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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Written Answers.....1

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Ministers and others who make Statements or answer Questions are referred to only by name, not their ministerial or other title. The current list of ministerial and other responsibilities is as follows.

<i>Minister</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Baroness Evans of Bowes Park	Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal
Earl Howe	Deputy Leader of the House of Lords
Lord Agnew of Oulton	Minister of State, Cabinet Office and Treasury
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon	Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development
Lord Ashton of Hyde	Chief Whip
Baroness Barran	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Baroness Berridge	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade
Lord Bethell	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care and Whip
Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist	Whip
Lord Callanan	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Earl of Courtown	Deputy Chief Whip
Lord Gardiner of Kimble	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Baroness Goldie	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park	Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development
Lord Greenhalgh	Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Lord Grimstone of Boscobel	Minister of State, Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for International Trade
Lord Keen of Elie	Advocate-General for Scotland and Ministry of Justice Spokesperson
Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay	Whip
Baroness Penn	Whip
Baroness Scott of Byfleet	Whip
Baroness Stedman-Scott	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions
Baroness Sugg	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development
Lord True	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport
Viscount Younger of Leckie	Whip

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Written Answers

Thursday, 21 May 2020

Agriculture: Subsidies

Asked by *Lord Farmer*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to reform the three crop rule in agriculture as part of the UK's withdrawal from the EU; and what plans they have to inform the farming industry of any such rule changes by the end of June to enable planning for 2021. [[HL4123](#)]

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: We are looking to take the opportunities which leaving the EU presents to make further simplifications for the 2021 Basic Payment Scheme. This could include removing some or all of the burdensome greening rules which have failed to deliver for the environment such as the 'three crop rule' which tells farmers how many crops they must grow, regardless of the demands of the market. Relevant regulations will be subject to Parliament's approval. We will announce the new rules to farmers in due course.

Airlines: Coronavirus

Asked by *Lord Blencathra*

To ask Her Majesty's Government which airlines have applied for financial help in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and for each such airline to give (1) the amount of financial support requested, (2) the recipients of any support given and the amount they received. [[HL4105](#)]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We do not comment on the commercial or financial matters of specific private firms, because this information is commercially sensitive. As has been reported in the media, a number of aviation companies have accessed the unprecedented package of economic measures Government has put in place during this time. These schemes include the Job Retention Scheme, the Covid Corporate Financing Facility, and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Schemes.

Airlines: Economic Situation

Asked by *Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) the resilience, and (2) the financial situation, of airlines which operate in the UK. [[HL4075](#)]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We recognise that airlines are facing a number of challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. They have seen unprecedented falls in demand which have had a significant impact of their financial position. To this end we are maintaining a regular dialogue with airlines across the sector to understand the positions they are in and to encourage

them to draw on the unprecedented package of cross-economy financial support measures which the Government has made available.

This engagement sits alongside the work of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in its role as independent regulator of the UK aviation sector. The CAA is responsible for the assessment of UK airlines under the formal licensing regime, and the financial health of airlines is taken into consideration throughout this process.

Apprentices: Coronavirus

Asked by *Lord Watson of Invergowrie*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure sustainable funding for the apprenticeship sector in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's Review of Funding Band methodology and their review of the apprenticeship levy in England as announced in the Budget. [[HL4158](#)]

Asked by *Lord Watson of Invergowrie*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to take account of the impact of COVID-19 when undertaking the review of the apprenticeship levy in England, as announced in the Budget. [[HL4159](#)]

Baroness Berridge: In 2020-21, funding available for investment in apprenticeships in England will remain around £2.5 billion, double what was spent in 2010-11. Budgets for future years will be set by HM Treasury in due course.

Apprenticeships are a valuable route into good quality employment and help to boost employers' skills – they will play an important role in supporting our economic recovery, post COVID-19.

The government is committed to improving the operation of the apprenticeship levy, as my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed in the Budget in March. We continue to engage closely with businesses and listen to their views about the operation of the apprenticeship levy and the programme more broadly, taking into account the impact of COVID-19.

In response to the challenges of COVID-19, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's consultation on changes to the funding band recommendation process was extended six weeks and closed on 18 May. It will launch a second consultation on a refined model later this year.

Aviation: Coronavirus

Asked by *Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures have been put in place to protect the safety of passengers (1) travelling to airports, (2) in airports, and (3) on aircraft. [[HL4074](#)]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government has recently published safer travel guidance for passengers, including advice on social distancing and face coverings. Public Health England advises that there are some circumstances when wearing a face covering may be marginally beneficial as a precautionary measure. The evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you, but it may protect others if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms.

If you choose to wear one, it is important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on and after taking them off.

Cabinet Office: Directors

Asked by Lord Tyler

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the appointment on 12 May of four Non-Executive Directors to the Cabinet Office was subject to the requirements of (1) the Ministerial Code, and (2) Civil Service open competition. [[HL4464](#)]

Lord True: Section 3.5 of the Ministerial code sets out the requirements for departmental Boards. The appointment of these members met those requirements.

Non-Executive Board members are not civil servants. Non-Executive Board members for departments are not subject to the requirements set out in the Governance Code for Public Appointments for regulated positions. However, in line with best practice, the appointment process of these Non Executives was open and transparent, and met the principles set out in the Governance Code for Public Appointments.

Children: Housing

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many children in families receiving housing benefit or the Universal Credit housing costs element share a bedroom with a sibling or parent. [[HL4161](#)]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The information requested is not available.

China: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Maginnis of Drumglass

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) reports that COVID-19 originated in a laboratory in China; (2) the response by the government of China to the initial outbreak of COVID-19; and (3) any delay in that government informing other governments of the outbreak; and what plans they have to change their approach to relations with the government of China as a result of any such assessment. [[HL4096](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: In time we will need to work with the international community, including China, to learn lessons and look at why this outbreak happened, and how to prevent something similar in future.

China is an important partner for the UK and has a vital role in the global response to the pandemic. Like the rest of the world, China has faced an unprecedented health crisis. The Chinese people - like so many others - have faced enormous sacrifices and challenges. We have always said that transparent and accurate information about the virus is essential for an effective global response.

The Government remains clear-eyed about the challenges and risks from China, and our approach is rooted in our values and our interests. It has always been the case that where we have concerns, we raise them, and where we need to take robust action, we will.

Coronavirus: Disease Control

Asked by Lord Hain

To ask Her Majesty's Government on which dates they discussed ways in which to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic with overseas counterparts. [[HL4057](#)]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is playing a major role in the global response to Coronavirus. Ministers and senior officials across government have carried out regular and extensive bilateral and multilateral engagement, as well as work with international companies to tackle the crisis.

Since the beginning of March, the Foreign Secretary has carried out over 66 conversations and virtual meetings, including G7 Foreign Ministers meeting on 25 March, NATO Foreign Ministers on 2 April and the G7 Leaders on 16 April. This intensive engagement will continue as we galvanise international support for our Four-Point Plan.

Asked by Lord Rosser

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the announcement of the lockdown on 23 March, between which dates was the letter and enclosed leaflet from the Prime Minister updating recipients on the steps being taken to combat COVID-19 despatched; and what were the maximum number of days allowed, under any contractual arrangements, between date of despatch and date of delivery. [[HL4078](#)]

Lord True: In light of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Government has developed a national campaign to provide information, guidance and reassurance to the public.

As part of this, a letter from the Prime Minister was sent to every UK household to urge them to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. It also outlined the guidance everyone should follow and the measures the government has put in place to fight coronavirus and to support businesses and workers.

The letter was despatched into Royal Mail's postal system between 31 March and 6 April. Royal Mail confirmed delivery of all letters by the end of 15 April.

Details of commercially sensitive information such as specific contractual agreements are not normally disclosed.

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to issue electronic bracelets to people breaking quarantine restrictions in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. [HL4155]

Lord Keen of Elie: The government uses electronic monitoring, tagging technology, where a requirement such as a curfew or exclusion zone is imposed by the court as part of a community order or suspended sentence order or to support court imposed Bail. The technology is also imposed on some eligible offenders on release from custody.

Parliament has provided the courts with the full range of sentencing powers to deal effectively with offenders who break social distancing rules. These range from fines to custodial sentences for more serious offences where coronavirus is used to threaten others. We have already seen significant sentences imposed on those using coronavirus as a threat. There are currently no plans in place to use electronic monitoring technology to monitor compliance with the Covid-19 regulations for the general public.

Coronavirus: International Cooperation

Asked by Lord Hain

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent diplomatic steps they have taken with overseas counterparts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL3860]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is playing a leading role internationally with partners and allies to: support an effective and co-ordinated global health response, reinforcing the resilience of vulnerable countries; pursue a vaccine, better testing and treatments; support the global economy, including keeping trade and supply chains open; and enable travelling nationals to return home where necessary. The Prime Minister, Chancellor, and Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, Health and International Development have all been actively engaged in dialogue with other world leaders through meetings with their G7 and G20 counterparts, the UN and other multilateral institutions and member states, in order to galvanise a stronger global effort. On 4 May we co-hosted the launch event of the Coronavirus Global Response Initiative, which generated \$8bn for research and development, and on 4 June the Prime Minister will host the Global Vaccine Summit, aiming to galvanise worldwide support for equitable access to a vaccine and for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Coronavirus: Prisons

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Bethell on 4 May (HL3394), whether any prisoners have yet been tested for COVID-19; when they expect testing will begin in a systematic way; what plans they have to prioritise the most overcrowded prisons; and how many COVID-19 (1) cases, and (2) deaths, have been reported among (1) prison staff, and (2) prisoners. [HL4118]

Lord Keen of Elie: COVID-19 testing is ongoing in prisons and is being conducted by internal or external healthcare practitioners on some symptomatic prisoners on site. The testing capacity is dependent on local commissioning services, therefore the numbers of those tested varies by establishment. However, prisoners that require hospital care are being transferred to hospital and may also be tested there. We are working with the Department of Health and Social Care to consider next steps for testing in prisons.

As of 17:00 on Sunday 17 May, 411 prisoners and 540 prison staff members have tested positive for COVID-19. This is an accumulative total and does not represent the number of live cases. Some of those that previously tested positive will have now made a full recovery.

Sadly, as of Friday 15 May, 21 prisoners and 8 members of prison staff have died. These figures represent cases where it was known that the individual had tested positive for the virus. It is a matter for coroners to determine a cause of death.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is containing the spread of COVID-19 within jails using an approach known as 'compartmentalisation'. Through this approach, staff have isolated those with symptoms, and many prisons have been able to shield the vulnerable and quarantine new arrivals. Modelling by HMPPS and Public Health England indicates that jails are successfully limiting deaths and the transmission of the virus within the estate.

Culture and Mass Media: Finance

Asked by The Earl of Clancarty

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the financial support being provided to the cultural, creative and media sectors in Germany; what plans they have, if any, to introduce a specific financial support package for the cultural, creative and media sectors in the UK; and what representations they have received in relation to such support. [HL3954]

Baroness Barran: The Government has noted international responses to support the creative, cultural and media sectors. Direct comparisons are difficult, as the sectors and the measures taken are different in each country. We are considering international examples as we continue to work with arm's-length bodies, sector representatives, and individual organisations to

understand the impact of COVID-19 and what support is needed. DCMS Ministers are in regular touch with creative, cultural and media organisations through regular roundtable sessions, including the Recreation and Leisure Taskforce announced recently to coordinate safe reopening.

Germany has announced a significant package for the self-employed and small businesses. That includes those in the cultural sector, but is not limited to them. Similarly, the UK's support covers all sectors and the creative and cultural industries have benefited from unprecedented support for business and workers to protect them against the current economic emergency including almost £300 billion of guarantees – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP. The cultural, creative and media sectors can access a range of support measures including:

- A 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England
- The retail, hospitality and leisure grant fund (RHLGF) Small business grant funding (SBGF) of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief 8 million jobs have now been furloughed with £11.1 billion claimed so far through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).
- 2 million Self-employment Income Support (SEISS) claims have been submitted worth £6.1 billion.
- Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) has seen 40,564 loans worth £7.25 billion approved so far.
- The Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS) has seen 86 approved loans totalling £0.59 billion.
- Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs) has seen 464,393 approved loans so far worth £14.18 billion for small businesses.
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- The Time To Pay scheme, through which businesses in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs
- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020
- There were 4.2m people on Universal Credit on 9 April, with 1.5m claims made in the period 13 March 2020 to 9 April 2020.

The Business Support website provides further information about how businesses can access the support that has been made available, who is eligible, when the schemes open and how to apply - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support>.

Separately, the Arts Council England has made £160 million of emergency funding available specifically for the arts and culture sectors, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund £50 million to heritage and museums organisations, originally with grants of between £3,000

and £50,000 available and now with grants of £50,000 to £250,000.

Eleven Plus: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Watson of Invergowrie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the continuation of 11-plus exams in state schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL4175]

Baroness Berridge: Arrangements for selecting pupils by ability are for the admission authorities for selective schools to decide. It will be important for admission authorities to consider what changes they may need to make to their arrangements for this year.

We are in discussion with representatives of the sector and will provide advice in due course.

Environment Protection: British Overseas Territories

Asked by Baroness Young of Old Scone

To ask Her Majesty's Government when the results of the Darwin Plus projects whose initial applications were submitted between May and July 2019 will be announced; and whether the allocation of the funds to projects will be in line with the results of the consultation on 'Safeguarding the environment in British Overseas Territories' which concluded on 26 July 2019. [HL4283]

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The successful projects for the recent round of Darwin Plus will be announced shortly.

I was encouraged that we received a strong response to the Call for Evidence on 'Safeguarding the environment in British Overseas Territories', with 51 responses received from the Overseas Territories, NGOs and other interested parties. This was an important evidence gathering-exercise designed to inform the Government's preparations for the next spending review. The summary of responses was published on 31 March 2020, after the application and assessment of Darwin Plus applications was completed. The findings of the Call for Evidence will be used to inform future funding for environmental support in the Overseas Territories.

Equal Pay

Asked by Baroness Goudie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of employers which can provide the gender pay gap data for the 2019–20 reporting year now. [HL4087]

Asked by Baroness Goudie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the pressures facing employers in

regard to reporting gender pay gap data for the 2019–20 reporting year. [HL4088]

Asked by Baroness Goudie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to give high priority to closing the gender pay gap during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL4090]

Asked by Baroness Goudie

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to reconsider their decision, announced on 24 March, to suspend gender pay gap reporting for the 2019–2020 reporting year until 2021. [HL4091]

Baroness Berridge: We recognise that employers are facing unprecedented uncertainty and pressure due to the Coronavirus pandemic. A number of employers contacted the Government, prior to the announcement on non-enforcement, to highlight their concerns about being unable to meet the gender pay gap reporting deadlines this year.

Due to the COVID 19 outbreak, the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission suspended enforcement of the gender pay gap reporting deadlines for the 2019/20 reporting year.

Around 5,500 employers have reported their gender pay gap data to date for the 2019-20 reporting year, which includes more than 2,000 employers who published their data since the suspension of enforcement on 24 March. More employers may choose to report in the coming months and we will continue to provide support to those employers that wish to do so.

The gender pay gap is caused by a range of factors. In order to tackle it, we must ensure that everybody has equal access to opportunities. We will continue to encourage employers to take action to provide equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace.

We are currently considering the impact of the pandemic on the gender pay gap data for the current reporting year. If there are any changes to reporting in future, we will proactively communicate these to all employers.

Family Proceedings: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Farmer

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of remote private and public family law proceedings in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic [HL4124]

Lord Keen of Elie: The President of the Family Division published a report of a rapid consultation on the use of remote hearings in the family court due to the Covid-19 pandemic, produced by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, on 6 May. The Judiciary and HMCTS will further refine guidance on the use of remote hearings in family proceedings based on the evidence provided in this report.

Ferries: Coronavirus

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the measures in place to protect ferry services across the UK from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic [HL4072]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We announced on 24 April a package of support for up to 31 critical Roll On, Roll Off (RoRo) freight routes between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and mainland Europe, which will help to maintain capacity on these routes. We also announced a package of support to safeguard the vital lifeline services to the Isle of Wight and the Isles of Scilly.

We will continue to keep these schemes under review so that vital ferry routes are supported during the Covid-19 pandemic.

House of Lords: Costs

Asked by Baroness Doocey

To ask the Senior Deputy Speaker what is the total annual cost of employment for each member excepted from the 20 July 2010 resolution on allowances in the House, by virtue of being salaried, including (1) employer national insurance contributions, (2) employer pension contributions, and (3) any other costs. [HL4086]

Lord McFall of Alcluith: The employment costs for three Office Holders fall to the House of Lords budget – the Lord Speaker, the Chairman of Committees (also known as the Senior Deputy Speaker) and the Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees (also known as the Chair of the European Union Committee). In the 2019-20 financial year the total annual cost of employment was £382,328. This includes the salaries claimed, the Lords Office Holders Allowance claimed, and other employment costs not received by the office holders themselves, such as employer national insurance contributions and the apprenticeship levy.

Industrial Health and Safety: Coronavirus

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask Her Majesty's Government what extra resources they plan to provide to (1) the Health and Safety Executive, and (2) local councils, to ensure that any responsibilities to make workplaces safe from COVID-19 are met. [T] [HL4477]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The Government have announced additional funding of up to £14 million has been made available to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to support their advice and regulatory activity as businesses implement the new guidance on working safely. HSE's plans will develop as more businesses return to work and this will include checks that appropriate measures are in place to protect workers from COVID-19.

The Government has also announced a total of £3.2 billion of funding for councils to support their response to the pandemic. This is a significant package of support which responds to the range of pressures councils have told us they are facing and will support them to protect vital services.

Motor Vehicles: Testing

Asked by *Lord Jones of Cheltenham*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to backdate the six months extension period for vehicle MOT tests to 23 March. [HL4314]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government has no plans to amend the period set out in the Motor Vehicles (Tests) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020.

National Parks: Coronavirus

Asked by *Baroness Doocey*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what targeted support they are making available to businesses in National Parks both during and after the lockdown. [HL4252]

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: The Government has made available a wide range of support measures to businesses during these unprecedented times. This support is available to businesses in National Parks. These include help with business rates, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, the Bounce Back Loan scheme, and the discretionary fund set up to accommodate certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme.

The Government has been working with the National Park Authorities (NPAs) from the outset to understand the impacts from Covid-19, ensuring Parks make full use of the existing Government support schemes. We continue to engage closely with each NPA to assess the level of further support required.

North Korea: South Korea

Asked by *The Marquess of Lothian*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that the armed forces of North Korea and South Korea exchanged gunfire in the Demilitarised Zone on 3 May. [HL4134]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: On 3 May, gunshots fired from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) side of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) hit a guard post on the Republic of Korea (ROK) side. The ROK military discharged two volleys of warning fire towards a designated, unmanned area in response, in line with its established protocols. There was no escalation or any casualties. The United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) is still investigating

but the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff publicly said it assesses the DPRK shots were accidental.

We continue to urge the DPRK to return to the talks with the United States and deliver on its denuclearisation commitments.

Pakistan: Hate Crime

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Pakistan to end discrimination and persecution of Ahmadis. [HL4165]

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Pakistan about the case for removing hate speech from social media platforms in Pakistan, including hate speech towards Ahmadis. [HL4166]

Asked by *Baroness Cox*

To ask Her Majesty's Government (1) what assessment they have made of the statement by the government of Pakistan's Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs on 29 April that "the only punishment for blasphemers is beheading", and (2) what assessment they have made of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development's statement that such comments have contributed to an anti-Ahmadi campaign in Pakistan. [HL4167]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We engage at a senior level with the Pakistani Government on our concerns about the mistreatment of religious and ethnic groups, including Pakistanis from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. We are concerned by language that may incite violence against any religious or ethnic groups. As the Minister of State for South Asia with responsibility for human rights, I raised the UK's concerns about freedom of religion or belief and the protection of the Ahmadiyya community with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister, Dr Shireen Mazari, on 27 February and with the Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK, Nafees Zakaria, on 12 May. We will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the fundamental rights of all its citizens, as laid down in the constitution of Pakistan and in accordance with international standards.

Prison Accommodation

Asked by *Lord Hylton*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many prison cells are being shared; in which prisons such cells exist; and what steps they are taking to end overcrowding in prisons. [HL4130]

Lord Keen of Elie: Upon arrival into custody, all prisoners' suitability to share a cell is risk assessed. These assessments are based on numerous factors including

index offence, health concerns and security information (such as beliefs and prejudices).

As at 24th April 2020 14,653 cells in prisons in England and Wales were occupied by prisoners on a shared basis. The detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system.

The following prisons in England and Wales held prisoners on a shared basis as at 24 April 2020.

ALTCOURSE	HATFIELD	PRESCOED
ASHFIELD	HAVERIGG	PRESTON
ASKHAM GRANGE	HIGH DOWN	RANBY
AYLESBURY	HIGHPOINT	RISLEY
BEDFORD	HINDLEY	ROCHESTER
BELMARSH	HEWELL	RYE HILL
BERWYN	HOLLESLEY BAY	SEND
BIRMINGHAM	HOLME HOUSE	SPRING HILL
BRINSFORD	HULL	STAFFORD
BRISTOL	HUMBER	STANDFORD HILL
BRIXTON	HUNTERCOMBE	STOCKEN
BRONZEFIELD	ISIS	STOKE HEATH
BUCKLEY HALL	ISLE OF WIGHT	STYAL
BULLINGDON	KIRKHAM	SUDBURY
BURE	KIRKLEVINGTON GRANGE	SWALESIDE
CARDIFF	LANCASTER FARMS	SWANSEA
CHANNINGS WOOD	LEEDS	SWINFEN HALL
CHELMSFORD	LEICESTER	THAMESIDE
COLDINGLEY	LEWES	THE MOUNT
COOKHAM WOOD	LEYHILL	THE VERNE
DARTMOOR	LINCOLN	THORN CROSS
DEERBOLT	LINDHOLME	USK
DONCASTER	LITTLEHEY	WAKEFIELD
DOVEGATE	LIVERPOOL	WANDSWORTH
DOWNVIEW	LONG LARTIN	WARREN HILL
DRAKE HALL	LOW NEWTON	WAYLAND
DURHAM	LOWDHAM GRANGE	WEALSTUN
EAST SUTTON PARK	MAIDSTONE	WERRINGTON
EASTWOOD PARK	MANCHESTER	WETHERBY
ELMLEY	MOORLAND	WHATTON
ERLESTOKE	MORTON HALL IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE	WHITEMOOR
EXETER	NEW HALL	WINCHESTER

FEATHERSTONE	NORTH SEA CAMP	WOODHILL
FELTHAM	NORTHUMBERLAND	WORMWOOD SCRUBS
FORD	NORWICH	WYMOTT
FOREST BANK	NOTTINGHAM	
FOSTON HALL	OAKWOOD	
FRANKLAND	ONLEY	
FULL SUTTON	PARC	
GARTH	PENTONVILLE	
GARTREE	PETERBOROUGH	
GRENDON	PETERBOROUGH FEMALE	
GUYS MARSH	PORTLAND	

We remain committed to reducing crowding across the prison estate. In the year to March 2019, the proportion of prisoners held in crowded accommodation was 22.5%, down from 24.2% the previous year and levels of around 25% experienced since 2004.

Our plan for reducing prison crowding is to replace prisons that are operating over their certified normal accommodation levels with new accommodation that is safe, decent, and uncrowded and close current (crowded or partially crowded) capacity. The first steps in this direction have already been taken with the opening of 2,100 uncrowded prison places at HMP/YOI Berwyn; 206 uncrowded places in a houseblock at HMP Stocken; and a commitment to construct modern, decent, uncrowded prisons at the former HMP Wellingborough and HMP Glen Parva sites, which are due to open in 2021 and 2023, respectively, as well as a new prison to be built at HMP Full Sutton alongside the existing establishment.

Prison Visitors

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they estimate they will permit family visits to prisoners to resume. [HL4119]

Lord Keen of Elie: As of 24 March, social visits in prisons in England and Wales are temporarily suspended to enable us to ensure the safe and secure functioning of our prisons, while enforcing social distancing. These measures are part of the nationwide efforts to fight coronavirus and we will review the restrictions in line with updates to public health advice.

In recognition of the importance of continued contact with family and to ensure stability in our jails, the Government has moved quickly to keep prisoners in touch with their family members. This includes the provision of 900 locked mobile phones to establishments that do not yet have in-cell telephony.

Additionally, on 15 May, the Government announced that secure video calls will be introduced to prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) across England and

Wales to maintain vital family contact for prisoners and young offenders during the coronavirus pandemic.

Following a successful trial at HMP Berwyn, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is installing the technology at 10 institutions with a wider rollout in the coming weeks.

Public Transport: Coronavirus

Asked by Baroness Randerson

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure that public transport services are expanded to take account of their recommendation that employers stagger working hours to reduce the pressures on public transport once the COVID-19 lockdown is lifted. [HL4102]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The department has been working closely with transport operators and local partners to explore options for restoring public transport services. Is it clear that restoring services is challenging, for example due to the need to bring drivers out of furlough and equipment back online, and will therefore take time. We are working to ensure that services are ramped up over the coming weeks and are grateful for the work of transport workers and for their support.

The guidance we published for the travelling public is clear that journeys on public transport should only be made if they are essential, and then only if walking, cycling or driving is not an option. Peak times should be avoided if at all possible – we look to employers to support their staff to travel outside the peaks.

Recycling

Asked by Lord Greaves

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) the impact of the temporary closure of recycling companies on waste disposal authorities, and (2) the ability of those authorities to store or otherwise dispose of or deal with the recyclates collected or received from waste collection authorities. [HL4112]

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Recycling companies rely on Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) to provide them with some of the materials which can then be used to make new products. Defra officials have been working closely with local authorities and the waste sector to keep HWRCs open. There is no reason in law why HWRCs cannot be open and where possible, local authorities should seek to retain access to HWRC services for their residents to dispose of waste. The Government is not setting a date by which HWRCs should be open. We recognise that the opening of HWRCs will depend on local circumstances and resource availability. A “one size fits all” approach is not appropriate. The decision to open a HWRC remains with the relevant local authority. Our most recent guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-to-local-authorities-on-prioritising-waste-collections/managing-household-waste-and-recycling-centres-hwracs-in-england-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

Indications are that most local authorities have been able to maintain collection services for packaging and food waste and continue to send materials to be recycled. Material recovery facilities which receive, separate and prepare recyclable materials for reprocessing and recycling companies, have been operating whilst maintaining social distancing measures. The impacts of COVID-19 and related restrictions on these facilities and the recycling sector are being closely monitored by Defra. In addition, the Chartered Institute for Waste Management (CIWM) has worked with Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP), local authority bodies and commercial waste collectors to establish the WasteSupport platform to assist local authorities to access additional capacity in the commercial waste collection sector for processing waste.

For some materials (including waste electrical equipment, furniture, and textiles) there are particular challenges and Defra is in regular discussions with these sectors, including the reuse/repair and reprocessing organisations, about these.

The Environment Agency has published time-limited Regulatory Position Statements (RPSs) to allow some flexibility for local authorities and other operators where, for reasons beyond their control, compliance with certain regulatory requirements may not be possible due to COVID-19. These include the ability to store more material at a permitted site than the permit usually allows. Each COVID-19 RPS sets out when it can be applied and conditions that will need to comply with, to ensure that the risks to the environment and human health are minimised. More details can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-regulatory-position-statements>.

Defra has published guidance on prioritisation of waste services and on management of HWRCs during the current pandemic and continues to monitor the situation with local authorities and industry bodies.

Religion: Census

Asked by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

To ask Her Majesty's Government what consideration they gave to including Jainism as a religion in the 2021 census. [HL4310]

Asked by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

To ask Her Majesty's Government what consideration they gave to including Zoroastrianism as a religion in the 2021 census. [HL4386]

Lord True: Everyone who wishes to identify as being Jain or Zoroastrian in the 2021 Census will be able to do so, using the write-in option in the religion question,

supported online by the new search-as-you-type function. Both the Government and Office for National Statistics recognise the importance of ensuring that everyone who wishes to identify as Jain or Zoroastrian will be able to do so.

Ryanair: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Blencathra

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by Ryanair that it may take up to six months for customers to receive a refund for flights aborted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, what plans they have to (1) initiate proceedings against Ryanair to ensure customers are refunded in a timely manner, or (2) withdraw Ryanair's licence to operate. [HL4106]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: It is for the Civil Aviation Authority as the independent regulator to determine whether to initiate proceedings against individual airlines who are in breach of their obligations.

Government recognises the challenges businesses and consumers are experiencing with processing large volumes of refunds. In particular, we appreciate the frustration consumers may be experiencing. The government's position is clear - if a customer asks for a refund, that refund needs to be paid.

Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to expand the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies to include (1) immunologists, and (2) experts on large scale logistics. [HL4154]

Lord Callanan: Expert participation varies depending on the subjects being discussed. The Government Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Medical Officer will decide who or what expertise is needed for each meeting, typically drawing from leading experts from within government and relevant fields of academia and industry.

Social Security Benefits

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many households currently have had their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing costs element reduced by (1) 14 per cent of the 'eligible rent' for one spare bedroom, and (2) 25 per cent of the 'eligible rent' for two or more spare bedrooms. [HL4162]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Figures on the number of households receiving Housing Benefit affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy are publically available through the DWP Stat Xplore website:

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>

Guidance for users is available at:

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

Figures on DWP Stat Xplore do not include claimants on Universal Credit with a Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy deduction, as this data is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Supermarkets: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Watson of Invergowrie

To ask Her Majesty's Government which supermarkets are participating in the COVID-19 national voucher scheme for children eligible for free school meals; and what the eligibility criteria are for supermarkets. [HL4173]

Baroness Berridge: Our latest guidance on providing free school meals is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>.

Through the national voucher scheme, schools and families could initially access eGift cards for Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Waitrose and M&S. On Monday 27 April Aldi were added to this scheme and on Wednesday 29 April McColl's were also added.

We continue to work with a wide range of supermarkets to encourage them to join. In order to be part of the scheme they are required to have the right infrastructure to deliver eGift cards in a uniform way across their network of stores.

If families are not able to access any of the supermarkets which are part of the national voucher scheme, schools are able to purchase vouchers directly for alternative supermarkets. They can be reimbursed for the cost of these alternatives through the schools' coronavirus exceptional costs fund, up to £15 per pupil per week. This funding covers unavoidable additional costs incurred to the COVID-19 outbreak that cannot be met from existing resources. Further information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools/school-funding-exceptional-costs-associated-with-coronavirus-covid-19-for-the-period-march-to-july-2020>.

Syria: Sanctions

Asked by Lord Hylton

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of international sanctions on the rise in food prices in Syria over one year. [HL4025]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We assess that the rise in food prices in Syria over the past year is primarily a result of the deteriorating economic situation in neighbouring Lebanon, whose economy is intrinsically linked to Syria's; the corresponding loss in the value of the Syrian pound; damage to agricultural areas and productivity due

to war and fires in summer 2019; and latterly border closures related to COVID-19. We do not assess international sanctions to be a major factor: EU sanctions are carefully targeted on specific sectors and individuals, in order to minimise their impact on ordinary Syrians, and do not apply to the food sector. More generally, the ongoing conflict combined with mismanagement and corruption by the Assad regime explain most of the problems of the Syrian economy.

Transport: Northern Ireland

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of COVID-19 on connectivity between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. [HL4076]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Officials are in regular contact with officials from the relevant Northern Ireland government departments.

Maintaining an airbridge between Great Britain (GB) and Northern Ireland (NI) during the current COVID-19 situation is critical for lifeline services, including the connectivity of key workers and repatriation.

A temporary support package has been agreed and is being funded jointly by the UK government and the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE). This package will ensure continuation of two lifeline passenger services – Derry to London and Belfast to London, including financial support to ensure the relevant airports remain operational to support those services. We will continue to monitor NI-GB connectivity as part of the Department's work on restart and recovery of the sector.

Travel Agents: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Mann

To ask Her Majesty's Government what advice they provide on the steps to take to reclaim the cost of cancelled flights made through a travel agency in instances where the airline has refunded the travel agency and either (1) the travel agency has not refunded customers, or (2) the travel agency seeks to charge customers an additional administrative charge. [HL4169]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Civil Aviation Authority has published guidance for businesses and consumers with respect to cancelled holidays and flights due to COVID-19.

The Government recognises the challenges businesses and consumers are experiencing with processing large volumes of refunds. In particular, we appreciate the frustration consumers may be experiencing. The Government's position is clear - if a customer asks for a refund, that refund needs to be paid.

Most businesses are trying to do the right thing in these unprecedented circumstances, but where enforcement

bodies have significant evidence that businesses are trying to take advantage of the crisis, we would expect them to take action.

Travel: Northern Ireland

Asked by Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support is available to UK residents seeking to travel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL4077]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government has announced a £5.7million funding package of measures, supporting two airlinks, from Belfast and Londonderry to London, alongside both City of Derry Airport and Belfast City Airport.

The funding package will ensure that lifeline connectivity services continue to both Belfast and Derry during the COVID-19 pandemic. These routes provide critical connectivity for key workers, repatriation, and access to healthcare services.

This approach was taken to ensure in the immediate term the continuity of service for passengers and specifically places an obligation on the operators to ensure the services continue at a minimum appropriate level. We will continue to monitor Northern Ireland – Great Britain connectivity as part of the Department's work on restart and recovery of the sector.

Universal Credit

Asked by Baroness Boycott

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many households with children are currently receiving Universal Credit as well as legacy benefits; and what proportion of those cannot fully benefit from the recent £1,000 increase in Universal Credit as that increase pushed them over the limit of the total amount of benefit they are allowed to receive. [HL3678]

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The information requested is not readily available and to provide a reply would require us to produce new analysis to link together several complex datasets, including Child Benefit data which is administered by HMRC, to identify if a household would have a benefit income above the cap levels due to increases in their UC award alone (independent of increases to Local Housing Allowance and CPI uprating of working age benefits). We would also need to identify if the household would otherwise be exempt from the benefit cap. This includes assessing whether or not a household has earnings over the earnings threshold, currently £604 per assessment period, is in receipt of an exempting benefit e.g. Personal Independence Payments, Carer's Allowance etc. or is eligible for a grace period due to previous earnings. It is estimated that the time this would take to produce and quality assure the results would be in excess of 4 working days and therefore would incur disproportionate costs.

Universities: Coronavirus

Asked by Lord Birt

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the success of individual universities in maintaining student courses and contact during the lockdown. [HL4143]

Baroness Berridge: As my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Our latest guidance on the impact of COVID-19 is set out below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronaviruses-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>.

Teaching, learning and assessment in higher education are not stopping and we are working with the sector to ensure that universities are able to make all reasonable efforts to enable students to continue and complete their studies, for their achievements to be reliably assessed and for qualifications to be awarded securely.

Higher education providers have adapted to the COVID-19 outbreak by rapidly moving teaching, examination and assessment online and all providers are developing their online provision ahead of the next academic year. Individual providers have issued advice and guidance to help support students through the transition to online provision and we are continuing to work closely with the sector, putting student wellbeing at the heart of these discussions. We believe that efforts so far have been largely successful in ensuring continued provision for the majority of students and are grateful to providers for taking such rapid action to ensure continued provision.

Universities offering good online tuition will continue to charge fees. However, the government has been clear that if universities want to charge full fees, they will have to ensure that good-quality courses are delivered which

are fit for purpose and help students progress towards their qualifications.

The government's clear expectation is that providers should make all reasonable efforts to enable students to complete their studies. If institutions are unable to facilitate adequate online tuition then they should seek to avoid charging students for any additional terms they may need to undergo as a consequence – therefore avoiding effectively charging them twice.

If students are concerned, there is a process in place. They should first raise this with their university. If their concerns are unresolved, students can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Utilities: Billing

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure that households unable to pay utility bills will not face disconnection from their utilities for non-payment between 1 October 2020 and 1 March 2021. [HL4163]

Lord Callanan: The utilities are taking measures to support customers whose ability to pay their bills is being impacted.

In energy, all domestic energy suppliers have agreed to a set of principles to support energy customers impacted by Covid-19. These principles include the suspension of energy credit meter disconnections and support for prepayment meter customers to stay on supply.

All of the UK's major internet service and mobile providers have committed to working with customers who find it difficult to pay their bill as a result of Covid-19 to ensure that they are treated fairly and are appropriately supported.

In the water sector, existing legislation means water companies cannot disconnect household water supply if consumers are unable to pay their bills.

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