 2024]: Departmental officials and ministers hold discussions with NHS England regularly on a range of issues, including eating disorders for children and adults.

■ Cancer: Young People**Sir George Howarth:****[13905]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to reduce waiting times for (a) diagnosis and (b) treatment for young people with cancer.

Andrew Stephenson:

Reducing waiting times for the diagnosis and treatment for young people with cancer is a priority for the Government. On 6 February 2024 the Department announced the setup of a new Children and Young People Cancer Taskforce to progress our mission to deliver world-leading cancer services. This dedicated work, focusing on cancers affecting children and young people, will explore detection, diagnosis and genomic testing and treatment, as well as research and innovation.

Several organisations across England, including the Department, are taking steps to increase diagnosis rates. This includes setting stretching ambitions, supporting general practices (GPs) in referring patients, expanding diagnostic capacity, and enabling more precise diagnosis through technology.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidance underpinning cancer referrals sets out detailed guidance for GPs on the symptoms of cancer in children and young people, recommending very urgent referral, an appointment within 48 hours, for those presenting with a range of potential cancer.

Backed by £2.3 billion of capital funding, the Department is expanding diagnostic capacity across the National Health Service by rolling out more community diagnostic centres (CDCs), delivering vital tests, scans and checks. With 153 CDCs open already and up to 160 set to open by March 2025, these offer millions of patients the chance to access quicker, more convenient checks outside of hospitals, with capacity prioritised for cancer.

In addition, the NHS now offers all children and young people with cancer whole genome sequencing, to enable more comprehensive and precise diagnosis, and access to more personalised treatments.

The Government is working jointly with NHS England on implementing the delivery plan for tackling the COVID-19 backlogs in elective care, and plans to spend more than £8 billion from 2022/23 to 2024/25 to help drive up and protect elective activity, including cancer diagnosis and treatment activity.

■ Clinical Priorities Advisory Group

Mr Virendra Sharma:

[\[14833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many times the Clinical Priorities Action Group are meeting each year; and what the dates are for each meeting in 2024.

Andrew Stephenson:

The number of times the Clinical Priorities Advisory Group (CPAG) meets in any year varies, depending on business demands of the CPAG. The meeting dates for 2024 are:

- Wednesday 10 January;
- Wednesday 7 February;
- Wednesday 6 March;
- Wednesday 3 April;
- Wednesday 1 May;
- Monday 20 May;
- Tuesday 21 May;
- Wednesday 5 June;
- Wednesday 3 July;
- Wednesday 7 August;
- Wednesday 4 September;
- Wednesday 2 October;
- Wednesday 6 November; and
- Wednesday 4 December.

■ Dental Services

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[14667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate has she made of the number of urgent and emergency dental appointments that will be delivered as a result of the dentistry recovery plan.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 22 February 2024]: Our Dentistry Recovery Plan, backed by £200 million of funding, will make dental services faster, simpler, and fairer for National Health Service dental patients. It will fund approximately 2.5 million additional appointments, or more than 1.5 million additional courses of dental treatment.

We are committed to evaluating the impacts of the measures included in our plan, and we will publish monthly data on progress once available. No estimates are

currently available of the number of urgent and emergency dental appointments that will be delivered through the plan.

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[14668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will set out a timeline for the individual elements of the dentistry recovery plan to take effect.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 22 February 2024]: The Dentistry Recovery Plan, published on 7 February 2024, sets out a number of actions which will improve access for patients, by helping the sector to recover activity more quickly, addressing underlying issues, and setting out the action needed for longer term reform of the system.

To help services recover from the pandemic, we will offer dental practices an additional payment for each new patient requiring treatment. This new patient premium will be a time-limited scheme launching in March 2024 and ending in March 2025.

We will deploy dental vans offering appointments to patients in targeted rural and coastal communities, starting later this year in the most under-served areas. To support practices in areas where recruitment is particularly challenging, we will launch a new Golden Hello scheme, and will decide on locations in the coming months.

We are exploring whether a tie-in would ensure that dentists spend a greater proportion of their time delivering National Health Service dental care. We will launch a consultation on this policy in spring. We are also launching Smile for Life, a major new focus on prevention and good oral health in young children, to be delivered via nurseries and other settings providing Start for Life services and promoted by Family Hubs, as well as introducing dental outreach to primary schools in under-served areas. A consultation on expanding fluoridation of water to the north-east of England will also be launched shortly

■ Dental Services: Contracts

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[14669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate she has made of how many people will be eligible under the premium for patients who have not seen a dentist in over two years; and if she will publish the modelling to determine the level at which payments should be set to incentivise dentists to treat patients with (a) simple and (b) more complex needs.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 22 February 2024]: As announced on 7 February 2024 in our plan to recover and reform National Health Service dentistry, to help services recover from the pandemic, we will offer dental practices an additional payment for each new patient requiring treatment. The scheme will start from 1 March 2024 and run for 13 months, making it faster and simpler for new patients to access NHS dental care. The

purposes of this scheme will be to support anyone who has not been able to receive NHS dental care in the preceding two years. These payments will support dentists in treating approximately one million new patients.

The payment level, of either £15 or £50, depends on the treatment required, and recognises the additional time that may be needed for practices to assess, stabilise and manage the oral health needs of patients who have not received NHS dental care for a significant period. The £50 payment is approximately equal to 50% of the money awarded for a Band 2a course of treatment. Therefore, a similar uplift would equate to £15 for a Band 1 course of treatment.

■ Dental Services: Finance

Preet Kaur Gill: [\[14670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will publish a breakdown of the costings of each element of the dentistry recovery plan; and whether funding will be delivered from existing underspends by ICBs.

Andrea Leadsom:

[Holding answer 22 February 2024]: The Dentistry Recovery Plan is fully-funded with £200 million and will deliver new initiatives to address the challenges facing National Health Service dentistry, including an extra 2.5 million appointments.

Overall NHS spending totals will be set at Budget in the usual way. We are committed to protecting this funding for dentistry purposes and we will ringfence this funding in 2024 to 2025. We will issue guidance to integrated care boards shortly through NHS England's 2024 to 2025 revenue finance and contracting guidance.

The Plan sets out the following funding commitments for actions: Golden Hellos of £20,000 to be offered per dentist, for up to 240 dentists over three years; a new patient premium, set at either £50 or £15 depending on the treatment required; an increase of the minimum unit of dental activity value to £28; and Government investment of an additional £300 million to enable 75 upper-tier local authorities to create more Family Hubs, and to improve vital services including oral health support to give every baby the best start in life.

■ Drugs: Shortages

Rachael Maskell: [\[14901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress has she made on tackling medicine shortages.

Rachael Maskell: [\[14902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment she has made of the financial impact of medicine shortages on people affected.

Rachael Maskell:

[14903]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has had discussions with charities representing groups impacted by recent medicine shortages.

Andrew Stephenson:

There are around 14,000 licensed medicines and the overwhelming majority are in good supply. Most supply issues have been managed with minimal disruption to patients. We are committed to helping build long term supply chain resilience for medical products, working with industry and colleagues across the Government and the health system.

Whilst we cannot always prevent supply issues from occurring, the Department has well-established tools and processes to manage supply issues whenever they arise, helping to prevent shortages and mitigate risks to patients. Each medicine supply issue is different, and the nature of the communication used depends on a number of factors. The Department works closely with industry, the National Health Service and others to prevent shortages and resolve any issues as soon as they arise. We regularly work with patient groups and charities, to better understand the impact and to help communicate messages to patients, so they are aware of the supply situation.

■ **Electronic Cigarettes: Children**

Dr Rupa Huq:

[11834]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take legislative steps to tackle the promotion of e-cigarettes and disposable vapes to children.

Andrea Leadsom:

The Government is concerned about the worrying rise in illicit and underage vaping, with rates of youth vaping having tripled in the last three years. Disposable vapes are the most popular device for children, with 69% of current vapers aged 11 to 17 years old in the United Kingdom using them, nearly a ninefold increase in the past two years. Five million disposable vapes are either littered or thrown away in general waste every week, a number which has quadrupled in the last year. The Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016 outlines restrictions on the marketing and promotion of vapes. This includes a ban on television, radio and online advertising. We work closely with the Advertising Standards Authority which investigates advertising on social media platforms. The regulations are available at the following link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/507/contents/made>

On 29 January, the Government responded to the consultation Creating a smokefree generation and tackling youth vaping: your views. This set out our plan to introduce legislation to tackle the appeal and availability of vapes to children. The legislation will introduce powers to restrict flavours, point of sale and packaging of vaping products.

In the consultation response, we also announced that we will be banning disposable vapes. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs are taking forward

the ban and are looking to legislate as soon as possible. The full response is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping/outcome/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping-consultation-government-response>

■ Emergency Calls: Mental Health

Alistair Strathern: [\[14998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many ambulances were despatched to incidents where police officers attended as part of Right Care, Right Person policy in each of the last five years; and what the average waiting time was for an ambulance in that period.

Maria Caulfield:

The numbers of joint ambulance and police incidents related to the Right Care, Right Person policy, and the response times to such incidents, are not collected centrally. Average ambulance service response times to incidents are published monthly by NHS England, and are available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ambulance-quality-indicators/>

■ Families: Health Services

Mr Virendra Sharma: [\[13966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to expand the eligibility of familial mapping services.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England has funded two specific projects, led by the NHS Genomic Medicine Service Alliances, to increase detection of inherited cardiac conditions such as familial hypercholesterolaemia and sudden cardiac death.

■ Heart Diseases: Medical Treatments

Mr Virendra Sharma: [\[14831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of issuing a commissioning policy for the use of transcatheter edge-to-edge repair in secondary mitral regurgitation.

Mr Virendra Sharma: [\[14832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she plans to publish a (a) commissioning policy and (b) policy statement on the use of transcatheter edge-to-edge repair in the Tricuspid valve.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England has received a policy proposition relating to transcatheter edge-to-edge repair for secondary mitral regurgitation. A policy working group has been established to consider the clinical evidence surrounding this procedure, in line with the process set out in the document, Methods: National Clinical Policies, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/methods-national-clinical-policies/>

However, NHS England has not received a clinical policy proposal relating to transcatheter edge-to-edge repair in the tricuspid valve. If a clinician feels there is sufficient published evidence to support the development of a policy, they can submit a proposal in line with the process set out in the above linked document.

Heart Diseases: Screening**Mr Virendra Sharma:****[13969]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she is taking steps to improve the reach of screening programmes for inherited cardiac conditions.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England is committed to increasing access to genetic testing for families who have lost a loved one to sudden cardiac or unexpected death. NHS England has published the guidance Inherited Cardiac Conditions, which requires that services investigate patients with a previously undiagnosed cardiac disease. Where a case is identified, screening is offered to relatives on the basis of risk.

In addition, the NHS England Genomics Unit, together with the British Heart Foundation and Cardiac Risk in the Young, is funding a transformation project, the NHS Cardiac Sudden Unexpected Death programme. This programme works with the NHS Genomic Laboratory Hubs, the NHS Genomic Medicine Service Alliances, Inherited Cardiovascular Conditions clinics, and the coronial system to develop a pathway that will ensure equitable access to a genomics-driven clinical programme that addresses the needs of families of those who have passed away due to sudden cardiac or unexpected death.

Mental Health Services**Alistair Strathern:****[14997]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department (a) has taken and (b) plans to take to help support NHS England with trends in the level of demand on mental health services in the context of the implementation of the Right Care, Right Person policy.

Maria Caulfield:

The Government has expanded mental health services to support the growing number of people in crisis to receive the care they need, and to prevent them from entering crisis in the first place. We are investing at least £2.3 billion of additional yearly funding by March 2024, compared to 2018/19, to expand mental health

services in England, with the aim of supporting access to mental health services for an additional two million people.

We are also investing £150 million in mental health urgent and emergency care infrastructure across 2023/24 and 2024/25, to fund up to 100 new mental health ambulances and a range of new and improved facilities, including crisis cafes, crisis houses, urgent mental health assessment and care centres, and health-based places of safety. This investment will improve patients' experience and outcomes, reduce the need for inpatient admission, and help ease the pressure on accident and emergency departments and ambulance services.

The Department of Health and Social Care and the Home Office will evaluate the implementation of Right Care, Right Person following the National Partnership Agreement published in July 2023.

■ **Midwives: Labour Turnover and Recruitment**

Cherilyn Mackrory:

[\[14313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 5.60 of the Autumn Statement Green Book 2022, how many FTE midwives (a) have been recruited by and (b) left the NHS since 2022.

Cherilyn Mackrory:

[\[14314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 5.60 of the Autumn Statement Green Book 2022, how many FTE midwives need to be recruited in order to reach the target of 2,000 more midwives.

Andrew Stephenson:

NHS England publishes quarterly data on the numbers of staff joining and leaving active service in hospital and community health services.

The data shows that in the year leading to September 2023, there were 3,152 full-time equivalent (FTE) midwives who joined active service. Joiners are not the same as those recruited to the National Health Service, as it will include staff returning after breaks in service. There is no data held on the number of newly recruited staff. In the same period, there were 2,255 FTE midwives who left active service in hospital and community health services. Leavers may be moving to other parts of the health and social care system such as private care providers, voluntary sector provision, or moving to devolved nations.

The Department's ambition is for a net increase in the FTE number of staff working in the NHS, which will be impacted by changes in rates of retention of staff, changes in rates of part-time working patterns, and rates of breaks from active service.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan has set out the expectation that we will increase midwifery training places by 13% a year, to 4,269 places, for students starting this academic year. We expect that 5% of midwifery placements will be delivered through apprenticeships by 2028. Recent investment in training places means we expect to see a growth in midwives of 1.8 to 1.9% per year, over the course of the plan. In

addition, NHS England's national retention programme for midwifery and nursing has prioritised five high impact actions to support improved staff retention, including a self-assessment tool and menopause guidance. Finally, valuing and retaining staff is also a key objective of NHS England's three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services. Examples of how this will be achieved include funding a retention midwife in every maternity unit this year and offering a preceptorship programme to every newly registered midwife.

■ **Social Services: Staff**

Derek Thomas:

[\[14913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will develop a long-term workforce plan for the social care sector.

Helen Whately:

We set out our national strategy for the social care workforce in our white paper, *People at The Heart of Care*, in December 2021. In 2023 we published the associated implementation plan, *Next Steps to Putting People at the Heart of Care*, which outlined our plans to invest in better workforce training, recognition, and career progression.

Most recently, we announced a package of measures as part of that implementation. This included launching a new national career structure for adult social care as well as funding for a new, accredited social care qualification, and social work and care nursing apprenticeships. By delivering our plan we will help care workers build long-term careers in social care.

■ **Voluntary Scheme for Branded Medicines Pricing and Access**

Rachael Maskell:

[\[14904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the voluntary scheme for branded medicines pricing, access and growth represents value for money.

Andrew Stephenson:

The voluntary scheme for branded medicines pricing, access and growth (VPAG) represents a landmark deal which will enable patients to access the latest lifesaving treatments more consistently, boost the United Kingdom's position as a global superpower in advanced healthcare, technology and clinical research, and is set to save the National Health Service £14 billion over five years, in medicines costs.

The VPAG also introduces a new payment mechanism in which older medicines that are yet to realise price reductions, will pay a higher payment rate. Those medicines that have realised price reductions will pay a lower payment rate. This ensures that the scheme is strictly pro-innovation and pro-competition, which will enhance health outcomes for patients and deliver value for money for taxpayers. It includes an additional £400 million of investment by industry over the five years of the scheme, for the VPAG Investment Programme.

HOME OFFICE**■ Antisemitism****Mr Gregory Campbell:****[14814]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will ensure an urgent investigation of the anti-Semitic defacing of a birth certificate submitted to the Passport Office.

Tom Pursglove:

The Home Secretary asked officials to urgently investigate this matter as soon as he became aware of this incident on 19 February.

The incident is being taken extremely seriously. Home Office officials are working with commercial partners to complete the investigation and will ensure that appropriate action is taken.

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Wales**Jo Stevens:****[14894]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle anti-social behaviour in (a) Cardiff Central constituency, (b) Cardiff local authority area and (c) Wales.

Chris Philp:

Last year the Government launched the Anti-social Behaviour Action Plan <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/anti-social-behaviour-action-plan> ensuring the police, local authorities and other relevant agencies have the tools they need to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The plan is backed by £160m of funding. This includes funding an increased police and other uniformed presence to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, targeting hotspots. In 2023/24 this covered ten police force areas, including South Wales. That initiative is being rolled out across England and Wales with total funding of £66m will be allocated to support a hotspot approach.

We are also strengthening police and local authority powers to tackle anti-social behaviour through a number of measures in the Criminal Justice Bill.

■ Arson: Wales**Jo Stevens:****[14893]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle arson in (a) Cardiff Central constituency, (b) Cardiff local authority area and (c) Wales.

Chris Philp:

The Government is committed to tackling and preventing arson. We know the serious impact that arson can have on both individuals and the wider community.

We are committed to ensuring fire services have the resources they need to do their vital work and to keep the public safe from fires, including those caused by arson. Funding of the Fire Service in Wales is a devolved matter.

Decisions on how their resources are best deployed to meet their core functions are a matter for each fire and rescue authority.

■ Ask for ANI Scheme

Jess Phillips: [\[14886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many disclosures of domestic abuse his Department's Ask for ANI scheme received in its pharmacy sites in (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

Jess Phillips: [\[14887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many disclosures of domestic abuse his Department's Ask for ANI scheme received in (a) Jobcentre and (b) Jobs and Benefit Office sites in 2023.

Jess Phillips: [\[14888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department plans to publish the evaluation of the Ask for ANI scheme.

Laura Farris:

Ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) was launched across pharmacies in the UK during the unprecedented emergency of the pandemic in January 2021. Since then, there have been 186 reported disclosures from across the UK where victims have been supported by pharmacists to access support from the police or domestic abuse services. Of those disclosures, 38 were in 2022 and 50 in 2023. This however is likely to be an underestimate as participating pharmacies are encouraged but not required to report disclosures to the Home Office.

The Ask for ANI scheme is currently being piloted in 15 Jobcentre Plus sites across England, Scotland and Wales and 4 Jobs and Benefits Offices in Northern Ireland. An independent evaluation has been commissioned to understand how the scheme has been implemented across the pilot sites which will conclude this summer. As the evaluation is ongoing, we are not able to share numbers of disclosures in pilot sites at this stage. A decision on the publication of the evaluation will be made in due course.

■ Cardington Airfield: Asylum

Alistair Strathern: [\[14999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Cardington Sheds are being used to train border force staff for the removal of asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Michael Tomlinson:

At present, Border Force staff are not being trained at the HOMES Training Facility in Bedfordshire, this facility is only being used for the purpose of training Immigration Enforcement officers and contracted escort officers.

Since 2015, the government has had training facilities to ensure escorts can respond professionally to the challenges of removing people with no right to be in the UK. This includes practical sessions, so escorts have the skills they need to deal with different scenarios.

As we continue to remove those with no legal right to be here, we will all ensure new escort officers will undertake required high quality training as necessary.

■ Hate Crime: Wales**Jo Stevens:**[\[14612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to help tackle hate crime in (a) Cardiff Central constituency, (b) Cardiff local authority area and (c) Wales.

Laura Farris:

The Government is clear that all forms of hate crime are completely unacceptable. We have a robust legislative framework in place to respond to hate crimes which target race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity, and expect the police to fully investigate these appalling offences and work with the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

Our absolute priority is to get more police onto our streets, cut crime, protect the public and bring more criminals to justice. We are supporting the police by providing them with the resources they need. Part of this necessitates police recruitment and training - there are now over 149,000 officers England and Wales, which is higher than the previous peak in March 2010 before the Police Uplift Programme. As of 30 September 2023, there were 3,535 police officers in South Wales, a total growth of 540 additional officers against the adjusted baseline (2,995) at the start of the Police Uplift Programme (PUP) in March 2019. Wales now has 8,108 officers, a total growth of 1,143 additional officers since the start of the PUP. In addition, funding for South Wales Police will be up to £399.9 million in 2024/25, an increase of up to £24.4 million when compared to 2023/24. Funding for Wales will be up to £936.4 million in 2024/25, an increase of up to £56.0 million when compared to 2023/24.

The Government continues to fund True Vision, an online hate crime reporting portal designed so that victims of all forms of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. We also fund the National Online Hate Crime Hub, a central capability designed to provide expert advice to support individual local police forces in dealing with online hate crime.

■ Horticulture: Seasonal Workers

Ian Byrne: [\[14387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether people on horticultural seasonal worker visas are permitted to transfer to different scheme operators in the event of their scheme operator's licence being revoked.

Ian Byrne: [\[14388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what was the average number of weeks of work provided to workers on the horticultural seasonal worker visa scheme during (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

Ian Byrne: [\[14389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many workers on the horticultural seasonal worker visa scheme were injured at work during (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

Tom Pursglove:

The Home Office has no plans to issue guidance to people with Seasonal Worker visas as to how to register with a GP. Orientation information is a matter for their licenced scheme operator.

The Home Office holds no records on the numbers of Seasonal Workers who have registered with a GP, as this is not an immigration related metric.

In the event that a scheme operator for the Seasonal Worker route became unlicensed for any reason, the Home Office will consider each case on its own merits and tailor our response accordingly.

The Home Office does not hold data on the average number of weeks of work provided to workers on the horticultural seasonal worker visa scheme during (a) 2022 and (b) 2023. Since 12 April 2023, Seasonal Workers must receive a minimum of 32 hour's pay for each week of their stay in the UK, regardless of whether work is available.

■ Immigration Controls: Social Services

Stephen Kinnock: [\[14596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the reason is for the time taken to publish reports by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration on (a) illegal working enforcement activity and (b) immigration in the social care sector; and when he plans to publish those reports.

Tom Pursglove:

The reports on illegal working enforcement activity and the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector are still being considered by the department.

The department has a ministerial commitment to lay ICIBI inspection reports before Parliament within eight weeks of receipt where possible. This excludes periods of parliamentary recess as both Houses must be sitting for ICIBI reports to be laid.

The department takes every inspection report seriously and considers the findings and recommendations carefully. This can sometimes mean the publication process extends beyond 8 weeks. We will publish the reports in due course.

■ Police: Wales

Liz Saville Roberts: [\[14908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether he has made an estimate of the cost of implementing the redesigned government crown logo for each police force in Wales.

Chris Philp:

Following a change in the design of the royal crown and the implementation of Kings Charles III cypher, the Cabinet Office issued guidance in July 2023 to organisations that use a depiction of the royal crown in their logo which includes the police.

This guidance sets out that there is no timeline for changes to be made and that organisations should adopt a low-cost approach to implementation and to avoid new costs where possible including when physical depictions are updated.

It is an operational matter for individual forces to develop their own implementation strategy based on these guidelines.

■ Spiking: Mid Bedfordshire

Alistair Strathern: [\[14709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to prevent drink spiking in Mid Bedfordshire constituency.

Laura Farris:

The Government has published a report on the prevalence and nature of drink and needle spiking and the action that we are and will take to tackle it across England and Wales. The report can be found here: [Understanding and tackling spiking - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118444/Understanding_and_tackling_spiking_-_GOV.UK.pdf).

Bedfordshire Police run a number of local initiatives across the County to raise awareness and prevent this crime. These include marketing and advertising across social media channels and directly in bars and clubs, partnership working with local universities and businesses and the provision of practical tools to help keep people safe. The force also has a dedicated Operation (Bournville) which includes community engagement and education.

The Government are funding local initiatives in the area aimed at tackling violence against women and girls more broadly. This includes bystander training for night-time economy staff and school students, education on violence against women and girls,

harms in schools, digital policing initiatives to identify perpetrators and additional staff at the Luton All Women's Centre.

■ Visas: Social Services

Stephen Kinnock:

[\[14597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information his Department holds on how many people admitted to the UK as care workers under the Health and Care Worker visa scheme took up employment outside the social care sector without prior authorisation in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Tom Pursglove:

If a Skilled Worker no longer works for their sponsor or breaches their visa conditions in the UK, it is the responsibility of their sponsor to report this to the Home Office who will cancel their visa.

We do not routinely publish information on the number of people whose visa we cancel for leaving their employer; but we do not recognise the figures reported in the media relating to health care visa holders working illegally which are based on flawed analysis.

■ Visas: Ukraine

Stephen Kinnock:

[\[14598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Written Ministerial Statement of 19 February 2024, HCWS258, on changes to the Immigration Rules, for what reasons the Government closed the Ukraine Family Scheme to new applications with immediate effect; how many applications to the Ukraine Family Scheme were awaiting a decision at the time of the closure of that scheme to new applications; and what his policy is on the processing of outstanding applications to the scheme made before 19 February 2024.

Tom Pursglove:

We are rationalising the offer for Ukrainians coming to the UK to provide one single out-of-country route - Homes for Ukraine (HFU) - for all Ukrainians to apply to when seeking to come to the UK. The Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) was created as an immediate response to the Russian invasion and allowed UK based British citizens and settled persons to act as sponsors for their Ukrainian family members. We have closed the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) to new applications from 19 February. This will strengthen and improve the sustainability of the schemes we provide and additionally ensure consistency with accommodation and safeguarding checks. Ukrainian nationals who may have previously been eligible to apply to come to the UK under the UFS will remain eligible to apply to the HFU sponsorship scheme.

The Government considered this departure from convention in closing the scheme with immediate effect to be justified and proportionate in order to maintain the orderly operation of the immigration system and to redirect applicants and sponsors to the Homes for Ukraine scheme without delay.

There are a small number of applications under the Ukraine Family Scheme outstanding and we aim to process these applications as soon as possible. Any application received prior to the closure of the Ukraine Family Scheme will be considered in-line with the rules in force on 18 February 2024.

JUSTICE

■ Adoption

Alex Davies-Jones:

[\[14758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the report entitled Ministry of Justice Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23, published on 28 November 2023, for what reason (a) there was a change in the scope of the Adoption project and (b) the asset being developed for that project was no longer required.

Mike Freer:

The changes to the scope of reform of Adoption were made in March last year, as part of a wider adjustment to the court and tribunal Reform Programme. There was a need to reduce the scope of the programme, in part due to challenging operational conditions caused by the pandemic, in order to be able to ensure successful delivery.

For Adoption, we reduced the scope to focus on the front-end digital application for cases where a child has been through care proceedings and placed for adoption. This is where the benefits for users - adoptive parents and local authorities – from having an accessible digital form were greatest. It will allow for a large percentage of adoption applications to be submitted digitally.

The change of scope in the Adoption project meant that some of the development work on the asset was no longer required for use. The cost of this development work was £873,000, which was disclosed as a constructive loss in the Ministry of Justice's Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23.

■ Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Alex Davies-Jones:

[\[14757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to page 139 of his Department's publication entitled Ministry of Justice Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23, published on 28 November 2023, what the intangible assets under construction written down to nil in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority were; and why there was a change in approach to the projects involved.

Laura Farris:

The Ministry of Justice Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 discloses two losses in CICA totalling £1 million. Both relate to the write-down of intangible assets under construction to nil, following a change of approach on the digital projects involved.

The first, with a constructive loss of £640,000, related to a digital project looking at improving how applicants for compensation could submit documents to CICA.

Following discovery and initial testing the service was found to be resource intensive and not sufficiently developed to support effective use at scale. The project was closed in favour of focusing on development of the GOV.UK application service (Apply).

The second, with a constructive loss of £374,000, related to a project to enable improvements to customer and stakeholder experience in the application process. The discovery work undertaken for this project informed the design and fed into the development of the new Apply service.

Apply is now in full operation, is hosted on GOV.UK and provides a more accessible, user-centred service through which victims can apply for compensation.

■ Criminal Proceedings: Legal Aid Scheme

Alex Cunningham:

[\[14862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of access to legal aid in criminal cases and what criteria his Department uses to make that assessment.

Mike Freer:

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is responsible for commissioning legal aid services in England and Wales. The LAA manages capacity in a number of ways. The LAA's network of regional contract managers located throughout England and Wales provide intelligence-led information based on contact with legal aid service providers.

In addition, the LAA frequently reviews market capacity, including the number of duty solicitors on each local duty scheme, to make sure there is adequate access to legal aid services throughout England and Wales. The LAA shares information about provider capacity to support policy development via a number of fora, including via the Criminal Legal Aid Advisory Board (CLAAB).

The LAA moves quickly, where issues arise, taking operational actions within its control to secure additional provision and to ensure continuity of legal aid services.

Provision under the duty scheme is demand led based on the individual factors for each local duty scheme and the needs of local courts and police. Anyone who is arrested and interviewed by the police is offered a duty solicitor irrespective of their financial means. Effective coverage is achieved where all duty schemes have a sufficient number of duty solicitors to cover the available rota slots. The LAA has arrangements in place to ensure all duty rotas have cover 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Information about the number of legal aid providers contracted to provide services, as well as details of numbers of duty solicitors across all schemes, are published as part of the LAA's statistics at: [Legal aid statistics England and Wales bulletin Jan to Mar 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). These statistics are used by the LAA as management information to monitor the availability of legal aid services over time, in different areas of law and different regions of England and Wales.

■ Legal Aid Scheme

Alex Cunningham: [\[14863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the judgment in the case of the Law Society of England and Wales v The Lord Chancellor of 31 January 2024.

Mike Freer:

While the claimants in the case being referred to were successful on specific narrow grounds, the majority of their claims were rejected by the Court. We are carefully considering the judgment and will set out further detail on our response in due course.

We recently announced a consultation that would lead to an additional £21 million being invested in the criminal legal aid solicitor profession, bringing the overall increase from 9% to 11%. We expect our existing reforms to increase spending on criminal legal aid by up to £141 million a year.

■ Legal Aid Scheme: Solicitors

Alex Cunningham: [\[14860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what modelling his Department is undertaking to estimate the number of criminal legal aid duty solicitors that will be working over the next five years.

Mike Freer:

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) frequently reviews market capacity, including the number of duty solicitors on each local duty scheme, to make sure there is adequate access to legal aid services throughout England and Wales. The LAA moves quickly, where issues arise, taking operational actions within its control to secure additional provision and to ensure continuity of legal aid services.

We publish data on numbers, new joiners, returners, and leavers [here](#).

In responding to the Criminal Legal Aid Independent Review, we uplifted most criminal legal aid fee schemes, including the police station fee scheme, by 15%.

On 29 January, we published a consultation on proposed reforms to the police station fee scheme and the Youth Court where an additional £21.1 million per year has been allocated.

This increases spend by up to £141 million a year, taking expected criminal legal aid spend to £1.2 billion per year.

Alex Cunningham: [\[14861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will have discussions with the Legal Aid Agency on the effectiveness of the duty solicitor scheme at providing duty solicitor coverage 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; and what data his Department holds on the number of schemes that are unable to provide this level of coverage.

Mike Freer:

Ministry of Justice Ministers and the Legal Aid Agency meet regularly to discuss matters pertaining to criminal legal aid, including the duty solicitor scheme.

In September 2022, we uplifted most criminal legal aid fee schemes by 15%. This includes a 15% increase to the police station scheme and the magistrates' court scheme, which includes youth court work.

On 29 January, we published a consultation on proposed reforms to the police station fee scheme and the Youth Court where an additional £21.1 million per year has been allocated.

The increases we have implemented, alongside longer-term reforms, mean that criminal legal aid spending is expected to be up to £1.2 billion per year.

We are unaware of any duty schemes unable to provide coverage 24 hours a day, 365 days a year either on an ongoing basis or as an isolated instance.

Prison and Probation Service: Databases**Alex Davies-Jones:**[\[14754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to page 139 of his Department's publication, Ministry of Justice Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23, HC13, for what reason the new Public Protection Unit database within HM Prison and Probation Service was permanently halted.

Edward Argar:

The Public Protection database is an existing case management system which supports the work of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Parole Board and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. As with many systems of this nature, it has developed and evolved over time to meet the changing needs of the respective business areas.

HMPPS's original plan was to create a completely new replacement service as the system was operated and managed by a third party in outdated technical code. In May 2022, a decision was taken to cease the complete replacement and move to re-platforming and develop the existing service, within Ministry of Justice Digital. This allows the Ministry of Justice to have closer scrutiny of the requirements of the tool. Re-platforming has already been successfully completed and work is underway to deliver longer term enhancements to the system.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE**Taxation: Scotland****Patricia Gibson:**[\[14896\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, with reference to (a) her oral contribution on 11 January 2024, Official Report, columns 455-456, (b) the findings on page 2 of the Scottish Government's Income Tax Policy Proposal: Scottish Budget 2023-24, published in

December 2022 and (c) research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies on Scottish council tax, published on 11 September 2023, on what evidential basis she stated that people in England pay lower tax than people in Scotland.

Patricia Gibson: [\[14897\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, with reference to (a) her oral contribution on 11 January 2024, Official Report, columns 455-456 and (b) figures stated in the Office for Budget Responsibility's Public finances databank – December 2023, published on 23 December 2023, on what evidential basis she stated that the Government has managed to have a balanced budget.

Penny Mordaunt:

I refer the Hon. Member to my remarks in response to her point or order on 31st January (Official Report, col. 898), and my responses during business questions on the 18th January (Official Report, col. 1039-40) and the 25th January (Official Report, col. 449).

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

■ Electoral Register: EU Nationals

Kim Johnson: [\[14299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what estimate he has made of the potential number of EU citizens resident in the UK who will be removed from the electoral roll after May 2024.

Simon Hoare:

This information has been published on Gov.uk [here](#).

■ Ground Rent

Derek Thomas: [\[14911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Answer of 7 December 2023 to Question 4731 on Ground Rent, if he will make it his policy that the proposed cap on ground rents will apply equally to investors from countries with which the UK has treaties prohibiting expropriation.

Derek Thomas: [\[14912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that proposed changes to ground rents (a) are affordable for leaseholders and (b) take account of people who may be reliant on that income.

Lee Rowley:

Government has consulted on a range of options to restrict ground rent in existing leases and asked questions about the effects of these proposals. We received a significant number of responses from a variety of sources. A consultation impact assessment has been published and can be found at [Consultation impact](#)

[assessment - modern leasehold: restricting ground rent for existing leases](#). That consultation closed on 17 January, and Government is currently analysing the responses before taking a decision on how to restrict ground rents through the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill.

■ Housing: Floods

Mr Laurence Robertson: [\[14787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make it his policy to (a) authorise and (b) fund local authorities to purchase homes which have been subject to regular flooding.

Simon Hoare:

The department has made no such assessment.

■ Public Sector: Scotland

Dan Carden: [\[14685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the four-day working week trial for the public sector in Scotland.

Simon Hoare:

The Government has been clear that it does not support any attempt from a local authority in England to implement Part-Time Work for Full-Time pay and has already taken steps to deter the sector from operating so called 'four day working week' practices and will take further steps if necessary.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Regulation

Mike Amesbury: [\[13668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a national regulator for temporary accommodation.

Felicity Buchan:

Government has an ambition to increase quality of all accommodation, including temporary accommodation. The Social Housing Regulation Act will deliver a new, proactive consumer regime giving the Regulator of Social Housing new tools to hold social landlords to account. The current review of the Decent Homes Standard, and the Renters (Reform) Bill will increase quality and regulation across all private rented housing stock, including temporary accommodation. Members of the public also have a right of redress for issues in temporary accommodation through the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Animal Experiments**

Beth Winter: [\[13672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she has considered the potential merits of instructing the National Centre for Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research to establish a timetable for the phase-out of animal-reliant research and testing.

Andrew Griffith:

The Government is keen to reach the point at which animal research and testing is no longer necessary and can be fully replaced by effective alternatives. However, technology is not yet at a point to wholly replace animal testing. Our current approach is to actively support and fund the development, dissemination and uptake of techniques that replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research (the 3Rs), primarily through funding the work of the National Centre for the 3Rs.

Beth Winter: [\[13673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a mandatory review of all animal-dependent scientific procedures.

Andrew Griffith:

Government policy, in line with the current scientific position, is that there is a need to continue to use animals in some areas of research where there are no non-animal alternatives, to protect human and animal health and the environment and to make discoveries that can underpin scientific and technological advances of the future. Underpinning this is a strong commitment to a rigorous regulatory framework that fully implements the replacement, reduction, and refinement of animals used in research (3Rs) and the continued development of non-animal alternatives.

■ Broadband: Rural Areas

Jim Shannon: [\[13556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of rural broadband coverage.

Julia Lopez:

According to Ofcom's December 2023 Connected Nations report, only 0.2% of properties are unable to get decent broadband coverage (defined as at least 10Mbps download speed and 1Mbps upload speed), with 88% of rural UK residential properties having superfast broadband coverage.

The Government is committed to improving broadband coverage in rural areas, with gigabit broadband coverage delivered through the £5 billion Project Gigabit which will deliver cutting edge connectivity for millions of rural homes, with alternative connectivity solutions being investigated for very hard to reach premises.

For those premises still unable to get a decent broadband connection, the Broadband USO provides consumers the right to request a broadband connection if their current connection falls below 10Mbps download and 1Mbps upload.

Dr Kieran Mullan:

[\[13626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to improve rural connectivity.

Julia Lopez:

Since the published response to Question 7150 on 19 December 2023, we have made further progress with Project Gigabit by signing an additional six contracts, providing more than £450 million to broadband suppliers to roll out fast, reliable broadband to rural and remote communities.

The Crewe and Nantwich constituency is covered by the Project Gigabit procurement for Cheshire, for which we aim to award a contract in the coming months.

Overall, the number of UK premises that can access gigabit-capable broadband has increased to over 80% up from just 6% in 2019, and the UK is on track to achieve 85% coverage by 2025.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Domicil

Jonathan Ashworth:

[\[14878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether any non-executive directors employed in her Department are non-domiciled.

Andrew Griffith:

Non-executive directors' personal data, including those relating to personal taxation or status, are protected by the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Personal data on domicile status is not routinely collected by the Department.

Non-executive directors are not employees of the Department and act in an advisory capacity.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Health and Safety

Chris Stephens:

[R] [\[13750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether all (a) buildings and (b) workplaces staff from their Department occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Andrew Griffith:

The Department works with the Government Property Agency, who acts as landlord for the Department's estate, to ensure that all workplaces and buildings its staff occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

■ EU Framework Programme

Chi Onwurah: [\[14865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she has had discussions with her EU counterparts on priorities for the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 10.

Andrew Griffith:

On the 12th February, Secretary of State, along with European Commissioner for Research Ivanova, launched the UK's Association to Horizon Europe, emphasising our joint commitment to ensuring the partnership is highly successful for UK scientists, innovators, businesses, and the economy. They confirmed that any decisions around Framework Programme 10 will be taken in the future.

■ Gene Therapies

Chi Onwurah: [\[13603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled National vision for engineering biology, published 5 December 2023, what steps her Department has taken to move towards customer screening for gene synthesis.

Andrew Griffith:

In September 2023, Government established the UK Biosecurity Leadership Council (BLC), bringing together leading academics and industry figures from across the engineering biology, life science and biotech sectors. The BLC provides Government with impartial and expert advice on emerging biosecurity risks and how to encourage responsible behaviour.

As stated in the National Vision for Engineering Biology, Government is prioritising looking at the case for domestic gene synthesis and customer screening, including through discussions in the BLC.

■ Gene Therapies: Manufacturing Industries

Jim Shannon: [\[13577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to encourage the growth of the (a) manufacturing capacity for and (b) delivery of cell and gene therapies.

Andrew Griffith:

The government is investing significantly to support manufacturing and delivery of cell and gene therapies.

Since 2021, the government has launched three capital grant schemes – up to £118 million of funds – to incentivise manufacturing investments, including in advanced therapies, which can help treat rare diseases. We anticipate announcing the next round of grant recipients in the Spring. Last year, the government announced a further £520 million to increase investment in Life Sciences manufacturing.

The UK is a world-leader in the development and manufacture of cell and gene therapies thanks to government investment in innovation and skills through the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult.

■ Horizon Europe

Dr Kieran Mullan: [\[13627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to encourage UK participation in Horizon Europe.

Andrew Griffith:

The Government is committed to restoring the UK's position in Horizon Europe by ensuring that businesses and researchers feel supported to re-engage with Horizon Europe and lead consortia. My Department is promoting the opportunities, including working closely with the EU to boost participation through joint UK/EU engagement campaigns. In January, Government launched a large-scale marketing campaign to encourage UK researchers and businesses to bid for Horizon funding. My Department is delivering a Horizon Europe Roadshow around the country to drive network-building and information-sharing and is making concrete support available through a 'pump priming' grant scheme delivered by the British Academy.

■ Members: Correspondence

John Penrose: [\[13542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, when she plans to respond to the correspondence of (a) 3 November and (b) 4 December 2023 from the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare on the online sale of Wagner flags.

Saqib Bhatti:

The Department apologises for the delay in our response on this occasion. A response has now been issued, on 15th February. Timely responses to Member's correspondence are of huge importance to the Department, with resources being aligned to deliver this in all cases.

■ Project Gigabit

Charlotte Nichols: [\[13622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the selection criteria were for Project Gigabit.

Julia Lopez:

Project Gigabit comprises a number of different schemes, with differing selection criteria to maximise accessibility to a range of broadband suppliers.

All broadband suppliers have the opportunity to register for the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme, providing that they can meet the thresholds for registration and the connectivity requirements set out in the scheme's Terms and Conditions:

<https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/for-suppliers/tcs/>.

Under the Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy Scheme, suppliers are awarded contracts following a rigorous and competitive public procurement process, designed to ensure maximum value for money for rural communities. Details of the criteria for broadband suppliers to participate in Project Gigabit procurements are available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bduk-new-procurement-pipeline) : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bduk-new-procurement-pipeline>.

■ Quantum Technology: Training

Chi Onwurah: [\[13605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to page 29 of the National Quantum Strategy published on 15 March 2023, how much funding her Department has provided for the expansion of STEM Learning's Quantum Ambassador schools outreach programme.

Chi Onwurah: [\[13606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled National Quantum Strategy, published on 15 March 2023, what steps she is taking to train more skilled technicians in the UK for the UK quantum sector.

Chi Onwurah: [\[13607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled National Quantum Strategy, published on 15 March 2023, what steps she is taking to deliver a quantum priority stream in the UK Global Talent Network.

Chi Onwurah: [\[13608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the National Quantum Strategy, updated on 14 December 2023, what steps they are taking to double the number of Centres for Doctoral Training focused on quantum technologies.

Andrew Griffith:

1. The Department has agreed to provide grant funding of £96,102 to STEM Learning to support the expansion of their Quantum Ambassador Programme.
2. The Department is developing a quantum apprenticeship programme. This programme will complement existing measures to train skilled technicians, including the National Physical Laboratory apprenticeship scheme, which can include deployments within their quantum department. The Quantum Skills Taskforce is considering apprenticeships and technical education, which will inform our approach to the technician workforce.
3. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) recently ran a funding competition for Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs). The results of this funding competition, including the CDTs focussed on quantum technologies, will be announced in due course.

4. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade is responsible for the Global Talent Network. Our departments are working together to engage businesses developing quantum technologies to understand their skills needs and any specific roles that would benefit from promotion to international talent. Through the Global Talent Network, those roles are then actively promoted to talent in the United States through events and newsletters. This activity is complemented by the Government's GREAT Talent campaign, which deploys marketing to promote the UK as a top destination to work and live amongst highly skilled migrants with skills in artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and life sciences in the United States and India.

■ Sickle Cell Diseases: Manufacturing Industries

Jim Shannon:

[\[13578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to support the growth of manufacturing capacity to (a) develop and (b) deliver treatments for sickle cell disease.

Andrew Griffith:

The government is investing significantly to support Life Sciences manufacturing, including of treatments for rare diseases such as sickle cell disease.

Since 2021, the government has launched three capital grant schemes – up to £118 million of funds – to incentivise manufacturing investments, including in advanced therapies, which can help treat rare diseases. We anticipate announcing the next round of grant recipients in the Spring. Last year, the government announced a further £520 million to increase investment in Life Sciences manufacturing.

The UK is a world-leader in the development and manufacture of advanced therapies thanks to government investment in innovation and skills through the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult, which also coordinates the Advanced Therapies Treatment Centre network.

SCOTLAND

■ Scotland Office: Information Officers

Dr Matthew Offord:

[\[14017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many posts there are for (a) press, (b) media and (c) other communications staff in his Department; and what the salary band is for each post.

Mr Alister Jack:

The Scotland Office is not a direct employer and staff are seconded on either Ministry of Justice or Scottish Government terms.

The Scotland Office press and media team is made up of five employees. Roles range from grades IO/B2 to Grade 6 and have salaries between £35,867 - £41,013 and £75,810 - £80,370.

These figures are for the Scotland Office press and media team only.

There are 12 other communications staff in various teams including the Director of Communications, Strategic Engagement, Visit and Events, and Digital.

Roles range from grades A4 to SCS 1 and have salaries between £27,513 - £29,677 and £75,000 - £117,800.

TRANSPORT

■ Community Transport: Driving

Dr Thérèse Coffey:

[\[14857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the National Disability Strategy, published on 28 July 2021, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle shortages in community transport drivers.

Guy Opperman:

The Government recognises the significant role community transport plays in facilitating people's independence and the challenge facing the sector in recruiting qualified drivers. As set out in the National Disability Strategy, we are working with the Community Transport Association and stakeholders to understand the issue of driver shortages in the community transport sector.

We continue to consider the licensing regime to see if there is a role for Government in addressing driver shortages.

■ Department for Transport: Domicil

Jonathan Ashworth:

[\[14879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether any non-executive directors employed in his Department are non-domiciled.

Anthony Browne:

This information is not held. Non-executive directors are not employees of DfT.

■ Euston Station

Stephen Morgan:

[\[14327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2024 to Question 12368 on Euston Station, whether it is his policy to appoint a development company to manage the delivery of Euston Station before July 2024.

Huw Merriman:

As the Prime Minister announced on 4 October 2023, the Government intends to appoint a development company, separate from HS2 Ltd, to manage the delivery of the HS2 Euston Station. The Government continues to examine a range of development models and financing mechanisms to best meet the objectives of the

'Euston Quarter'. As per my previous answer, we will set out next steps in due course.

■ **Govia Thameslink Railway: Standards**

Louise Haigh:

[\[14133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has received correspondence from Govia Thameslink Railways on service quality standards on the (a) Thameslink, (b) Southern and (c) Great Northern franchise since the start of those franchises.

Huw Merriman:

Department officials receive performance reports after each rail period against the Service Quality Regime (SQR) standards for Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR). Train Operators are required to publish their SQR results on their websites each Rail Period, alongside the contractual Benchmarks. The Department regularly discusses and reviews performance with GTR and continues to hold them to account to deliver improvements for passengers.

■ **Great British Railways: ICT**

Stephen Morgan:

[\[14726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what budget was allocated for the Consolidated Online Retail Solution project by the Great British Railways Transition Team in the financial years (a) 2023-24 and (b) 2024-25; and how many full time equivalent staff were assigned to that project.

Huw Merriman:

The Great British Railways Transition Team worked on the consolidated online retail project as part of a wider programme of fares, ticketing and retail improvements. This project was resourced from existing Great British Railways Transition Team budgets and using staff that worked on this alongside other fares, ticketing and retail projects.

■ **Motorcycles: Driving Licences**

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[14473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2023 to Question 1424 on Motorcycles: Carbon Emissions, what plans he has to simplify the L-category licensing regime in 2024.

Guy Opperman:

In December officials met with motorcycle stakeholder representatives to listen to and discuss various motorcycle initiatives including ideas for reform. Discussions continue and a Ministerial roundtable is scheduled for May.

■ Railway Stations: Access

Caroline Lucas: [\[13980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent staff are assessing nominations for funding under the Access for All programme.

Huw Merriman:

The Department's stations enhancement team has 5 FTEs and delivers a number of station enhancement programmes, including Access for All. Additional ad hoc support for assessing the Access for All nominations comes from analytical and legal colleagues, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, Network Rail and consultants.

Stephen Morgan: [\[14322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 February 2023 to Question 12367 on Railway Stations: Access, what discussions he has had with the Great British Railways Transition Team on when the accessibility audit of railway stations will be published.

Huw Merriman:

As I mentioned in my previous answer, officials and I continue to engage in discussions with the Great British Railways Transition Team on the publication of the accessibility audit data and we will announce further details in due course.

■ Railways: Crew

Stephen Morgan: [\[14321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information his Department holds on the number of train drivers recruited in each of the last 10 years.

Huw Merriman:

The Department is not responsible for the recruitment of train drivers and does not collect information on the number of train drivers, and therefore does not have data on train drivers recruited over each of the past 10 years. The train operating companies, as employers, are responsible for ensuring there are adequate number of train drivers to suit their operational functions.

■ Railways: Educational Visits

Chi Onwurah: [\[14868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 7 February 2024 to Question 13609 on Rail Fares, which operators offer the dedicated discounts for group travel; and whether the Government takes steps to (a) encourage and (b) support operators in offering that discount.

Huw Merriman:

All Department for Transport contracted operators offer some form of group discount. In addition many train operators participate in the GroupSave offer which offers 1/3

off Off-Peak tickets for a group of three to nine people travelling together. More detail can be found on the National Rail and local train operator websites.

Group discounts are a commercial decision for operators.

■ Railways: Tickets

Stephen Morgan:

[\[14323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he had with the representatives of the rail sector before his decision to cancel the proposal to deliver a centralised Great British Railways online rail ticket retailer in December 2023.

Huw Merriman:

Department for Transport ministers and officials engage regularly with representatives across the rail sector on a range of policy matters. This includes in relation to fares, ticketing and retail projects like the centralised online ticket retailer, which we are no longer pursuing.

Stephen Morgan:

[\[14324\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether officials in his Department had discussions with Treasury officials on his decision to cancel a centralised online rail ticket retailer in December 2023.

Huw Merriman:

Department for Transport and Treasury officials engage regularly on policy matters. This includes in relation to fares, ticketing and retail projects like the centralised online ticket retailer, which we are no longer pursuing.

■ Railways: WiFi

Stephen Morgan:

[\[14294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Answer of 20 October 2023 to Question 201667 on Railways: WiFi, what were the results of his Department's discussions on the provision of wi-fi as part of the Annual Business Plan for each train operating company.

Huw Merriman:

The information supplied by operators to the Department on Wi-Fi provision is commercially confidential.

Stephen Morgan:

[\[14295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Answer of 19 July 2023 to Question 194228 on Railways: WiFi, what the results were of his Department's analysis of responses from train operating companies.

Huw Merriman:

The information supplied by operators to the Department on Wi-Fi provision is commercially confidential.

■ Southeastern Trains: Standards**Louise Haigh:** [\[14134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has received correspondence from Southeastern Trains Ltd on service quality standards on the Southeastern franchise since ownership was transferred to the operator of last resort.

Huw Merriman:

Department officials speak to Southeastern regularly about their service quality standards and have recently requested that they produce a plan to improve service quality standards at stations. Implementation should commence by April 2024.

■ Train Operating Companies: Armed Forces Covenant**Stephen Morgan:** [\[14325\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of mandating train operating companies (a) contracted to the private sector and (b) under the control of DfT OLR Holdings to adopt the Armed Forces Covenant to a gold standard.

Stephen Morgan: [\[14326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will have discussions with train operating companies (a) contracted to the private sector and (b) under the control of DfT OLR Holdings on the adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant to a gold standard for their employees.

Huw Merriman:

The Government supports our Armed Forces fully, whether they be ex-forces personnel who wish to retrain for a role with a transport provider, or a current employee who wishes to serve as a reservist.

It is for Train Operating Companies, as employers, to ensure that they continue to support their employees who wish to volunteer to become reservists whilst continuing to undertake their role. Train Operating Companies can work towards gold standard should that be appropriate for their businesses.

■ Train Operating Companies: Standards**Louise Haigh:** [\[14135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an estimate of the number of full-time equivalent hours spent (a) monitoring performance of train operating companies and (b) assessing performance based fees on National Rail contracts.

Huw Merriman:

The Department does not hold this information. However, we hold operators to account for their performance through the National Rail Contracts (NRC). Department officials are continuously monitoring the overall performance, including compliance with the service levels as specified in NRCs. This regular monitoring includes regular

meetings with their senior management where performance figures are scrutinised and challenged. There are a range of enforcement mechanisms available to the Department in the event of non-compliance.

TREASURY

■ Beer and Cider: Tax Allowances

Navendu Mishra:

[\[14382\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the temporary off-sales regulatory easement to allow beer and cider festival volunteers to take home unsold produce without breaching off-sale tax regulations.

Gareth Davies:

Draught Relief, introduced under the new alcohol duty system, provides a reduction in the duty on draught products sold in on-trade venues such as pubs and restaurants and helps to level the playing field between these venues and off-trade venues such as supermarkets, allowing them to price their on-trade products more competitively.

To ensure the relief is targeted at the on-trade, the Government has prevented repackaging of products that have received Draught Relief for off-site consumption. The core objective of the relief is to recognise the cultural importance of pubs and other on-trade venues as community hubs and to encourage responsible drinking in supervised settings. Providing reduced rates of duty for beers consumed at home is not consistent with the objectives of the relief.

As with all taxes, the Government keeps the alcohol duty system under review during its yearly Budget process.

■ Business: Accountability

Alexander Stafford:

[\[13670\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to help support the adoption of environmental, social and governance practices.

Gareth Davies:

The Government has taken world-leading action to green the financial system, and we remain fully committed to that work. We published the 2023 Green Finance Strategy in March 2023, providing further clarity on key policy areas such as the next steps under our Sustainability Disclosure Requirements (SDR) framework, transition plan disclosures and the work of the Transition Plan Taskforce, and next steps on the UK Green Taxonomy.

■ **Childcare**

Claire Hanna:

[\[14357\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will bring forward measures in the Budget to provide further support for (a) parents with childcare costs and (b) reforms to the childcare sector.

Laura Trott:

At Spring Budget 2023, the government announced the biggest ever investment in childcare in England, meaning eligible working parents in England will be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year from when their child is 9 months old, to when they start school.

To support this expansion, the Government will spend over £4.1 billion by 2027-28, has provided over £600 million to substantially uplift the hourly rate paid to providers to deliver the existing childcare entitlements, and is allocating £100 million capital funding to support childcare settings to increase their physical space. The government has also made changes to the childcare market, including further flexibilities for providers and the introduction of a new, better tailored childminder-specific Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Finally, this month we launched the childcare recruitment campaign, showcasing the lifelong impact early years professionals have on 0-to-5s, and next month the Financial Incentives Pilot will begin, which will test the impact of £1000 tax free financial incentives on recruitment in the early years sector.

■ **Developing Countries: Debts**

Dan Carden:

[\[14923\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the University of Warwick GLOBE Centre and University of Leeds CBLP briefing paper entitled UK Parliament responses to deal with sovereign debt crises: proposals for legislative reform, published in February 2024.

Bim Afolami:

The UK, alongside the G20 and Paris Club, expects creditors, including private creditors, to participate in debt restructurings on comparable terms. This is a fundamental principle of the G20 Common Framework.

At this stage, the Government is not pursuing legislative approaches, such as those outlined in the cited briefing paper, to ensure comparability of treatment. The Government is focused on delivering enhancements to the market-based (contractual) approach to private sector participation in debt treatments, including taking the lead in developing Majority Voting Provisions for private syndicated loans. These promote more efficient restructurings by reducing the ability for creditors to hold out in restructurings.

■ Employee Ownership

Sir Graham Brady:

[\[14476\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to his Department's call for evidence on non-discretionary tax-advantaged share schemes, which closed on 25 August 2023, when he plans to bring forward proposals on employee share schemes.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government is carefully considering the responses and evidence submitted to the call for evidence on the non-discretionary tax-advantaged employee share schemes and will respond in due course. Any tax policy changes would be announced at a fiscal event in the usual way.

■ First Time Buyers: Northern Ireland

Claire Hanna:

[\[14224\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Northern Ireland Executive has received a Barnett consequential as a result of the First Homes scheme.

Laura Trott:

The First Homes scheme is not a funded programme and is instead delivered via the planning system through section 106 planning obligations. As such, there are no Barnett consequentials associated directly with the First Homes scheme.

Two First Homes pilots were funded through the Affordable Homes programme, for which the Northern Ireland Executive received Barnett consequentials in the normal way.

■ Hearing Aids: VAT

Vicky Foxcroft:

[\[14280\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason VAT relief is not available on hearing aids.

Nigel Huddleston:

Most hearing aids are dispensed free of charge to NHS patients. Specialised hearing devices designed for people with severely defective hearing are relieved of VAT, when purchased by disabled people. However, generic hearing aids that are not designed specifically for disabled persons are not relieved of VAT.

■ Housing: Environment Protection

Alexander Stafford:

[\[14444\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing employees who environmentally upgrade their home to be able to pay for this from their gross salary.

Nigel Huddleston:

Allowing employees to pay for environmental upgrading on their homes from their gross salary would introduce a new relief on their personal taxes.

There are a wide range of factors to consider when considering introducing a new relief, including whether they are cost-effective and well targeted. New reliefs can also add complexity to the tax system and are likely to result in similar calls for reliefs on other expenditure, which others may argue are equally deserving.

Nonetheless, the Government keeps all aspects of the tax system under review.

Income Tax

Sarah Olney: [\[14169\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much income tax was paid in each parliamentary constituency in the 2022-23 financial year.

Nigel Huddleston:

The information for the tax year 2022 to 2023 is not available. However, table 3.15 of HMRC's Personal Incomes Statistics contains the latest constituency-level estimates of Income Tax liabilities for the tax year 2020 to 2021.

[Income and tax by Parliamentary Constituency](#)

Inheritance Tax

Alexander Stafford: [\[14343\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the inheritance tax threshold to £1 million.

Alexander Stafford: [\[14344\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of incorporating the residence nil rate band into inheritance tax.

Alexander Stafford: [\[14345\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to incorporate the residence nil rate band into inheritance tax.

Alexander Stafford: [\[14346\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the impact of inheritance tax on single divorcees.

Nigel Huddleston:

The estates of all individuals benefit from a £325,000 nil-rate band for inheritance tax. The targeted residence nil-rate band is a further £175,000 and is available to those passing on a qualifying residence on death to their direct descendants, such as children or grandchildren. This means qualifying estates, including those belonging to individuals who were divorced, can pass on up to £500,000 because of the combined nil-rate band and residence nil-rate band.

The qualifying estate of a surviving spouse or civil partner can pass on up to £1 million without an inheritance tax liability because any unused nil-rate band or residence nil-rate band is transferable between spouses and civil partners. Any unused nil-rate band or residence nil-rate band is not transferable between other individuals. However, the rules for all individuals mean that two divorced individuals can still pass on up to £500,000 each, and so up to a £1 million in total, without an inheritance tax liability because of the nil-rate band and residence nil-rate band.

The Government keeps all taxes under review, including inheritance tax.

■ Oil and Natural Gas: Finance

Alexander Stafford: [\[13804\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Written Ministerial Statement of 12 June 2023 on Energy tax update, HCWS845, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the oil and gas energy profits levy on the ability of oil and gas companies to access funding.

Alexander Stafford: [\[13805\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether his Department is taking steps to support oil and gas firms to use reserve-based lending to access private finance.

Alexander Stafford: [\[13806\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the oil and gas energy profits levy on the ability of oil and gas firms' to use reserve-based lending to access finance.

Alexander Stafford: [\[13807\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of (a) impact investing, (b) social responsible investing and (c) environmental, social and governance practices on the access to public funding for oil and gas companies.

Alexander Stafford: [\[13808\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the oil and gas energy profits levy on the ability of oilfield developers to access funding to develop potential future oilfields that would be created as a result of provisions in the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill.

Alexander Stafford: [\[13810\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the implications for the UK's Green Taxonomy of the potential impact of the EU's Green Taxonomy on the ability of oil and gas firms operating in the EU to access funding to develop oilfields.

Gareth Davies:

The Energy Profits Levy (EPL) was introduced on 26 May 2022 to respond to exceptionally high prices that meant oil and gas companies were benefiting from unexpectedly high profits. The EPL balances ensuring the oil and gas sector pays its fair share while encouraging investment to bolster the UK's energy security. The government has been clear that we want to encourage reinvestment of the sector's profits to support the economy, jobs, and our energy security.

In June 2023, the Government announced the Energy Security Investment Mechanism (ESIM), a price floor for the EPL, to give operators and their investors, including reserve-based lenders, more confidence in the fiscal regime while the EPL remains in place. Under the ESIM, if prices fall to historically normal levels for a sustained period before the EPL's sunset date of March 2028, the EPL will cease, giving operators and reserve-based lenders the confidence to keep investing in domestic energy.

Oil and gas extraction in the UK and on the UK Continental Shelf is a market orientated activity undertaken by commercial organisations; there is no public funding available. Similarly, reserves-based lending decisions are also a commercial matter, and it is for banks and other reserves-based lenders to consider how much funding to individual operators on a case-by-case basis.

The Government is committed to delivering a UK Green Taxonomy – a tool to provide investors with definitional certainty about the green economic activities they are invested in to support mobilising green investment and tackle greenwashing. We will continue to monitor and learn the lessons from taxonomies introduced in other jurisdictions. We expect to publish the consultation on the UK Green Taxonomy shortly.

■ Theatre: Tax Allowances**Simon Jupp:**[\[14732\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of extending the current rate of Theatre Tax Relief beyond April 2025.

Nigel Huddleston:

The government recognises the value of the UK's world-leading theatre sector.

That is why at Spring Budget 2023, the government went further to support theatres by announcing a 2-year extension to the current 45% (for non-touring productions) and 50% (for touring productions) rates of theatre tax relief (TTR). These rates will now taper to 30%/35% on 1 April 2025 and return to 20%/25% on 1 April 2026.

The government keeps all tax reliefs under review. Any changes will be announced at a fiscal event.

■ Treasury: Health and Safety

Chris Stephens:

[R] [[13755](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether all (a) buildings and (b) workplaces staff from their Department occupy have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment under Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Gareth Davies:

The Government Property Agency are responsible for the buildings occupied by HM Treasury staff. The Government Property Agency have suitable and sufficient building and common area health and safety risk assessments in place under Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

■ Treasury: Mortgages

Sarah Olney:

[[14166](#)]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many staff in his Department worked on mortgage support in each of the last two years.

Bim Afolami:

This subject is primarily the responsibility of the Banking and Credit team, working with colleagues across a range of other teams. The specific number of staff working on issues relating to mortgages is not static in any given year, and the department deploys resources flexibly to respond to the priorities of Ministers.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ AEA Group: Pensions

Patrick Grady:

[[14895](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to Q329 of the oral evidence given by the Minister for Pensions to the Work and Pensions Select Committee on 10 January 2024, HC 144, what discussions his Department has had with the Cabinet Office on adequate means of redress for individuals impacted by the collapse of the AEA Technology pension scheme.

Paul Maynard:

Discussions between officials from my Department and Cabinet Office have not concluded. It would be unreasonable to pre-empt the outcome of those discussions. Wider considerations, such as potential routes of redress beyond the powers of the Pensions Ombudsman, fall outside the remit of my Department.

■ Children: Maintenance

Dr Thérèse Coffey:

[[14859](#)]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when he plans to respond to the consultation entitled Child Maintenance: Improving our enforcement powers through the commencement of curfew orders, published on 9 July 2022.

Paul Maynard:

The Child Maintenance “Improving our Enforcement powers through the commencement of Curfew orders” consultation concluded on 12 August 2022. Several enforcement initiatives aimed at improving compliance are currently in train and we are considering our strongest enforcement powers more broadly and will consider the next steps and how curfews fit in as part of this.

The Child Maintenance Service already has a suite of strong enforcement powers at its disposal. These include, using Enforcement Agents (previously known as bailiffs) to take control of goods, forcing the sale of property, removal of driving licence or UK passport, deductions directly from earnings and bank accounts or even commitment to prison.

Department for Work and Pensions: Information Officers**Sarah Olney:** [\[14165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff in his Department worked in communications roles in each of the last two years.

Paul Maynard:

On 18 July 2023 there were 146.87 communication professionals working within the Department.

On 1 August 2022 there were 139.18 communication professionals working within the Department.

Department for Work and Pensions: Mortgages**Sarah Olney:** [\[14164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff in his Department worked on support for mortgage interest in each of the last two years.

Mims Davies:

The information requested is not available and to provide would incur disproportionate cost.

Department for Work and Pensions: Procurement**Alistair Strathern:** [\[13653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to his Department’s publication entitled DWP commercial pipeline at September 2023, published on 28 September 2023, when he plans to put the framework contract that includes security guarding services, reference project_25880, out to tender.

Paul Maynard:

The Invitation to Tender for Security Guarding Services was published on 6th October 2023 via Lot 3c of the Crown Commercial Services Framework for Facilities Management and Workplace Services (RM6232).

■ Driving Licences and Passports

Dr Thérèse Coffey:

[\[14856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many driving licences have been cancelled due to avoid order to disqualification; and how many passports have been cancelled due to lack of payment for child maintenance in each of the last 10 years.

Paul Maynard:

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) has an extensive range of Enforcement Powers and sanctions available to them to ensure parents meet their financial obligations to their children.

The CMS' strategy is to tackle payment breakdowns at the earliest opportunity. The CMS attempts to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of its enforcement system, by deciding what is appropriate on a case-by-case basis. Sanctions are only used as a last resort when every other method of recovering unpaid child maintenance has been attempted.

These include:

- referral to Enforcement Agents
- registering a Paying Parent's debt on the Register of Judgments, Orders and Fines
- using an order for sale to sell a Paying Parent's property or assets.
- stopping the Paying Parent getting or keeping a driving licence or passport
- sending the Paying Parent to prison

Statistics on sanctions are published as part of the CMS [quarterly statistics](#) in Table 7.2 of the [National tables](#).

This table contains information on court referrals which resulted in an outcome. It does not contain information on applications which were stopped before court. There are several potential reasons the CMS may not go ahead with a court case, including but not exclusively:

- The Paying Parent paid in full before the hearing date
- The payment agreement was accepted
- The Receiving Parent no longer wishes to proceed with the enforcement action

From the table, between July 2019 and September 2023, there have been 2 driving disqualifications and 3 passport confiscations.

From the quarter ending September 2020 to the quarter ending September 2023, there have been 4,311 applications to the courts in England, Wales, and Scotland with the following outcomes:

- 735 suspended prison sentences
- 15 suspended disqualifications from driving
- 6 immediate prison sentences

- 2 immediate disqualifications from driving.

Following the Child Support (Enforcement) Act 2023, the Government proposes to bring into force a legislative change to accelerate the enforcement process, reducing current liability enforcement from 22 weeks to as low as 6 weeks. The change will introduce a simpler administrative process to obtain a liability order against those paying parents who actively avoid their responsibilities. This will enable the Child Maintenance Service to take faster enforcement action, affecting at least 10,000 cases each year.

■ Employment: Health and Safety

Dan Carden:

[14916]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to ensure worker safety for those working (a) shifts and (b) unsociable hours.

Paul Maynard:

The [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#) (HSWA) and The [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#) (MHSWR) both place general duties on employers with regard to managing the risks to health and safety of their employees. This includes health and safety risks associated with shift work and working unsociable hours.

HSWA places a duty on all employers, so far as is reasonably practicable, to protect the health, safety, and welfare at work of all their employees. MHSWR places a duty on all employers to make an assessment of the risks to their employees from work activities and introduce measures that are 'reasonably practicable' to remove or control these risks.

This includes any health and safety risks associated with the number of hours worked; how these hours are scheduled and hazards such as fatigue, and its likelihood of occurring because of shift working.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published guidance for employers to support them in managing the health and safety of shift workers ([Managing shift work \[HSG 256 \]](#)) and [Hints and tips for shift-workers \(hse.gov.uk\)](#) to improve sleep quality, increase alertness and reduce health risk.

■ Health and Safety

Ian Lavery:

[14874]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps his Department is taking to meet its obligations under the International Labour Organisation Convention on Occupational Safety and Health 1981.

Paul Maynard:

The Government takes seriously the obligation to provide a safe and healthy working environment in the United Kingdom (UK).

While the UK has not ratified the International Labour Organisation's 1981 Convention on Occupational Safety and Health, there are already general and specific duties on employers, in our primary and secondary legislation, that require them to ensure the health and safety of their employees. Some of those duties predate the 1981 Convention, such as the well-established duties in Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

■ Pensions Dashboard Programme

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[14775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent estimate he has made of when he will receive an updated assessment of the pensions dashboard programme from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

Paul Maynard:

The Infrastructure and Projects Authority is expected to carry out its next review of the Pensions Dashboard Programme in early summer.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Veterans

Steve McCabe: [\[12908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an estimate of the number of veterans that claim Personal Independence Payments in the West Midlands.

Mims Davies:

The information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Remploy: Workplace Pensions

Alistair Strathern: [\[13654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what payments his Department has made to the Remploy Ltd Pension and Assurance Scheme in each of the last 15 years.

Mims Davies:

The Department for Work and Pensions became the sponsor employer for the Remploy Ltd Pension and Assurance Scheme on 1 April 2016. Prior to that date, the Disabled Persons Employment Corporation Ltd (formerly Remploy Ltd) was the sponsor employer for the Scheme.

The payments made by the department to the scheme since 1 April 2016 are as follows:

2016-17 - £11 million

2017-18 – £79.59 million

2018-19 - £27.85 million

2019-20 - £32.16 million

2020-21 – £27.00 million

2021-22 - nil

2022-23 - nil

The triennial valuation of the Scheme as at 31 March 2022 concluded that no further payments were required by the department at the current time.

■ Sick Pay: Women

Neil Coyle: [\[14883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will take steps to help support women to meet the lower earnings limit for statutory sick pay.

Jo Churchill:

The government has taken steps to support all individuals to meet the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL).

At Autumn Statement 2023, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the government will freeze the LEL at 2023/24 levels in 2024/25. This follows on from freezing the LEL in 2022 to 2023, to support individuals with the cost of living. Since 2019, 500,000 more people now earn above that Lower Earnings threshold and can therefore benefit from Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

■ Support for Mortgage Interest

Sarah Olney: [\[13798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many applications for Support for Mortgage Interest loans have been (a) rejected and (b) accepted in each of the last two years.

Mims Davies:

We do not record the information requested because eligible benefit claimants are offered a loan when they become eligible for Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) which they can choose to accept. It is worth noting that we publish, on a quarterly basis, the number of households who are in receipt of SMI [here](#).

Sarah Olney: [\[13799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much money has been paid out for Support for Mortgage Interest loans in each of the last 2 years.

Mims Davies:

The amount of SMI payments made in the financial year 2021/22 is £25 million and financial year 2022/23 is £22 million. This is rounded to the nearest million and is in relation to households in payment in Great Britain.

■ Universal Credit

Sir Stephen Timms: [\[14776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether his Department has made an estimate of the number and proportion of monthly universal credit payments that differed from the amount listed in a claimant's journal in the last 12 months.

Jo Churchill:

Monthly Universal Credit payments are not listed in a customer's journal. Payment details are recorded on a customer statement.

■ Universal Credit: Housing

Alistair Strathern: [\[14996\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many recipients of Universal Credit had their Universal Credit housing cost element removed for a period due to moving properties midway through the period in the last 12 months; and how many and what proportion of recipients declared that they moved with more than 90% of the pay period completed.

Mims Davies:

The data requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate costs.

■ Universal Credit: Telephone Services

Sarah Olney: [\[13800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many calls were received by the universal credit helpline in each month of the last two years.

Jo Churchill:

The tables below show the volume of calls received (Calls Offered to Agent Queue) by Universal Credit each month.

MONTH YEAR	CALLS OFFERED TO AGENT QUEUE
Jan-2022	1,403,295
Feb-2022	1,567,168
Mar-2022	1,633,545
MONTH YEAR	CALLS OFFERED TO AGENT QUEUE
Apr-2022	1,499,101

MONTH YEAR	CALLS OFFERED TO AGENT QUEUE
May-2022	1,528,005
Jun-2022	1,491,626
Jul-2022	1,334,005
Aug-2022	1,359,542
Sep-2022	1,392,858
Oct-2022	1,318,787
Nov-2022	1,280,920
Dec-2022	1,150,052
Jan-2023	1,297,883
Feb-2023	1,164,493
Mar-2023	1,345,024

MONTH YEAR	CALLS OFFERED TO AGENT QUEUE
Apr-2023	1,213,815
May-2023	1,223,812
Jun-2023	1,215,854
Jul-2023	1,150,900
Aug-2023	1,213,767
Sep-2023	1,263,332
Oct-2023	1,323,566
Nov-2023	1,307,174
Dec-2023	1,148,327
Jan-2024	1,413,983

DISCLAIMER

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business. As such, it has not been subjected to the rigorous quality assurance checks applied to our published official statistics. As DWP holds the information internally, we have released it. However, it is possible information held by DWP may change due to operational reasons and we recommend that caution be applied when using it.

Sarah Olney:

[\[13801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average waiting time for a caller to the universal credit helpline was in each month in the last two years.

Jo Churchill:

The tables below show the average waiting time (Average Speed to Answer) for all calls received by Universal Credit each month in hours, minutes and seconds format (hh:mm:ss).

MONTH/YEAR	AVERAGE SPEED TO ANSWER (HH:MM:SS)
Jan-2022	00:00:31
Feb-2022	00:01:50
Mar-2022	00:01:58

MONTH/YEAR	AVERAGE SPEED TO ANSWER (HH:MM:SS)
Apr-2022	00:03:21
May-2022	00:03:58
Jun-2022	00:03:53
Jul-2022	00:02:58
Aug-2022	00:03:40
Sep-2022	00:05:01
Oct-2022	00:02:46
Nov-2022	00:01:25
Dec-2022	00:02:23
Jan-2023	00:02:13
Feb-2023	00:01:49
Mar-2023	00:01:28

MONTH YEAR	AVERAGE SPEED TO ANSWER (HH:MM:SS)
Apr-2023	00:03:39
May-2023	00:02:01
Jun-2023	00:01:30
Jul-2023	00:01:53
Aug-2023	00:02:59
Sep-2023	00:03:17
Oct-2023	00:04:24
Nov-2023	00:02:52
Dec-2023	00:03:03
Jan-2024	00:02:13

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Sarah Olney:

[\[14098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many calls to the universal credit helpline were abandoned in each of the last two years.

Jo Churchill:

The table below shows the number of Calls Abandoned (Calls abandoned is the term we use for calls placed in a queue but terminated before being answered) on Universal Credit telephone lines, by month, for the last two years.

MONTH - YEAR	CALLS ABANDONED
Jan-2022	24,556
Feb-2022	82,413
Mar-2022	86,234
Apr-2022	122,295
May-2022	146,088

MONTH - YEAR	CALLS ABANDONED
Jun-2022	130,226
Jul-2022	85,719
Aug-2022	109,072
Sep-2022	152,761
Oct-2022	92,832
Nov-2022	39,043
Dec-2022	56,171
Jan-2023	63,110
Feb-2023	48,763
Mar-2023	51,304
Apr-2023	110,399
May-2023	59,434
Jun-2023	45,069
Jul-2023	52,643
Aug-2023	80,659
Sep-2023	95,546
Oct-2023	128,193
Nov-2023	89,078
Dec-2023	89,325
Jan-2024	82,469

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WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Online Slots Response

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society
(Stuart Andrew):**

[\[HCWS285\]](#)

I wish to inform the House that His Majesty's Government has today published its response to the 'Consultation on proposals for a maximum stake limit for online slots games'.

Online slots games can be associated with large losses, long sessions, and binge play, posing a higher risk of gambling harm. However, unlike land-based gaming machines which offer broadly similar games, they have no statutory stake limits. The [Gambling Act Review white paper](#), published last April, committed to addressing the risk posed to players by these theoretically limitless online slots stakes. This is in line with the Government's objectives of protecting people from gambling-related harm, levelling the regulatory playing field between offline and online gambling, and more broadly bringing our gambling regulation into the smartphone era.

The consultation ran from 26 July to 4 October and invited views on a stake limit for online slots games of £2, £5, £10 or £15 per spin. It also outlined options for additional protections for those aged 18 to 24 through a £2 limit, a £4 limit, or specific protections on a case-by-case basis.

Following consultation, the Government will introduce a statutory maximum stake limit of £5 per spin. We will also introduce a statutory maximum limit of £2 per spin for young adults aged 18-24 years old, who the evidence suggests can be particularly vulnerable to harms associated with high stakes play.

We believe these limits are proportionate and will achieve the Government's stated objectives of reducing the risk of gambling-related harm while minimising the risk of unintended consequences and disruption for the vast majority of gamblers who do not suffer harm. Importantly, these changes bring online slot games in line with existing restrictions on slot machines in casinos. These limits are also aligned with the recommendation made by the DCMS Select Committee's Second Report into Gambling Regulation, published in December 2023.

Our intention is that the imposed limits should serve as a maximum stake which customers can choose to stake up to, rather than as a new default which operators drive customers towards, or which is otherwise seen as objectively 'safe'. We will continue to monitor the evidence base and there will be future opportunities to review and if necessary adjust the limits.

Stake limits will also build on existing protections and controls for those who gamble through online slots games and will work alongside other measures outlined in the

gambling white paper, including frictionless financial risk checks, data sharing on high-risk customers, and making online games safer by design.

The limits will come into force in September this year, once we have laid the necessary legislation. The white paper package also contained proposals that will support the land-based gambling industry and the introduction of a statutory levy for research, prevention and treatment. The consultations for these measures have now closed and we will publish our response to them in the coming months.

I will deposit a copy of the Consultation in the libraries of both houses.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Pollack in western waters

Minister of State (Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries) (Mark Spencer):
[\[HCWS288\]](#)

Background

The UK, as an independent coastal state, participates in bilateral, trilateral and multilateral fisheries negotiations. In these negotiations, the UK strives to improve the sustainable management of fisheries and support our fishing industry in line with the objectives of the Fisheries Act.

As a result of quota share uplifts agreed in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the UK has approximately 120,000 tonnes more quota from the 2024 negotiations than it would have received as an EU Member State. We have so far secured £970 million of fishing opportunities for 2024, an increase from £900m in 2023.

In June 2023, the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) provided advice that for pollack in western waters the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for 2024 should be set at zero for the first time. Defra negotiated a UK-EU bycatch TAC of 832 tonnes to avoid 'choking' other healthy fisheries in the southwest, where pollack is a bycatch. This would not, however, allow vessels to target pollack.

Throughout this process, we have engaged closely with industry representatives and have understood that, even with a bycatch TAC, this would pose difficulties for fishers who have predominantly targeted pollack. My department has been working to find ways to assist and support those most affected with the long-term sustainability of the fishery in mind.

We want to see the long-term recovery of this pollack fishery and believe the measures set out below will help support the sector through this time, securing a vibrant and prosperous seafood sector that supports thriving coastal communities.

Re-opening of the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme

I am pleased to announce that the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS), England's domestic grant scheme, is open again as of 23 February 2024. The scheme supports a variety of measures including support for setting up new practices or processes for new

income streams, and training and skills development to support business diversification, and the creation of partnerships so local stakeholders can participate in co-design and management. **It will provide up to £6 million in grant funding for the fishing industry this year.** Applications from all fishers are encouraged but to assist those most impacted by the zero TAC for pollack, applications from those affected fishers will be expedited, bringing the application processing time down from 8 weeks to 4. This will mean we will be able get support to those most affected more quickly.

Launch of a New Scientific Study and Long-term Sustainability of the Stock

ICES advice suggests that the issues facing pollack are highly likely to last multiple years. We are working nationally and with the EU in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF) to help improve the scientific assessment of pollack and the long-term sustainability of the stock.

For example, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) is leading a scientific study, based on collaborative research between fishers and scientists, following an approach used in the Fisheries Industry Science Partnership scheme. Fishers will be engaged in the project to collect genetic samples from around 3,000 pollack. These fishers will receive payment for their initial training, payment for catching the fish required for the study and would be able to sell the pollack they caught as part of the study. The study aims to understand more about the abundance and stock structure of pollack. Not only will this help us understand the stock better, it will also help us to improve the scientific assessment of pollack, as we are committed to doing with the EU through the SCF. **Applications, along with detailed eligibility criteria, will be open as soon possible for the most affected pollack fishers to apply to the study.**

Our work also involves improving our understanding of the recreational fishery, with a view to the introduction of limits where appropriate and where these are likely to be effective in reducing pressure on the stock.

We will continue to work together with industry on this and any potential future management options towards the recovery of the stock. We are also looking at the future management of this stock through our Fisheries Management Plans, specifically the Celtic Sea and Western Channel Demersal plans, to be published towards the end of 2025.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Israel/Gaza update

Minister of State for Development and Africa (Mr Andrew Mitchell):

[\[HCWS289\]](#)

The Government supports Israel's right to self-defence, in compliance with International Humanitarian Law, against the horrific terror attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023.

We condemn the slaughter, abuse and gender-based violence perpetrated on 7th October 2023, Hamas' use of civilian areas, their continued failure to release hostages and their ongoing launching of attacks into Israel.

We are working to end the fighting in Gaza, to stop the further loss of civilian lives and create the conditions for a permanent peace.

The most effective way to end the fighting in Gaza is to agree an immediate humanitarian pause, which we have consistently called for. This would allow for the safe release of hostages and a significant increase in the aid going to Gaza.

Crucially, it would also provide a vital opportunity to establish the conditions for a genuinely long-term and sustainable ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

That is a position shared by our close partners, and what our diplomatic efforts are focused on.

We have set out the vital elements for a lasting peace, namely:

- the immediate release of all hostages;
- removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel;
- Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza;
- the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; and,
- a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

We are increasingly concerned about the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and recognise the urgent need to significantly scale up the flow of aid getting in. All parties must take immediate steps to ensure unhindered humanitarian access, ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies and ensure the UN and aid agencies can reach civilians in need throughout Gaza.

The UK is stepping up support. We have tripled our aid commitment. In the last week, family tents provided by the UK and Qatar have arrived in Rafah, and on Wednesday, the UK and Jordan air-dropped life-saving aid to a hospital in northern Gaza, providing four tonnes of vital supplies including medicines and food for hospital patients and staff.

We remain deeply concerned at the number of civilian casualties to date, and at the prospect of an Israeli military offensive into Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it. We continue to urge Israel to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming citizens.

Ultimately, a two-state solution is the best way to ensure safety and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. Our long-standing position remains that we will recognise a Palestinian State at a time that is most conducive to the peace process.

The Palestinian Authority has an important long-term role to play and will need continued support from us and our partners, but it must also take concrete steps on reform. We remain concerned about the situation in the West Bank— and have taken action in response to extremist settler violence.

We are committed to finding a lasting resolution to this conflict that ensures Israelis and Palestinians can live in the future with dignity and security. It is the aim of the Government to see an end to the fighting as soon as possible and the creation of a permanent peace based on a new political horizon for the region.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Correction to Written Parliamentary Questions

Minister of State (Minister for Health and Secondary Care) (Andrew Stephenson):
[\[HCWS286\]](#)

I wish to draw the attention of the House to data errors in the Government's responses to two Parliamentary Questions (numbers 332 and 12694) tabled by the Honourable Member for Ilford North. The questions enquired as to the costs paid by the National Health Service for the outsourcing of teleradiology in the last five years.

The data provided by NHS England to the Department for Health and Social Care was incorrect. Therefore, the PQ response underreported the number of scans provided in the requested timeframe.

NHS England has been asked by My Right Honourable Friend, the Member of Parliament for Louth and Horncastle, to urgently conduct a full audit of the quality of the data. Once NHSE has completed the audit, and I am satisfied that the data is sufficiently robust, the house will be updated.

HOME OFFICE

■ Working Arrangement between the United Kingdom and Frontex

The Minister of State for Countering Illegal Migration (Michael Tomlinson):
[\[HCWS287\]](#)

I am pleased to announce that a landmark working arrangement between the UK and Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) is being launched today.

The working arrangement is a non-legally binding arrangement that provides a long-term framework for mutually beneficial cooperation with Frontex across a range of operational areas to tackle illegal migration and cross-border crime. A working arrangement is the standard means for non-EU countries to cooperate with Frontex and various other third countries have similar arrangements, including the USA, Canada, Albania and Ukraine.

Our aim is to work with Frontex through this arrangement to enhance our respective and joint operational responses to illegal migration and cross-border crime, making the UK's

and EU's borders safer and more secure. This is another step in our cooperation with European partners to tackle illegal migration into and across Europe.

The working arrangement includes provision for cooperation on:

- information and intelligence exchange, situational awareness and risk analysis, including through the framework of EUROSUR (the European Border Surveillance System);
- training and capacity building;
- cooperation on research and innovation projects;
- technical and operational cooperation, including the deployment of UK and Frontex staff in observation, advisory, or coordination capacities;
- sharing best practice and expertise, including on border management; and
- exchange of Liaison Officers.

This follows the previous announcement regarding the opening of discussions on a working arrangement by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the European Commission at the Council of Europe Summit in May 2023.

We intend to begin cooperation under this working arrangement as soon as possible, with an initial focus on sharing knowledge, expertise, and information on mutual priorities. Over the coming months, the Home Office will build on this by agreeing detailed cooperation and operational plans with Frontex to support further collaboration. We will announce more detail in due course.

Organised immigration crime and people smuggling are global challenges that require shared solutions and ambitions. Signing the working arrangement underscores our shared commitment to tackling illegal migration and organised immigration crime, be it in the Channel, along the EU's external border, or further upstream.

The working arrangement and an accompanying Explanatory Memorandum will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and both documents will also be published on GOV.UK.