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**Thursday
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**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

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[I] indicates that the member concerned has a relevant registered interest. The full register of interests can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests/>

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<i>Minister</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Lord True	Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal
Earl Howe	Deputy Leader of the House of Lords
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon	Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Baroness Barran	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education
Lord Bellamy	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice
Lord Benyon	Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist	Spokesperson, Wales Office, Whip
Lord Caine	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office, Whip
Lord Callanan	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
Earl of Courtown	Deputy Chief Whip
Lord Davies of Gower	Whip
Lord Evans of Rainow	Whip
Baroness Goldie	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park	Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
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Lord Johnson of Lainston	Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade
Lord Markham	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care
Earl of Minto	Minister of State, Department for Business and Trade
Lord Murray of Blidworth	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Borders, Home Office
Baroness Neville-Rolfe	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Lord Offord of Garvel	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business and Trade and Scotland Office
Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Baroness Penn	Parliamentary Secretary, HM Treasury
Baroness Scott of Bybrook	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Lord Sharpe of Epsom	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Lord Stewart of Dirleton	Advocate-General for Scotland
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport
Baroness Williams of Trafford	Chief Whip
Viscount Camrose	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
Viscount Younger of Leckie	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions

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Written Statements

Thursday, 25 May 2023

Contingent Liabilities: Liquidations of UKCloud Ltd and Virtual Infrastructure Group Ltd

[HLWS795]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: My Rt Hon Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and HM Paymaster General, Jeremy Quin MP, has today made the following statement:

I am pleased to report that following the compulsory liquidations of UKCloud Ltd and Virtual Infrastructure Group Ltd His Majesty's Government have successfully enabled the continuity of public services. On 26 October 2022, I laid a departmental minute to notify the House of two contingent liabilities incurred by the Cabinet Office: to indemnify the Official Receiver for any costs and expenses incurred by him in carrying out the proper performance of his duties as liquidator of UKCloud Ltd, and its parent company, Virtual Infrastructure Group Ltd; and an indemnity for any claims made against him in respect of the same. This was followed by written statements from myself and Baroness Neville-Rolfe in each of our respective Houses.

At the time of the statements, it was not possible to reliably estimate the size or maturity of either contingent liability.

In respect of costs incurred, the Official Receiver now expects the peak funding requirement of the liquidations to be £20 million and the liquidation to conclude in the first half of 2024.

In respect of the claims indemnity provided to the Official Receiver, I would like to assure the House that the Official Receiver has not been notified of any potential claims that may require a call on the indemnity, and that all UKCloud Ltd customers have now successfully migrated their services on to alternative platforms with no unexpected disruptions to public services. As such, it is deemed unlikely any claims on the indemnity will be made post-liquidation. We, therefore, assess that it is unlikely that there will be any cost to the public purse as a result of this contingent liability.

Delivering for Patients

[HLWS798]

Lord Markham: My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay) has made the following written statement:

I refer hon. Members to the Oral Statements I will make in the House today, 25 May 2023, on Patient Choice and New Hospitals.

Health Transformation Programme update

[HLWS794]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: My honourable Friend, the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work (Tom Pursglove MP) has made the following Written Statement:

I would like to update the House on the outcome of the procurement of new health and disability benefit assessment contracts – the 'Functional Assessment Services' contracts – for the period 2024 to 2029. These important new contracts have been subject to a rigorous and competitive process in line with public contract regulations.

In the Health and Disability White Paper published in March, I set out the actions this Government will take to ensure disabled people, and people with health conditions, can lead independent lives and fulfil their potential. Firstly, by reforming the benefits system for the future so it focuses on what people can do, rather than on what they cannot. Secondly, by investing in our employment offer to help more disabled people and people with health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work. And thirdly, by ensuring people can access the right support at the right time and have a better overall experience when applying for, and receiving, health and disability benefits.

To support these important commitments, the Health Transformation Programme is modernising benefit services to vastly improve the claimant experience, build trust in our services and the decisions we make, and create a more efficient service for taxpayers. As part of this, the programme will deliver improvements I announced through the White Paper.

The Health Transformation Programme is developing a new Health Assessment Service and transforming the entire Personal Independence Payment (PIP) service, over the longer term. The Health Assessment Service is being developed on a small scale initially and will gradually replace the different services we and our assessment providers use to undertake health assessments across all benefits. It will be fully integrated with other systems, including the transformed PIP service, with the aim of creating a much-improved experience for people who apply for support.

The Functional Assessment Services contracts will provide the foundation for the new Health Assessment Service, replacing the separate contracts for Health and Disability Assessment Services and PIP assessments with single contracts for all assessments in a geographic area. The contracts will ensure continuity of service for claimants while we safely develop the new Health Assessment Service and provide the flexibility to introduce it gradually before we roll it out nationally from 2029.

We have informed bidders that the successful bidders in each geographic lot are as follows:

Lot 1 (North England and Scotland): Maximus UK Services Limited.

Lot 2 (Midlands and Wales): Capita Business Services Limited.

Lot 4 (South East England, London and East Anglia): Ingeus UK Limited.

Lot 5 (Northern Ireland): Capita Business Services Limited.

Procurement activity in Lot 3 (South West England) is continuing and we will announce the outcome in due course.

We will work with providers to ensure that the transition to the new service is as smooth as possible. We will also work with the Functional Assessment Services providers to deliver structural reform, removing the Work Capability Assessment via a phased approach over the lifetime of the contracts, as announced in the White Paper.

This represents a positive step forward in delivering our ambitions for disabled people and people with health conditions. It shows that this Government is committed to delivering a more effective health and disability system for people now and in the future.

Hong Kong Six-monthly Report

[HLWS797]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly), has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

The latest Six-monthly Report on the implementation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong was published today. It covers the period from 1 July – 31 December 2022. The report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A copy is also available on the [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office website](#).

I commend the report to the House.

Legal Aid Means Test Review: Government Response

[HLWS796]

Lord Bellamy: ‘Legal aid is fundamental to a fair justice system and underpins the rule of law. It ensures equality of arms, so that people can access justice and enforce their legal rights. Means testing is a crucial component of the justice system as it ensures those on lower incomes receive help with paying their legal costs, and that those who can afford to contribute towards their legal costs do so.

The Government has today published its response to the consultation which reviewed the entire system of legal aid means testing. The comprehensive suite of changes we will now be implementing to civil and criminal legal aid means tests will significantly widen eligibility for legal aid and ensure continued access to justice.

Changes we will be making include:

- Increasing income and capital thresholds for legal aid eligibility, so they better reflect essential living costs and

different household compositions. This means that 3.5 million more people will be eligible for criminal legal aid in the magistrates’ court and 2.5 million more people will be eligible for civil legal aid;

- Introducing a £500 per month earnings threshold for applicants in receipt of Universal Credit. If exceeded, applicants will need to complete a full income assessment in the same manner as applicants not in receipt of benefits. This replaces the interim position adopted in 2013, when Universal Credit roll out began. This policy is designed to deliver fair eligibility according to applicants’ means, regardless of the source of those means;

- Removing the upper income threshold for legal aid at the Crown Court, meaning that all Crown Court defendants will be eligible for legal aid. Those on higher incomes will be asked to pay more towards their legal aid, ensuring taxpayer resources are directed at those most in need;

- Excluding assets such as the family home from the means test where they are the subject matter of the case or where coercive control has denied applicants use of their shared marital assets, making it easier for domestic abuse victims to access legal aid;

- Removing the means test for three areas of civil legal aid: civil representation for under-18s, civil representation for parents or those with parental responsibility facing the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment from their child, and legal help for inquests involving a potential breach of rights under the ECHR (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998) or where there is likely to be a significant wider public interest in the individual being represented at the inquest.

The MTR will be implemented in phases. Phase 1 will deliver changes to non-means tested areas. The rest of the new civil means test will be implemented in phase 2, followed by the new criminal means tests in phases 3 and 4. Changes to the regulations will be laid in 2023/24, coming into force in 2025. This timeframe allows digital build and testing of the new assessments by the legal aid agency and legal aid providers.

This has been an open and collaborative review and we are grateful for the invaluable contribution of a wide range of interested parties throughout the consultation period and during the course of the review.’

Level 3 Qualifications Review Update

[HLWS800]

Baroness Barran: Today my Right Honourable Friend, the Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education (Robert Halfon), made the following statement.

Today I am announcing an update to phase 2 of the Government’s reforms to post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England – removing funding from technical qualifications that overlap with T Levels. We are publishing a provisional list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wave-3-t->

levels-overlapping-qualifications, of 92 technical qualifications that have been assessed to overlap with wave 3 T Levels: Business and Administration; Engineering and Manufacturing; and Finance and Accounting.

The assessment of overlapping qualifications is carried out by independent assessors, who carry out in-depth reviews of qualifications. This is the same process as for waves 1 and 2 T Levels. Subject to the outcomes of an appeal process which gives awarding organisations the opportunity to contest a qualification's placement on the list, we will withdraw public funding at 16-19 from these qualifications for new starts from August 2025. On the provisional list of 92 qualifications, we know there were 36 qualifications which had no enrolments and a further 24 had fewer than 100 enrolments in 2020/21 academic year, highlighting the need to streamline the qualifications system. The final overlap list for wave 3 T Levels will be published in the autumn.

We are reforming technical qualifications at level 3 as the current qualifications do not consistently progress young people to related employment. In the future technical qualifications will be based on IfATE's occupational standards which have been designed by employers and which set out the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that employers need.

Removing funding from technical qualifications which overlap with T Levels will ensure young people can feel confident that they are studying technical qualifications which will prepare them for jobs in their chosen occupation. The breadth and depth of T Levels is unmatched, giving students a thorough understanding of the sector and the skills needed to work in specific occupations, as well as an industry placement which gives them valuable experience.

T Levels are being scaled up in a managed rollout, with 16 subjects currently available at over 160 providers across England, with 24 T Levels in total planned by 2025. We are continuing to build on the success of T Levels and have put in place extra measures to support providers, employers and students. We are providing a 10% uplift in funding to providers delivering T Levels for the 2023-24 academic year, a new £12m Employer Support Fund and extra funding for providers to provide careers guidance on T Levels. The Gatsby Charitable Foundation is also supporting providers as they make the move to T Levels. This includes a new Technical Education Networks Programme to offer subject-specific support for T Level teaching, and providing grant funding to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust to support UTCs in their transition to T Levels.

We are supporting more learners to access T Levels through the T Level transition programme. This is a high quality, holistic study programme for learners who would benefit from the additional study time and preparation that it will give them before they start their T Level. Learners on the programme develop a broad range of knowledge, skills and behaviours to prepare them for T Levels. This includes the national technical content developed for the

programme, through which learners gain industry-relevant technical knowledge and practical skills aligned to T Levels, as well as gaining valuable work experience and preparation for the workplace, English, maths and digital skills, developing their study skills and wider personal development. In total, close to 9,800 students have enrolled on the programme in the first three years, since 2020, and provisional estimates show that c.49% of the first cohort subsequently progressed onto level 3 or higher outcomes.

The removal of public funding from qualifications that overlap with T Levels at 16-19 forms a small part of our wider technical education reforms. Our new integrated funding approval process means that from 2025, awarding organisations can develop and submit new technical qualifications for funding, which are based on occupational standards approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Awarding organisations with qualifications on the wave 3 overlap list have been notified, as have the Federation of Awarding Bodies and Joint Council for Qualifications.

Woking Borough Council Intervention and Tees Valley Independent Review

[HLWS799]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Honourable friend the Minister for Local Government and Building Safety (Lee Rowley MP) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement:

I would like to update the House on action the Government is taking in relation to two local authorities. In the case of Woking Council, Government is taking decisive action given clear evidence that the best interest of taxpayers is not being served. In the case of Tees Valley Combined Authority, in response to a request from the Mayor, the Secretary of State has decided on an exceptional basis to commission an external assurance review.

Woking Borough Council

Woking Borough Council is a small district that has engaged in commercial investment activities since 2016. As a result of this, as of December 2022 the Council had debts of £1.9 billion, with plans to increase it to almost £2.4 billion by 2024/25, and now faces significant impairments against key assets. This makes Woking the most indebted council in England compared to its financial size, with a net budget of £24 million and core spending power of £14 million. In its most recent budget report Woking Borough Council recognises that this debt, and the Council's reliance on commercial income to fund services, places it in an extremely challenging financial position. The Department considers that this is, based on current evidence, the most challenging financial position of any local authority in England.

The Government is introducing new powers through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill that will allow direct intervention where authorities are exposed to excessive risk from borrowing and investment practices. Ahead of

that, since May last year, we have been engaging with Woking, given that it is likely to fall within scope of those powers. As a result of our engagement, the Department has been increasingly concerned about the level of risk the Council is carrying and how that is being managed.

External Assurance Review

As a result of the Department's concern about the specific situation in Woking, in January 2023 the Department commissioned an External Assurance Review covering the Council's governance, finance and commercial issues. This review was carried out by Jim Taylor, Carol Culley OBE and Mervyn Greer, with fieldwork taking place over January and February. The review team was asked to provide an external assessment of Woking's governance arrangements, financial situation, commercial investments and their capacity and capability to manage these in the immediate and longer-term.

The Council made the Department aware of further developments in their commercial and finance arrangements in April 2023, following which the Department requested that the review team undertake further fieldwork in April and May. The resulting report reflects all review work undertaken from January to May 2023 and will be published on gov.uk and copies have been deposited in the libraries of both Houses. This report has been redacted in places in light of the commercially sensitive nature of some of its contents. The full report, including the commercially sensitive information, has been considered by the Secretary of State in taking his decisions in relation to Woking.

Failure to Comply with Best Value Duty

Evidence within the review shows that Woking Borough Council is failing to comply with its best value duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, as required by the Local Government Act 1999. The financial challenge is acute, and the review has concluded that the Council cannot become financially self-sustaining without considerable Government support.

To quote the review:

"The scale of this issue is unprecedented."

"From the historic base, the sheer scale and complexity of the investment and commercial activity of the council, means that the Council will never have the capacity to effectively manage all the commercial and economic considerations."

"Commercially, the council is overstretched and remains reliant on further support in the form of additional skills and capacity to continue to find a resolvable solution to its commercial position."

"There is no realistic route to the Council returning to financial sustainability alone... The Council will need to undertake significant service transformation and consider their future operating model."

"The new leadership of the Council is taking the right steps. However, it does not have the capacity or capability to address a challenge of this scale without additional support...on the current trajectory the Council will not rectify these issues itself and will continue to fail its best value duty. The Council will require significant support, including statutory oversight."

"There are critical decisions that need to be taken in the next 2-3 months, for which immediate expert support is required." "...the financial issues are more severe and immediate than initially thought [when undertaking work in January and February]."

"This leads to the conclusion that, despite many initiatives and advice being actioned there is no overarching strategy for the whole situation under the council's control."

In addition to the work of the reviewers, the Department has had direct engagement with Woking Borough Council in relation to its financial situation. It is the Department's view that the Council has failed to provide assurance that it is taking the necessary actions to comply with its best value duty and address the serious issues noted in the review. Nor have they given the Department assurance that they have capacity to take the necessary action, or develop an adequate strategy to resolve the situation – when considering the scale and pace of the response required.

The Council is aware of the gravity of the situation and has made clear in published papers for its meeting on 23 February 2023 that it is at risk of issuing a Section 114 notice, with public statements attributing this to issues relating to shortfalls in commercial income and cost pressures.

Statutory Intervention in Woking

The Secretary of State is satisfied that Woking Borough Council is failing to comply with its best value duty. The Secretary of State considers it necessary to put in place an intervention package immediately to secure the Council's future and sustainable compliance with its best value duty. The intervention will consist of the appointment of Commissioners to oversee specific functions of the Council, alongside directions to the Council. The Secretary of State is confident that this package will address the failings identified, and is necessary for the Council to secure compliance with its best value duty.

It is the Secretary of State's view that the situation in Woking is sufficiently urgent to justify forgoing the usual period of representation. He considers that there is a pressing case for urgent government action to protect the interests of the residents and tax-payers of Woking, and the public purse. The scale of Woking's financial challenges is unprecedented, and we have serious concerns about their commercial arrangements; the Secretary of State is concerned that further evidence of failure could come to light imminently and require further immediate action. The appointment of Commissioners and the Directions set out below will therefore take effect from today.

Appointment of Commissioners

The Secretary of State is appointing the following individuals as Commissioners to exercise certain functions as required:

- Jim Taylor (Lead Commissioner) - Jim is an ex-Chief Executive Officer of three metropolitan borough local authorities and was appointed in March 2022 by the Secretary of State as a commissioner at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. He also conducted a governance review of Slough Borough Council for the Secretary of State in 2021;
- Carol Culley OBE - Carol is the current Deputy Chief Executive and section 151 officer at Manchester City Council. She is CIPFA Junior Vice President, a member of the CIPFA Council and Chair of the CIPFA Public Financial Board; and
- Mervyn Greer - Mervyn is a Crown Representative at the Cabinet Office where, amongst other responsibilities for strategic suppliers to HMG, is the appointed Crown Representative for Local Government Commercial and the LGA. His background is in property and built asset management in the private sector, where he was responsible for major outsourcing and property related commercial contracts. He retired from the private sector in 2016. He was a member of the team which conducted the statutory Best Value Inspection of Liverpool City Council in 2021.

The Secretary of State has taken the unusual step of appointing the three individuals who carried out the External Assurance Review as Commissioners. This reflects the acute situation in Woking, and the urgent need for Commissioners to begin work immediately to ensure that the Council takes steps to secure compliance with their best value duty. The Secretary of State considers that these individuals are best placed to take up these roles in the immediate term, due not only to the knowledge acquired during their time reviewing the Council, but also their individual knowledge and experience in local authority leadership, governance, and commercial development. Our understanding of the situation in Woking is likely to change throughout the period of intervention. Their appointments are therefore for 12 months and will be reviewed within six months or at such a time as the Secretary of State determines necessary.

The scale of the financial challenge in Woking means that the Council must take immediate steps to address their commercial and financial challenges, and to make transformative change across its entire operations. The Commissioners will therefore exercise the following functions:

- those associated with the source of Woking's failures – financial governance and decision making, commercial decision making and management of commercial projects, regeneration and property;
- those where the Council will need to make changes as a result of these failures – functions associated with the Council's operating model and service redesign to

achieve value for money and financial sustainability; and

- those that will ensure the Council has the right skills and structures to make ongoing improvements across the entire organisation – governance and scrutiny of strategic decisions; and the appointment, dismissal and performance management for senior and statutory officer positions.

Directions to Woking Borough Council

Alongside this, Woking Borough Council will be directed to prepare and agree an Improvement and Recovery plan to the satisfaction of Commissioners. This must include, as a minimum, plans to:

- achieve financial sustainability and reduce debt;
- ensure value for money when exiting commercial arrangements;
- ensure compliance with financial management rules and guidance;
- reconfigure services; and
- ensure the Council has the necessary skills, capabilities and capacity to carry out this work and achieve compliance with their best value duty.

As with other interventions led by the Department, the Council are directed to meet the costs of the Commissioners. The fees paid to individuals are published in appointment letters which are available separately on gov.uk. I am assured this provides value for money given the expertise that is being brought, and the scale of the challenge in councils requiring statutory intervention.

The Government is committed to making sure the residents of Woking have what they need from their local council, including confidence in its service delivery, financial management and governance.

I will publish the Directions and Explanatory Memorandum associated with this announcement on gov.uk, and place copies in the libraries of both Houses.

Independent Review: Teesworks

Yesterday, the Secretary of State confirmed that he has made the exceptional decision to support the commissioning of an independent review to consider the specific allegations made, and Tees Valley Combined Authority's oversight of the South Tees Development Corporation (STDC) and Teesworks joint venture.

The Tees Valley Mayor approached Government some time ago regarding the possibility of an independent review of STDC and Teesworks. He raised concerns regarding the allegations made in Parliament by Andy McDonald MP of 'dubious dealings' and 'industrial-scale corruption'. The Mayor was, understandably, particularly concerned about the damaging effects that these allegations could have on investment and job creation across Teesside.

My colleague, the Minister for Levelling Up, explained in her letter of 17 May to Andy McDonald MP that the

Department has so far seen no evidence of corruption, wrongdoing, or illegality. This is still the case.

The Secretary of State's decision has been taken in response to Mayor Houchen's previous request for an independent review to address these allegations and reflects his recognition that the continued allegations of 'corruption' poses a real risk to the shared ambitions to deliver jobs and economic growth in Teesside.

In line with established practice, a Review Panel will be appointed by the Secretary of State to undertake the independent, external assurance review. The members of the Panel will be announced shortly as will detailed terms of reference. Since serious allegations of corruption, wrongdoing and illegality have been made, I will ask the Panel to address these accusations directly, and to report

on the governance arrangements at STDC including how decisions are made, as well as looking at the value achieved for the investment of public money on the site.

The Secretary of State yesterday wrote to the Tees Valley Mayor explaining his decision, a copy of his letter has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons. He also wrote to the Chairs of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Business and Trade Select Committees, and to the Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Any interested party, including Members of Parliament, will be invited to make representations to the Panel as part of their evidence gathering. The report and any recommendations will of course be published in line with usual practice.

Written Answers

Thursday, 25 May 2023

Asylum: Children

Asked by *Lord Scriven*

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by Lord Murray of Blidworth on 10 May (HL Deb, col 1924), what evidence they have collected since 2014 that leads them to conclude that excluding children from immigration detention would "incentivise the people smugglers" to target children to smuggle to the UK. [HL7795]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The purpose of the Illegal Migration Bill is to prevent and deter all unlawful migration, and in particular migration by unsafe and illegal routes. Those who arrive illegally will be liable to detention and will be swiftly removed to their home country or to a safe third country.

The organised people smuggling criminal gangs can be expected to exploit any exceptions or loopholes in the scheme provided for in the Bill, a point made by a number of noble Lords at Second Reading. An economic impact assessment will be published for the Bill in due course.

Bank Services: Companies

Asked by *Lord Hannan of Kingsclere*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have made any assessment of the impact of regulation on the ease with which companies can open bank accounts; and whether there is a detrimental impact on investment. [HL7971]

Baroness Penn: Access to banking facilities is important for the economy. The provision of banking services is a commercial decision for firms based on a variety of factors, including the local law, regulation of individual countries, an assessment of profitability, or other commercial drivers.

The Government regularly engages with industry to understand the impacts of regulation on businesses' ability to access banking services. That is why, for example, in last year's review of the Money Laundering Regulations, the Government committed to consult on options aiming to address the difficulties for businesses in accessing Pooled Client Accounts, including broadening the range of low-risk circumstances in which these accounts may be provided without checks being required on the clients whose funds are held in the account. As committed to in the second Economic Crime Plan, this consultation on changes to the Money Laundering Regulations will begin by the end of this year.

I would encourage businesses seeking a bank account to explore the Business Current Account (BCA) finder tool developed by UK Finance, designed to help businesses

compare the full range of bank accounts available and find products that best suit their needs

My officials will continue to engage with industry to understand any emerging issues and assess any impact on investment as a result.

Children Act 1989

Asked by *Lord Touhig*

To ask His Majesty's Government whether section 20 of the Children Act 1989 allows local authorities to delegate their duties under that section for child protection to other public bodies. [HL7804]

Baroness Barran: Local authorities have a duty to provide services to all children in need in their area. Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, local authorities are under a statutory obligation to provide accommodation to children when the criteria in Section 20(1) is met.

It is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the duty to accommodate is met. Whilst the local authority can make arrangements with other persons to act on their behalf by providing certain services, including the provision of accommodation, the local authority is still responsible for meeting the duty under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, and for anything that flows from a child being accommodated by the local authority.

Civil Servants: Disclosure of Information

Asked by *The Lord Bishop of St Albans*

To ask His Majesty's Government how many cases of whistleblowing were reported and investigated by the Civil Service in (1) 2022, (2) 2021, (3) 2020, and (4) 2019. [HL7792]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: We are made aware by departments annually, who also report on behalf of their agencies, of cases raised formally through whistleblowing procedures.

We will be commissioning data for the 2022/23 period (April 2022-March 2023) from departments in June 2023.

In 2021/22, 311 cases were formally raised and investigated in government departments. The concern was upheld in 30 cases.

In 2020/21, 245 cases were formally raised and investigated in government departments. The concern was upheld in 13 cases.

In 2019/20, 383 cases were formally raised and investigated in government departments. The concern was upheld in 33 cases.

We do not ask departments for reports of informal cases.

Duty Free Allowances: Northern Ireland

Asked by **Baroness Hoey**

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Penn on 4 May (HL7280), which airlines fly from Belfast to the Republic of Ireland; and if there are none, why passengers flying from Belfast to EU countries are not eligible for duty free like passengers from the rest of the UK. [HL7778]

Baroness Penn: As of March 2023, no airlines offered scheduled services from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland.

On the issue of passengers flying from Belfast to the European Union not having access to duty-free, Northern Ireland enjoys frictionless trade with both the rest of the United Kingdom and the EU. The government is committed to ensuring that remains the case.

Enabling duty-free shopping between the EU – which includes Ireland - and Northern Ireland without also introducing border controls would lead to significant distortions of trade on the island of Ireland as well as a significant revenue loss for both UK and Ireland by creating a legal route for unlimited amounts of alcohol and tobacco to flow into the UK market duty-free.

Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Asked by **Lord Taylor of Warwick**

To ask His Majesty's Government how much they have spent expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure in each year since 2018. [HL7884]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Since financial year 2018/19, the Government has spent the following on supporting the rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure:

Year	Total spend (£ million)*
2018/19	16
2019/20	30
2020/21	32
2021/22	81
Total	159

* Total spend is rounded to the nearest £million and includes the following schemes: *Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme, Workplace Charging Scheme, On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme and Taxi Infrastructure scheme.*

Details relating to 2022/23 Government grant spending will be available in due course.

Asked by **Lord Truscott**

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Penn on 22 February (HL5634), how much it would cost the taxpayer to equalise the VAT rate for public charging (20 per cent)

and home charging (5 per cent) for electric vehicles. [HL7886]

Baroness Penn: As noted in the Written Answer of 22 February, the Government has no plans to change the VAT treatment of EV charging.

The practical challenges of differentiating between the electricity used at home for general domestic purposes and the electricity used to charge electric vehicles (EVs) currently means that the reduced rate VAT relief for supplies of domestic energy is effectively being applied to EV charging at home. Given those practical challenges the Government has not estimated the additional cost to taxpayers from increasing the rate of VAT applied to home EV charging.

The fiscal cost of introducing a new relief, to reduce the rate of VAT applied to public charging, would likely depend on a range of factors including the level of EV take-up, driver behaviour and the comparative energy costs for home and public charging, which can vary significantly. Introducing such relief would likely have a large fiscal cost, which would grow over time as use of EVs increases.

Emergencies: Mobile Phones

Asked by **Lord Harris of Haringey**

To ask His Majesty's Government what has been the total cost to date of developing, maintaining and testing the UK's emergency alert system; and what plans they have for further tests. [HL7733]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: The total cost to date of developing the technical architecture and systems which underpin the emergency alert programme, in addition to the first three years of operational delivery, will be a maximum of £25.3 million.

The contracts which are publicly available on contracts finder include:

- i) The Government Digital Service have a contract with Fujitsu for £1.6 million per year for a three year period, a potential total of £5 million assuming that the contract runs to completion;
- ii) The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (as was) issued contracts totalling £18.6 million to mobile network operators, as well as further spending on security testing and legal work.

The remaining costs were spent on security testing and legal fees. The specific figures are commercially sensitive and can therefore not be released to the public.

There are no current plans for a further UK-wide, or public, test of the system, though it is likely that there will be further public tests in the coming years to ensure the system is operational to help keep the British people safe.

Asked by **Baroness Twycross**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effectiveness of the test of the UK's emergency alert system on 23 April. [HL7805]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: Last month's UK-wide Emergency Alert was the largest simultaneous public message in British history. 88% of the public knew the test was coming and we reached 93% of eligible phones in the country within 3 minutes of the test alert being sent. The system is now fully operable in the event of a real emergency, and is a vital tool in our toolkit to keep people safe.

We are aware that some people did not receive the test alert. There are several reasons why this may have been the case, which we are working with the Mobile Network Operators to resolve.

However, we would like to reassure those who did not receive an alert that Emergency Alerts are just one of many tools the Government has to communicate with the public about emergency situations. Existing procedures for warning and informing the public remain in place, including the use of local emergency services and local/national news.

Asked by Baroness Twycross

To ask His Majesty's Government when they forecast rolling out the UK's emergency alert system. [HL7806]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: Following the test on 23 April, the system is now fully operable. During the initial pilot phase, which started on 23 April and will last 3 months, alerts will be limited to severe weather events and flooding. However, future messages are also expected to include fires, public health emergencies and other life-threatening or major incidents.

Asked by Baroness Twycross

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the total cost to date of developing, maintaining and testing the UK's emergency alert system. [HL7807]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: I refer the Noble Baroness to the previous answer HL7733 on 24th May.

Employment: Disability

Asked by Lord Addington

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by the Minister of State for the Department of Work and Pensions in evidence to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee on 3 May, when the root and branch review of the Disability Confident scheme will take place. [HL7767]

Viscount Younger of Leckie: In 2021, we began a review of the Disability Confident scheme which was announced in the National Disability Strategy (NDS). In January 2022, the High Court declared the NDS was unlawful because the UK Disability Survey, which informed it, was held to be a voluntary consultation that failed to comply with the legal requirements on public consultations. The Secretary of State wanted to minimise the risk of acting inconsistently with the Court's declaration, therefore, we paused a limited number of policies referred to in the strategy, including work directly

related to the Disability Confident review. The Secretary of State has successfully obtained permission to appeal this decision. The Court of Appeal hearing is due to take place on 28 and 29 June 2023.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work is exploring what additional steps we can take, whilst respecting the Court's decision and awaiting the outcome of the appeal.

Enterprise Investment Scheme

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to update the Enterprise Investment Scheme for the 2023/24 tax year, in order to support new businesses and start-ups. [HL7961]

Baroness Penn: The Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) continues to be available to help incentivise and support investment into early-stage, higher risk unquoted companies over the coming tax year. The amount of EIS funding that companies can raise remains at a generous £5 million each year and a maximum of £12 million over their lifetime, or £10 million and £20 million respectively for knowledge intensive companies.

Holiday Accommodation: Planning Permission

Asked by Lord Tyrrie

To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the likely change in the total number of days of short-term lets resulting from the introduction of their proposed policy to make such lets subject to local planning permission. [HL7990]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: We are currently seeking views on the introduction of a short-term let use class and associated permitted development rights. The consultation may be found (attached) [here](#).

The Answer includes the following attached material:

Consultation [Introduction of a use class for short term lets and associated permitted development rights.pdf]

The material can be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2023-05-19/HL7990>

Human Trafficking: Prosecutions

Asked by Lord McColl of Dulwich

To ask His Majesty's Government, how many people have been (1) prosecuted, and (2) convicted, for offences of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015, for each of the past five years. [HL7291]

Lord Stewart of Dirleton: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) holds no data showing the number of

convictions for human trafficking offences in England and Wales under the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

However, data is held showing the number of defendants prosecuted and convicted where the human trafficking monitoring flag has been applied to case records. The table below shows the number of prosecutions and convictions for defendants during each of the last five years in England and Wales.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Prosecuted	294	349	267	466	405
Convicted	191	251	197	332	282

Data Source: CPS Case Management Information System

Asked by Lord McColl of Dulwich

To ask His Majesty's Government how many people have been (1) prosecuted, and (2) convicted, for offences of people smuggling under the Immigration Act 1971, for each of the past five years. [HL7292]

Lord Stewart of Dirleton: The Immigration Act 1971 contains offences (including those created by the Nationality and Borders Act 2022) for assisting and facilitating unlawful immigration into the United Kingdom.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not hold any data which shows the number of defendants in England and Wales charged with, prosecuted and convicted for people smuggling offences created by the Immigration Act 1971.

However, management information for England and Wales is held showing the number of offences charged by way of S25 (Assisting unlawful immigration to member State or the United Kingdom), S25A (Helping an asylum-seeker to enter United Kingdom) and S25B (Assisting entry to United Kingdom in breach of deportation or exclusion order) of the Immigration Act 1971 in which a prosecution commenced in each of the last five years. The table below shows the number of these offences to the latest available year, 2022, in England and Wales.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Immigration Act 1971 {25}	309	291	139	249	155
Immigration Act 1971 {25A}	8	5	2	134	6
Immigration Act 1971 {25B}	1	0	0	5	0

Data Source: CPS Case Management Information System

The figures relate to the number of offences and not the number of individual defendants. It can be 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.

Asked by The Lord Bishop of Southwark

To ask His Majesty's Government how many prosecutions were undertaken of people smugglers in each of the last three years for which data are available. [HL7713]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The Home Office works tirelessly, with other national and international law enforcement authorities, to tackle migrant smuggling gangs who organise and profit from illegal crossings and to bring to justice the ruthless criminals behind them.

We are determined to go after the callous people smugglers who exploit vulnerable people in difficult circumstances and put them in life-threatening situations.

Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom: Finance

Asked by The Lord Bishop of Leeds

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the contribution of inter-faith engagement and cooperation to the Levelling Up agenda; and what plans they have, if any, to provide funding support towards the work of the Inter Faith Network, including for Inter Faith Week during 2023–24. [HL7839]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: The department continues to take steps to support inter-faith community cohesion. For example, this government is supporting Dame Sara Khan's independent review of Social Cohesion and Resilience which is due to report in the Autumn, and I am considering additional options to take forward.

This department has provided funding to the Inter Faith Network since 2006/07. The Government considers a wide range of factors when deciding which projects to fund.

The department monitors all funded organisations throughout the lifecycle of their project for the purposes of assessing delivery against workplan targets, compliance and evaluation, in line with best practice for the management of public funding.

Iron and Steel: Redcar

Asked by Lord Scriven

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they will provide an update on plans for the former Redcar Steelworks site, and (1) what recent assessment they have made of the terms of the original business case used to agree public funding, and (2) whether they have agreed any changes or amendments to that business case. [HL7842]

Asked by Lord Scriven

To ask His Majesty's Government which department took the decision to partner with South Tees

Development Corporation for development of the former Redcar Steelworks site and, in making that decision, which procedures set out in 'The Green Book: Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation' were not followed; and why. [HL7843]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: Further to the PNQ last week, the SSI steelworks in Redcar closed in September 2015, with the loss of more than 3100 jobs. The Government appointed Lord Heseltine to review how the economic fortunes of the area could be turned around, including through the redevelopment of the former SSI site. The Government accepted Lord Heseltine's recommendation in his report *Tees Valley: Opportunity Unlimited* that it should establish the first mayoral development corporation outside London, the South Tees Development Corporation (STDC).

In 2020, the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) submitted a full business case to Government. The business case was developed and then approved in line with Green Book principles. The funding is governed by a memorandum of understanding between Government and TVCA, including quarterly monitoring reports on spend, risks and delivery.

Logistics: Business Rates

Asked by Viscount Waverley

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of business rate increases on warehousing on the efficiency of the UK's logistics network. [HL7851]

Baroness Penn: It is important that revaluations are undertaken periodically to maintain accuracy and fairness in the business rates system. Updating rateable values ensures bills more closely reflect the property market and means the burden of rates is fairly redistributed across all properties.

While this will result in bill increases for some ratepayers, the Government is introducing a support package worth £13.6 billion over the next five years to help ratepayers transition to new bills, including:

- a freeze to the business rates multiplier for 2023-2024, a tax cut worth £9.3 billion over the next 5 years, meaning all bills are 6 per cent lower than without the freeze.
- an Exchequer funded Transitional Relief scheme worth £1.6 billion to protect an estimated 700,000 ratepayers facing bill increases due to increases in rateable value.

Logistics: Charging Points

Asked by Viscount Waverley

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of (1) the cost of installing energy connections, and (2) the time taken to install energy connections, on the introduction of depot charging facilities at logistics sites. [HL8071]

Lord Callanan: Ofgem has decided that electricity demand customers, such as depot charging facilities at logistics sites, submitting a connection application after 1 April 2023, will no longer be charged for any distribution network reinforcement costs to accommodate their connection. Additionally, the Government is working with Ofgem and network companies to release network capacity and improve the connections process, which will reduce connection timescales, including potentially for depot charging facilities. The Government will publish a connections action plan in the summer.

Logistics: Planning Permission

Asked by Viscount Waverley

To ask His Majesty's Government what measures are in place to encourage planning authorities to support planning applications for the UK's logistics network, including (1) transport, (2) intermodal sites, (3) warehousing, and (4) other facilities. [HL7849]

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

The Framework also states that planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for clusters or networks for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations.

In support of this the Planning Practice Guidance states that the logistics industry plays a critical role in enabling an efficient, sustainable and effective supply of goods for consumers and businesses, as well as contributing to local employment opportunities, and has distinct locational requirements that need to be considered in formulating planning policies.

Minimum Wage: Enforcement

Asked by The Marquess of Lothian

To ask His Majesty's Government what is the detection rate for underpayment of the National Minimum Wage by employers; what incentives there are to ensure that employers comply with the National Minimum Wage; and what action they are taking to enforce compliance with, and to prevent underpayment of, the National Minimum Wage. [HL7782]

The Earl of Minto: In 2021/22, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) concluded over 2,800 minimum wage investigations and returned more than £16.3m in arrears to over 120,000 workers. HMRC issued 696 fines totalling £13.2m to businesses who had failed to pay the minimum wage. Where there has been an underpayment,

HMRC will instruct the employer to pay workers the arrears owed, and a penalty of up to 200% of arrears.

HMRC's Promote team issued 7.8 million advisory notices to workers, employers, and their agents increasing awareness of the rules. Since 2015, the Government has ordered employers to repay over £100 million to over 1 million workers.

Schools: Absenteeism

Asked by Baroness Twycross

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have considered the case for requiring schools to share their pupil absences data with local councils. [HL7809]

Baroness Barran: Government guidance sets out that schools of all types, Local Authorities and other local partners should work jointly and share data on individual cases where it is of benefit to the pupil.

Under Regulation 12 of The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, all schools are required to share pupil absence data with Local Authorities for pupils who fail to attend school regularly or have been absent from school for a continuous period of ten or more school days. Local Authorities also have access to state funded schools' attendance data under The Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (England) Regulations 2013, which underpin the school census data collection.

Local Authorities can also access near real time attendance data from state funded schools that are voluntarily sharing daily attendance data. Approximately 80% of these schools have opted to share daily data. This data is automatically extracted and returned in the form of interactive reports to the school and relevant multi academy trust and Local Authority.

Schools: Mental Health Services and Pastoral Care

Asked by Baroness Twycross

To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to expand pastoral and mental health support in schools to keep students in education. [HL7810]

Baroness Barran: The mental health of children is a government priority and we know schools can play a vital role in supporting this. The department is committed to helping all schools provide calm, safe and supportive environments that promote and support mental wellbeing, which can also support attendance, attainment and behaviour. It is up to schools to decide what pastoral support to put in place to support pupils.

The government's vision for improving school attendance is for pupils, parents, all schools, local authorities, and other partners to work together to prevent patterns of absence from developing. The department has issued guidance for schools, which highlights the

importance of a 'support first' approach. The 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance makes clear that schools are expected to work with each identified pupil and their parents to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any in-school barriers to attendance. Where absence persists, schools are expected to take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the local authority and other partners. This guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>.

As set out in associated guidance specifically related to mental health and attendance, schools are not expected to diagnose or provide specialist mental health support, but they can play an important role in identifying and responding to emerging or existing mental health issues. This may include providing targeted pastoral support, or ensuring referrals are made to external specialist support.

To help schools make informed decisions on what support to provide, the department is offering funding to all schools and colleges in England to train senior mental health leads who can put in place effective whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing. More than 13,800 schools and colleges have now received a senior mental health lead training grant, including more than 7 in 10 state-funded secondary schools, backed by a £10 million investment in the 2022/23 financial year. The department is also providing over £1 billion recovery premium funding for schools for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years which, on top of pupil premium, can be used to support pupil mental wellbeing and attendance.

To expand access to early mental health support, the department is working with NHS England to increase the number of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) working with schools and colleges. MHSTs offer support to children experiencing common mental health problems and liaise with external specialist services to help pupils get the right support and stay in education. As of April 2023, MHSTs covered 35% of pupils in schools and learners in further education in England. A further 100 teams are expected to be operational by April 2024, to cover an estimated 44% of pupils and learners.

Special Educational Needs: Training

Asked by Lord Addington

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the extent to which trainees and early career teachers understand the legislative requirements, including their professional responsibilities, which relate to pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. [HL7770]

Baroness Barran: The Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (CCF) has been designed with the knowledge that the quality of teaching is the most important factor in improving outcomes for pupils, particularly pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with additional needs.

Careful consideration has been given to the needs of trainee teachers in relation to supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The early career framework (ECF) builds on that learning for early career teachers (ECTs). These reforms support the department's ambition that all new teachers starting in the profession learn how to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND.

The CCF sets out a minimum entitlement for trainee teachers and places a duty on ITT providers, and their partner schools, to meet this entitlement. In addition to the content detailed in the CCF, it remains a statutory requirement of providers to ensure that their curricula ensure trainees are fully aware of their duties in respect of safeguarding and equalities legislation.

Courses must be designed so that trainee teachers can demonstrate that they meet the Teachers' Standards at the appropriate level. This includes the requirement in Standard 5 that all teachers must have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND.

Part two of the Teachers' Standards outlines that teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities. To be recommended by an accredited provider for the award of qualified teacher status, trainees must demonstrate that they meet the Teachers' Standards at the appropriate level. To pass induction, ECTs must demonstrate that they meet the Teachers' Standards through a formal assessment, signed off by their head teacher and independently checked by their appropriate body.

The department is exploring opportunities to build teacher expertise through a review of the CCF and ECF. Aiming to conclude by the end of 2023, the review will identify how the frameworks can equip new teachers to be more confident in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.

Teachers: Training

Asked by Lord Addington

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the ITT core content framework and early career framework: call for evidence consultation, which closed on 21 April, when updates to the ITT core content and early career framework will be published. [HL7768]

Baroness Barran: The Department is conducting a review of the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework together this year. This review began in January 2023 and is aiming to conclude by the end of 2023.

Asked by Lord Addington

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the ITT core content framework and early career framework: call for evidence consultation, which closed on 21 April, what criteria they will use to assess the evidence

presented and include it in the updated framework. [HL7769]

Baroness Barran: In partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and panels of experts, the department is reviewing the evidence base of the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (CCF) and Early Career Framework (ECF). To support this work, the department published a call for evidence to identify additional recent, relevant and high-quality research that may inform amendments to the existing CCF and ECF.

Evidence submitted will be considered by the Department and EEF on the basis of whether it is robust, relevant and helpfully supplements the existing evidence cited in the frameworks. The EEF will provide a quality assessment on submitted evidence, particular attention will be paid to the methodology, effect of any study, and the relevance of the source to UK classroom contexts.

These standards already underpin the CCF, ECF and National Professional Qualifications frameworks, ensuring framework statements are based on the latest and most robust evidence.

Trade Unions

Asked by Lord Taylor of Warwick

To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the levels of (1) collective bargaining coverage, and (2) trade union membership, in the UK; and what steps they are taking, if any, to increase those levels. [HL7760]

The Earl of Minto: In the UK, collective bargaining is largely a matter for individual employers, their employees and their trade unions. Most collective bargaining in the UK takes place because employers have voluntarily agreed to recognise a trade union and bargain with it.

Where an employer refuses to recognise a union voluntarily, the union can apply to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) for statutory union recognition. This will be granted so long as the union can demonstrate majority support in the workplace.

The latest Trade Union Membership Statistics publication shows that an estimated 6.4 million employees were trade union members in the United Kingdom at the end of 2021. Statistics from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings show an estimated 41% of employee jobs in the UK had their pay set with reference to a collective agreement in 2021.

UK Endorsement Board: Disclosure of Information

Asked by Baroness Bowles of Berkhamsted

To ask His Majesty's Government why the website of the UK Endorsement Board for accounting standards shows it has been supporting reduced disclosures applicable to Companies House-filed accounts, given that the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency

Bill is amending the Companies Act accounting exemptions so as to increase the disclosure of financial information to help deal with financial crime. [HL7684]

The Earl of Minto: The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill removes exemptions from filing accounts for small and micro entities rather than amend the content of those accounts, as determined by international accounting standards or UK accounting standards.

The UK Endorsement Board's publication commented on the proposals for a new international accounting standard set out in the Exposure Draft *Subsidiaries without Public Accountability*. These proposals would permit eligible subsidiaries to apply international accounting standards with some reduced disclosure requirements.

The proposed international accounting standard should reduce costs and complexity for eligible subsidiaries but

continues to require more disclosures than the equivalent UK accounting standard.

Water: Pollution Control

Asked by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Water targets detailed evidence report, published on 6 May 2022, what progress they have made towards formally adopting the proposed nutrient pollution reduction targets. [HL7963]

Lord Benyon: On 19th December the Government laid The Environmental Targets (Water) (England) Regulations 2022 Statutory instrument. This introduced legally-binding targets to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment loads from agriculture by 40% by 2038 against a 2018 baseline, and to reduce phosphorus loads from wastewater by 80% by 2038 against a 2020 baseline.

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