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**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

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Lord Ashton of Hyde	Chief Whip
Baroness Barran	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education
Lord Benyon	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist	Whip
Lord Caine	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
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Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen	Whip
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Lord Stewart of Dirleton	Advocate-General for Scotland
Lord True	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport
Baroness Williams of Trafford	Minister of State, Home Office
Lord Wolfson of Tredegar	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice
Viscount Younger of Leckie	Whip

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Written Statements

Friday, 28 January 2022

Student Loan Repayment Thresholds

[HLWS555]

Baroness Barran: My Right Honourable Friend the Minister of State for Higher and Further Education (Michelle Donelan) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I am announcing details of the repayment threshold and interest rate thresholds that will apply to post-2012 (Plan 2) student loans, and the repayment threshold that will apply to postgraduate (Plan 3) student loans, for financial year 2022-23.

Plan 2 student loan repayment threshold

I can confirm today that I intend to bring forward regulations that will keep the repayment threshold for Plan 2 student loans – the income level above which post-2012 student loan borrowers are required to make repayments – at its current level for the financial year 2022-23. The threshold will be maintained at its financial year 2021-22 level of £27,295 per year, £2,274 a month, or £524 a week. The post-study interest rate thresholds that apply to Plan 2 loans will also be kept at their current levels in accord. For financial year 2022-23, the lower interest rate threshold will remain at £27,295 – to align with the repayment threshold – and the upper interest rate threshold will remain at £49,130.

It is now more crucial than ever that higher education is underpinned by just and sustainable finance and funding arrangements, and that the system provides value for money for all of society at a time of rising costs. This government has already confirmed that we will freeze maximum tuition fee caps again for the 2022/23 academic year, the fifth year in succession that we have held fee caps at current levels.

The ongoing fee freeze is reducing the burden of debt on students and is helping to make higher education more affordable for them. However, the overall cost to taxpayers of the system is rising. Since 2018, the repayment threshold for Plan 2 student loans has increased each April in line with changes in average earnings. If we do not keep the threshold at its current level, it would rise by a further 4.6% in April 2022.

Maintaining the repayment threshold at its current level, alongside the ongoing freeze in fees, will help to ensure the sustainability of the student loan system, while keeping higher education open to everyone who has the ability and the ambition to benefit from it, including the most disadvantaged.

We will also shortly set out further plans for addressing the student finance recommendations made by the Independent Panel that reported to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding.

Postgraduate (Plan 3) student loan repayment threshold

I can also confirm today that the repayment threshold for postgraduate student loans will remain at its current level of £21,000 per year, £1,750 a month or £404 a week for financial year 2022-23.

Postgraduate loan outlay is forecast to increase in coming years, and 30% of borrowers holding a master's loan (academic year 2020/21 entrants) are not expected to repay their loans in full. We must ensure that postgraduate loans remain sustainable and that is why we are also retaining the current repayment threshold for postgraduate loans.

United Kingdom-European Union Parliamentary Partnership Assembly: UK Delegation Appointments

[HLWS556]

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

Article 11 of the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement states: “The European Parliament and the Parliament of the United Kingdom may establish a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly” —consisting of Members of both Parliaments— “as a forum to exchange views on the partnership.” In December, the House of Commons and House of Lords endorsed the establishment of the Assembly. Both Houses agreed that the procedures currently applying to the nomination, support and funding of delegations to other treaty-based parliamentary assemblies will apply.

This statement sets out the United Kingdom delegation to the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly. The Government also takes this opportunity to congratulate Roberta Metsola on her election as the new President of the European Parliament.

The UK delegation is:

Full representatives

Stuart Anderson MP

Lord Bach

Simon Baynes MP

Hilary Benn MP (Vice Chair)

Andrew Bowie MP

Baroness Crawley

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP

Lord Gilbert of Panteg

Lord Godson

Sir Robert Goodwill MP

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town

Sir Oliver Heald MP (Leader and Co-Chair)

Sir Mark Hendrick MP

Rupa Huq MP
Darren Jones MP
The Earl of Kinnoull (**Vice Chair**)
Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate
Andrea Leadsom MP
Lord Liddle
Sir Tony Lloyd MP
Baroness Ludford
Baroness Mobarik
David Morris MP
David Mundell MP
Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne
Neil Parish MP
Lord Ricketts
Chris Skidmore MP
Karin Smyth MP
Lord Teverson

Kelly Tolhurst MP
Valerie Vaz MP
Phillipa Whitford MP
Mike Wood MP
Substitutes
Baroness Bull
James Daly MP
Marsha De Cordova MP
Dame Angela Eagle MP
Baroness Foster of Oxton
Kate Griffiths MP
Luke Hall MP
Sally-Ann Hart MP
Robin Millar MP
Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick
Alyn Smith MP
Baroness Suttie

Written Answers

Friday, 28 January 2022

Aircraft: 5G

Asked by *Viscount Stansgate*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking in respect of the concerns raised by the aviation industry about the potentially dangerous effects of 5G networks on certain categories of aircraft. [HL5595]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: We continue to monitor US Aviation industry concerns that the US 5G network could affect equipment onboard aircraft.

The UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is leading on assessing any risks from the implementation of the UK 5G network on aviation safety, in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence, OFCOM, and industry stakeholders. The CAA has issued guidance to UK operators throughout the world on 5G status in other countries, including the US.

The UK CAA will continue to monitor the situation, and both my department and the CAA is in close contact with industry, the US Federal Aviation Administration, the EU Aviation Safety Agency and other stakeholders on this.

Defence: Finance

Asked by *Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to signing up to the "Peace Dividend Campaign". [HL5417]

Baroness Goldie: The first responsibility of Government is to protect its citizens.

Defence is one of a full spectrum of levers that we routinely use - alongside diplomatic, intelligence, economic, legal and strategic communication tools. For example, Defence continues to play a direct role in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, most recently through ongoing Royal Navy support to the international disaster relief efforts following the tsunami in Tonga; and last year providing a Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel to assist the US humanitarian aid mission in Haiti. Our Armed Forces are also always ready to respond to requests to support civil authorities, and from vaccine supply logistics to front line medical support they have played a critical role in supporting the response to the COVID pandemic.

We must stay ahead of the increasingly complex threats to our people and allies by investing in, rather than cutting, defence budgets. That is why we are increasing defence spending by over £24 billion over the next four years.

Schools

Asked by *Lord Storey*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made, if any, of the effects of reducing the school week from five days to four; whether they are aware of any schools in England Wales seeking to introduce a four day week; and if so, whether they are empowered to do so. [HL5563]

Baroness Barran: Education is a devolved matter, and the response will outline the information for England only.

A review into the current use of time in schools and 16 to 19 providers in England has been undertaken, and the results were published on 4 November 2021 here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-time-in-school-and-16-to-19-settings>. The review found that more time can improve pupil and student outcomes, but the extent of any benefit is dependent on how well the time is used. We need to ensure that all children are spending quality time in school, where they can access the full breadth of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities to maximise their overall experience and give them the best chance to succeed, regardless of age, background or ability.

The review did not assess the effects of reducing the school week from 5 days to 4. We are not aware of any schools in England that are seeking to introduce a 4 day week.

Schools should organise the school day and school week in the best interest of their pupil cohort, to provide them with a full time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and ability. The structure of the school week should not be the cause of inconvenience to parents and it is unacceptable for schools to shorten their school week unless it is a direct action to support and enhance pupils' education.

The Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999 require all maintained schools to be open to educate their pupils for at least 380 sessions (190 days) in each school year. Academy trusts (of academies and free schools) are not bound by these regulations.

Asked by *Lord Jones*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many (1) primary, and (2) secondary, academy schools there are at present. [HL5630]

Baroness Barran: As of 1 January 2022, there are 6,474 primary academies and free schools, and 2,768 secondary academies, free schools, university technical colleges and studio schools. Primary academies include middle-deemed primary schools, whilst secondary academies include all-through schools, middle-deemed secondary schools and 16 to 19 academies.

Schools: Absenteeism

Asked by Lord Storey

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they are giving to the Children's Commissioner's inquiry to track down the thousands of children who have gone missing from school during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL5564]

Baroness Barran: The department is very supportive of this work. Regular attendance at school is vital for children's education, wellbeing and long-term development.

The Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza, pledged to do this work at the inaugural meeting of the attendance action alliance, which was hosted by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, on 9 December 2021. The Office of the Children's Commissioner is updating the department on its progress, which will be reported back to the alliance. Where necessary, the department will respond to any recommendations.

To support the execution of their responsibilities, the Children's Commissioner has access to a range of department data sets. The department is also exploring how to improve the availability of attendance data with some urgency.

We welcome the Children's Commissioner's focus on children missing from school. The department is committed to a form of local authority register for children not in school. This would help local authorities undertake their existing duties to ensure children receive a suitable education and help safeguard all children who are in scope. We will set out further details on this in the government response to the 'Children not in school' consultation, which we will publish in the coming weeks.

The department continues to make clear that schools and local authorities should be identifying children who are persistently absent, or at risk of persistent absence, and is developing further plans to support them to return to regular education.

Schools: Repairs and Maintenance

Asked by Lord Jones

To ask Her Majesty's Government how much was spent on the (1) upgrading, and (2) improvement, of (a) primary, and (b) secondary, state school buildings for the years (i) 2015, and (ii) 2000. [HL5629]

Baroness Barran: The department allocates annual condition funding to schools and those responsible for school buildings. Since 2015, the department has allocated £11.3 billion to maintain and improve school buildings, including £1.8 billion for the financial year 2021-22.

Local authorities (LAs), large multi-academy trusts and large voluntary-aided (VA) school bodies receive an annual school condition allocation to invest in capital

maintenance and upgrades across the schools for which they are responsible. Stand-alone schools, small academy trusts and smaller VA bodies are eligible to apply for funding through the Condition Improvement Fund.

All schools also receive funding to spend on their capital priorities through an annual devolved formula capital allocation.

In addition to condition allocations, we deliver major rebuilding programmes centrally, including the Priority Schools Building Programme, which is rebuilding or refurbishing more than 500 schools in the poorest condition. In June 2020, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, announced a new 10-year School Rebuilding Programme. We have announced the first 100 schools to benefit from the programme, as part of a commitment to 500 projects over the next decade.

In the 2015-16 financial year, the department allocated a total of £5.1 billion in capital funding to schools, including funding for rebuilding projects and to deliver school places. This includes £1,399,601,236 in condition funding to schools and those responsible for school buildings. You can find the allocations for individual schools here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-capital-funding>. This funding is not broken down between primary and secondary schools because much of the funding was allocated to LAs, academy trusts and VA school bodies to invest based on local knowledge.

In the 2000-01 financial year, the department allocated £1.9 billion in capital funding for schools. A breakdown of how this funding was spent across different projects is not readily available.

Slovenia: British Council

Asked by Lord German

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the value of the British Council's presence in Slovenia; and what have been the principal successes of its work in that country. [HL5482]

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: We welcome the contribution the British Council has made to UK-Slovenia relations since it opened its offices there in 1992. The British Council's work across the education, cultural and science and innovation sectors in particular have been an important part of deepening UK-Slovenia relations, fostering strong links between our citizens and promoting the exchange of best practice.

Tigray: Armed Conflict

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that Ethiopian air force strikes on the Mai Aini refugee camp have killed three Eritrean refugees and injured four. [HL5409]

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: We are deeply concerned by recent airstrikes in northern Ethiopia. The

Minister for Africa raised her concerns about this with Minister Redwan in Addis Ababa 20 January.

We call for a ceasefire by all sides, including the Ethiopian Government, to end hostilities. We support the call by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for all parties to the conflict to respect the rights of all civilians, including refugees. The indiscriminate targeting of civilians, no matter the weapon used, is against international law, and is entirely unacceptable.

The Foreign Secretary, as Chair of the G7 Foreign and Development Minister's meeting, made a statement on 12 December 2021 that called for an additional independent investigation on human rights violations as recommended by the Joint Investigation report from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. The UK supported the Human Rights Council resolution of 17 December that mandates an independent and transparent mechanism for investigation and redress of human rights violations. The UK will continue to support the UN in the need for independent, transparent and impartial investigations and will work to ensure that those responsible for these atrocities are held to account.

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made concerning reports of conditions in the blockaded hospital in Mekelle, Tigray; what discussions

they have had with the government of Ethiopia regarding medical supplies reaching that hospital; and what steps, if any, they will take, to provide support. [HL5410]

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: On her visit to Addis Ababa on 20 January 2022, the Minister for Africa discussed the clear need for an urgent improvement in humanitarian access with the Government of Ethiopia, including in her meeting with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

The humanitarian response in Tigray is at standstill owing to the de facto blockade of the region imposed by the Government of Ethiopia since July 2021. The blockade has also caused major disruption to the provision of essential services. UK funded partners report that single-use items including medical gloves and surgical materials such as chest drains are being washed and reused significantly increasing the risk of infections for patients. The UK is appalled at reports that civilians are dying due to the unavailability of insulin and other generic medicines.

According to the latest available information from the UN, no humanitarian aid trucks entered Tigray during the period 14 December 2021 - 13 January 2022 with only 12% of required aid permitted to enter Tigray since July 2021.

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