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Notes:

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Defence Equipment: Israel

Andy McDonald:

[\[5324\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, if she has provided advice on whether F-35 components supplied by the UK to Israel via a third party are used by Israel in Gaza in compliance with international humanitarian law.

Sarah Sackman:

Paragraph 2.13 of the Ministerial Code states: 'the fact that the Law Officers have advised or have not advised and the content of their advice must not be disclosed outside Government without their authority'. This is known as the Law Officers' Convention, and it applies to your question.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Arts and Culture: Finance

Shivani Raja:

[\[5437\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether financial support is available for firms looking to invest in the creative industries within the UK.

Sarah Jones:

The Creative Industries Tax Reliefs and Expenditure Credits have been highly effective in attracting investment into the UK creative industries, especially for feature film, high end television (HETV), video games and animation. The British Film Institute reported that inward investment into Film and HETV production in 2023 totalled £3.1 billion, representing 74 per cent of UK production expenditure.

The Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS) and the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) are available for those looking to invest in start-up and scale-up creative industries businesses offering tax reliefs to individual investors.

■ Arts: Foreign Investment in UK

Shivani Raja:

[\[5436\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps the Government is taking to attract foreign direct investment into the UK's creative industries.

Sarah Jones:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) has dedicated resource within its Creative Industries team in the UK and in key markets across the world, focused on developing and delivering foreign direct investment and promoting the UK creative sector and the investment opportunity for international businesses. DBT works

closely with the Office for Investment on major investment projects linked to the creative industries.

We provide support through the British Film Commission to grow high-end TV inward investment. We promote the UK as a destination for foreign direct investment through targeted inward delegations to the UK and engagement with potential investors at key international creative industries trade shows working closely with external partners, such as the British Film Commission, the UK Interactive Entertainment Association and Innovate UK.

DBT will support the upcoming Investment Summit to promote the opportunity represented by our world class creative sector.

■ Employment

Gareth Bacon: [\[5121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the report entitled Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay, published on 24 May 2024, when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to implement the policies set out in that report.

Justin Madders:

The Government is committed to delivering the Plan to Make Work Pay in full. The Employment Rights Bill will be introduced within the first 100 days in Government and will play a key role in delivering aspects of the Plan to Make Work Pay.

Ministers are identifying the most appropriate delivery mechanisms for all the Make Work Pay measures.

Work is already underway deliver measures through non-legislative routes.

■ English Language: Education

Tom Hayes: [\[5239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate his Department has made of the number of English Language Teaching centres that have closed permanently since the pandemic began.

Tom Hayes: [\[5240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support the English Language Teaching industry.

Gareth Thomas:

This Department has not made an estimate of the number of English Language Teaching (ELT) centres that have closed permanently since the pandemic began, but is aware of data published by English UK which states that one in six of the UK's 415 language schools, 69 in total, closed in the first year of the pandemic.

This Department works closely with English UK and have provided support for their English with Confidence campaign, including through the production of promotional material and hosting ELT agents during familiarisation visits. We will continue to

ensure that the ELT sector's recovery and ambition is captured in the Government's International Education Strategy and via the English Language Teaching Action Group. DBT will be supporting English UK's Study World event in the UK and in China and will support the sector at ICEF (International Consultants for Education and Fairs) Berlin, alongside considering ELT mission destinations for the next 12 months.

■ Night-time Economy: Greater London

David Simmonds:

[\[5421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether (a) officials, (b) Ministers and (c) special advisers in her Department have (a) met and (b) corresponded with the Mayor of London's Night Czar on the issue of London's night-time economy since the general election.

Gareth Thomas:

Since the General Election, officials, special advisors, or Ministers, in their Ministerial roles, have not as yet met or corresponded with the Mayor of London's Night Czar, Amy Lamé.

■ Parental Leave

Josh Simons:

[\[5433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what (a) his planned timescale is and (b) the terms of reference are for the review of parental leave; and who will conduct the review.

Justin Madders:

As committed to in the Plan to Make Work Pay, the Government will review the system of parental leave to ensure that it better supports working parents. We are still in the early planning stages for this Review and are actively considering the parameters and process for delivering it. As such it is not possible to confirm these details at this time.

■ Retail Trade: Fines

Sir John Hayes:

[\[5534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many retailers were handed fines by the Groceries Code Adjudicator in (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

Justin Madders:

The Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) has powers to investigate where there are reasonable grounds to suspect the Code has been breached by a designated retailer. If an investigation finds the Code has been breached, the GCA can make recommendations, require the retailer to publish details of any breach and in the most serious cases impose a fine up to 1% of total turnover. The GCA did not launch or conclude an investigation in 2022 or 2023 and therefore did not impose fines on any of the designated retailers.

■ Small Businesses: Annual Reports

Gareth Bacon: [\[5667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps the Department is taking to improve the requirements for annual reporting for small and mid-sized quoted companies.

Justin Madders:

The Government is reviewing non-financial reporting requirements and company size thresholds to simplify, streamline and reduce reporting obligations for all companies. Small quoted companies will benefit from the removal of unnecessary and duplicative reporting. However the Government believes that small quoted companies should provide enhanced transparency compared to similar sized private companies. Accountability and transparency are necessary to protect investors and maintain trust in financial markets.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Culture: Disability

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[5268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Answer of 10 January 2024 to Question 8935 on Culture: Disability, when she expects to receive the results of the pilot survey for young people on cultural activities for children and young people with a disability.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Youth participation pilot survey findings are [due to be published in October 2024](#).

■ Film and Television

Tom Hayes: [\[5449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department to support the UK as a major location for the visual effects industry.

Tom Hayes: [\[5450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to increase the competitiveness of the United Kingdom's (a) visual effects and (b) animation industry.

Chris Bryant:

The government is committed to supporting the UK's visual effects and Animation industries, ensuring that they are able to remain competitive and with international reach. We will continue to focus on maintaining a strong and globally competitive sector by keeping tax incentives modern, agile and attractive; investing in infrastructure; supporting innovation; working with industry on skills development; and promoting independent content.

The audio-visual tax reliefs - administered by the BFI - play a key role in boosting competitiveness, incentivising the production of culturally British content, and contributing to the industry's - and the nation's - economic growth.

■ **Holiday Accommodation: Licensing**

Jayne Kirkham:

[\[5179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans that the short term lets licensing scheme will (a) allow local authorities to charge a fee to property owners to licence their property and (b) include a requirement to carry out fire and safety checks.

Chris Bryant:

Parliament has legislated for a registration scheme for short-term lets in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. We are committed to the introduction of such a scheme as soon as possible.

The details of how the scheme will operate and who it will be administered by will be confirmed in our full consultation response. This includes how costs for the service will be established and maintained through the recovery of fees charged to the property owner or provider(s) of the short-term let(s). It is not intended that the scheme would raise revenue above and beyond cost recovery (including for set-up and delivery).

The registration scheme will be designed to ensure that all providers of short-term lets are aware of their legal responsibilities to ensure health and safety standards, including fire and relevant safety checks, are met in their properties.

■ **Sports: Epping Forest**

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[5146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to promote access to sports for (a) young people and (b) people with disabilities in Epping Forest.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Inclusion 2024 programme is available to all schools in the country, including Epping Forest. It provides both expert support and free resources, and can help schools enhance opportunities for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to engage in P.E. and school sports.

The Government is committed to doing more to ensure that everyone, including children, young people, and those with disabilities, has access to and benefits from quality sport and physical activity opportunities. Sport and physical activity is central to achieving our health and opportunity manifesto missions, with the biggest gains coming from supporting those who are inactive to move more.

The Culture Secretary recently attended the launch of ParalympicGB's Equal Play Campaign where she expressed her determination to put sport at the heart of the

school curriculum. This includes opening up opportunities for all young people, including those with disabilities, to be able to access sport and physical activity at school.

The Government provides the majority of support for grassroots sport through Sport England - which annually invests over £250 million in Exchequer and Lottery funding. Sport England's work focuses on bringing the health and sport sectors together at community level and to champion physical activity with local leaders to develop interventions tailored to communities. Since 2019, Sport England has invested over £195,000 in Epping Forest for grassroots sport & physical activity.

Sport England also works to ensure that each of their programmes impact directly on disabled people and those with a long-term health condition, with initiatives like the 'We are Undefeatable' campaign and partnerships with disability organisations.

■ Unemployment: Film and Television

Tom Hayes:

[\[5448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of unemployment in (a) the visual effects sector and (b) UK film and TV post production.

Chris Bryant:

The last Parliament saw the biggest increase in economic inactivity in nearly 40 years. Film and TV employment rates were drastically affected by the US writers' and actors' strikes in 2023, and VFX and post-production was affected for longer than most. Figures from trade union Bectu suggest that the sector is recovering slowly, as unemployment across film and TV is down from 74% in September 2023 to 52% in July 2024. This clearly remains a difficult time for the sector and the government is committed to working with the sector to get it back to rude health, by attracting new film and high-end TV productions that require our VFX and post-production studios; providing competitive tax incentives; investing in infrastructure; supporting innovation, and promoting independent content.

The government will continue to ensure our tax incentives are modern, agile, competitive and attractive.

The government wants to ensure a creative career remains a viable prospect for people from whatever their background. We are working with industry stakeholders as they respond to the recommendations of the Good Work Review, a sectoral deep dive funded by DCMS into job quality and working practice. This sets out a number of priorities, including developing dedicated support and guidance for self-employed creators.

The government will continue to engage with sector organisations such as the UK Screen Alliance to support and champion our award winning VFX and post-production talent and make the UK an attractive and competitive place to do business.

DEFENCE**■ Israel: Military Aid****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[5365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Answer of 9 February 2024 to Question 12736 on Israel: Armed Forces, how many Israeli armed forces personnel were undertaking training in the UK on 9 September 2024; which courses they took part in; and to which UK military bases they were posted.

Luke Pollard:

I thank the hon. Member for her question, I'm sure she will understand I am unable to provide an answer in order to protect personal information.

EDUCATION**■ Alternative Education: Inspections****Kim Johnson:**[\[5397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Written Statement of 2 September 2024 entitled Education reforms to deliver on the government's opportunity mission, HCWS54, whether it is her policy to replace single headline grades for alternative provision education providers.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government's announcement to remove Ofsted's single headline grades with immediate effect included state-funded alternative provision schools. The government is committed to removing single headline grades in all the remits that Ofsted inspects and replacing them with report cards.

■ Film and Video Games: Further Education**Tom Hayes:**[\[5454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will provide additional support for the provision of AIM level 3 extended diploma in games, animation and visual effects skills in further education colleges.

Janet Daby:

This government recognises the importance of the creative industries sector and the need to ensure a skills pipeline into professions in that sector. Whilst the government publicly funds qualifications in a range of subject areas, it is for schools and colleges to determine what provision they deliver to their students based on their individual circumstances and when taking into consideration factors such as learner and employer demand.

The department believes that qualifications must deliver on its two central missions of enhancing and spreading opportunity for everyone and growing the economy. The department will ensure there are a range of high-quality qualifications that provide

young people and adults with the skills they need, and which deliver on its missions. It has been previously announced that the department will undertake a focused review of the post-16 qualifications reform and clarify the position by the end of the year. The qualifications that remain will allow the department to unlock opportunity for young people, harness their talents to drive growth and fulfil the government's missions.

■ Further Education: Admissions

James Naish: [\[5429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that there are a sufficient number of local places for students that choose to stay in full-time education beyond the age of 16.

James Naish: [\[5430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that further education providers proactively adjust their admissions (a) criteria and (b) numbers to ensure that local demand is met for students that choose to stay in full-time education beyond the age of 16.

Janet Daby:

Young people are required to continue in education or training until they turn 18. They can do this through full-time education, a job or volunteering combined with part-time study, or by undertaking an apprenticeship or supported internship.

Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Education and Skills Act 2008 to identify and support 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education or training.

Furthermore, under the September Guarantee, all 16 and 17 year olds are entitled to an offer of a suitable place in education or training. This aims to ensure that all young people, regardless of what they achieved in school, understand that there are opportunities that will help them to progress, and to ensure that they get the advice and support they need to find a suitable place.

Over £7 billion of 16 to 19 programme funding will be invested during the 2024/2025 academic year to pay for education for any 16, 17 or 18 year olds in post-16 education. The bulk of the money is committed through lagged funding allocations, based on student numbers taking part in education at each college, school or other institution in the year before. However, the department recognises that, for those institutions that recruit significantly more students than they are funded for in their lagged funding allocation, there are additional costs and the department provides in year growth funding to help with these.

For the 2024/25 academic year, the department took the exceptional step of publishing the policy on in year growth on 21 August 2024, which was before GCSE results day and the start of the academic year, to support providers' planning decisions. This should support providers to offer places to all young people who want

one. This policy is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-2024-to-2025>.

The post-16 capacity fund provides funding to schools and colleges to ensure they have enough capital capacity to accommodate the demographic increases in 16 to 19 learners. It has made available £238 million in capital funding since 2021.

■ Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Sir Gavin Williamson: [5579]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the cost of compliance with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

Sir Gavin Williamson: [5580]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an estimate of the cost to educational institutions of stopping the implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

Janet Daby:

An estimate of costs associated with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech Act) 2023 was provided in the Impact Assessment published with the Act.

The Act was paused to consider options for its future, including repeal, and no final decision has been made on this. One of the reasons for pausing the Act was to consider the burden on higher education providers before making a final decision, and the department is currently engaging with stakeholders on this. The department will undertake all required impact assessments before making a final decision.

■ Non-teaching Staff: Labour Turnover and Recruitment

Laura Kyrke-Smith: [4896]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of trends in (a) recruitment and (b) retention of school support staff in (i) Aylesbury constituency and (ii) England in the last five years.

Laura Kyrke-Smith: [4897]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve the (a) recruitment and (b) retention of school support staff in Aylesbury constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

The full-time equivalent (FTE) of support staff has increased since 2019/20, rising to 510,400 in 2023/24. This is an increase of 4,800 (0.9%) since last year. Support staff roles include teaching assistants, administrative staff, auxiliary staff, technicians and other supporting staff, plus two new posts of school business professional and leadership non-teacher, which were reported for the first time in 2023/24.

Data relating to the FTE of all support staff between 2019/20 and 2023/24 is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/7b0a17e8-b3ff-403e-687f-08dca70c1109>.

Data from the School Workforce census shows that, as of November 2019 in the Aylesbury constituency, there were 1360 FTE support staff reported from all 47 state-funded school data returns. In November 2023, there were 1430 FTE support staff in the Aylesbury constituency, when 46 schools returned data.

In a Department for Education survey in 2023 ('Use of teaching assistants in schools'), 75% of school leaders found it either 'fairly' or 'extremely' difficult to recruit teaching assistants. The survey found that retention was less of a concern, but still difficult for 29% of leaders.

The department values and will recognise the professionalism of the entire school workforce by addressing recruitment and retention challenges through reinstating the School Support Staff Negotiating Body.

The body will be tasked with establishing a national terms and conditions handbook, including training and progression routes. This reform will ensure that schools can recruit and retain the staff needed to deliver high quality, inclusive education.

■ School Milk

Clive Jones: [\[5477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of school compliance with school food standards to provide milk for pupils entitled to free school meals.

Stephen Morgan:

Under the School Food Standards, schools must ensure milk is available to all pupils who want it during school hours. Section 512ZB (3) of the Education Act 1996 sets out the requirement that milk must be provided free of charge to pupils eligible for free school meals.

Compliance with the School Food Standards is mandatory for all maintained schools, academies and free schools. Governors have a responsibility to ensure compliance and should appropriately challenge the headteacher and senior leadership team to ensure the school is meeting its obligations.

■ Schools: Buildings

Helen Whately: [\[5619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to fund improvements to academy school buildings which are not fit for purpose.

Stephen Morgan:

Ensuring schools have the resources and buildings they need is a key part of the department's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the

best start in life. The department remains committed to improving the condition of the school estate and to the continuing School Rebuilding Programme as part of that.

Responsibility for keeping buildings safe and well-maintained lies with schools and their responsible bodies, such as academy trusts and local authorities. The department supports them by providing capital funding, delivering major rebuilding programmes and offering guidance and support.

The department has allocated £1.8 billion in capital funding for the 2024/25 financial year to improve the condition of the estate, which is informed by consistent data on the condition of buildings. This included a capital allocation for large multi-academy trusts, large voluntary aided bodies and local authorities. Small and stand-alone academy trusts were able to apply to the Condition Improvement Fund for specific projects. Academies and other schools also received their own allocation to support small capital projects to improve facilities. Allocations and the outcome of the Condition Improvement Fund are published on GOV.UK.

The department is also fixing the problem of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) as quickly as possible, permanently removing RAAC either through grant funding or rebuilding.

All future decisions on spending plans, including for capital funding, remain subject to the Spending Review and further details will be set out in due course.

Helen Whately:

[5620]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the next steps are for schools which have been approved for funding under the Rebuilding Schools programme.

Stephen Morgan:

All the schools selected for the School Rebuilding Programme have been notified of indicative start dates and are either in delivery or ensuring they are prepared for when they do start delivery.

■ Schools: Reigate

Rebecca Paul:

[5805]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an estimate of the number of children who may move from independent to state sector schools as a result of the planned introduction of VAT on independent schools in Reigate constituency; and whether she has made an assessment of the adequacy of local state school places available.

Stephen Morgan:

In line with research from the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies, the government does not anticipate the ending of the VAT exemption that private schools enjoy to prompt notable movement into the state sector, and any movement is expected to take place over several years. This research can be found here:

<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/tax-private-school-fees-and-state-school-spending>.

There is significant spare capacity in existing state schools. The department collects pupil forecasts and school capacity data from local authorities annually through the school capacity survey and this data shows that in May 2023, 11.7% of primary capacity and 11.5% of secondary capacity was unfilled nationally, meaning school places are available in many parts of the country. The department will monitor demand and capacity using its normal processes and continue to work with local authorities to meet any pressures.

■ Schools: Transport

Laura Kyrke-Smith:

[5508]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of recent trends in the amount of time taken for transport to be arranged for SEND pupils; and what steps she is taking to ensure that local authorities process applications for SEND transport promptly.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. The department's home to school travel policy aims to make sure that no child is prevented from accessing education by a lack of transport. Local authorities must arrange free home to school travel for children of compulsory school age, 5-16, who attend their nearest school and would not be able to walk there because of the distance, their SEND or mobility problem, or because the nature of the route means it would be unsafe for them to do so. There are extended rights to free travel for children from low-income families.

The department is aware that challenges within the wider SEND system are creating pressure on home to school travel. The department is grateful to local authorities for their continued efforts in the face of significant challenge to ensure transport is available for eligible children.

The government is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, with specialist provision supporting children with the most complex needs. Improving early identification of need and setting clear expectations about the type of support that should be available in mainstream settings will mean fewer children need to travel long distances, with complex travel arrangements, to a school that can meet their needs. This will reduce the pressure on home to school travel.

■ Special Educational Needs

Dr Neil Hudson:

[5144]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help local councils support children with special educational needs.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or in alternative provision, receive the

right support to achieve and thrive including as they move into adult life. The department is committed to taking a community-wide approach in collaboration with local area partnerships to improving support for all children and young people with SEND.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) introduced a strengthened area SEND inspection framework in January 2023, leading to a greater emphasis on the outcomes being achieved for children and young people. It is the primary tool to maintain a focus on high standards in the SEND system across all partners.

The department works to monitor, support and challenge local authorities as needed, working closely with NHS England to tackle weaknesses that sit with health partners.

Where a council does not meet its duties, the department can take action that prioritises children's needs and supports local areas to bring about rapid improvement. We offer a range of universal, targeted and intensive support through department-managed programmes, such as our Sector Led Improvement Partners, which provide peer-to-peer tailored support.

We will continue to work closely with Ofsted and CQC as they review the local area SEND inspection framework in response to feedback from the Big Listen exercise.

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[5145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help local councils reduce waiting times for education, health and care plans.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department knows that parents often struggle to get the right support for their children, including having to go through long and difficult education, health and care (EHC) plan processes.

We want to ensure that EHC plan applications are processed promptly and, where required, plans are issued so that children and young people can access the support they need. The department has listened to parents, schools and local authorities and is reflecting on what practice could be made consistent nationally.

Where local authorities are failing to deliver consistent outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), we work with them using a range of support, and challenge, improvement programmes and SEND specialist advisors, to address identified weaknesses.

Dr Beccy Cooper:

[\[5788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that support for SEN children is needs-led.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government has made it their mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life. The department's ambition is that all children and young people receive the support they need, in the most appropriate setting. The department is committed to taking a community-wide approach, improving inclusivity

and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs.

An important part of this work is strengthening the evidence base on what works to identify and support children with different types of needs. The department has recently commissioned a number of independent evidence reviews to shed further light on this.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Breakfast Clubs**

James Naish:

[\[5427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to regulate (a) service standards and (b) access requirements specifically for SEND provision by breakfast club providers.

Stephen Morgan:

The government's National Wraparound Childcare Programme Handbook makes clear that providers are expected to ensure their provision is inclusive and has considered the needs of all children including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This guidance also sets out the expectation that local authorities publish the local offer for children with SEND.

The government is committed to ensuring delivery of breakfast clubs in every primary school, and will work with schools, providers and local authorities to ensure they can meet the needs of children with SEND as part of this programme. Providing a supportive start to the day ensures that every child, no matter their circumstances, is set up for the day and ready to learn.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Buckinghamshire**

Callum Anderson:

[\[5461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had recent discussions with Buckinghamshire Council on (a) the adequacy of support for children with special educational needs and disabilities in Buckinghamshire and (b) the level of funding for SEND support in that county.

Callum Anderson:

[\[5462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of (a) the (i) quality and (ii) accessibility of special educational needs support services in Buckinghamshire, and (b) the adequacy of funding received by Buckinghamshire council for SEND services.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is continuing to support and challenge Buckinghamshire to improve its delivery of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services.

The last local area SEND inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for Buckinghamshire was in March 2022, during which inspectors identified three areas of significant weakness. These areas were:

- i) The lack of a cohesive area strategy to identify and meet the needs of those children and young people requiring speech and language, communication and occupational therapy.
- ii) Waiting times for assessments on the autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnosis pathways, and the system-owned plans in place to address this.
- iii) Waiting times to see a community paediatrician.

Following the inspection, Buckinghamshire produced a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to address these areas of weakness, which was accepted by Ofsted and CQC. The department's regional team has put in place systems to track outcomes against these areas of weakness and the progress made by children and young people with SEND, including regular review meetings. At the most recent WSoA review meeting in July 2024, the local area demonstrated progress against the range of actions in place to secure clear and sustained improvement across all the areas of significant weakness. Buckinghamshire is also taking part in the Delivering Better Value (DBV) in SEND Programme.

Nationally, the government is providing schools with extra funding of almost £1.1 billion in this 2024/25 financial year through the new Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) to support them with overall costs, including the costs of supporting their pupils SEND. Of this total, special schools and alternative provision settings will be receiving over £140 million through the CSBG.

The additional funding through the CSBG comes alongside high needs funding for services and support for children and young people with complex SEND. Buckinghamshire County Council is receiving a high needs funding allocation of £127.5 million through their 2024/25 dedicated schools grant. Decisions on future funding levels beyond this financial year will be for the forthcoming Spending Review.

■ Teachers: Aylesbury

Laura Kyrke-Smith:

[\[4895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help improve the (a) recruitment and (b) retention of teachers in Aylesbury constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

High quality teaching is the factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's education. There are now 468,693 full-time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools in England, but the government must do more to ensure it has the workforce needed to provide the best possible education for every child in all parts of the country. This is why the government has set out the ambition to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers.

The first crucial step towards achieving this is to ensure teaching is once again an attractive and respected profession and to reset the relationship with the teaching profession. As part of this, it is important that teachers get the pay they deserve,

which is why this government has accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools from September. This government is providing schools with almost £1.1 billion in additional funding in the 2024/25 financial year to support schools with overall costs.

Alongside teacher pay, the department is continuing to support teacher trainees with tax-free bursaries of up to £28,000 and scholarships of up to £30,000 in shortage subjects. To help with retention, new teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing in the first five years of their careers can also receive a Targeted Retention Incentive if working in disadvantaged schools. Four schools in Aylesbury are eligible for payments to teachers of up to £6,000 after-tax.

The department has published a range of resources to help address teacher workload and wellbeing, including its 'Improve workload and wellbeing for school staff' service and the 'education staff wellbeing charter'. Additionally, effective use of technology can automate tasks and help manage workload for teachers. For example, high quality AI tools have the potential to reduce the amount of time that teachers spend marking, whilst supporting effective feedback and tailored teaching which drive pupil progress.

In August 2024, the department announced a £1 million fund to support innovators to develop proof of concept AI tools to support teachers with marking and providing feedback. Oak National Academy has also recently launched a sector-leading AI lesson planning assistant which enables teachers who choose to use it to create personalised and tailored lesson plans and resources in minutes.

The department is committed to supporting schools to implement flexible working practices, including taking planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time remotely, to improve recruitment and retention of teachers. The department is also funding bespoke support provided by flexible working ambassador schools and multi-academy trusts. The named flexible working ambassador for schools in Aylesbury is Upton Court Grammar School.

The department has established Teaching School Hubs across the country, which provide approved high-quality professional development to teachers at all stages of their careers. They play a significant role in delivering Initial Teacher Training, the Early Career Framework, National Professional Qualifications and Appropriate Body services. Astra Teaching School Hub is a centre of excellence supporting teacher training and development across Aylesbury.

■ T-levels

Alex Burghart:

[5644]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support colleges and schools to (a) adopt T-levels and (b) expand their T-levels programmes in their settings in the 2025-26 academic year.

Janet Daby:

The government is committed to supporting the continued roll-out of T Levels to ensure young people have a choice of high quality options post-16.

T Level providers have access to a suite of support and resources to help them prepare for and deliver T Levels. This includes workforce support from the Education and Training Foundation, which helps with the teaching skills, subject knowledge and industry skills needed for successful T Level delivery. Further information about the resources available to T Level providers can be found here:

<https://support.tlevels.gov.uk/hc/en-gb/articles/13561653292818-New-resources-for-schools-and-colleges-added-all-in-one-place>.

Providers planning to deliver T Levels for the first time can access a support package from the Association of Colleges, including help with planning, organisation and curriculum design.

The department has made practical tools and resources available to help providers source and deliver high quality industry placements and all providers have £550 allocated for each T Level student as part of their wider 16-19 funding allocation to help with these costs. T Level funding rates have also been uplifted by 10% for the 2024/25 academic year to help providers expand the number of T Levels offered and the number of students enrolled.

The department's T Level ambassador network continues to champion the T Level programme with members sharing their experiences and passion for technical education. The network now stands at over 700 members including employers, providers, students and other organisations.

The department is introducing new T Level foundation qualifications that are specifically designed to support students' progression to T Levels. Approved qualifications will be available for teaching from 2026.

Alex Burghart:**[5645]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her oral statement of 24 July 2024, Official Record, col 697, on Education and Opportunity, what plans her Department has to consult (a) external stakeholders and (b) people who have undertaken T-Levels during its review of post-16 qualification reform at level 3 and below; if she will publish the (i) name of the person leading and (ii) terms of reference for that review.

Janet Daby:

The department is committed to working to break down barriers to opportunity, harnessing talent and driving growth. In July this year, my Right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education announced that the department is undertaking an internal review of post-16 qualifications reform and has paused the planned defunding of qualifications that was due to go ahead on 31 July 2024. This was followed by a Written Ministerial Statement on 25 July, which can be read here:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-25/hcws22>.

The department understands that the sector needs certainty and will publish the outcomes of this review before Christmas.

Stakeholder views from all parts of the system will be important to contribute to the direction of future policy. Later this month departmental officials will begin engaging with providers, including those delivering T levels, awarding organisations and other key stakeholders.

In line with this being an internal review we will not publish the terms of reference. My noble Friend, the Minister for Skills is overseeing the review which is being undertaken by officials who the department does not intend to name.

■ Vocational Education: Aylesbury

Laura Kyrke-Smith:

[\[5492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking help improve technical skill development in Aylesbury constituency.

Janet Daby:

High quality technical education is a priority for this government in order to boost opportunity for individuals and tackle skills gaps which are essential for driving economic growth.

The department has established Skills England is central to the government's plan to ensure that we have the highly trained workforce needed to meet national, regional and local skills needs, such as those in Aylesbury. This is a critical part of the government's mission to raise growth sustainably across the whole country, and to support people to get better jobs and improve their standard of living.

This government is transforming the failing Apprenticeships Levy into a new Growth and Skills Levy to create opportunities across the whole country and give employers greater flexibility to train and upskill their workforce. By allowing investment in a broader range of skills training, the department will empower employers to address critical skill shortages and drive economic growth. The department is developing the design of the Growth and Skills Levy and will set out more detail in due course.

In the Aylesbury region, Buckinghamshire College Group offers a range of T Levels, supporting 16-19 learners to develop their technical knowledge and skills and gain direct experience of the workplace through the integral industry placement.

The department has provided £2,054,400 of capital funding in the last two years to support the development of state-of-the-art facilities in Buckinghamshire. The Aylesbury campus of the Buckinghamshire College Group has seen the development of facilities focussing on key local sectors including Construction, Engineering and Health and Social care, supporting the delivery of new qualifications at Level 3, HTQs and degree apprenticeships.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Agriculture: Land Use****Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[5441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of solar farms on levels of availability of agricultural land.

Mary Creagh:

Solar power is crucial to achieving net zero, providing an abundant source of cleaner, cheaper energy on the mission towards 2030. The total area used for solar farms is very small, and – even in the most ambitious scenarios – solar farms will occupy less than 1% of the UK's agricultural land.

■ Animal Products: Imports**Bambos Charalambous:**[\[5351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timescale is for introducing legislation to ban the import of hunting trophies.

Mary Creagh:

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Islington North, Jeremy Corbyn, on 23 July 2024, [PQ 591](#).

■ Batteries: Fire Prevention**Helen Whately:**[\[5623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if his Department what his Department's timetable is for its consultation into amending environmental permitting regulations to ensure that battery energy storage systems have appropriate mitigations in place against fire risk.

Emma Hardy:

The Government agrees with the need to have robust measures in place to manage the risks associated with facilities that use large numbers of lithium-ion batteries.

Defra is considering further options, including environmental permitting, for managing the environmental and public health risks from fires at BESS sites.

■ Bottles: Deposit Return Schemes**Wendy Morton:**[\[5329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of the introduction of a bottle deposit and return scheme in England.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to delivering the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) in October 2027, as agreed with the devolved Governments of the UK, and in accordance with the Joint Policy Statement published in April 2024.

The DRS will reduce litter, increase recycling rates, create high quality recycle for producers and promote a circular economy.

Coastal Erosion: North Norfolk**Steff Aquarone:**[\[5235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to protect the coast in North Norfolk constituency from erosion.

Emma Hardy:

Over £200 million has been invested in Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) projects in Norfolk since 2010, protecting 15,500 properties. Two major coast protection schemes are currently underway in North Norfolk, at Mundesley and Cromer, funded through Government FCERM Grant in Aid. These two schemes, with a forecast total cost of £30 million, will better protect 600 homes from coastal erosion and climate change over this century.

Funding for these schemes have come about through a close working partnership between North Norfolk District Council and the local Environment Agency team who work together to find affordable and environmentally sound solutions to the challenges facing the coast. They also work together on the Anglian Coastal Monitoring Programme which began in 1990 and is one of the longest running regional scale Government funded coastal monitoring programmes in the world. The output of this programme is essential for both the technical design of engineering solutions and providing robust, evidence-based policies for sustainable coastal management into the long term.

North Norfolk is also benefitting from approximately £15 million funding through the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme, delivered locally through the Coastwise project, trialling innovative approaches to adapt to the impacts of climate change and coastal erosion. The Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme aims to speed up strategic and action planning on how coastal local authorities, partners and communities will address the long-term plan of moving communities, businesses and resources away from the coast at risk. The programme is supporting the trial of early on-the-ground actions for medium and long-term plans. This will allow coastal areas at serious risk to address the challenges a changing climate creates.

Environment Agency: Powers**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[5777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the enforcement powers of the Environment Agency.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) publishes an annual Review of Activities Regulated by the EA setting out, details of enforcement action taken. The most recent of these reports was published in March this year and sets out statistics demonstrating the effectiveness of the regulatory activities of the Agency, including enforcement.

In 2018 the Government published the Noel Review: an independent review into serious and organised crime in the waste sector. The review made several recommendations for enhanced enforcement powers and regulations to control the management of waste. The EA's powers to search and seize evidence and access communications data have been strengthened as a result. Wide ranging recommendations are being implemented through regulatory reform. In 2023, the EA requested and was provided with enhanced powers to sanction offenders using Variable Monetary Penalties.

In addition to the formal review, individual incidents and criminal investigation provide the regulators opportunity to learn lessons and identify further ways to frustrate the efforts of those who are determined to make profits, breaching environmental control with no regard to their impact on the environment and local people.

■ Fly-tipping**Alex Mayer:****[5446]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a single reporting mechanism for fly-tipping incidents.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities are often best placed to tackle local issues such as fly-tipping, and incidents can be reported to them by visiting the local authority's website. Individuals can get help on identifying the relevant local authority webpage at <https://www.gov.uk/report-flytipping>.

■ Fly-tipping: Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard**Alex Mayer:****[5447]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on the number of instances of fly tipping in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard constituency in each year since 2010.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities are required to report fly-tipping incidents and enforcement actions to Defra, which the department have published annually since 2012, at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/env24-fly-tipping-incidents-and-actions-taken-in-england>. This data isn't available at a constituency level and excludes the majority of private-land incidents.

■ Food: Labelling

Dr Luke Evans:

[5659]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the transparency in food labelling for British (a) food and (b) drink.

Daniel Zeichner:

The UK maintains high standards on the information that is provided on food labels, whether that be mandatory or voluntary, so that consumers can have confidence in the food that they buy.

All food and drink sold on the UK market must comply with food labelling rules. The fundamental principle of food labelling rules is that information provided to the consumer must not mislead and must enable the safe use of food.

Country of origin information is required for fresh and frozen meat of beef cattle, sheep, goat, pigs and poultry, as well as uncut fresh fruit and vegetables, honey, olive oil, wine and some fish products. Buying food locally and supporting their local food economy is important to many consumers and where any label indicates that a food is produced locally, this must not be misleading to a consumer.

A public consultation on fairer food labelling was undertaken between March and May 2024 by the previous Government. This sought views on proposals to improve and extend current mandatory method of production labelling. We are now carefully considering all responses before deciding on next steps and will publish a response to this consultation in due course.

■ Forests: Northern Ireland

Robin Swann:

[5506]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what guidance his Department provides on whether the EU Deforestation Regulation will apply to Northern Ireland.

Mary Creagh:

Ministers are currently considering our approach to Regulation 2023/1115 in Northern Ireland, and the Government will communicate relevant arrangements at the earliest possible opportunity.

■ Fresh Produce Supply Chain Review

Helen Whately:

[R] [5613]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on the review to increase fairness in the fresh produce supply chain.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government will deliver a resilient and healthy food system, with a new deal that ensures fairness in the supply chain across all sectors, including the fresh produce supply chain. Farmers should always receive a fair price for their products and the Government is committed to tackling contractual unfairness wherever it exists.

Defra will continue the work closely with stakeholders from the fresh produce sector on the best way to achieve this.

Government Departments: Food**Sir John Hayes:**[\[5532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy to encourage Government Departments in Whitehall to prioritise the (a) procurement and (b) purchase of British produced (i) food and (ii) drink.

Daniel Zeichner:

As set out in the manifesto, we have an ambition to supply half of all food and drink into the public sector from local, British producers or those certified to higher environmental standards, whilst remaining in line with our World Trade Organization and domestic procurement obligations.

Inland Waterways: Midlands**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[5371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to support the long-term resilience of canal infrastructure in (a) the Midlands and (b) Leicestershire.

Dr Luke Evans:[\[5372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Canal and River Trust on ensuring the long-term resilience of canal infrastructure in (a) the Midlands and (b) Leicestershire.

Dr Luke Evans:[\[5373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of ensuring a structurally-robust canal network on levels of active travel in communities.

Dr Luke Evans:[\[5374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of ensuring a structurally-robust canal network on levels of biodiversity in communities.

Emma Hardy:

The Government recognises that inland waterways provide many public benefits, including health and wellbeing effects, leisure and recreation uses, and industrial heritage attractions. They are also important for the natural environment by providing

green corridors along which biodiversity can flourish, and contribute to the growth of local economies, via domestic tourism and facilitating active transport links. These were assessed as part of the Government's review in 2021/22 of the current Canal and River Trust Grant. Officials also meet regularly with the Trust to discuss a range of issues.

As an independent charity the Trust is responsible for managing operational matters relating to individual canals, and the Government does not have a role in that. When the Trust was set up in 2012, the Government provided it with a 15-year grant (2012-2027) currently worth £740 million, which at £52.6 million a year represents 20-25% of its annual income. At the same time the Government also provided the Trust with a permanent endowment fund now worth over £1 billion that generates a further quarter of its income. The Government has reconfirmed its provision of a substantial new 10-year grant worth £401 million between 2027 and 2037, which reflects the importance it places on our waterways. It will bring the total amount of Government support for the Trust since 2012 to around £1.14 billion.

■ Packaging: Recycling

Wendy Morton:

[5328]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the weight-based model for calculating extender producer responsibility fees.

Mary Creagh:

The Government has now published a first set of pEPR illustrative base fees. We are assessing industry's feedback, including on the importance of accounting for the weight and volume of packaging materials, to ensure our methodology is based on the best available evidence to date.

Gavin Robinson:

[5330]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of pausing the implementation of the Extender Producer Responsibility scheme.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR) as a vital first step to cracking down on waste as we move towards a circular economy. It will create 21,000 jobs, stimulate more than £10 billion investment in the recycling sector over the next decade, and see packaging producers, rather than the taxpayer, cover the costs of managing waste. Delay to the implementation of the scheme would defer these environmental and economic benefits.

We will continue to work closely with businesses on the implementation of this programme and provide them with the clarity they need to prepare.

■ Pesticides

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[5440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to publish the National Action Plan for the sustainable use of pesticides.

Emma Hardy:

We intend to publish a National Action Plan in due course that reflects the Government's priorities and ambitions to minimise the risks and impact of pesticides on human health and the environment, and to facilitate sustainable use.

■ Public Bodies: Food

Sir John Hayes:

[\[5264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make it his policy to help support public bodies to prioritise the purchase of British produced (a) food and (b) drink.

Daniel Zeichner:

As set out in the manifesto, we have an ambition to supply half of all food and drink into the public sector from local, British producers or those certified to higher environmental standards, whilst remaining in line with our World Trade Organization and domestic procurement obligations.

■ Rivers: Access

Grahame Morris:

[\[5571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of granting rights of access to rivers to (a) kayakers and (b) swimmers.

Emma Hardy:

Inland waterways such as canals and rivers are categorised as regulated (mostly canals and some larger rivers, owned by a navigation authority) and unregulated (mostly smaller rivers and no canals, owned/managed by riparian landowners along their length).

If the waterway is owned or managed by a navigation authority, access can be obtained through the navigation authority's licensing regime. If the waterway is unregulated then access should be negotiated with the relevant landowners through local voluntary access agreements, to ensure the interests of all parties concerned are considered. Legislating on this issue is not (currently) Government policy.

To formally designate a site as a bathing water, an application must be submitted to Defra. Defra welcomes applications for both coastal and inland waters such as lakes and rivers. Local authorities, groups and individuals can apply for sites to be designated. Defra encourages this by writing to local authority Chief Executives, and stakeholders like Swimming Associations.

■ Rivers: Walking**Catherine Atkinson:** [\[5490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on the designation of new national river walks in England.

Mary Creagh:

The Department is progressing plans to designate nine new National River Walks across England, one in each region, to enhance access to nature. This is a priority for us, and we are currently considering several delivery options, as well as reviewing where existing river walks are in place. Further details will be provided in due course.

■ School Milk**Clive Jones:** [\[5478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to encourage schools to participate in the school milk subsidy scheme.

Daniel Zeichner:

The long-standing School Milk Subsidy Scheme was accessed by over 11,000 schools in England in the last school year. Any school wishing to participate can access information about the Scheme [here](#). The scheme is voluntary and it is a matter for individual schools as to whether they wish to participate in it.

■ Seafood: Exports**Seamus Logan:** [\[5770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has requested special arrangements for seafood consignments leaving the UK as part of the European Union Entry/Exit System.

Seamus Logan: [\[5771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the European Union Entry/Exit System on seafood exports.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government recognises the importance of seafood exports to the economies of many coastal communities around the United Kingdom. We will tackle trade barriers through seeking to negotiate a veterinary/SPS agreement. We will continue to work closely with seafood exporters to ensure that they can continue to sell their world-class produce to markets around the world.

■ Waste Management

David Simmonds:

[\[5411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 6 September 2024 to Question 2316 on Equality, whether the socio-economic duty will apply to local authority decisions on the configuration of household waste and recycling collections.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities must comply with all relevant Equalities Act duties and in England this will include the socio-economic duty in due course.

■ Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015

Ruth Jones:

[\[5356\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what guidance his Department issues on the application of the Welfare of Animals at Time Of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 to (a) commercial fishing operations and (b) other activities to which the Animal Welfare Act 2006 does not apply.

Daniel Zeichner:

Commercial fishing activities are not covered by the relevant welfare at killing legislation unless animals are kept alive for processing later. In these circumstances fish and invertebrates shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations. Defra has not issued guidance on these issues.

Following publication of the Animal Welfare Committee's updated Opinion on the welfare of farmed fish at the time of killing, a GB-wide farmed trout joint government and industry working group is examining the issues raised in the report to explore potential options for more detailed welfare at killing requirements. The Scottish Government is similarly working closely with the salmon industry.

■ Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 and Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006

Ruth Jones:

[\[5355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the enforcement of the (a) Welfare of Animals at Time Of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 and (b) Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 by local authorities; and whether he plans to take steps to help improve enforcement the enforcement of those regulations.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Post Implementation Review to the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 published in Jan 2021 addressed the roles of the Food Standards Agency, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and local authorities in enforcement of the regulations. No such assessment has been made of the Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order.

Defra regularly engages with local authorities, APHA and other interested parties to discuss the enforcement of animal welfare regulations.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Alaa Abdel Fattah

Carla Denyer:

[\[5445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 26 July 2024 to Question 1338 on British Nationals Abroad: Detainees, what response he has received to his request for consular access to Alaa Abd El-Fattah; and if he will take further steps to call for his release prior to the fifth anniversary of his detention in prison on 29 September 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

HMG Ministers and officials at the British Embassy in Cairo continue to raise Mr Alaa Abd El-Fattah's case with the Egyptian government at the highest levels. They have been consistently clear in calling for his release and continue to press for urgent consular access. The Egyptian Government does not recognise Mr El-Fattah as a British national and are refusing consular access. The Foreign Secretary raised Mr El-Fattah's case with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty most recently on 25 September, the Prime Minister also raised Mr El-Fattah's case with President Sisi on 8 August, and I raised Mr El-Fattah's case with the Egyptian Ambassador on 11 September.

■ Bangladesh: Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon:

[\[5317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Bangladesh on protecting religious minorities; and what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to support (a) religious tolerance and (b) human rights in that country.

Catherine West:

The UK has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. We are committed to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all, as guaranteed under international human rights law. In July, the UK Government expressed concern about the situation in Bangladesh and called for all sides to work together to end the violence. We support the independent fact-finding mission by the United Nations to identify human rights violations in Bangladesh. The Interim Government in Bangladesh has the UK's full support as it works to restore peace and order, ensure accountability and promote national reconciliation.

■ China and Hong Kong: Diplomatic Service

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[5527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an estimate of the number of British National (Overseas) visa holders in (a) Hong Kong and (b) China who do not have access to consular protection.

Catherine West:

The FCDO and our embassies, high commissions and consulates worldwide provide consular assistance to British nationals abroad. This includes BN(O)s who, under the Memoranda to the Joint Declaration, are eligible for consular assistance in third countries, but not in Hong Kong, Macao or mainland China. It is not possible to give an exact figure of the number of BN(O)s who live in, or travel to, Hong Kong and China, as this information is not captured by the FCDO. There are an estimated 2.9 million people who retain BN(O) nationality.

■ Development Aid: Water

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[5444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much official development assistance was provided to programmes aiming to ensure access to clean water in the last financial year; and how much he plans to provide to such programmes this financial year.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK oversees a portfolio of bilateral and multilateral development programmes that seek to improve access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). In 2022, the UK provided £124 million of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for programmes which help improve WASH access; this includes £45 million of bilateral ODA and £79 million of multilateral ODA. Official figures for 2023 will be published in Autumn 2024. These programmes include an £18.5 million WASH Systems for Health programme, which supports governments in developing countries to strengthen the systems that provide WASH services. This financial year we will continue to fund these programmes and work closely with our partners to ensure equitable access to WASH services.

■ Israel: Arms Trade

Andrew Bowie:

[\[5344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the decision to suspend arms export licences to Israel on relations between the UK and the US.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We have been clear that this is our own independent process, specific to the UK and according to our own law. The Strategic Export Licensing Criteria state that the Government will not issue or maintain export licences if there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of International

Humanitarian Law. We have deemed that there is such a risk and have taken the necessary decision. The US-UK relationship remains strong and we are united by decades of unrivalled security and defence cooperation. Our priority remains achieving a ceasefire in Gaza in which we see hostages released, civilians protected and aid floods in.

■ **Japan: Religious Freedom**

Jim Shannon: [\[5315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Japanese counterpart on recent legislation affecting religious groups in that country.

Catherine West:

This is a subject that is reserved for the Government of Japan and institutions of Japan. As a matter of principle, the UK has a long-standing policy to defend freedom of religion or belief for all and promote respect between different religious and non-religious communities. The right to adopt a religion or belief, to practise it without hindrance, to share your faith and to change your religion or beliefs are all key freedoms that everyone should be able to enjoy.

■ **Saudi Arabia: UN Human Rights Council**

Angus MacDonald: [\[5453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what his policy is on Saudi Arabia's bid for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK does not disclose voting positions on multilateral elections. However, we expect all members elected to the Human Rights Council to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.

■ **Zimbabwe: Foreign Relations**

Adam Jogee: [\[3465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Zimbabwean counterpart since his appointment.

Anneliese Dodds:

Since the Foreign Secretary's appointment, he has written to his Zimbabwean counterpart to reaffirm his commitment to working with the country in order to boost trade and investment, enhance strong people to people links and to tackle the climate crisis. As President Mnangagwa begins his role as Chairperson of South African Development Community (SADC), the UK will continue to engage with Zimbabwe on areas of mutual importance, both through Ministers and the Embassy in Harare.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE■ **Alan Milburn****Nick Timothy:**[\[5434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether Alan Milburn has been issued with a departmental security pass.

Karin Smyth:

As my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, stated in Parliament on 9 September 2024, Alan Milburn does not hold a Departmental pass.

■ **Disabled Facilities Grants****Laura Kyrke-Smith:**[\[5209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Disabled Facilities Grant scheme, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of updating the Test of Resources in order to ensure working people with disabilities can access means-tested support.

Stephen Kinnock:

We recognise how important the right housing arrangements are in enabling people to live independently, and the need to support people to live in their own home wherever possible. In England, we continue to fund the locally administered Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) which helps eligible older and disabled people on low incomes to adapt their homes, through practical changes like installing stair lifts or level access showers, to make them safe and suitable for their needs.

We continue to keep all aspects of the DFG under review. Local authorities have a significant degree of flexibility in how they deliver home adaptations funding. For example, they can publish a housing assistance policy to increase the upper limit of the grant, or remove means testing for grants costing under a certain amount.

■ **Health Education: Communication****Tom Hayes:**[\[5163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will launch a national public communications campaign ahead of winter 2024-25 on how to stay well including advice on (a) vaccinations for (i) flu and (ii) coronavirus, (b) keeping warm and (c) contacting relevant services.

Andrew Gwynne:

This year's national communications campaign to support the uptake of essential winter vaccinations, including influenza and COVID-19, launched on 23 September 2024, and will run throughout the autumn and winter. The campaign, called Get Winter Strong, will particularly target eligible cohorts where uptake has historically been lower, and will involve a range of national media engagement activities, paid marketing, social media, and stakeholder engagement.

There is also a comprehensive range of information leaflets, promotional materials, and other resources to inform members of the public and health care professionals, to raise awareness of the programmes, and support decisions in relation to consent. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.healthpublications.gov.uk/Home.html>

These cover all of the vaccination programmes, including childhood programmes, flu, COVID-19, and vaccines for older people, specifically pneumococcal, respiratory syncytial virus, and shingles. These resources are co-branded with the National Health Service and include translations into a range of languages and accessible formats, for instance braille, British Sign Language videos, large print, and audio.

In addition, NHS England has now published the Winter and H2 Priorities for the NHS letter. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/winter-and-h2-priorities/>

A national press release has also been issued, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2024/09/nhs-announces-plans-to-prepare-for-busy-winter-period/>

■ **Mental Health Services: Aylesbury**

Laura Kyrke-Smith:

[4947]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle waiting lists for mental health services in Aylesbury constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

People with mental health issues in the Aylesbury constituency and across the country are not getting the support or care they deserve, which is why we will fix the broken system to ensure that mental health is given the same attention and focus as physical health, so that people can be confident in accessing high quality mental health support when they need it. We will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers to reduce delays and provide faster treatment, which will also help ease pressure on hospitals. By cutting mental health waiting lists and intervening earlier with more timely mental health support, we can get this country back to good health.

■ **NHS: Equality**

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[R] [4240]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to reduce external spending on equality, diversity and inclusion programmes, in the context of NHS efficiency savings.

Karin Smyth:

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, along with the Department's arm's length bodies, are fully committed to creating a fair health system that tackles health inequalities effectively. We will support appropriate spend on

equality, diversity and inclusion where it helps us meet these aims and aligns with our health mission and priorities.

■ Parkinson's Disease: Prescriptions

Sarah Green:

[5424]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, If he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending free NHS prescriptions to people with Parkinson's disease.

Karin Smyth:

There are no current plans to review the list of medical conditions that entitle someone to apply for a medical exemption certificate. Approximately 89% of prescription items are dispensed free of charge in the community in England, and there are a wide range of exemptions from prescription charges already in place, for which those with Parkinson's disease may be eligible. Eligibility depends on the patient's age, whether they are in qualifying full-time education, whether they are pregnant or have recently given birth, or whether they are in receipt of certain benefits or a war pension.

People on low incomes can apply for help with their health costs through the NHS Low Income Scheme. Prescription prepayment certificates (PPCs) are also available. PPCs allow people to claim as many prescriptions as they need for a set cost, with three-month and 12-month certificates available. The 12-month PPC can be paid for in instalments.

■ Sexual Assault Referral Centres

Preet Kaur Gill:

[4404]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the performance of for-profit providers of sexual assault referral centres.

Andrew Gwynne:

All Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) services are commissioned through an open and transparent procurement process. The quality of the service provision is a key consideration in any contract award

All SARC services are subject to Care Quality Commission regulations, and within NHS England, each region has a commissioning and contracting team that oversees all SARC contracts to ensure the performance and quality of the service provision meets National Health Service standards. From October 2025, SARC services will also be required to be accredited under forensic services regulations, which will provide an additional level of assurance.

■ Tony Blair Institute for Global Change**Sir John Hayes:** **[4172]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether Ministers in his Department have met the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change since 5 July 2024.

Karin Smyth:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. The most recent publication of transparency data took place on 29 August 2024.

■ Urology: Health Education**Mr Gregory Campbell:** **[5270]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help promote Urology Awareness Month in September 2024.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department has a number of existing partnerships to help promote awareness of urology conditions. NHS England is partnering with P-Wave on a campaign targeted at men, specifically focussing on blood in urine as a possible symptom of cancer. The partnership has seen more than 430,000 P-Wave urinal mats distributed around the United Kingdom since its launch, with the awareness message appearing in pubs, workplaces, and sporting and music venues. Further information is available at the following link:

https://www.p-wave.co.uk/pages/nhs-partnership?srsltid=AfmBOooUsgp-sQbOb1cEBiXn8eYh73_kU1LJ5jDABF2ZTBvL2nC8WWr

NHS England is also partnering with major supermarkets to increase awareness of various health conditions, including urological conditions, via messaging on products like toilet paper. There is a specific focus on lower cost products reaching members of the public from lower socio-economic groups, supporting the National Health Service drive to reduce health inequalities.

HOME OFFICE**■ Defending Democracy Taskforce****Mr Gregory Campbell:** **[5269]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to continue the Defending Democracy Taskforce.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government is committed to rolling out a Young Futures programme which will bring together local services to improve the delivery of support for young people at risk of being drawn into crime .

The HO has already set up a YF delivery unit to make progress on the design of local prevention partnerships and will be working cross government on the design and delivery of Young Futures Hubs. More information will be provided in due course.

■ **Mental Health Services: Buckinghamshire**

Laura Kyrke-Smith:

[\[4944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to roll out open access young futures hubs for (a) children and (b) young people in (i) Aylesbury constituency and (ii) Buckinghamshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government is committed to rolling out a Young Futures programme which will bring together local services to improve the delivery of support for young people at risk of being drawn into crime .

The HO has already set up a YF delivery unit to make progress on the design of local prevention partnerships and will be working cross government on the design and delivery of Young Futures Hubs. More information will be provided in due course.

■ **Passports: Republic of Ireland**

Colum Eastwood:

[\[5143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing (a) elected representatives from Ireland and (b) other Irish passport holders to verify UK passport applications using the HM Passport Office online verification system.

Seema Malhotra:

As part of the criteria for a person to act as a referee to a passport application, His Majesty's Passport Office requires that the referee must hold a passport that it can validate to confirm that person's identity. In addition to British passport holders, Irish passport holders can act as a passport referee.

For a British passport holder, an automated check is conducted through the interface with HM Passport Office systems. However, this system interface is not in place for the external checks against the Irish passport database, and these checks can currently only be conducted through the manual input of information. However, a range of technical options are being explored to enable Irish passport holders to verify UK passport applications using the online verification system in due course.

■ **Terrorism: Iran**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[5548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the threat of pro-Iranian front groups operating in (a) Parliament and (b) Westminster.

Dan Jarvis:

While we do not routinely comment on the detail of specific threats, it is an absolute priority for this Government to protect our democratic and electoral processes from interference by any foreign state, including Iran.

The National Security Act 2023 provides the security services and law enforcement agencies with tools to deter, detect, and disrupt modern-day state threats, including foreign interference. Alongside this, the Defending Democracy Taskforce is working to safeguard our democracy from threats we face.

The Government's top priority is our national security, and we will use all the tools at our disposal to protect the UK, and its people, from state threats.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Council Tax: Probate****David Simmonds:**[\[5410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of holding a consultation on the potential merits of removing the council tax exemption for homes in probate in the context of the Welsh Government's consultation on that matter.

Jim McMahon:

Council tax is a devolved policy issue, the devolved governments therefore take decisions on council tax policy independent of central government. The Government does not currently have any plans to reform council tax in England.

■ Help to Buy Scheme**Sir Christopher Chope:**[\[5254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4169 on Help to Buy Scheme, how many Help to Buy loan repayment applications are being processed; and how many and what proportion have been outstanding for more than (a) three and (b) six months.

Matthew Pennycook:

The requested information is not held centrally. Publicly available information covers total annual redemptions (see response to written Question UIN [4169](#)).

Homes England do hold information on redemptions initiated and redemptions concluded in any given month. In the 3 months to September, for Help to Buy and associated legacy schemes, an average of 2104 redemptions per month were initiated and an average of 2260 concluded. Please note that these numbers are not directly comparable.

In order to be able to redeem a Help to Buy loan, several steps need to be completed by the customer, their surveyor, their solicitor and by the Help to Buy Mortgage Administrator. Timescales are therefore dependent on each of the parties.

Redemptions may also be initiated by customers who subsequently decide not to proceed.

■ Insulation: Housing

Helen Hayes:

[5069]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 4 September 2024 to Question 2960 on Insulation: Housing, what discussions her Department has had with mortgage lenders on (a) the installation of spray foam insulation and (b) its impact on lending.

Helen Hayes:

[5070]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 4 September 2024 to Question 2960 on Insulation: Housing, what steps she is taking to ensure homeowners who retrofit their homes with recommended measures are not penalised by mortgage lenders.

Rushanara Ali:

We are aware of the issues some homeowners are facing in obtaining finance where spray foam insulation has been installed. Officials in the department have previously consulted UK Finance and the Building Societies Association, the trade bodies for lenders about this matter, who advise that their members rely on the views of valuers and surveyors on this issue.

Whilst the department cannot comment on the decisions made by individual lenders, the presence of spray foam should not automatically prevent lending, and decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis following a survey.

That is why it is important that surveyors continue to follow published protocols published in March 2023 to support these assessments, which can be found here: <https://www.property-care.org/resources/spray-foam-insulation-inspections>(opens in a new tab)(opens in a new tab) and [Guides & Documents - IMA](#) (insulationmanufacturers.org.uk)(opens in a new tab).

The Government do not specify or recommend which types of insulation are appropriate for a particular property, and all measures installed under government schemes must be installed by TrustMark registered installers.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Civil Servants

Mrs Kemi Badenoch:

[2984]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether any of (a) her Parliamentary staff, (b) the Parliamentary staff of other Ministers and (c) Labour Party staff have joined her Department as civil servants, rather than special advisers, since the general election.

Alex Norris:

It is the longstanding convention of government under successive administrations that we do not comment on matters relating to individual staff.

There are clear rules governing recruitment and appointment of civil service roles, which are regulated by the Civil Service Commission.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Departmental Responsibilities

David Simmonds: [\[1985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will update the list of ministerial responsibilities for her Department.

Alex Norris:

Details of ministerial responsibilities for the department are published on gov.uk.

■ Park Homes: Sales

Rachel Hopkins: [\[5693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is for publishing a response to the report entitled The impact of a change in the maximum park home sale commission, published in June 2022.

Matthew Pennycook:

The park homes sector is an important part of the housing market and must be a safe and secure place for residents.

The Government recognises that there are longstanding concerns about the requirement to pay site owners a commission upon sale of a park home.

The Government will consider the 2022 report in detail and set out its position on this matter in due course.

■ Parking Offences: Automatic Number Plate Recognition

Jayne Kirkham: [\[5164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is for a decision on the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition technology by local authorities as a parking enforcement tool to tackle non-compliance with parking charges.

Alex Norris:

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology cannot be used by Councils to enforce parking contraventions once a vehicle has left the car park. A notice of a parking charge from a Council must be given by a civil enforcement officer affixing it to the vehicle. The Government has no plans to review this position.

JUSTICE■ **Funerals****Richard Foord:**[\[5425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the National Association of Funeral Directors report entitled Picking up the pieces, published in April 2023, if she will (a) make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of that report's findings on the number of families that have waited more than four weeks for a funeral and (b) hold discussions with local authorities on coordinating work between (i) health services, (ii) coroners, (iii) undertakers and (iv) others highlighted in that report.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Death management is a complex and sensitive area, spanning the work of multiple government departments. Whilst the Government does not have operational responsibility for the provision of funeral services, we are aware of funeral delays in some areas and acknowledge that these are often exacerbated by pressures from within the wider death management system. Death management policy sits across a number of government departments and responsible departments take a collaborative approach to addressing concerns in this area and are committed to continuing to work together, and with local authorities, to improve timeliness and services provided to the bereaved.

■ **Prisoners' Release****Paula Barker:**[\[5139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether any prisoners convicted of violent offences are scheduled for early release.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Certain offences have been excluded from this change. This includes serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more; specified offences linked to domestic abuse irrespective of sentence length (including stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour and non-fatal strangulation); sex offences irrespective of sentence length; as well as offences concerning national security. The change will also not apply to sentences subject to release at the discretion of the Parole Board or to certain sexual and violent offences which currently attract automatic release from an SDS at the two-thirds point.

This change means that by law, an offender serving multiple sentences could have a mixture of some sentences that are eligible for the 40% release point and others that are not. Someone serving a sentence for an excluded offence will not see their custodial time for that sentence reduced.

Paula Barker:[\[5141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what categorisations of crimes will perpetrators be eligible for release from prison under the early release schemes; and what methodology was used to determine the categories of offenders to be released.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Release provisions for different sentence types and length are fixed by law. This change has amended the automatic release point for standard determinate sentences.

Certain offences have been excluded from this change. This includes sex offences irrespective of sentence length; serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more; specified offences linked to domestic abuse irrespective of sentence length (including stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour and non-fatal strangulation); as well as offences concerning national security. The change will also not apply to sentences subject to release at the discretion of the Parole Board or to certain sexual offences and violent offences which currently attract automatic release from an SDS at the two-thirds point.

This means that by law, an offender serving multiple sentences could have a mixture of some sentences that are eligible for the 40% release point and others that are not. Someone serving a sentence for an excluded offence will not see their custodial time for that sentence reduced.

Paula Barker:[\[5142\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what methodology was used to determine a 18 month review period for the new Early Release Scheme.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Government inherited a criminal justice system in crisis. Due to ongoing pressures on prison capacity, the Government adjusted the release point for prisoners serving eligible standard determinate sentences (SDS), allowing release after 40% of their sentence rather than 50%, and have committed to review this change after 18 months. This measure was necessary to stop the collapse of the justice system and quickly free up prison places, as well as ensuring courts can continue to send offenders into custody. 18 months allows time for officials to monitor the impact of the measure on prison capacity and act accordingly based on the impact.

■ Prisoners' Release: Domestic Abuse**Paula Barker:**[\[5140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that perpetrators in line for early release who have (a) history of and (b) prior convictions for domestic violence do not reoffend.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Government inherited a justice system on the brink of collapse and due to acute prison capacity pressure, the Government had no option but to introduce a change that will allow prisoners serving an eligible standard determinate sentence (SDS) to be released after serving 40% rather than 50% of that sentence in custody. Certain offences have been excluded from this change. They include serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more, specified offences linked to domestic abuse

irrespective of sentence length (including stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour, and non-fatal strangulation).

The policy is being implemented in two tranches to safely manage releases. All offenders released will be subject to robust licence conditions and risk management plans, monitored by the probation service. There are clear expectations in place for probation staff managing cases where there is evidence of domestic abuse. While on licence they will be subject to conditions including those deemed necessary to protect the public, such as exclusion zones, location monitoring, residence at a specified place or disclosing details of any new relationship. Offenders must comply with these conditions and attend supervision. If they fail to comply, they can be recalled to continue serving their sentence in prison.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

Ben Lake:

[\[5354\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, if she will facilitate a vote on proposals for financial redress contained in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman report on changes to women's State Pension age, published on 21 March 2024.

Lucy Powell:

The Government is taking the necessary time to properly review and consider the Ombudsman's report, given the significance and complexity of the issue. Once the Government has outlined its approach, opportunities for the House to debate this matter would be considered in the usual way.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Out of Area Treatment: Northern Ireland

Jim Shannon:

[\[5321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will have discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of providing financial support to (a) cancer patients under the age of 26 and (b) their families when travel is required from Northern Ireland to England for treatment.

Hilary Benn:

Support for patients required to travel from Northern Ireland to Great Britain for medical treatment is a devolved matter for the Northern Ireland Department of Health. However, this Government wants to work with the Northern Ireland Executive, Assembly, and local leaders to support them in delivering better health outcomes.

Patients in Northern Ireland pay for their own travel to appointments unless they are eligible for the Department of Health's Hospital Travel Costs Scheme which is for people on a low income, including travel to the rest of the UK for treatment.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY■ **Innovation**

Saqib Bhatti: [5396]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Innovation Skills Framework.

Feryal Clark:

The Department has not made a formal assessment of this Framework, which is being delivered by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). UKRI is working to further refine and develop the Framework. Through Innovate UK, it will continue to work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and in due course with Skills England, to monitor the impact of applying this Framework.

■ **Patents: Registration**

Andrew Griffith: [5695]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what information the Intellectual Property Office holds on the number of patents registered in (a) July and (b) August 2024.

Feryal Clark:

There were 746 patents granted (registered) by the Intellectual Property Office in July 2024, and 625 patents granted in August 2024. These figures are part of IPO's Official Statistics and are published each month. They can be accessed [on our website](#).

■ **Social Media: Suicide**

Richard Burgon: [5332]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will have discussions with Ofcom on the use of its powers under Schedule 11 of the Online Safety Act 2023 in the context of online forums that share instructional content on methods of suicide.

Feryal Clark:

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology is carefully considering Ofcom's categorisation research and advice and will make Regulations as soon as reasonably practicable.

Ministers have regular meetings with Ofcom on a range of online safety related subjects. The Secretary of State wrote to Ofcom's CEO on 10 September requesting an update on the regulator's approach to monitoring small but risky online services, including how Ofcom will use the full force of enforcement. Ofcom's CEO responded on 11 September. Both letters are available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-but-risky-online-services-under-the-online-safety-act-letter-from-dsit-secretary-of-state/6c50a830-4b15-4205-a37c-230c16c4ba07>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/what-we-do/public-correspondence/>

SCOTLAND

■ Local Growth Deals: Ayrshire

Alan Gemmell:

[5499]

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what progress his Department has made on the Ayrshire Growth Deal.

Ian Murray:

The Scotland Office is working closely with local partners and the Scottish Government to deliver for the people of Ayrshire through the £251 million Ayrshire Growth Deal.

As part of this, my department is supporting a programme review of the Deal in order to make strategic changes to ensure the originally envisaged benefits of the Deal are realised.

This includes proposals from the Ayrshire Councils to develop the new Prestwick space and aerospace proposition. This is a normal part of the Deal process, to ensure the programme can respond to external challenges such as inflation whilst having the greatest possible impact.

TRANSPORT

■ Roads

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[5078]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what criteria her Department is using to assess the (a) value and (b) prioritisation of road projects in its capital spend review.

Lilian Greenwood:

As the Chancellor set out in her statement on 23 September, the Government has inherited extremely challenging fiscal conditions and a litany of unfunded commitments. The Transport Secretary is undertaking a review of the previous governments transport plans, including unfunded schemes.

The value of roads projects is assessed using the principles set out in the Green Book. Rather than assessing value and prioritisation of individual projects, the review will consider the alignment of capital schemes across mode with the Government's priorities and provide strategic advice to the Secretary of State on how she might approach prioritisation of projects.

■ Tolls: Research**Helen Whately:** [\[5610\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 3 September 2024 to Question 2445 on Tolls, if she will commission research on pay per mile charge schemes.

Lilian Greenwood:

There are no pay-per-mile road charges in the UK, and the Department has no plans to commission research into pay-per-mile road charging schemes.

TREASURY**■ Arts: Tax Allowances****Shivani Raja:** [\[5439\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether there are fiscal incentives for businesses looking to invest in creative industries in the UK; and whether she plans to take steps to encourage such investments.

James Murray:

The creative industries play a key role in driving economic growth. The Government is committed to supporting them and will implement a creative industries sector plan as part of the Industrial Strategy, creating good jobs and accelerating growth in film, music, gaming, and other creative sectors.

One of the ways that the Government incentivises investment in the sector is through the creative industry tax reliefs, which provide generous support for production costs of theatres, orchestras, museums and galleries and film, TV and video games companies. The reliefs delivered £2.2 billion of support to these industries in financial year 2022-23.

The government also provides a range of grant support.

■ Business Rates**David Simmonds:** [\[5684\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to (a) increase and (b) uprate the business rate multipliers for 2025-26.

David Simmonds: [\[5685\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to (a) increase and (b) discontinue business rate reliefs in 2025-26.

James Murray:

The government is committed to delivering a fairer business rates system by levelling the playing field between the high street and online giants, better incentivising investment, tackling empty properties and supporting entrepreneurship.

Any decisions on future tax policy will be announced by the Chancellor at a fiscal event.

■ Domicil

Dr Luke Evans:

[5377]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact on growth and investment of changes in levels of the number of people with non-domiciled tax status resident in the UK.

James Murray:

The government has published a policy note setting out its plan to remove the concept of domicile status from the tax system, and to implement a new residence-based regime which is internationally competitive and focused on attracting the best talent and investment to the UK. The details of this plan can be found on gov.uk at the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2024-non-uk-domiciled-individuals-policy-summary/changes-to-the-taxation-of-non-uk-domiciled-individuals>

Full details of the reform will be provided at the Budget, including a Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN), as is routine for tax policy.

■ Energy: VAT

Alicia Kearns:

[5393]

To ask the Chancellor for the Exchequer, whether she plans to review the list of approved energy-saving technologies that receive VAT relief.

James Murray:

The installation of qualifying energy-saving materials in residential accommodation and buildings used solely for a relevant charitable purpose benefits from a temporary VAT zero rate until March 2027, after which they will revert to the reduced rate of VAT at five per cent. Last year, a Call for Evidence (CfE) seeking views on additional technologies to potentially include within this relief was run. Following this CfE, three additional technologies were added to this relief.

The Government currently has no plans to add further technologies to this VAT relief. Nevertheless, the Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the policy making process. Changes to the tax system are announced at fiscal events in the usual way.

■ Environment Protection: Investment

Callum Anderson:

[5474]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to track green finance flows into the UK; and how will this data be used to promote investment in the green economy.

Callum Anderson: [\[5493\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking at (a) the G7, (b) the G20 and (c) other multilateral forums to promote (i) sustainable finance and (ii) climate-related investments.

Callum Anderson: [\[5494\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions she has had with her international counterparts on the adoption of sustainability disclosure requirements in line with global standards.

Tulip Siddiq:

The government is committed to leading the world in sustainable finance by making the UK a global hub for green and transition finance activity, and delivering a world-leading sustainable finance regulatory framework.

The 2023 Green Finance Strategy committed to develop a pilot model to track net zero investment within the UK. This research has now concluded, and Government is considering, alongside relevant stakeholders, how to build on this research and whether to repeat the exercise in future.

Internationally, the UK is proud to be actively involved in the G20 Finance track's work on sustainable finance. Through that work, we have helped develop principles for climate transition plans for financial institutions. The Chancellor herself made interventions on climate and sustainable finance when visiting Rio for the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting in July.

■ Film: Tax Allowances**Tom Hayes:** [\[5457\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will bring forward the implementation of the five per cent increase in tax relief for UK visual effects in film and high-end TV, with UK visual effects costs exempt from the 80 per cent cap on qualifying expenditure, announced in the Spring Budget 2024, from 1 April 2025 to 1 January 2025.

Tom Hayes: [\[5458\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department plans to provide (a) tax relief and (b) other fiscal support for the visual effects sector.

James Murray:

Qualifying visual effects costs in film and TV are already eligible for the Audio-Visual Expenditure Credit, which provides a tax credit worth 34% of a film or TV company's production costs.

The previous Government announced that from 1 April 2025, UK visual effects costs in film and high-end TV will receive a 5% increase in Audio-Visual Expenditure Credit (AVEC). The previous Government also announced that the AVEC's 80% cap on costs that may receive tax relief will be removed for UK visual effects costs.

The policy has not been legislated. The Government will provide an update as soon as it is able to do so.

■ Financial Services

Callum Anderson:

[5485]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to promote the UK financial services industry in (a) Asia, (b) Africa and (c) other countries.

Tulip Siddiq:

The financial services sector is one of the UK's greatest assets and will be at the heart of delivering the sustainable economic growth that is this government's core mission. Promoting the financial services sector abroad will be central to our efforts to enhance the UK's international competitiveness and bolster its status as an open, global financial hub. We will continue to collaborate with international partners to increase trade and investment and shape global regulatory standards.

■ Financial Services: Exports

Callum Anderson:

[5484]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans her Department has to help expand financial services trade with other key international financial centres.

Tulip Siddiq:

As set out in the [Written Ministerial Statement](#) by the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, this government are committed to developing a trade strategy that will drive economic growth. That is why we intend to deliver the UK's Free Trade Agreement programme, starting with the Gulf Co-operation Council, India, Israel, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Turkey.

The financial services sector is one of the UK's most critical industries. With Free Trade Agreements, we will secure commitments on financial services that will drive growth by increasing UK financial services exports, attracting foreign investment, and enhancing the City's competitiveness.

■ Holiday Accommodation: Taxation

Edward Morello:

[5479]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the abolition of the furnished holiday lettings tax regime on the economy in (a) West Dorset constituency and (b) other coastal economies.

James Murray:

Short-term lets will continue to play an important role in the UK's tourism economy, including in coastal areas, without the FHL tax regime. Removing the regime. It equalises the tax treatment of landlords' income and gains.

■ Ian Corfield**Laura Trott:** [\[5367\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the civil service grade is of the Director of Investment.

James Murray:

There is no member of HM Treasury staff with the job title Director of Investment.

Laura Trott: [\[5656\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what meetings Ian Corfield has held with businesses since his appointment as an unpaid adviser.

James Murray:

This information is not centrally collated.

■ Income Tax: Tax Allowances**Alex Easton:** [\[5491\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of raising the personal tax allowance to £15,000.

James Murray:

The previous government announced the Personal Allowance would be maintained at its current level of £12,570 until April 2028.

The government must ensure the tax system supports strong public finances. Sound fiscal policy is key to economic stability and, ultimately, growth, which is vital to keeping taxes as low as possible whilst continuing to deliver excellent public services.

■ Inheritance Tax: Tax Allowances**Edward Morello:** [\[5464\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether it is her policy to retain (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief.

Edward Morello: [\[5467\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of (a) removing and (b) amending the level of agricultural property relief on farmers in West Dorset constituency.

James Murray:

The Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the policy making process. If the Chancellor decides to make any changes to APR/BPR, this would be announced at a fiscal event.

■ Insurance: Payment Methods

Sorcha Eastwood:

[\[5500\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will hold discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority on the (a) comparative costs of paying (i) vehicle and (ii) household insurance (A) annually and (B) in monthly instalments and (b) impact of such costs on people with lower incomes.

Tulip Siddiq:

Treasury Ministers and officials have regular meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors on an ongoing basis.

The Government recognises that the ability to pay insurance premiums in instalments is an important tool for improving access to insurance. The Government is determined that insurers should treat all customers fairly and firms are required to do so under the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) rules.

The FCA requires firms to ensure their products offer fair value (i.e. if the price a consumer pays for a product or service is reasonable compared to the overall benefits they can expect to receive). The FCA has been clear that it will be monitoring firms to make sure they provide products that are fair value, and, where necessary, it will take action.

■ Mileage Allowances

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[4483\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the impact of the HMRC mileage rate for reimbursing the use of private cars on (a) volunteer drivers and (b) organisations in the volunteer sector; and if she will take steps to review the mileage payment allowance.

James Murray:

Approved Mileage Allowance Payments (AMAPs) are used by employers to reimburse an employee's expenses for business mileage in their private vehicle.

Voluntary organisations reimbursing volunteers can either use the AMAP rates or reimburse the actual cost incurred. Actual costs above the AMAP rate can be reimbursed without incurring a tax liability, so long as drivers can provide evidence of their costs. It is ultimately up to the voluntary organisation to determine the amount they reimburse to volunteers.

The AMAP rate is intended to reflect both running costs (such as fuel) and a proportion of standing costs (such as insurance, MOT and depreciation). Therefore, in estimating typical motoring costs per business mile the Government must consider the weighting given to each component and how to apportion certain costs.

As with all taxes and allowances, the Government will continue to keep the AMAP rate under review. Any changes to the AMAP rates will be announced by the Chancellor at fiscal events.

■ Motor Insurance**James Cartlidge:** [\[5343\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority on the regulation of the car insurance sector.

James Cartlidge: [\[5605\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will hold discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority on trends in the level of insurance premium increases for people involved in a motor insurance claim.

Tulip Siddiq:

Treasury Ministers and officials have regular meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors on an ongoing basis.

The Government is determined that insurers should treat all customers fairly and insurance companies are required to do so under the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) rules.

The FCA is an independent body responsible for regulating and supervising the financial services industry across the United Kingdom and has robust powers to act against firms that fail to comply with its rules. The FCA monitors firms to make sure they provide products that are fair value, and, where necessary, it will take action.

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[5501\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will hold discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority on the comparative costs of car insurance in (a) Northern Ireland and (b) Great Britain.

Tulip Siddiq:

Treasury Ministers and officials have regular meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors on an ongoing basis.

The Government is determined that insurers should treat all customers fairly and insurance companies are required to do so under the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) rules.

The FCA is an independent body responsible for regulating and supervising the financial services industry across the United Kingdom and has robust powers to act against firms that fail to comply with its rules. The FCA monitors firms to make sure they provide products that are fair value, and, where necessary, it will take action.

■ New Businesses: Government Assistance**Callum Anderson:** [\[5473\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will make an assessment of the adequacy of support provided to (a) high growth start-ups and (b) entrepreneurs by the (i) Enterprise Investment Scheme, (ii) Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme and (ii) Venture Capital Trust.

James Murray:

The Enterprise Investment Scheme, Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme and Venture Capital Trust Scheme were all recently evaluated, with reports published in November 2023. These are available on gov.uk.

■ Private Education: Fees and Charges**Sir John Hayes:**[\[5267\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of introducing VAT on independent schools on faith groups.

Damian Hinds:[\[5273\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4047 on Private Education: Fees and Charges, whether she plans to conduct primary research for the Tax Information and Impact Note; and which secondary sources she will use for that Note.

Damian Hinds:[\[5274\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4047 on Private Education: Fees and Charges, whether the Tax Information and Impact Note will differentiate between (a) mainstream and special provision and (b) primary, secondary and sixth form phases.

Damian Hinds:[\[5275\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4047 on Private Education: Fees and Charges, whether the Tax Information and Impact Note will include estimated effects (a) at January 2025, (b) at September 2025 and (c) over the long term.

Damian Hinds:[\[5276\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4047 on Private Education: Fees and Charges, whether the Tax Information and Impact Note will include a (a) reasonable worst case scenario and (b) central planning estimate.

James Murray:

On 29 July, the Government announced that, as of 1 January 2025, all education services and vocational training provided by a private school in the UK for a charge will be subject to VAT at the standard rate of 20 per cent. This will also apply to boarding services provided by private schools.

Any fees paid from 29 July 2024 relating to the term starting in January 2025 onwards will be subject to VAT. Furthermore, where a school in England has charitable status, the Government will legislate to remove their eligibility to business rates charitable rate relief. This is intended to take effect from April 2025, subject to Parliamentary passage.

A technical note setting out the details of these two tax policies has been published online here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-on-private-school-fees-removing-the-charitable-rates-relief-for-private-schools>.

Draft VAT legislation was also published alongside this technical note, forming a technical consultation, which closed on 15 September. As part of this technical consultation, the Government engaged with a broad range of stakeholders.

Whilst developing these policies, the Government has carefully considered the impact that they will have on pupils and their families across both the state and private sector, as well as the impact they will have on state and private schools. Following scrutiny of the Government's costings by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), details of the Government's assessment of the expected impacts of these policy changes will be published at the Budget on 30 October in a Tax Information and Impact Note.

■ Private Education: VAT

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[5661\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the oral contribution of 12 September 2024 from the Leader of the House in response to the Question asked by the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth, if she will publish the Government's impact assessment of VAT being charged on public school fees.

James Murray:

On 29 July, the Government announced that, as of 1 January 2025, all education services and vocational training provided by a private school in the UK for a charge will be subject to VAT at the standard rate of 20 per cent.

This was a tough but necessary decision that will secure additional funding to help deliver the Government's commitments relating to education and young people, including opening 3,000 new nurseries, rolling out breakfast clubs to all primary schools, and recruiting 6,500 new teachers.

The Government has carefully considered the impact that this policy will have on pupils and their families across both the state and private sector. Following scrutiny of the Government's costings by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), details of the Government's assessment of the expected impacts of these policy changes will be published at the Budget on 30 October in a Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN).

■ Public Houses: VAT

Edward Morello:

[\[5470\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of reducing VAT for community pubs.

James Murray:

The Government recognises the significant economic contribution made by pubs as well as their importance in fostering a sense of place and community across the UK.

VAT is the UK's second largest tax, forecast to raise £176 billion in 2024/25. Taxation is a vital source of revenue which helps to fund public services.

The Government has inherited a challenging fiscal position, with debt near 100% of GDP and borrowing more than double what it was before the pandemic. In addition to this, a Treasury audit in July 2024 revealed an additional £21.9 billion pressure on departmental spending.

As a result, the Government will have to take difficult decisions in relation to tax, spending and welfare at the budget.

■ Research: Tax Allowances**Callum Anderson:**[\[5471\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps improve accessibility for high-growth SMEs to the research and development tax credit system.

James Murray:

The Government recognises the important role that R&D plays in driving innovation and economic growth as well as the benefits it can bring for society. The UK's R&D tax reliefs have a key role to play in supporting R&D investment in a fiscally sustainable way.

R&D intensive, lossmaking, small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) qualify for an enhanced rate of relief ("ERIS"). This gives eligible companies a cash value of £27 for every £100 spent on R&D. The Government expects around 20,000 SMEs annually will benefit from this support, which is worth around £600 million per year.

To give additional certainty and assure compliance HMRC offers an Advanced Assurance scheme to eligible SMEs (companies with a turnover of below £2 million and less than 50 employees) claiming R&D tax relief for the first time.

To further support accessibility, HMRC publishes comprehensive guidance and has produced new "guidelines for compliance" explaining what is and is not R&D.

■ Self-assessment**Claire Hazelgrove:**[\[5460\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with HMRC on recent technical issues affecting the online self assessment process; and whether HMRC has made an assessment of the cause of those issues.

James Murray:

HMRC had two unrelated incidents during August impacting the online Self-Assessment service, one for 21 hours and one for 8 hours. As part of HMRC's standard process, both incidents were resolved as quickly as possible and analysed

in post incident reviews where we took learnings and put in place actions to avoid future incidents.

■ Stocks and Shares: Digital Assets

Callum Anderson:

[\[5495\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department has plans to bring forward legislative proposals on the regulation of securities tokenisation.

Tulip Siddiq:

The government recognises the potential of tokenisation to transform the UK's financial services sector by enhancing efficiency, increasing liquidity, and strengthening risk management.

The government is taking forward the new Digital Securities Sandbox, which will allow the Treasury and financial regulators to assess how securities can be tokenised including through the use of Distributed Ledger Technology. In particular, the sandbox will assess whether the existing regulatory framework appropriately support and regulates such assets, and whether any changes are needed. The Treasury will report to Parliament on lessons learnt through the sandbox.

Additionally, the Ministry of Justice has introduced into Parliament the Property (Digital Assets etc) Bill, which will confirm in statute the common law position that certain digital assets can possess personal property rights.

■ Tobacco: Smuggling

Sir John Hayes:

[\[5256\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with the National Crime Agency on tackling the illicit tobacco trade.

James Murray:

Tackling the illicit tobacco trade is the responsibility of HMRC and Border Force, who carry out enforcement activity throughout the illicit supply chain and are supported at retail level by Trading Standards.

Last year this enforcement activity resulted in the seizure of over 1.3 billion cigarettes and 92 tonnes of hand rolling tobacco as well as 194 arrests and 107 convictions.

HMRC work closely with a range of law enforcement partners, including the National Crime Agency, to support each other in tackling organised crime.

Sir John Hayes:

[\[5257\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with HMRC on tackling the illicit tobacco trade.

James Murray:

There have been, and will continue to be, discussions between HMT Ministers and HMRC officials on a range of issues including tackling the illicit tobacco trade.

The government is committed to tackling illicit tobacco which has significant negative impacts on the economy, public health, legitimate businesses, and overall public safety. It cheats the Exchequer of revenues and blunts the effectiveness of tobacco duty as a tool to reduce smoking.

■ Treasury: Public Appointments and Recruitment

John Glen: [\[5277\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will publish the exception application form sent to the Civil Service Commission for the appointment of (a) Ian Corfield and (b) Oliver Newton.

James Murray:

Ian Corfield was appointed on a short-term basis to carry out urgent work in support of the government's International Investment Summit in October. A full recruitment process could not have been completed in the time available. He has since been appointed, unpaid, as a direct ministerial appointment. The Civil Service Commission has published their letter to HM Treasury approving the appointment of Ian Corfield.

The Treasury does not comment on individual appointments at Deputy Director level or below.

■ Treasury: Senior Civil Servants

Laura Trott: [\[5369\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who line-manages the Director of Special Advisers and Chancellor Engagement.

James Murray:

The Director of Special Advisers and Chancellor Engagement is managed by the Second Permanent Secretary.

■ Treasury: Staff

Laura Trott: [\[5368\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will publish (a) an organogram of the Private Office Group in her Department and a (b) breakdown by grade of the staff in that group.

James Murray:

Within private offices, the Director of Special Advisers and Chancellor Engagement is an SCS pay band 2. All other Treasury staff in private offices are at Deputy Director or below and we do not comment on individual roles and appointments at this level.

WALES

■ Wales Office: Arden Strategies

Kit Malthouse: [\[5600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what (a) meetings and (b) communications via electronic messaging (i) he and (ii) his special advisers have had with representatives of Arden Strategies.

Jo Stevens:

Neither I nor my Special Advisers have had any meetings or communications via electronic messaging with representatives of Arden Strategies.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Pension Credit

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[4973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of eligible people claimed Pension Credit in each of the last five financial years.

Emma Reynolds:

Information relating to Pension Credit eligibility is only available via take-up statistics. The latest available Pension Credit take-up statistics for Great Britain cover the financial year 2021 to 2022 and are available at: [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year ending 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-related-benefits-estimates-of-take-up-financial-year-ending-2022). The next release of statistics for Financial Year Ending 2023 will be published on Thursday 10 October 2024. The below table shows the number of eligible people receiving Pension Credit and the estimated take up of Pension Credit.

Please note that Financial Year Ending 2021 proportion of take-up is not available due to the pandemic restricting the number of face-to-face interviews required to collect the data. Also, the take-up figures shown below are central estimates.

	NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE PEOPLE RECEIVING PENSION CREDIT	ESTIMATED TAKE UP OF PENSION CREDIT
Financial Year Ending 2018	1,690,000	61%
Financial Year Ending 2019	1,570,000	63%
Financial Year Ending 2020	1,490,000	66%
Financial Year Ending 2021	1,410,000	X
Financial Year Ending 2022	1,350,000	63%

Laura Trott:

[\[5657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to Table 2, page 9, footnote 2 of his Department's report entitled Fixing the foundations: Public spending audit 2024-25, published in July 2024, what estimate his Department has made of the number of people that will receive Pension Credit over (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26.

Emma Reynolds:

Fixing the Foundations showed Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) Winter Fuel Payments (WFP) savings of £1.4bn, for 2024/2025, for Great Britain. These included an assumption about increased take-up of Pension Credit which is in line with the highest levels it has achieved historically. Final savings will be certified and published by the Office for Budget Responsibility at the Autumn Budget on the 30th October, taking account of any behavioural response and associated impact on the estimated number of people who will receive Pension Credit in upcoming years.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Dental Services: High Peak

Jon Pearce:

[2010]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of dental practises are rated as good by the CQC in High Peak constituency.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 1 August 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Stephen Kinnock:

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulates all health and social care services in England. The commission ensures quality and safety across the range of sectors that deliver health and care to people in England.

The CQC carries out assessments of primary dental services to determine if they are compliant with regulations, however they do not rate dental services in the same way they do for the other services they regulate. 44 12 out of the 18 active dental locations in the High Peak constituency have been assessed and are compliant with the regulations. The remaining seven six locations have not yet been assessed.

HOME OFFICE

■ Defending Democracy Taskforce

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[5269]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to continue the Defending Democracy Taskforce.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 7 October 2024. The correct answer should have been:

~~**Dame Diana Johnson**~~ ~~**Dan Jarvis:**~~

~~The Government is committed to rolling out a Young Futures programme which will bring together local services to improve the delivery of support for young people at risk of being drawn into crime.~~

~~The HO has already set up a YF delivery unit to make progress on the design of local prevention partnerships and will be working cross government on the design and delivery of Young Futures Hubs. More information will be provided in due course.~~

~~**The Defending Democracy Taskforce coordinates a whole of government response to threats of foreign interference in our democracy.**~~

The Taskforce was established in 2022 and continue its work to safeguard our democracy and strengthen its resilience to the threats we face.

The Taskforce's latest meeting was on the 25 July, when it considered issues relating to the recent General Election and the work going on across government to ensure that anyone who wishes to participate in our democracy can do so without fear of intimidation or abuse.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ **Kroll Associates' report on Post Office Capture software**

Minister for Services, Small Business and Exports (Gareth Thomas):

[\[HCWS100\]](#)

Earlier this year, concerns were raised by Parliamentarians and postmasters about the Post Office's Capture software, which was rolled out by the Post Office to some branches in the 1990s, and pre-dated Horizon. The concerns were that Capture software had bugs which may have caused shortfalls, leaving postmasters to pay the Post Office back, with some postmasters said to have been prosecuted as a consequence.

Responding to those concerns, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade committed on 9 September to publishing the results of forensic accountant, Kroll Associates' investigation into the Capture system as soon as we received their report. Kroll have now completed their investigation, and I published their report on Monday 30 September. The report is available on gov.uk and I have also placed a copy in the House Library.

Kroll Associates investigated the Capture software system, examined the available evidence from postmasters and others who have been working with postmasters to uncover the issues with the software. Further evidence from the Post Office was given to Kroll towards the end of their investigation. Considering this, Kroll have produced an addendum to this report which will be published shortly.

I am very grateful to the postmasters and postmasters' families who spoke to and provided evidence to Kroll during their investigation. I recognise in some cases that this meant revisiting very distressing memories. I am grateful to those who attended the Ministerial chaired roundtable hosted by the Department for Business and Trade. I would also like to thank the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board for their continued work on redress issues, in particular Lord Beamish for helping to shine a light on the issues related to Capture.

In their report Kroll concluded there was a reasonable likelihood that Capture could have created shortfalls for sub-postmasters. Kroll has not identified any available evidence that Post Office Limited's audit, investigations or legal teams took into account known issues with Capture arising from bugs identified in various versions of the software in the course of their work.

I recognise that this report and its conclusions will be of considerable interest to postmasters and their families across the country. The Government will thoroughly examine Kroll's report into the Capture system and its impact on postmasters. We will update the House on next steps in December.

■ **Launch of the UK-Thailand Enhanced Trade Partnership**

Minister of State for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):

[\[HCWS105\]](#)

I am pleased to announce that the UK Thailand Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) was signed and launched on 18 September in Bangkok.

Thailand is Southeast Asia's second largest economy. The total trade in goods and services between the UK and Thailand was £5.9 billion to the end of Q1 2024.

The UK-Thailand ETP is a non-legally binding memorandum of understanding which creates a framework to enhance trade, investment and economic cooperation between the UK and Thailand. The new partnership is designed to boost trade and investment across 20 priority areas including automotive, tourism, investment, digital trade, financial services, education.

The partnership is underpinned by a comprehensive workplan guided by the priorities identified through consultations with businesses in the UK and Thailand. Its delivery will be overseen by the UK- Thailand Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) which will monitor progress and agree updates to the workplan guided by ongoing business consultation.

This partnership further supports this Government's commitment to economic growth through providing a strong commitment and underpinning actions to further enhance our strong bilateral trade relationship with Thailand.

The UK-Thailand Enhanced Trade Partnership text is available online on gov.uk.

■ Measures to tackle late payments and long payment terms

Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): [\[HCWS106\]](#)

Late payments and long payment terms continue to be a significant issue for small businesses and the self-employed across the UK. In 2022, small businesses were owed on average an estimated £22,000 in late payments from the businesses they supply. As well as the direct costs to businesses through lost and late revenue there are also indirect costs which include a reduction in productivity through lost time chasing late payments and foregoing investment and growth opportunities. We are determined to foster a strong payment culture in the UK by bringing the payment performance and behaviour of large companies more clearly into focus.

Therefore, we are announcing that we will lay secondary legislation in this parliamentary session to make it a requirement for large companies to include information about their payment performance in their Annual Reports.

This measure will help increase transparency around the payment practices of large businesses and bring them into focus for boards and investors.

Introducing secondary legislation however only represents our first step. The Department for Business and Trade will also launch a public consultation within months on additional legislative measures to address late payments and long payment terms. We will take action as needed to ensure improvements in payment times, especially for small businesses and the self-employed.

We will also be launching a new Fair Payment Code to be overseen by the Small Business Commissioner - a voluntary code of best practice for companies committed to fair and fast payments. This will replace the existing Prompt Payment Code, with a clearer and more measurable set of ambitious commitments and will be a further lever to improve the UK's business payment culture by shining a light on the best performers.

Secondary legislation has also been laid today to amend the Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance Regulations 2017 and the Limited Liability Partnerships (Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance) Regulations 2017, to require qualifying companies and LLPs to publish certain information on their practices, policies and performance with respect to retention clauses in any qualifying construction contracts with suppliers. This measure will help increase transparency around retention policies and performance, and encourage improved payment practices.

This package demonstrates this Government's determination to tackle the scourge of late payments, meeting the commitments laid out in our manifesto and Plan for Small Business.

These initiatives will ensure more businesses are paid on time – ultimately increasing productivity, improving cash flow and driving growth.

DEFENCE

■ MOD purchase of semiconductor facility in Newton Aycliffe

Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):

[\[HCWS102\]](#)

On Friday 27 September, the Ministry of Defence bolstered the UK defence supply chain with the acquisition of a key semiconductor factory in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham.

This factory is the only secure facility in the UK with the skills and capability to manufacture gallium arsenide semiconductors. These types of specialist semiconductors are used in a number of military platforms, including fighter jet capabilities. It is therefore crucial for our national security that this facility remains suitable for UK defence needs.

This acquisition will not only safeguard the future of the facility, which is critical to the defence supply chain and major military programmes and exports, but also secures up to 100 skilled jobs in the North East of England.

Semiconductors are vitally important for the functioning of almost every electronic device we use and are equally as important in military platforms. This Government recognises the strategic importance of semiconductors as a critical technology for the future and a significant enabler of the Government's growth and clean energy missions.

The semiconductor factory in Newton Aycliffe, which has been renamed Octrice Semiconductors UK, has been acquired by the Government from its previous parent company Coherent Corporation who were looking to sell or close the site.

I visited the facility on the first day of ownership accompanied by the member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor. The site and the people working there are doing incredible things for Defence for which I thank them.

This Government intends to invest in the company over the coming years, ensuring the nation's security whilst boosting UK defence industrial capacity, expanding export opportunities and supporting our mission to deliver growth. These investments will ensure the facility is capable of producing gallium arsenide semiconductors as well as more powerful semiconductors in the future.

Work has already started to implement best practice governance, providing the appropriate financial oversight to secure the company's future success.

■ Royal Navy Behaviours

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Veterans) (Al Carns):
[\[HCWS103\]](#)

This Government is committed to improving Service life for our dedicated Service personnel. This includes addressing any experience in our Armed Forces which falls short of the standards we expect. The Secretary of State for Defence made clear in his first address to the Ministry of Defence that we will have a culture that values all, and will have zero tolerance for any abuse, in the military or the Civil Service.

That is why today, I am updating the house on the findings of an investigation into misconduct in the Submarine Service. This investigation was commissioned by the Royal Navy in October 2022 as a result of allegations of misconduct made by a former female submariner. The investigation has now concluded and has found evidence to prove that misogyny, bullying and unacceptable behaviour did occur amongst a range of ranks and rates during the period 2014-2020.

This is appalling and should have never happened. I sincerely apologise for the treatment that the victim experienced during her time as a submariner, and I commend to the House her bravery in coming forward. Those that have chosen to serve deserve better. The First Sea Lord has also offered his personal and unreserved apologies to the victim for her treatment.

Action is underway to address the findings of the investigation. First and foremost, I can confirm that the Royal Navy has conducted misconduct proceedings, and action has been taken against several individuals up to and including discharge from the Service.

The investigation also made 37 recommendations to address practical and cultural shortcomings which must change. The First Sea Lord has accepted these in full and implementation is underway. These changes include proactive welfare checks for submarine crews pre and post deployment, to understand the experiences of the crew; changes to training and the Submarine Command Course and increased outreach from the Royal Navy Police so that personnel are aware of the routes available to them should they wish to raise a complaint.

Further detail on the investigation, including its findings, recommendations and how they have been implemented has been published on the Ministry of Defence website. The executive summary and redacted report will be placed in the Library of the House. However, changes made so far are not limited to the Submarine Service. In parallel to the investigation itself, the First Sea Lord instigated a wider review of the Royal Navy's working culture. As a result of this, the Royal Navy has appointed a Commadore as its Head of Culture and a team to support driving cultural, behavioural and leadership improvements across the entirety of the Royal Navy.

Misconduct such as that identified in this investigation is unacceptable and has no place anywhere in Defence. While progress is being made, there is more to be done.

I will hold the First Sea Lord, the Royal Navy and the Submarine Service to account for delivering the change this investigation has identified. I have requested a formal review of progress in six months.

More widely, the MOD has established a programme for Raising our Standards that builds on existing work to instil a positive working culture and uphold the standards of behaviour that we expect. The programme focuses on communications and training, underpinned by work to test the action being taken and make sure that unacceptable behaviours are being eliminated from Defence.

Work is underway by the new Ministerial team to look at what action has been taken to raise standards and tackle unacceptable behaviour so far across the Ministry of Defence and the whole of the military; assess what impact this action has had; identify where we are still falling short; and ensure where we learn lessons and establish good practice this is shared across the whole of Defence.

Furthermore, I will personally oversee the programme of change through our External Challenge Panel; a group of experienced subject matter experts in organisational change that have been brought together to hold this Department to account for action on these issues, and ensure we have strong ambition and independent testing of our programme.

It is only by delivering on this commitment that we will enable Defence to better reflect the nation it serves and protects, and draw from the best of British talent, to deliver operational outcomes in an increasingly uncertain world.

Poor practices and behaviours in the past that may have been normalised in some quarters are unacceptable, and they have no place today. We will learn from this, and I will provide further updates to the House on action taken across Defence in due course.

The leadership of the Submarine Service has my, and the First Sea Lord's, full support to deliver the changes needed.

Attachments:

1. Report [20241003_MisconductinSubmarineService_ExecSummary_Final.pdf]
2. Summary Report [20231221-ISI SM Summary report-Final-OSP_LIMDISEC - Redacted Version for Release Final_Redactedv.pdf]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): [\[HCWS99\]](#)

My Noble Friend, the Minister of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath OBE), made the following statement today.

This Statement concerns an application for development consent made under the Planning Act 2008 by Ecotricity (Heck Fen) Limited for the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic electricity generating station situated in Lincolnshire.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the Examining Authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a Statement to Parliament to announce it.

The statutory deadline for the decision on the Heckington Fen Solar Park application was 27 September 2024.

Ecotricity (Heck Fen) Limited has requested that the Secretary of State extends the statutory deadline to allow time for further negotiations with landowners and to ensure the necessary permissions can be obtained. I have decided to set a new deadline of no later than **24 January 2025** for deciding this application for these reasons.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ September 2024 Flood Response

Minister for Water and Flooding (Emma Hardy): [\[HCWS104\]](#)

Just over 1,000 properties flooded in late September after double the monthly average of rain fell across central and southern England. Devastating impacts were felt in communities across Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Buckinghamshire and North West London in particular. Our deepest sympathies are with those whose homes and businesses have been damaged, whose lives have been upended, and who are now facing months of disruption and upset. The government reiterates its thanks to the Environment Agency, local responders and many others who worked tirelessly to help communities across the country deal with the impacts.

The condition of flood defences has declined in recent years through a lack of investment. This was compounded when no more funding was made available by the previous government to repair damage from last winter. Asset condition is now at 92%, its lowest point since 2010, with approximately 60,000 properties at higher risk. The

Environment Agency has allocated £36 million this year to do the most urgent repairs from last winter's flood events.

Despite this, over 22,000 properties were protected by existing flood defences. Assets have stood up well. The Environment Agency has not had any reports of asset failures that have resulted in flooding. There may be some unseen damage to defences which the Environment Agency will inspect and assess once the river levels have subsided. My department will be carrying out a post-event assessment with resilience partners to identify where lessons can be learned.

Protecting communities from flooding is a key priority for this government. The government is determined to turbocharge the delivery and repair of flood defences, improve drainage systems and develop natural flood management schemes. That's why we held the first meeting of the government's newly established Flood Resilience Taskforce last month. The government set up the taskforce to improve coordination of the national and local flood response and strengthen preparedness ahead of the winter flood season.

We are investing over £1.25 billion this year to scale up national resilience through building new and improving existing flood defences. The government is reviewing the investment programme to get it back on track after the pace slowed due to the impacts of inflation and delays with the supply chain. Decisions on future spending will be made at the spending review later this month.

The Environment Agency's flood action week is running from 14 to 20 October. The campaign has simple messages and aims to increase awareness of the risk of flooding and what individuals and communities can do to prepare.

Together, the government's work to improve coordination of flood response, strengthen our preparedness and invest in our flood defences will better protect communities from flooding right across the country.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Annual Capital Investment for Research Call through the National Institute for Health and Care Research

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention (Andrew Gwynne): [\[HCWS107\]](#)

My Hon Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health (Baroness Merron) has made the following statement:

Today I am pleased to announce Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) funding of nearly £30 million through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) for capital equipment, technology and modular buildings to support NHS trusts in England to deliver high-quality research to improve the health of the population.

This large-scale investment will support 36 NHS trusts to develop and deliver research which aims to reduce early death from major conditions and improve access to high-

quality health and care. The funding will increase NHS capacity to deliver commercial clinical trials which bring innovative medicines to patients earlier and maximise our potential to lead the world in clinical trials. This includes investment in modular buildings to expand the footprint for research in hospitals, many of which are in rural and coastal areas. It is important that everyone, regardless of where they live, can access the latest innovations in the health and care system through research.

Funding is going to NHS trusts the length and breadth of England, from Harrogate to Plymouth. A mobile research unit in Hull will increase participation in trials in East Yorkshire; and modular buildings will expand capacity for clinical research in Bradford, Essex, Exeter and Derby.

Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust is receiving funding for a mobile x-ray unit to increase their capability to carry out trials that are normally only available in large research units. This is a huge step forward for a district general hospital, bringing research closer to the communities which they serve.

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust were successful in their application for funding for equipment which applies red and near infra-red light to injuries or lesions to improve wound and soft tissue healing. This will allow children to participate in studies at their regular clinic, reducing travel and reaching underserved communities.

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust and East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust will expand their capacity for commercial trials in conditions such as dementia with a standalone pharmacy space and a pharmacy dispensary, respectively, to enable studies in new medicines. The Royal Marsden have received funding for equipment to increase capability and capacity in advanced therapy areas in oncology across commercial and non-commercial portfolios.

This significant funding will support cutting edge research to improve population health and support commercial research delivery in NHS settings for both the benefit of patients but also the economic growth of the country, positioning the UK as an attractive place for innovative companies to invest in research.

While the equipment or technology is primarily for research, when not in use in this way, equipment such as MRI Scanners will be used for clinical care. This will bolster the capacity of the health system to carry out procedures such as diagnostic testing to inform care and reduce the time taken to treatment, maximising the benefit from this investment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Legacy/Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn):

[\[HCWS108\]](#)

I wish to provide an update to the House following the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal's judgment in *Dillon and Others* regarding the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act ('the Legacy Act'); and on the appointment of Sir John Evans as the Chair of the Robert Hamill Inquiry.

The Government is absolutely committed to implementing mechanisms to address the legacy of the Troubles that fully comply with human rights. My previous Written Ministerial Statement, laid on 29 July 2024, confirmed that the Government, as part of its ongoing commitment to repeal and replace the Legacy Act, had formally abandoned all grounds of appeal against the section 4 Human Rights Act declarations of incompatibility made by the Northern Ireland High Court in relation to the Act. This included the immunity provisions, providing important clarity for families that the immunity scheme and other offending provisions would not take effect. I also confirmed the Government's intention to propose measures to further strengthen the independence and powers of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR).

On 20 September, the Court of Appeal handed down its judgment in *Dillon and Others*. The Court recognised “*the wide powers of ICRIR and the benefit of having investigations placed within one body which is well-resourced*” and further noted that the ICRIR has “*unfettered access to all information, documents and materials as it reasonably requires in connection with a review*” (<https://www.bailii.org/nie/cases/NICA/2024/59.html> , Paragraph 210). The Court concluded that such powers “*cannot be criticised, nor should they be underestimated*” (<https://www.bailii.org/nie/cases/NICA/2024/59.html> , Paragraph 210).

However, the Court of Appeal also made further declarations of incompatibility in relation to the Legacy Act to those made by the High Court. One of these was in relation to the current prohibition on civil proceedings - another policy pursued by the previous Government that this Government has already committed to reversing.

The other declarations of incompatibility relate to effective next of kin participation where an inquest was previously assigned in order to discharge the state's Article 2 procedural obligations, and the role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to public disclosure of information (<https://www.judiciaryni.uk/files/judiciaryni/2024-09/Summary%20of%20judgment%20-%20In%20re%20Dillon%20and%20others%20-%20NI%20Troubles%20%28Legacy%20and%20Reconciliation%29%20Act%202023%20CA.pdf>).

The Government has already made clear its intention to propose measures that allow legacy inquests previously halted to proceed, should that be the preference of families. Notwithstanding this, the Government takes these further declarations of incompatibility very seriously, and it remains my priority to ensure that the ICRIR can provide human rights compliant investigations in **all relevant** cases.

The Court largely upheld the High Court's findings in relation to Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, which as I noted in my statement to the House on 29 July, introduces legal uncertainty about what protections are afforded by Article 2, and how legislation applies across the United Kingdom.

This is a complex and wide-ranging judgment with significant implications. The Government is therefore carefully considering its findings to inform a decision on the way forward. I wish to make clear to the House that any such decision will be without prejudice to the Government's absolute commitment to addressing legacy issues in a way

that is fully human rights compliant, and to the fullest possible transparency within the framework that rightly exists to ensure that those who work to keep the citizens of the United Kingdom safe are themselves protected from harm.

As set out in my statement of 29 July, the Government has begun preparations to lay in Parliament a draft remedial order under section 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 to remedy the original declarations of incompatibility made by the High Court, including the immunity provisions. In light of the additional declarations of incompatibility made by the Court of Appeal, I am reviewing this process and will update the House in due course.

This Government takes its human rights obligations - and its responsibilities to victims and survivors of the Troubles - extremely seriously. As part of the Government's commitment to repeal and replace the Legacy Act, I continue to undertake consultations with interested parties regarding a practical way forward that can command support across communities in Northern Ireland and beyond. I said previously that this process will involve difficult conversations, and that is proving to be the case in my engagements so far which have been sometimes challenging but always insightful. I am encouraged by the willingness of those I have met to date to engage constructively. I look forward to further discussions in the period ahead.

Separately, I am pleased to announce the appointment of Sir John Evans as Chair of the Robert Hamill Inquiry. A Chair of the Inquiry is required in order for the Inquiry Report to be formally passed to me for publication. Due to the passage of time since the report was completed in 2011, it was necessary for me to appoint a new Chair of the Inquiry, as the former Chair, Justice Sir Edwin Jowitt, is unfortunately unable to continue in the role. I wish to send him my very best wishes, and thank him for all he did in his time as Chair.

Sir John was a panel member when the Inquiry was in operation, and worked closely with Sir Edwin on the report. Sir John brings a wealth of experience to the role as a former Chief Constable, and I know he will do everything in his power to ensure the Inquiry Report is published soon.

I will remain in close contact with Sir John ahead of the Inquiry report being passed formally to me in order to arrange for the necessary legal and security checks to be completed. While I will do everything I can to ensure the report is published as soon as possible, due to the passage of time since the report was completed, it is imperative that these checks happen before publication.

I want to pay tribute to Robert Hamill's family for their patience, and their dignity, as they awaited the conclusion of relevant criminal proceedings. I will make a further statement to Parliament when the report is published.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Towards an FP10 Fit to Tackle Global Challenges: The UK's position on the Successor to the World's Largest R&D Programme**

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):
[\[HCWS101\]](#)

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is focused on improving people's lives by maximising the potential of research and development, science and technology to drive economic growth and wider societal benefits. It is our ambition to accelerate innovation, investment and productivity through world-class science, research and development. In line with this goal, the UK's association to Horizon Europe, the world's largest internationally collaborative research programme, empowers UK innovators and scientists to collaborate with colleagues from across the EU, as well as with other associated countries.

From 2028, the 10th Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP10), will replace Horizon Europe. It will be tasked with harnessing excellence-based research and development to support delivery of European security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness.

On 26th September, DSIT published a Position Paper setting out the UK Government's views on the potential shape and direction of FP10. We have published this Position Paper to support the work of the EU and Member States in developing an impactful programme which delivers research and development across all disciplines of the highest quality to the benefit of all participants. A copy of the position paper was deposited in the libraries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The Government wants to strengthen ties with our European neighbours and explore areas where we can boost our shared prosperity and security through mutually beneficial agreements. This includes ensuring that UK scientists, innovators, businesses, and institutions can collaborate with partners across Europe and beyond.

Given current geopolitical realities, we believe now is the time to address global challenges through collective action. We believe that through genuine openness, EU Member States, the UK, and other likeminded countries can pool resources to effectively tackle priorities which affect us all. This includes using the power of research to harness emerging technologies and in turn boost productivity and competitiveness.

Our clear position is for FP10 to be based on openness and excellence, and to ensure the continuation of proven instruments within Horizon Europe.

In the paper, we advocate for an FP10 which:

1. Maintains excellence at the very core of FP10 to harness the full potential of Europe's research and innovation capabilities across the entire research pipeline.
2. Enables the equal participation of likeminded associated countries in all areas of the programme from its very inception, with barriers removed to ensure collaboration on critical technologies between like-minded partners. Maintaining the

principle of openness to those who share common goals and values will support the best research and collaboration to tackle these shared challenges.

3. Preserves the three-pillar architecture in Horizon Europe, maintaining stable and predictable support for proven elements within Horizon Europe to continue supporting discovery research, international collaboration opportunities and applied innovation respectively. Through a careful balance between curiosity-driven research and applied research and innovation, FP10 should remain flexible and responsive to future global challenges.

We very much welcome opportunities for future discussion with researchers, innovators, businesses, institutions, the European Commission and EU Member States as FP10 develops given our many shared priorities.

We will, of course, be interested in potentially associating to FP10, assuming it is open, relevant, and provides good value for researchers and taxpayers.