



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 15 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (04:02 P.M., 15 November 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

CONTENTS

ANSWERS	5	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	11
BUSINESS AND TRADE	5	■ Passenger Ships	11
■ Department for Business and Trade: Buildings	5	■ Sports: Transgender People	12
■ Exports: Ukraine	6	■ Tourism	12
■ Foreign Investment in UK: Lincolnshire	6	■ Tourism Industry Council: Passenger Ships	12
■ Shipping: Weapons	6	■ Tourism: North East Somerset and Hanham	13
■ Trade Agreements: USA	7	■ Youth Services	13
CABINET OFFICE	7	DEFENCE	13
■ Animal and Plant Health Agency: Weybridge	7	■ Defence	13
■ Cabinet Committees	8	■ Israel: Armed Conflict	14
■ Civil Servants: Recruitment	8	■ National Armaments Director	14
■ Civil Servants: Whitehall	9	EDUCATION	14
■ Civil Service: Equality	9	■ Apprentices	14
■ Civil Service: Zero Hours Contracts	9	■ Apprentices: Employers' Contributions	15
■ Elton John	10	■ Department for Education: Buildings	15
■ Employment: Policy	10	■ Department for Education: Data Processing	16
■ Lobbying	10	■ Education: Digital Technology	17
■ Prime Minister: Arsenal FC	10	■ Educational Institutions: Subversion	18
■ Prime Minister: Official Gifts	11	■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs	19
■ Public Sector: Financial Services	11	■ Private Education: VAT	19

■ Students: Fees and Charges	20	■ Horticulture: Government Assistance	31
■ Universities: Asylum	21	■ Livestock: Animal Housing	31
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	21	■ Pets: Animal Welfare	32
■ Climate Change: Children	21	■ Slaughterhouses: CCTV	32
■ Electric Cables	22	■ Sole: English Channel	32
■ Geothermal Power: Heating	22	■ Trees: Conservation	33
■ Great British Energy	23	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	33
■ Heating: Renewable Fuels	23	■ Africa: Debts	33
■ Petroineos	23	■ Kiribati: Diplomatic Service	33
■ Small Modular Reactors	24	■ Myanmar: Human Rights	34
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	24	■ Nepal: Administration of Justice	34
■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax	24	■ Turks and Caicos Islands: Crime	34
■ Agriculture: South of England	25	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	35
■ Avian Influenza	25	■ Cancer: Health Services	35
■ Avian Influenza: Yorkshire and the Humber	26	■ Cystic Fibrosis: Staffordshire	35
■ Bluetongue Disease: Disease Control	26	■ Fertility	36
■ Construction: Waste	27	■ Health Services: Norfolk	36
■ Dangerous Dogs	28	■ Hospitals: Construction	37
■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Buildings	28	■ Long Covid and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome	37
■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Civil Servants	28	■ NHS: Private Sector	38
■ Fisheries: Celtic Sea and North Sea	29	■ NHS: Protective Clothing	39
■ Fisheries: English Channel and South West	29	■ Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures: Regulation	39
■ Food: Brexit	30	■ Primary Health Care: Medical Records	39
■ Genetically Modified Organisms: Crops	30	■ Prostate Cancer: Screening	40
		■ Vaccination	40
		HOME OFFICE	41
		■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel	41

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Language	42	■ Government Departments: Finance	53
■ Undocumented Migrants: Essex	42	■ Instagram: Politics and Government	53
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	42	■ Manufacturing Industries: Digital Technology	54
■ Community Housing Fund	42	■ Research: Finance	54
■ Devolution: Norfolk	42	■ Research: Investment Returns	54
■ Devolution: Suffolk	43	■ Space Technology	55
■ Freehold: Service Charges	43	■ Universities: Research	55
■ Housing: Norfolk	43	TRANSPORT	55
■ Internal Drainage Boards: Finance	44	■ Bus Services: Finance	55
■ Leasehold: Reform	44	■ Electric Bicycles: Accidents	56
■ Local Government: Grants	44	■ Railways: Carbon Emissions	56
■ Local Government: Property	45	■ Railways: Freight	57
■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Data Processing	47	■ Rolling Stock	57
■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: HOPE not hate	48	■ South Fylde Line: Finance	58
■ Planning Permission	48	■ Telecommunications: Infrastructure	58
■ Rents: Payments	49	TREASURY	58
■ Social Rented Housing	50	■ Agriculture: Finance	58
JUSTICE	50	■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax	59
■ Courts	50	■ Import Duties	60
■ Ministry of Justice: Buildings	51	■ Inheritance Tax: South Norfolk	60
■ Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices	52	■ Land: Taxation	60
SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	52	■ Off-payroll Working	61
■ 5G: Wokingham	52	WORK AND PENSIONS	61
■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology	53	■ Care Leavers: Finance	61
		■ Employment: Disability	61
		■ Health: Working Hours	62
		■ Household Support Fund	63
		■ Personal Independence Payment	63
		■ Personal Independence Payment: Appeals	64

■ Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations	64	■ State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad	66
■ Personal Independence Payment: Patients	65	■ Universal Credit: Mental Health	67
■ Social Security Benefits	65	MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS	68
■ State Retirement Pensions	65	BUSINESS AND TRADE	68
		■ Food: Overseas Trade	68

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

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Department for Business and Trade: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox:

[13048]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9607 on DBT: Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in his Department's headquarters in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available.

Justin Madders:

Heads of Department have agreed that 60% minimum office attendance for most staff continues to be the best balance of working for the Civil Service.

Office occupancy data for the period July - September has been published, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-hq-occupancy-data>

Sir Ashley Fox:

[13049]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9607 on DBT: Buildings, how many civil servants are assigned to work in his Department's headquarters in London; and how many individual desks are available in that office.

Justin Madders:

I refer the (Rt.) Hon. Member to my response to question 9606, tabled on 16th October 2024.

Please see below a summary of the number of staff assigned by each location and the number of desks per location as of 30th September 2024:

DBT HUB	HEADCOUNT	DESK NUMBERS
Belfast	63	16
Birmingham	403	216
Cardiff	145	66
Darlington	248	100
Edinburgh	92	56
Greater Manchester	171	65
London	4010	1500

DBT HUB	HEADCOUNT	DESK NUMBERS
*Regional Offices	194	141
Total	5326	2160

*We have several offices across the country that are listed under Regional Offices, it would exceed the word count if these were to be listed in totality.

■ Exports: Ukraine

Stephen Gethins: [\[13191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent progress his Department has made on assessing the export application for Ukraine with ECO reference SIE2024/004708 and SPIRE document reference 4388747, submitted on 14 May 2024; and whether any further steps are required to bring this application to conclusion.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

We rigorously assess every application on a case-by-case basis against strict assessment criteria, the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (the SELC).

We are reviewing this case with other government departments and we will conclude our assessment once we receive that advice.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes: [\[13169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many jobs were created in Lincolnshire as a result of foreign direct investment in the last five years.

Sarah Jones:

Official statistics at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dbt-inward-investment-results-2023-to-2024> show that 1,295 new jobs were created in Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in 2021-22, 1,159 in 2022-23 and 198 in 2023-24. Statistics at LEP level are not available for previous years. Figures were published at International Territorial Level 2 (ITL2) for the first time in 2023-24 which showed that 182 new jobs were created in Lincolnshire. Previous years figures at ITL2 level are not available.

■ Shipping: Weapons

Liam Byrne: [\[13415\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make it his policy that vessel based armouries export licence applications should include an undertaking to return the licensed (a) goods and (b) items to the UK if an approved licence is (i) suspended and (ii) revoked.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Licences issued to Private Maritime Security Companies for the movement of arms (including for storage on vessel based armouries) already include provision in the terms and conditions for the controlled goods to either be returned to the UK via a Standard Individual Trade Control Licence (SITCL) or for the destruction of the controlled goods (with evidence) should the licence expire, be suspended or revoked.

Liam Byrne:[\[13416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the weapons stored in Vessel Based Armouries operated by MNG Maritime were returned to the UK following his Department's revocation in July 2023 of six export licences.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Private Maritime Security Companies impacted by the revocation of MNG Maritime's Licences were given a month to begin the process of relocating their controlled goods, including submitting licence applications to store those controlled goods on another approved vessel based or land-based armoury.

■ Trade Agreements: USA**Andrew Griffith:**[\[13641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what discussions his Department has had with representatives from President-Elect Trump's transition team on UK-US trade.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The incoming US administration is currently in the process of nominating members of its Cabinet and appointing senior staff.

The Prime Minister had a warm introductory call with President-elect Trump on 6 November. During this call, the Prime Minister offered his congratulations and said he looked forward to working closely with President-elect Trump across all areas of the special relationship.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Animal and Plant Health Agency: Weybridge****Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[12781\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of including the potential risks associated with not fully rebuilding the Animal Plant and Health Agency Headquarters in Weybridge in the National Risk Register.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

All risks in the National Risk Register, including those related to animal and plant health, are kept under review to ensure that they are the most appropriate scenarios

to inform emergency preparedness and resilience activity and to reflect the risk landscape.

The risks that meet the threshold for inclusion in the NRR would have a substantial impact on the UK's safety, security and/or critical systems at a national level.

Lead government departments develop generic capabilities that can be used to respond to impacts, regardless of the risk that caused them. This means the government can respond flexibly to the widest range of risks.

■ Cabinet Committees

John Glen: [\[11596\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether there is an (a) informal and (b) formal quadrilateral committee or sub-committee of the Cabinet.

Georgia Gould:

The list of Cabinet committees has been published in the House of Commons library and on gov.uk.

■ Civil Servants: Recruitment

John Glen: [\[6099\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of roles advertised on the Civil Service jobs website have been accessible (a) to the general public and (b) only to people with gov.uk email addresses since 4 July 2024.

John Glen: [\[6100\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish copies of posts that have been advertised on the Civil Service jobs website since 4 July 2024 which have only been accessible to people with gov.uk email addresses.

Georgia Gould:

As was the case when the Rt Hon member was a minister in the Cabinet Office, roles advertised through Civil Service Jobs can be categorised as 'internal' and therefore viewable by civil servants within the advertising department; 'across government' and therefore viewable by all those across the Civil Service; and 'external' and therefore viewable by the general public. As under the previous Government, for appointments below Senior Civil Service (SCS) level, departments have the authority to determine how they recruit in line with the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles, while all SCS jobs must be advertised externally to the public unless an exemption is approved.

As of 11 November 2024, :

- Approx. 73% (37,037) of jobs advertised through Civil Service Jobs were accessible by the general public; and
- Approx. 27% (13,478) of jobs advertised through Civil Service Jobs were accessible only to civil servants.

Publishing copies of all these posts will take a disproportionate amount of activity to analyse and provide.

■ **Civil Servants: Whitehall**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12340\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil service staff worked on Whitehall in (a) January 2024 and (b) the latest period for which data is available.

Georgia Gould:

Civil Service Headquarters (HQ) occupancy data is collected and published on GOV.UK for all HQ buildings of Whitehall Departments, Office for Scotland, Office for Wales and Northern Ireland Office. Post-election period, publications now happen on a quarterly basis.

Data for the latest period for which data is available can be found [here](#).

■ **Civil Service: Equality**

John Glen:

[\[12260\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Written Statement of 14 May 2024 on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Civil Service, HCWS464, and pursuant to the Answers of 19 September 2024 to Question 5049 and of 16 September 2024 to Question 4679, on Civil Service: Equality, what progress he has made on ending standalone EDI roles outside of HR.

Georgia Gould:

The Civil Service Equality Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Guidance published on 14 May, remains in place.

■ **Civil Service: Zero Hours Contracts**

John Glen:

[\[10991\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Civil Service has employed any (a) staff and (b) contractors on zero-hours contracts since 5 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The number of (a) civil servants and (b) contractors employed on zero hour contracts is not held centrally by the Cabinet Office.

Zero hours contracts are not the normal practice or a recommended approach within the Civil Service. Departments may use them in very limited circumstances to help meet exceptional or fluctuating demands on the business.

The flexibility offered by zero hours contracts, zero hour arrangements and low hour contracts can benefit both workers and employers, but without proper safeguards this flexibility can become one-sided, with workers bearing all the financial risk. The Government's Employment Rights Bill will end one-sided flexibility, ensuring that jobs provide a baseline of security and predictability so workers can better plan their lives and finances. We will consult extensively on the implementation of the legislation to

ensure it works for workers and employers alike, and anticipate this meaning the majority of reforms will take effect no earlier than 2026. Government understands that adjusting to these new reforms will take time and is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders receive appropriate time to prepare for these changes ahead of their commencement.

■ Elton John

Mr Richard Holden: [\[12222\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether there was a cost to the public purse of the performance by Sir Elton John at the International Investment Summit.

Georgia Gould:

There was no fee for Sir Elton John to perform at the International Investment Summit.

■ Employment: Policy

John Glen: [\[8805\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what methodology the Government uses to assess whether someone is a working person for the purposes of policy development; and whether pensioners are included in that demographic.

Georgia Gould:

Each government department is responsible for assessing potential policies to ensure they deliver the Government's objectives.

■ Lobbying

John Glen: [\[12701\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what recent guidance the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments has provided to special envoys on lobbying.

Georgia Gould:

The Business Rules apply to Ministers and Crown servants. The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA) provides advice on applications for advice from Crown servants of grade SCS3 and above, and former ministers.

Special envoys are made via a direct ministerial appointment and are not ministerial or civil service roles.

■ Prime Minister: Arsenal FC

John Glen: [\[11589\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what estimate has been made of the value of the donation in kind from Arsenal to the Prime Minister of use of the Directors Box in the next twelve months.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Right Hon. Member to the entry made to the Register of Members' Financial Interests by my Right Hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras.

Prime Minister: Official Gifts**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[12226\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 21 October 2024, to Question HL1279, on Ministers: Official Gifts, whether the Prime Minister will pay a tax charge on his gifts from Lord Alli.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Right Hon. Member to my Noble Friend's answer of 07 October 2024, Official Report, HL1279. The Prime Minister follows the rules outlined in the Employment Income Manual.

Public Sector: Financial Services**Ayoub Khan:**[\[10578\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the Government's policy is on whether private asset management companies can play a role in the delivery of key public services.

Georgia Gould:

The Government is determined to rebuild public services so that they deliver high standards and good outcomes for users and value for money for the taxpayer.

In the Budget, the Chancellor announced significant additional investment in key public services, such as the NHS. Our reform agenda is also central to improving public services going forward, including to drive greater efficiency and productivity.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**Passenger Ships****Kim Johnson:**[\[13253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to engage with the cruise industry; and whether she plans to invite representatives of that industry to join industry groups that her Department convenes.

Chris Bryant:

DCMS recognises the significant role the cruise industry plays in the broader tourism and hospitality sectors. The Department regularly engages with a range of stakeholders across the tourism sector, including the cruise industry, to understand their perspectives and challenges. As part of our ongoing commitment to represent the diverse interests within tourism, DCMS is reviewing opportunities for industry representation in relevant groups and will consider the cruise industry's inclusion in

these forums where appropriate. Further details on stakeholder engagement will be made available in due course.

■ Sports: Transgender People

Rupert Lowe:

[\[13602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the participation of transgender athletes in women's sport on women; and if she will meet with women impacted by transgender participation in sport.

Stephanie Peacock:

Sporting bodies have a responsibility to protect the integrity and fairness of women's sport and the safety of all participants, particularly when it is not possible to balance those factors with inclusion.

National Governing Bodies set their own policies for who can participate in their sports in domestic competitions. Our UK sports councils have produced guidance to help domestic sports bodies determine the right position for their sport.

■ Tourism

Kim Johnson:

[\[13255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how her Department plans to engage with (a) the cruise industry and (b) other tourism sectors in the development of tourism planning.

Chris Bryant:

DCMS is committed to working collaboratively with all sectors of the tourism industry to support sustainable growth and resilience across the sector. The Department engages regularly with representatives from the cruise industry, as well as other key tourism stakeholders, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges each sector faces. These consultations will continue to inform our approach to tourism planning.

■ Tourism Industry Council: Passenger Ships

Kim Johnson:

[\[13252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to consider the cruise industry's role in (a) inbound, (b) outbound and (c) domestic tourism when determining the membership of a re-established Tourism Industry Council.

Chris Bryant:

DCMS is reviewing how best it works with industry and local and devolved authorities to drive forward an ambitious plan for UK tourism and the visitor economy. We are committed to ensuring that we work with the whole of the tourism sector, including those who work in inbound, outbound and domestic tourism. We hope to make announcements soon.

■ Tourism: North East Somerset and Hanham

Dan Norris:

[\[13161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an estimate of the number of (a) domestic and (b) international tourists visiting North East Somerset and Hanham constituency annually.

Chris Bryant:

This data is shared by all constituencies in the ceremonial county of Somerset:

- Inbound: Somerset saw 496K visits, 3.2M nights, and a spend of £296M in 2022.
- Domestic: Somerset saw 2M trips, 6.7M bednights, and a spend of £460.4M - annual average based on 24 months between Sep 21-Sep 23

■ Youth Services

Natasha Irons:

[\[12817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to improve access to youth services.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government recognises the vital role that youth services and activities play in improving the life chances and wellbeing of young people. The Secretary of State recently announced our plans to create a new National Youth Strategy, designed to put the views of young people at the centre of decision-making on policies that affect them. As the new National Youth Strategy is developed, the Government will continue to support access for young people to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and volunteering opportunities.

DEFENCE

■ Defence

David Reed:

[\[13656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to (a) strengthen the UK's role within NATO and (b) ensure that the UK leads in (i) European and (ii) transatlantic security.

Luke Pollard:

NATO is the cornerstone of UK and Euro-Atlantic security. Our commitment to NATO is unshakeable. This Government is pursuing a 'NATO First' defence strategy. In response to growing threats, the Prime Minister has underlined the UK's cast-iron commitment to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. Our commitment to NATO includes our nuclear deterrent and world class carriers with 5th generation combat aircraft.

European security will be our foreign and defence priority. Britain must also restore trust with our closest neighbours. This includes new security and defence

agreements with close allies and partners in Europe, such as Germany, our plan for an ambitious and broad-ranging UK-EU Security Pact and reinvigorating the Lancaster House Agreement with France. This work enhances cooperation between the UK and key allies that complements the wider NATO alliance.

■ Israel: Armed Conflict

Mr Andrew Snowden: [\[12745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, following the Chancellor's commitment of £3 billion a year for the Ukraine war effort, what similar commitment does this budget make for our continued support of Israel's war effort.

Luke Pollard:

A resolution to this conflict has been a priority since day one of this Government. An immediate ceasefire is just the first step towards a lasting solution to the crisis. The UK continues to fund our operational presence in Middle East to support regional stability as we push for a long-term political solution that includes the implementation of a two-state solution.

■ National Armaments Director

James Cartlidge: [\[12949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he categorises the National Armaments Director role as a (a) civil servant or (b) military appointment.

James Cartlidge: [\[12950\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, where he plans to locate the private office of the National Armaments Director.

James Cartlidge: [\[12951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many staff members will be employed in the National Armament Director's private office.

Maria Eagle:

The National Armaments Director (NAD) role will be a civil servant appointment.

Private office arrangements are yet to be confirmed.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices

Caroline Voaden: [\[13067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure people without Maths and English GCSEs can access appropriate apprenticeship schemes.

Janet Daby:

The department does not have entry requirements for apprenticeships, but we understand that employers may wish to set their own as apprentices are employees.

The department does have specific English and mathematics exit requirements which apprentices must meet, and we recognise the concerns that have been raised by learners, employers and providers about the barriers these can pose to accessing or completing an apprenticeship.

The department is considering how its English and mathematics exit requirements policy can be improved to make sure it recognises the benefits to upskilling in these subjects, while also being delivered in a way that supports people to achieve.

The department continues to fully fund apprentices who do not hold the required English and mathematics qualifications to achieve these as part of their apprenticeship.

■ Apprentices: Employers' Contributions**Neil O'Brien:**[\[13233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the increase in the rate of employer National Insurance Contributions on the number of apprenticeship starts in each year to 2030.

Janet Daby:

To repair public finances and help raise the revenue required to increase funding for public services, the government has taken the difficult decision to increase employer National Insurance.

The government recognises the need to protect the smallest employers, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of businesses with National Insurance Contributions (NICs) liabilities either gain or see no change next year. Employers will continue to be able to claim employer NICs reliefs, including the relief for employing apprentices under 25, where eligible.

■ Department for Education: Buildings**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[13050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9068 on Department for Education: Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in her Department's headquarters office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available.

Janet Daby:

Heads of department have agreed that 60% minimum office attendance for most staff continues to be the best balance of working for the Civil Service. Office occupancy data for the period July to September has been published, with further publications to

happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-hq-occupancy-data>.

■ Department for Education: Data Processing

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[12792]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps they are taking to help increase productivity within their Department through the use of (a) artificial intelligence and (b) effective use of data.

Janet Daby:

The department is committed to improving its productivity, including through artificial intelligence (AI) and effective use of data.

For example, a Microsoft Azure Open AI sandbox environment has been enabled to limited groups of users within the department, allowing them to build and test AI models based on specific use cases in a safe and secure environment. This has allowed the department to safely and securely test 12 use cases ahead of a launch into production and wider rollout to our workforce. If testing goes well, newly-developed technologies are expected to be rolled out to staff from December 2024. We believe these will be amongst the first bespoke generative AI tools launched in government and will allow the department to deliver its services to the public at a faster pace and lower cost.

The department is also mid-way through the migration of its analysts to the new Analytical Data Access service, giving analysts and policy teams a single point of access to key departmental data. This data is fully governed, secure and discoverable using the latest cloud technology tools. This is significantly improving the speed and reliability of the department's data to better inform holistic policy and funding considerations, and support scenario planning. It also provides a secure environment for utilising AI and large language models, where both lawful and ethical.

The department draws on a range of resources, published on GOV.UK, to inform its AI and data usage, for example, the Generative AI Framework and the Ethics, Transparency and Accountability Framework. We also work closely with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to widen access to the data we are responsible for via the existing ONS Secure Research Service, and are also partnering with the ONS to support development and integration of department data into the new Integrated Data Service.

The department also has access to the Central Digital and Data Office, based in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, for expert advice. We will continue to regularly review our usage of AI and data to maximise productivity benefits for staff and the public.

■ Education: Digital Technology

James McMurdock:

[\[13125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase digital learning opportunities across (a) schools and (b) colleges.

Stephen Morgan:

The department is taking action to increase digital learning opportunities in schools and colleges. To do this effectively requires ensuring that students have the right digital and computing skills.

To help break down barriers to opportunity, this government will deliver a curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive and innovative, and ensures that all young people get the opportunity to learn digital skills as part of their education. To meet this ambition, the government announced an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review on 19 July, that is being chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The Review Group has launched a call for evidence, which sets out key questions and themes where it would particularly welcome input.

Information about how to respond to the call for evidence, or to register to join a live event, is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>. The call for evidence is open until 22 November 2024, and the review will publish its recommendations in 2025. Ministers will then consider any changes to curriculum and qualifications in the light of these recommendations.

This government has also announced the creation of Skills England, which will transform the skills system to make it truly world leading. It will help to build a high skill, high productivity workforce that is matched to employers' needs and ensures that everyone, regardless of their background, can access the opportunities they need to thrive. It is a new body that will tackle skills shortages, including digital skills, and support sustained economic growth.

Technology is not a catchall solution to educational challenges and its use in the classroom should be informed by evidence and best practice. The department is working to establish a strong evidence base for the effective use of technology and will embed this evidence across our world class education system, so that it is easy for schools, colleges and families to use the best products at the right time. The department funded the Education Endowment Foundation, an independent charity, with £137 million to encourage innovative and effective evidence based teaching, including using technology.

The department has published digital and technology standards to help schools and colleges make more informed decisions about technology leading to safer, more cost efficient practices and new learning opportunities for students. To support schools to meet these standards, the department has invested in connectivity infrastructure and developed a digital support service.

The department has worked with commercial providers and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to fund gigabit capable broadband rollout to over

1,500 schools. We have also invested over £200 million in its Connect the Classroom programme, improving Wi-Fi connectivity for over one million pupils in over 3,100 schools.

The department is also committed to using assistive technology (AT) to support inclusive digital learning. AT can break down barriers to opportunity for students with special educational needs or disabilities and the department is broadening the effective use of AT through research, training and guidance.

■ Educational Institutions: Subversion

Blair McDougall:

[12753]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department issues guidance on (a) identifying and (b) tackling political interference from international actors to academic institutions.

Janet Daby:

Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The government works in partnership with the sector to support institutions to make informed decisions on international collaborations and manage national security risks. Universities UK, with government support, continues to deliver a programme of work to increase the understanding and awareness of the threat from interference within the higher education sector. A key output of this work is the publication of two sets of guidelines: 'Managing risks in Internationalisation: Security related issues' and 'Managing risks in international research and innovation'.

These guidelines are available here:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/managing-risks-internationalisation> ;

<https://www.ukri.org/publications/managing-risks-in-international-research-and-innovation/>.

The guidance has specific sections on mitigating against foreign interference. In addition, the Research Collaboration Advice Team and National Protective Security Authority continue to provide tailored advice to researchers and institutions on how to manage national security risks in international research collaborations.

The National Security Act 2023 further strengthened the government's legal powers to counter foreign interference, including those actions which amount to transnational repression, and provides the security services and law enforcement agencies with additional tools to deter, detect and disrupt modern-day state threats.

■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs

Tracy Gilbert:

[\[12534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of VAT on private schools on children with special educational needs in Scotland.

Stephen Morgan:

Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

HM Treasury (HMT) is responsible for UK wide VAT policy. HMT has published its assessment of the impacts of removing the VAT exemption that applied to private school fees. This assessment also considers impacts on Scotland and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-on-private-school-fees/applying-vat-to-private-school-fees#summary-of-impacts>.

While VAT is a reserved tax and the VAT policy will apply across the UK, education policy is devolved. The Scottish government will be able to provide further details of special educational needs support available to pupils in Scotland.

■ Private Education: VAT

Adam Dance:

[\[13114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the capacity of state schools to accommodate a potential increase in students transferring from private schools; and whether students transferring from private schools in rural areas will be guaranteed a place at their nearest state school.

Stephen Morgan:

The government predicts that 35,000 pupils will move into UK state schools in the long-term steady state following the removal of the VAT exemption to school fees. The government expects approximately 2,900 pupils will move into state schools in England following the business rates policy taking effect. As such, the impact on the state education system as a whole is expected to be very small.

This increase in the state sector represents less than 0.5% of total UK state school pupils, of which there are over nine million. The number expected to move before the end of the 2024/25 academic year is around 3,000. The government expects the associated revenue costs of pupils entering the state sector to steadily increase to a peak of around £300 million after several years.

Local authorities have statutory duties to ensure that there are sufficient school places for children in their area. They must also, on request, provide information to parents about the availability of places in schools in their area.

Parents that require a state-funded place for their child must apply to the admission authority of the school for which they want to apply. Admission authorities must deal with applications in line with their published admissions policy. Admissions policies

can prioritise applicants on a range of factors, including by distance from home. However, no pupil is guaranteed a place at their nearest state-funded school.

■ Students: Fees and Charges

Neil O'Brien: [\[12985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of an increase in university tuition fees have on public sector net (a) debt and (b) financial liabilities.

Neil O'Brien: [\[12986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of increasing the maximum level of maintenance loan that students can take out on public sector net (a) debt and (b) financial liabilities.

Neil O'Brien: [\[12987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with the Office of Budget Responsibility on increasing (a) university tuition fees and (b) maximum maintenance loan levels.

Janet Daby:

The department publishes forecasts annually for higher education and further education student loans in England. The published forecasts include assumptions that fee caps and maintenance loans will increase annually by RPI All Items Index Excl Mortgage Interest (RPIX). These assumptions are agreed with a range of stakeholders, including HM Treasury (HMT), the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) and the National Audit Office. These forecasts are available here:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/student-loan-forecasts-for-england>.

These assumptions in the baseline forecast mean the policy to apply inflationary increases to fee caps and maintenance loans in the 2025/26 academic year is equivalent to the baseline forecast, so there is no additional cost on either public sector net debt or financial liabilities when compared to the published figures, which are included in departmental accounts and provided to HMT.

Any increase to loan amounts, whether on maintenance or fee loans, compared to the baseline would increase public sector net debt (PSND) and public sector net financial liabilities (PSNFL). Student loans affect PSND by changing the government's cash balance. The change in PSND is calculated as outlay (payments to students and providers) minus repayments. PSNFL includes the portion of student loans expected to be repaid and is calculated as PSND minus the modified loan balance. The annual increase in net debt would be equal to the increased cashflow, so the same as the increase in outlay in the near future.

In the context of student loans, public sector net financial liabilities are most affected in the short term by the proportion of the additional outlay the department forecasts

will eventually be written off. As such, the impact of increased loan amounts would be smaller on net financial liabilities than on net debt.

The OBR was created in 2010 to provide independent and authoritative analysis of the UK's public finances. The OBR's approach to scrutinising each measure on HMT's scorecard and incorporating these into its forecast is set out in its 'Briefing paper No.6: Policy costings and our forecast', which is available here:

https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/27814-BriefingPaperNo_6.pdf.

Inflationary increases to fee caps and maintenance loans are already included in the baseline forecast provided to the OBR, so no policy costing was necessary in this case, and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has had no discussions with the OBR on this matter.

■ Universities: Asylum

Lee Anderson:

[12994]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) asylum seekers and (b) refugees are studying degree courses at universities.

Janet Daby:

The UK has a longstanding and proud tradition of providing a safe haven to those who have no choice but to leave their home country because of endangerment to their lives or to those of their families. Higher education student support is available to those recognised as refugees, as well as their spouses, civil partners and children who were family members on the date the refugee applied for asylum, provided they have been ordinarily (i.e. lawfully) resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and Isle of Man) since being recognised by the government as a refugee and are ordinarily resident in England on the course start date. They are exempt from the three-year ordinary residence requirement.

4,948 students with refugee status received student support from Student Finance England in the 2023/24 academic year to support their studies on full time undergraduate courses.

Individuals seeking asylum are not entitled to student support in England, whilst they are seeking asylum.

The department does not hold information on students who have self-funded their studies.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Climate Change: Children

Richard Foord:

[13569]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to help ensure that the vulnerabilities that children experience in relation to climate change are (a) acknowledged and (b) addressed in Nationally Determined Contributions.

Kerry McCarthy:

The UK is committed to supporting the most vulnerable, including children, who are experiencing the worst impacts of the climate crisis, and working together with partners to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

For example, through UK support to the NDC Partnership, the global coalition for coordinating support for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), we will enable up to 40 countries to strengthen the ambition, quality and investability of their NDCs ahead of COP30. The NDC Partnership is committed to supporting a country-driven process to advance youth engagement in NDC implementation.

The UK has just launched its own new, ambitious 1.5C-aligned 2035 NDC. The Government has consulted with civil society and youth groups to advance the policies on which our NDC target is based.

■ Electric Cables**James McMurdock:**[\[13133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will meet the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock to discuss pylons.

Michael Shanks:

The design and development of electricity transmission infrastructure is the responsibility of developers. Government sets the rules for a robust and independent planning process that communities can participate in.

Given the Secretary of State's role in determining consent for Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects, it would not be appropriate for the Secretary of State to discuss any specific projects, so as not to prejudice this process.

■ Geothermal Power: Heating**Dr Kieran Mullan:**[\[13004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when the Government plans to publish its findings from research into the potential costs of geothermal heat in the UK.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The electricity generation and heat supply cost estimates from geothermal energy in the UK commissioned by Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and undertaken by Ove Arup & Partners Limited (Arup) will have completed by the of this calendar year (2024). DESNZ are aiming for this work to be published in the first half of next year, but at this time cannot give an exact date as to when the publication of the outcomes will be.

■ Great British Energy

Caroline Voaden:

[\[13116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to encourage Great British Energy to consult with local communities on the development of renewable energy projects.

Michael Shanks:

Great British Energy will support the roll out of small and medium-scale renewable energy projects, using established technologies, to develop up to 8 GW of cleaner power. To ensure Great British Energy is set up to deliver its Local function effectively, my officials will continue to engage with local and community groups as GBE continues to be developed and implemented.

■ Heating: Renewable Fuels

James MacCleary:

[\[13098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he plans to launch the consultation on technical issues for the renewable liquid heating fuel obligation under Section 159 of the Energy Act 2023; and what steps he is taking to support rural households using oil for heating to transition to (a) hydrotreated vegetable oil and (b) other lower-carbon alternatives.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

As sustainable biomass is a limited resource, the Government expects to prioritise its use in sectors like aviation which have fewest options to decarbonise. Renewable liquid heating fuels (RLHF) are also much more expensive to use than other heating solutions.

Before taking decisions on whether to support the use of RLHFs, like hydrotreated vegetable oil, in heating, the Government would require stronger evidence on their affordability for consumers, and the availability of sustainable feedstocks.

■ Petroineos

Brian Leishman:

[\[12859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the financial information provided by Petroineos; and what discussions he has had with Petroineos on that information.

Michael Shanks:

Petroineos is a private company – a joint venture between PetroChina and INEOS. We have worked closely with the company and with the Scottish Government to understand the financial challenges facing the Grangemouth refinery. Petroineos' shareholders have invested more than \$1.2bn since 2011 to maintain the refinery's safe operation, recording losses in excess of \$775m during the same period. The Government pushed the company to continue refining for as long as possible

however the company made clear that there was no viable commercial future for the refinery operation, which it will now convert to an import terminal.

Details of Ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK.

■ Small Modular Reactors

Josh MacAlister:

[\[12758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the small modular reactor competition run by Great British Nuclear, whether his Department is taking other steps to support the development of privately (a) funded and (b) operated nuclear power projects.

Michael Shanks:

Great British Nuclear (GBN), the Government's nuclear delivery body, is pushing forward with the small modular reactor competition – at the Autumn Budget it was confirmed GBN had entered negotiations with the four remaining bidders, with final decisions expected in the spring. In parallel, the government is continuing to consider responses to the Alternative Routes to Market consultation for Advanced Nuclear Technologies and will publish a factual response in due course. The Government is the majority shareholder in Sizewell C, and the Budget provided £2.7bn of funding to continue supporting the project's development in 2025/26.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Lee Anderson:

[\[13238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans his Department has to support farmers who are affected by the changes made to inheritance tax regulations at the Autumn Budget 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government's commitment to our farmers remains steadfast. We are reforming the Agricultural Property Relief on Inheritance Tax in way which protects small family farms. Changes are expected to only affect around 500 claims for agricultural property relief in 2026-27.

The Government has committed to support farmers through a farming budget of £5 billion over two years – more money than ever for sustainable food production. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8bn for environmental land management schemes in 2025/26. This funding will deliver improvements to food security, biodiversity, carbon emissions, water quality, air quality and flood resilience.

Environmental Land Management schemes will remain at the centre of our offer for family-owned farms and other farmers, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive,

Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing. These offer funding streams for farmers to make their businesses more sustainable and resilient, including those who have been often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenant farmers. We will work with the sector to continue to roll out, improve and evolve these schemes, to make them work for farming and nature.

The Government will invest a further £2.4bn over the next two years to protect communities across the country from the devastating impacts of flooding by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences.

This range of support forms part of the government's New Deal for Farmers. The Government is also supporting family-owned farms and other farmers by protecting them from being undercut by low welfare and low standards in trade deals, by lowering energy bills for farmers by switching on GB Energy, and by using the Government's own purchasing power to back British produce so that 50% of food brought in hospitals, army bases and prisons is locally produced or certified to high environmental standards.

■ **Agriculture: South of England**

Alex Mayer:

[\[13900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what (a) funding and (b) other support his Department is providing to farmers to transition to more sustainable agricultural practices in (i) East, (b) South West and (c) South East of England.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government has committed to support farmers through a farming budget of £5 billion over two years, including £2.4 billion in 2025/26. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8 billion for environmental land management schemes in 2025/26. This funding will deliver improvements to food security, biodiversity, carbon emissions, water quality, air quality and flood resilience.

Environmental Land Management schemes will remain at the centre of our offer for farmers, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing. These offer funding streams for farmers to make their businesses more sustainable and resilient, including those who have been often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenant farmers.

We will work with the sector to continue to roll out, improve and evolve these schemes, to make them work for farming and nature.

■ **Avian Influenza**

Paul Davies:

[\[12808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department made of the number of cases of avian influenza within the game bird population.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) assesses the impact gamebird releases have on the likelihood of transmission of avian influenza to wild birds, and between wild birds and kept birds. These risk assessments are available as part of the APHA's '[Animal diseases: international and UK monitoring](#)' collection on GOV.UK.

■ Avian Influenza: Yorkshire and the Humber**Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[13571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on tackling cases of avian influenza in Yorkshire.

Daniel Zeichner:

One case of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N5 has been confirmed in the Yorkshire area this season. This case follows recent detections of the HPAI H5N5 in wild birds in the region and is the first case confirmed since declaration of Great Britain's zonal freedom from HPAI in March 2024.

The case was confirmed in commercial poultry at a premises near Hornsea, East Riding of Yorkshire on the 5 November 2024. To prevent further disease spread, all poultry on the infected premises have been humanely culled and preliminary cleansing and disinfection has been carried out at the premises by the Animal and Plant Health Agency. A 3km protection zone and 10km surveillance zone have been put in place surrounding the premises. Protection zones must stay in force for a minimum of 21 days and surveillance zones for a minimum of 30 days. The zones will only be lifted once all disease control activities and surveillance in the zones have been successfully completed and there are no suspect cases in the zones under investigation. Defra continue to monitor the situation and the need for an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) will be considered in response to further increases in risk.

■ Bluetongue Disease: Disease Control**Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[13570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent progress his Department has made on tackling cases of bluetongue virus.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra acted quickly to contain bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) when the first case this season was detected on 26 August 2024, implementing zones with movement controls on susceptible livestock to prevent spread. These disease control restrictions have been adapted in response to new findings and there is now a single restricted zone (RZ) covering the east coast and some inland areas in England.

The movement of susceptible animals from the RZ to live elsewhere in England requires a specific licence and is subject to free pre-movement and post-movement testing. This helps to prevent the possible establishment of new pockets of disease from undetected spread via animal movements. Some animals were humanely culled

to prevent establishment at the outset and infected animals in cases found in free areas outside the restricted zone have also been humanely culled.

Defra has permitted the use of vaccines for BTV-3 and these vaccines are now available for vets to prescribe in England.

Defra and APHA continue surveillance of susceptible animals and epidemiological assessments, remaining vigilant for any changes, and are working closely with key industry stakeholders to review how we approach controls for BTV-3 for the coming winter months, in 2025 and beyond.

■ Construction: Waste

Tom Hayes:

[\[13910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support industry to reduce waste generated in the construction industry.

Mary Creagh:

The 9 English Water and Sewerage Companies (WaSCs) submit data to the Environment Agency on the total quantity of sludge sent to different outlets to meet the European reporting requirements. The total sludge sent to the agriculture outlet over the last 10 years is shown in the table below.

YEAR	TOTAL SLUDGE TO AGRICULTURE – ENGLAND ONLY (TONNES DRY SOLIDS)
2014	716,928
2015	696,355
2016	750,049
2017	726,063
2018	752,992
2019	698,597
2020	761,246
2021	759,578
2022	766,630
2023	764,810

■ Dangerous Dogs**Tim Roca:** [\[13354\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to publish guidance on withdrawing a Certificate of Exemption for XL Bully dogs.

Daniel Zeichner:

Where an owner has applied for a certificate of exemption and no longer thinks that their dog is an XL Bully, it will be possible to ask Defra to withdraw the certificate. Defra will provide more information about this process soon.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Buildings**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[13046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024, to Question 9617, on DEFRA: Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in his Department's HQ office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available.

Daniel Zeichner:

Heads of Department have agreed that 60% minimum office attendance for most staff continues to be the best balance of working for the Civil Service. Office occupancy data for the period July - September has been published, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-hq-occupancy-data>

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[13047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9617 on DEFRA: Buildings, how many civil servants are assigned to work in his Department's headquarters in London; and how many individual desks are available in that office.

Daniel Zeichner:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 November to Question [9616](#).

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Civil Servants**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[9616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many civil servants are assigned to work in each of his Department's offices; and how many desks are available in each office.

Daniel Zeichner:

Attached is the data for how many Civil Servants are assigned to work in each departments office as of August 2024.

Below is the data for how many desks are available in policy hubs from October 2024. The reason we have only given this data, is that all other buildings are

predominantly utilised by the Environment Agency. No Data is given for CEFAS or VMD, as we don't hold that information

SITES	DESKS AVAILABLE PER DAY
HORIZON HOUSE	727
MARSHAM STREET	1146
NEWCASTLE LANCASTER HOUSE	479
YORK THE KING'S POOL	776

Attachments:

1. Civil servants in each Department's offices Aug 24 [PQ 9616 attachment (1).pdf]

■ **Fisheries: Celtic Sea and North Sea**

Caroline Voaden:

[\[13673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the International Council of the Exploration of the Sea's publication entitled Advice on fishing opportunities, catch, and effort, Celtic Seas and Greater North Sea ecoregions, published on 28 June 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra routinely use the best available scientific advice, including that provided by the International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES), within international fisheries negotiations, where catch limits are agreed on shared stocks, and in wider policy development The best available scientific advice is considered as part of our policy approach which seeks to balance obligations and objectives, as set out in the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS).

In line with the JFS, making use of ICES advice, the UK seeks to achieve greater environmental sustainability and provide profitable outcomes for the industry including aiming to increase over the medium term the total number of stocks fished at Maximum Sustainable Yield. As part of the annual negotiation process, Defra officials provide Ministers with an assessment of how the UK negotiating position on fishing opportunities balances these objectives on a stock-by-stock basis.

■ **Fisheries: English Channel and South West**

Caroline Voaden:

[\[13674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential socio-economic impact of proposed quota adjustments on the (a) South West fishing industry and (b) English Channel fisheries.

Daniel Zeichner:

Consultations with the EU to agree fishing opportunities for 2025 began in November and are expected to conclude in December 2024. A final assessment of quota changes, as a result of these consultations, will be published in spring next year.

As per requirements of the Fisheries Act 2020 and Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS), the UK uses the best available scientific advice in fisheries management and negotiations, this includes the annual advice from the International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) on fishing opportunities. Accepting the ICES advised headline advice in full, would lead to a reduction in UK quota in the South-West of England and English Channel compared to 2024.

However, in seeking to appropriately balance all the fisheries objectives set out in the Fisheries Act 2020 and the JFS, the UK will in some cases seek to agree an allocation with the EU, above that advised by ICES, for example for a 0 Total Allowable Catch (TAC) stock where a bycatch-only TAC may be required to prevent adverse impacts on the fishing industry, within sustainable limits.

Food: Brexit**Clive Jones:**[\[12537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of leaving the European (a) Union, (b) Customs Union and (c) Single Market on food prices.

Daniel Zeichner:

This Government cares deeply about the cost of living and food security; therefore, it closely monitors factors impacting food prices. Defra modelling shows that consumer food prices are driven by farmgate prices, import prices, exchange rates, labour costs in food manufacturing and non-labour costs in food manufacturing.

We are working to reset our relationship with our European friends to strengthen ties and tackle barriers to boost UK-EU trade. We will seek to negotiate a veterinary/SPS agreement to boost trade and deliver benefits to businesses and consumers in the UK and the EU. We have been clear that we are ambitious to improve our trading relationship but we are not rejoining the single market or customs union, and we will not return to freedom of movement.

Genetically Modified Organisms: Crops**Alicia Kearns:**[\[13590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that the British Society of Plant Breeders correctly applies the small producer exemption from royalty fees applied to grain crops with diverse genetic makeup.

Daniel Zeichner:

The British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) is the representative body for the UK plant breeding industry. In the collection of royalty fees and farm saved seed payments, the BSPB are acting as independent agents of various breeders and are

not contracted by Government to undertake this work. Therefore, any queries on the payment of royalty fees should be made to the BSPB.

The Plant Varieties Act 1997 provides an exemption from making farm saved seed payments if the farmer meets the definition of a small farmer as defined in the Act.

Regulation 3(2)(a) of The Plant Breeders' Rights (Farm Saved Seed) (Specified Information) Regulations 1998 provides an obligation on a small farmer to inform the rights holder that they are exempt from farm saved seed payments. Therefore, a small farmer must inform the BSPB that they meet the exemption for it to be applied. The arrangements for small farmers are publicised through various sources including gov.uk and via the BSPB.

■ Horticulture: Government Assistance

Ben Goldsborough:

[\[13882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support the horticulture sector.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government appreciates and values the vital work of the horticulture industry and, as part of our mission-driven government, we are committed to working with colleagues across Whitehall to support the sector.

Underlining this commitment, the Seasonal Worker visa route has been confirmed for 2025, with a total of 43,000 Seasonal Worker visas available for horticulture next year. This is broadly the same allocation as the sectors received in 2023 and 2024, which comfortably met demand. This will help the sector secure the labour and skills needed to bring high quality British produce to market.

We are also continuing support for crop Genetic Improvement Networks (GINs) investing in R&D for breeding to improve crop varieties supporting crop resilience and efficiency.

■ Livestock: Animal Housing

Ian Byrne:

[\[13031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies on animal welfare of the use of cages in farming.

Daniel Zeichner:

We remain firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare and want to work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards.

The use of cages and other close confinement systems for farmed animals is an issue which we are fully considering.

■ Pets: Animal Welfare**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[12373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what meetings (a) he and (b) other Ministers in his Department have had with animal welfare charities to discuss (i) puppy and cat smuggling and (ii) a ban of electronic shock collars for dogs since 5 July 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

This Government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation.

As outlined in our manifesto we will end puppy smuggling. We will also be considering available evidence around the use of hand-controlled e-collars and their effects on the welfare of animals.

We are considering the most effective ways to deliver our commitments. Ministers will continue to meet with animal welfare charities to discuss their views on a range of issues.

■ Slaughterhouses: CCTV**Laurence Turner:** [\[12007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of The Mandatory Use of Close Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018.

Daniel Zeichner:

Published in June 2023, the Post Implementation Review of [The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses \(England\) Regulations 2018](#) confirmed that the legislation has met its objectives of improving animal welfare and providing assurance that slaughterhouses are operating to high welfare standards.

■ Sole: English Channel**Caroline Voaden:** [\[13675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will review the proposed reduction in the sole fishery in the Western Channel.

Daniel Zeichner:

There is no reduction in the International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) advice for Western Channel (7e) sole, from 2024 to 2025. For the 2024 fishing year, the ICES advice was 1057t, for the 2025 fishing year it is 1151t. This is an 8.9% increase.

In terms of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) which was set for 2024, although ICES advised a 24% cut, the UK and EU agreed a smaller (15%) reduction, in order to mitigate the short-term economic risks potentially consequent of a such a cut.

■ Trees: Conservation

Alex Mayer:

[\[13548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support the conservation of endemic tree species.

Mary Creagh:

Genetic conservation is critical to maintaining the genetic pool of England's native and endemic tree species. This diversity is important for evolutionary adaptation to environmental change.

The Millennium Seed Bank, managed by Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, safeguards seed from the majority of UK endemic tree species, including all those that reliably produce viable seed. Further collecting is ongoing, with seed and data available to support research, conservation and reintroduction work.

Forestry England's arboreta also currently support ex situ and in situ conservation of endemics from many countries. Alongside this, in September, Westonbirt National Arboretum launched the Global Conservation Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans, and Service Trees, with initial focus on threatened UK and Irish species.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Africa: Debts

Ben Maguire:

[\[12888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support unsustainable debt burdens and service payments from countries in Africa.

Anneliese Dodds:

Supporting developing countries to tackle unsustainable debt is a key development priority of this government. Where we are a creditor, we have fully engaged in debt restructuring negotiations. We welcome recent Common Framework debt agreements with Zambia and Ghana.

We are also focussed on strengthening the system for the future. This means improving debt transparency, strengthening debt management, global implementation of sustainable lending and borrowing practices, and wider roll out of Natural Disaster Clauses which pause debt repayments when a climate or health disaster hits.

■ Kiribati: Diplomatic Service

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[13745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what information his Department holds on whether the position of Honorary Consul of Kiribati is planned to be filled in the next 12 months.

Catherine West:

There are no plans to appoint an Honorary Consul in Kiribati. The British High Commissioner for Fiji is the accredited non-resident High Commissioner for Kiribati.

■ Myanmar: Human Rights**Ian Byrne:**[\[13028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his counterpart in Myanmar on upholding human rights in that country.

Catherine West:

The UK condemns human rights violations by the Myanmar military, including airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, gender and sexual-based violence, and forced recruitment, including of children. The UK has announced 19 rounds of targeted sanctions, most recently in October 2024 against suppliers of aviation fuel and equipment to the Myanmar military. We consistently use our role as penholder at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to maintain a spotlight on Myanmar, convening four UNSC meetings on Myanmar this year including to address human rights violations and calling for humanitarian action. In April, we co-sponsored a UN Human Rights Council resolution on Myanmar and in May we coordinated a statement with partners calling for an immediate end to violence from all sides in Myanmar.

■ Nepal: Administration of Justice**Fabian Hamilton:**[\[13173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the new transitional justice legislation in Nepal.

Catherine West:

A legitimate and effective transitional justice process in Nepal remains necessary even 18 years after the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It will help ensure reconciliation and underpin lasting peace. The UK welcomes Nepal's recent step forward with its new transitional justice legislation. The UK continues to engage with the Government of Nepal, the UN and others on how best to provide constructive support for Nepal's transitional justice efforts that are victim-centric, fair and in-line with international standards. We also continue to work to address the injustices, inequalities and exclusion that sowed the seeds of the civil war.

■ Turks and Caicos Islands: Crime**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[12403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many cases of gun crime were reported in the Turks and Caicos Islands in each of the last five years.

Stephen Doughty:

The FCDO does not hold this data. The Royal Turks and Caicos Island Police Force (RTCIPF), who hold this data, is regulated under Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) law and is independent of the UK Government. However, we are acutely aware of the increase in gun crime in TCI, as well as the rising number of fatal shootings in TCI. I have already responded to a clear request for additional support from the Governor, Premier and local authorities, and visited in person last week to see the situation on the ground, including undertaking a patrol with police and to view training of the Royal TCI Regiment in support of local police. Our support has included deploying externally contracted Authorised Firearms Officers to boost police numbers and embedding investigators within the RTCIPF to support the investigation of cases of fatal shootings and to build long-term local capability. I was also able to announce our plans to provide two additional vessels to enhance maritime patrols by the police. I will continue to discuss additional ways we can provide sustainable support with ministerial colleagues.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Cancer: Health Services****Rupert Lowe:**[\[13928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating an internal league table comparing UK cancer (a) care and (b) waiting times with other developed countries.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department has no current plans to create such an internal league table. Professor Lord Darzi has undertaken an independent investigation into the state of the National Health Service, the findings of which were published on 12 September 2024 and will feed into the Government's 10-Year Health Plan to build a health service that is fit for the future. The Government will therefore set out any further priorities on cancer and health for England in due course.

The Department remains committed to improving cancer survival rates by hitting all NHS cancer waiting time targets within five years, so no patient waits longer than they should.

■ Cystic Fibrosis: Staffordshire**Adam Jogee:**[\[13556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support for (a) children and (b) adults with cystic fibrosis in (i) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (ii) Staffordshire.

Andrew Gwynne:

No specific assessment has been made of the adequacy of support for children and adults with cystic fibrosis in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire.

NHS England commissions 47 specialised cystic fibrosis centres for adults and children across England, in addition to supporting the optimal monitoring of patients with cystic fibrosis at home, and supporting best practice in remote consultations. Service specifications published by NHS England clearly define the standards of services, care, and outcomes that people can expect from these centres. Service specifications aim to deliver improvements to life expectancy and quality of life for adults and children with cystic fibrosis.

Services for children and adults with cystic fibrosis in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire are provided by multi-disciplinary teams at the North West Midlands Cystic Fibrosis Centre. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://nwmcfc.nhs.uk/>

NHS England recently produced the RightCare Cystic Fibrosis Toolkit which is supporting service improvement and better care for patients with cystic fibrosis. The toolkit is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/rightcare-cystic-fibrosis-toolkit/>

The Midlands region will be undertaking a review of local services over the coming months, based on the recommendations in the toolkit.

■ Fertility

Sir John Hayes:

[\[12362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will set up a cross-departmental working group to discuss how to increase the fertility rate.

Karin Smyth:

We currently have no plans to set up any working groups to discuss how to increase the fertility rate.

■ Health Services: Norfolk

Ben Goldsborough:

[\[12835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, what estimate he has made of the amount of funding that will be allocated to NHS services in Norfolk in each of the next five years.

Karin Smyth:

At the Autumn Budget, the Government announced a £22.6 billion increase in day-to-day health spending and a £3.1 billion increase in the capital budget over this year and next. Phase 2 of the Spending Review will consider overall funding for subsequent years. For next year, 2025/26, the allocation for the NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board will be set out alongside planning guidance for the next financial year at the earliest opportunity, and is therefore not currently available.

■ Hospitals: Construction

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[13190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, what estimate he has made of the potential impact of the increase in the rate of employer National Insurance Contributions on the New Hospitals Programme.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 13 November 2024]: The Autumn Budget Statement announced by my Rt Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 30 October set out that we would continue to deliver the New Hospital Programme by placing it on a more sustainable and deliverable footing.

We expect that the potential impact of Employer National Insurance Contributions to individual schemes in the New Hospital Programme will be covered through the individual Full Business Cases submitted by the trusts, where the final costs will be reviewed through the business case process.

■ Long Covid and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Tim Roca:

[\[13720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to provide support for people with (a) long Covid, (b) chronic fatigue syndrome and (c) ME.

Andrew Gwynne:

Since 2020, the National Health Service in England has invested significantly in supporting people with long COVID. This includes setting up specialist post-COVID services nationwide for adults, and children and young people, as well as investing in ensuring general practice teams are equipped to support people affected by the condition.

As of 1 April 2024, there are more than 90 adult post-COVID services across England, along with an additional ten children and young people's hubs. These services assess people with long COVID and direct them into care pathways which provide appropriate support and treatment. General practitioners will assess patients that have COVID-19 symptoms lasting longer than four weeks and refer them into a long COVID service where appropriate. Referral should be via a single point of access, which is managed by clinician-led triage.

Over the last five years, the Government, through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the Medical Research Council (MRC), has invested over £57 million in long COVID research, with almost £40 million of this through two specific research calls on long COVID. The NIHR specifically has invested £42.7 million towards research funding for long COVID. The projects funded aim to improve our understanding of the diagnosis and underlying mechanisms of the disease and the effectiveness of both pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies and

interventions, as well as to evaluate clinical care. Further information on the research into long COVID commissioned through the NIHR is available at the following link:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/what-we-do/covid-19/long-COVID>

It is a priority for the Department to publish the final myalgic encephalomyelitis / chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) delivery plan, and it is our intention to publish a consultation response summary later this autumn. We cannot comment on the exact content of the final delivery plan at this time, but it will be shaped by the consultation responses, along with continued close engagement with stakeholders, with three broad themes of attitudes and education, research and living with ME. We aim to publish in the winter of 2024/25.

The Department is also currently working with NHS England to develop an e-learning course on ME/CFS for healthcare professionals, with the aim of supporting staff to be able to provide better care and improve patient outcomes.

Additionally, the Government funds research into ME/CFS through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and the Medical Research Council (MRC), through UK Research and Innovation. In 2020, the NIHR and the MRC came together to fund the world's largest genome-wide association study of ME/CFS. This £3.2 million study, termed DecodeME, will analyse samples from 25,000 people with ME/CFS to search for genetic differences that may indicate underlying causes or an increased risk of developing the condition. Further details of the study are available at the following link:

www.decodeme.org.uk

■ NHS: Private Sector

Anna Sabine:

[12897]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure contracts made between the NHS and private providers aren't acquired by private equity companies.

Karin Smyth:

In accordance with the NHS Provider Selection Regime, contracts for National Health Service-funded healthcare services may be awarded to NHS trusts or foundation trusts and to non-NHS providers from the private and voluntary sectors. It is possible for a private organisation, that holds such a contract to deliver services to the NHS, to be acquired by a private equity company. In such circumstances, the NHS commissioning organisation, either an integrated care board or NHS England, which holds the contract must be notified of the change of control. In all cases, organisations delivering NHS services must deliver the requirements of the contract, and failure to do so may result in sanctions or even contract termination. More information on the selection regime is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/how-commissioning-is-changing/nhs-provider-selection-regime/>

■ NHS: Protective Clothing

Layla Moran: [\[12461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on companies involved in supplying PPE which was subsequently marked as do not supply due to being unsuitable for use in the NHS.

Layla Moran: [\[12462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the cost to the public purse is of storing PPE unsuitable for NHS use; and which companies are contracted to provide such storage services.

Layla Moran: [\[12463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much unusable PPE has been disposed of since November 2023.

Karin Smyth:

The Department holds all pertinent contractual detail on those companies who provided personal protective equipment (PPE) products that were considered unsuitable for use. Between 1 November 2023 and 30 September 2024, approximately 432,700 pallets of unusable PPE have been disposed of.

It currently costs approximately £200,000 per week to store PPE unsuitable for National Health Service use. The figure is dynamic because the stock is reducing. NHS Supply Chain manages PPE product supply and logistics and they lease storage for PPE from the following companies GXO and Visku (Bis Henderson).

A programme of work is underway to reduce our excess stock. This work will significantly reduce the cost of our storage network and is due to be complete by January 2025 through sales, donations, recycling, and energy from waste.

■ Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures: Regulation

Melanie Onn: [\[12940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps his Department has made on tackling unregulated cosmetic procedures; and whether he plans to follow up on the previous Government's consultation on that matter.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is currently considering what steps may need to be taken in relation to the safety of the non-surgical cosmetics sector and will set out its position at the earliest opportunity.

■ Primary Health Care: Medical Records

Dr Beccy Cooper: [\[12610\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring NHS Trusts to amalgamate patient data across primary care.

Karin Smyth:

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has announced the intention for there to be a single patient record, including primary care and hospital data, so professionals have the data they need when treating patients and are able to make better informed decisions and deliver more preventative health and care.

We are in the early stages of engaging with the public and stakeholders to understand their views about the use of health and care data. We will use the findings to form the basis of any future plans regarding a single patient record.

Prostate Cancer: Screening**Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[13978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the screening rates for prostate cancer in men aged over 50; and if he will take steps to increase the level of funding available to help screen more men over 50 for prostate cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

Screening for prostate cancer is currently not recommended by the UK National Screening Committees (UK NSC) due to the inaccuracy of the current best test called the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA). A PSA-based screening programme could harm some men as many would be diagnosed with a cancer that would not have caused them problems during their life. This would lead to additional tests and treatments which can also have harmful side effects, for example, sexual dysfunction and incontinence.

That is why no steps have been taken to increase the screening rates and funding for prostate cancer screening for men over 50. However, the Government have invested £16 million into a trial seeking to find better methods of detecting prostate cancer.

Vaccination**Charlie Maynard:**[\[13361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of adding a QR code to the NHS App on the (a) speed and (b) safety of the processing of patients (i) in vaccination clinics and (ii) generally.

Karin Smyth:

There are no firm plans to incorporate Quick Response (QR) codes into the vaccination user experience, for example, in invitations, booking confirmations, at the point of care more generally, or in the NHS App specifically.

Work for the QR code feature is still in the research and development phase, however, it is not planned for use in the NHS App roadmap between now and the end of quarter four in March 2025.

HOME OFFICE**■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel****James McMurdock:****[12843]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the cost to the public purse has been of housing asylum seekers who have arrived on small boats in (a) hotels and (b) other locations since January 2020.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation and subsistence support whilst their application for asylum is being considered.

Data on the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation is published by the Government in table ASY D_11 here: Asylum and resettlement datasets - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Data on asylum support costs under the previous government are available in the Home Office Annual Report.

James McMurdock:**[12851]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had recent discussions with her French counterpart on the potential merits of preventing small boats from crossing the Channel by intercepting them mid-journey.

James McMurdock:**[13128]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had recent discussions with her French counterpart on preventing small boats from crossing the Channel by intercepting them mid-journey.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Secretary is in regular contact with her new French counterpart, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, to discuss ongoing cooperation to stop small boat crossings. They met for the first time on 3rd October at the G7 in Italy.

Rupert Lowe:**[12871]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many irregular migrants were housed in hotels of each star rating in each year since 2018.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Data on the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation, by local authority and accommodation type, can be found within the Asy_D11 tab for our most recent stats release: Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

The Government is determined to restore order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly, and fairly, ensuring the best value for money for the British taxpayer.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Language**Rupert Lowe:** [12810]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department provides free English lessons for irregular migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office does not provide English Language lessons as part of the provision of Asylum Support.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Essex**James McMurdock:** [12828]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of irregular migrants were (a) in Essex and (b) housed in hotels in Essex in the last 12 months; and how many of those have been removed since October 2023.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Data on asylum applications, the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation, including hotels, and returns is published at: [Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables)(opens in a new tab)

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**■ Community Housing Fund****James Cartlidge:** [12955]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to renew the Community Housing Fund.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Community Housing Fund was established in 2016 and closed in 2022. The Government recognises that the community-led housing sector delivers a wide range of benefits, including strengthening community participation in local decision-making, engendering community cohesion, achieving high quality design and strengthening the co-operative economy. As we develop our Long Term Housing Strategy, we will consider how the Government may further support the growth of the community-led housing sector.

■ Devolution: Norfolk**Ben Goldsborough:** [12837]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of a devolution deal for Norfolk on (a) local housing supply and (b) economic growth.

Jim McMahon:

I met with the Leader of Norfolk County Council on 13 November to discuss next steps for devolution in the area. The Government is committed to transferring power out of Westminster and into local communities, with landmark legislation to expand devolution across England. This will devolve further powers to local leaders over areas such as employment support, housing and strategic planning, adult education, and skills to drive economic growth.

Devolution: Suffolk**James Cartlidge:**[\[12952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans she has to include district councils in the Suffolk devolution deal.

Jim McMahon:

In areas of two-tier local government, as is the case in Suffolk, the Government will continue to seek to establish combined county authorities. The Government recognises the vital role district councils play and strongly encourages their involvement in combined county authorities in a number of ways, including non-constituent membership, positions on overview and scrutiny and audit committees, and via local joint working on key issues.

Freehold: Service Charges**Monica Harding:**[\[13718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will take steps to (a) improve the transparency of estate charges for freeholders, (b) give freeholders the power to challenge estate charges and (c) give freeholders more powers to take over estate management through a Right to Manage company.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to taking steps to bring the injustice of 'fleecehold' private estates and unfair maintenance costs to an end and we will consult on the best way to achieve this.

In the interim, we will act to provide residential freeholders with greater protections by implementing the relevant provisions of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024. The implementation of that Act will require an extensive programme of secondary legislation, and we will set out the details in due course.

Housing: Norfolk**Ben Goldsborough:**[\[12836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of building a new settlement in Norfolk.

Matthew Pennycook:

This government's New Towns Programme will include large-scale new communities built on greenfield land and separated from other nearby settlements, but also a larger number of urban extensions and urban regeneration schemes that will work with the grain of development in any given area.

The New Towns Taskforce will advise ministers on appropriate locations for our next generation of new towns. It will deliver a final shortlist of recommendations within 12 months, but will have the freedom to share conclusions in respect of specific sites earlier if beneficial to the government's housebuilding drive.

On 4th November, the New Towns Taskforce launched a call for evidence to explore opportunities for large developments. This call for evidence will be open until Friday 13 December 2024.

Internal Drainage Boards: Finance

James Cartlidge: [\[12954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to reform funding arrangements for Internal Drainage Board levies.

Jim McMahon:

Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) play a crucial role managing water levels and flood risk.

The Government recognises the sustained increases in Internal Drainage Board levies that some local authorities have experienced over the last two years.

MHCLG also recognises the need for a long-term solution and are working with Defra to explore potential approaches.

Leasehold: Reform

Olivia Blake: [\[12764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to publish guidance on the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my Hon Friend to the answer I gave to Question UIN [8491](#) on 18 October 2024.

Local Government: Grants

Ashley Dalton: [\[13587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of (a) reinstating and (b) replacing the New Homes Bonus and (c) increasing the S31 grant.

Matthew Pennycook:

The New Homes Bonus (NHB) provides local authorities with an incentive to support new housing delivery. Since its introduction in 2011, over £10.6 billion has been paid through the NHB in respect of 2.7 million homes. Details of the 2025-26 Local Government Finance Settlement will be set out shortly in the usual way.

■ **Local Government: Property****Sean Woodcock:**[\[13058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will list every case in which Secretaries of State have granted consent under Section 128(1) of the 1972 Local Government Act for disposal of building for (a) less than best consideration and (b) where the undervalue exceeds £2,000,000 in the last ten years.

Jim McMahon:

Information in respect of this question is only available from 2018 onwards. The requested information is provided below.

ADDRESS	COUNTY	POSTCODE	LOCAL AUTHORITY	DATE CONSENT GRANTED
Besson Street	Greater London	SE14 5AE	London Borough of Lewisham	10/05/2018
Little Paxton Community Centre & Sports Pitch	Cambridgeshire	PE19 6QY	Huntingdonshire District Council	06/08/2018
Gunnersbury Park	Greater London	W3 8LQ	London Borough of Hounslow	17/08/2018
Land at Manor Road	Greater London	E16 4PA	London Borough of Newham	10/09/2018
The Laurels	Greater London	N15 5AZ	London Borough of Haringey	07/11/2018
Excalibur Estate Regeneration - Phase 3	Greater London	SE6 1RN	London Borough of Lewisham	07/11/2018
Former Richard Cloudesley School	City of London	EC1Y 0TZ	City of London Council	21/12/2018
Land at Maple Drive	West Sussex	RH15 8DJ	Mid Sussex District Council	11/01/2019

ADDRESS	COUNTY	POSTCODE	LOCAL AUTHORITY	DATE CONSENT GRANTED
Tithe Barn	Cambridgeshire	CB25 9FD	South Cambridgeshire District Council	25/01/2019
9, 11 and 13 Cairns Street	Merseyside	L8	Liverpool City Council	06/03/2019
St Leonards Court	City of London	N1 6JA	London Borough of Hackney	07/06/2019
Kensington and Chelsea College	Greater London	W10 5QQ	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	02/09/2019
The Former Central Library	West Yorkshire	HX1 1UN	Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	28/01/2020
New Campus City Learning Quarter	West Midlands	WV1 3AH	Wolverhampton City Council	28/01/2020
Phase 4	Hertfordshire	NW9 7BS	London Borough of Barnet	29/01/2020
Former Clifton Hill Sports Centre	Devon	EX1 2DJ	Exeter City Council	29/04/2020
Fleet Street Estate	City of London	EC4N 4XY	City of London Council	03/06/2020
Seven Sisters Country Park	East Sussex	BN25 4AB	East Sussex County Council	25/11/2020
Land at Eastern Way	Northamptonshire	NN11 0QE	Daventry District Council	01/12/2020
St Ann's Hospital site	Greater London	N15 3TH	London Borough of Haringey	25/03/2021
White Hills Park	Nottinghamshire	NG9 3HH	Nottinghamshire County Council	27/04/2021
Land at Grahame Park	Greater London	NW9	London Borough of Barnet	09/07/2021
Sawyers Close	Berkshire	N/A	Royal Borough of Windsor and	01/02/2023

ADDRESS	COUNTY	POSTCODE	LOCAL AUTHORITY	DATE CONSENT GRANTED
			Maidenhead	
South Mill Arts Centre	Hertfordshire	CM23 3JG	East Hertfordshire District Council	05/06/2023
16 and 24 China Street	Lancashire	N/A	Hyndburn Borough Council	28/06/2023
Grahame Park Estate (Regeneration Scheme - Stage B)	Greater London	NW9	London Borough of Barnet	14/03/2024
St Josephs primary school caretakers house	Lancashire	NA	Kirklees Metropolitan Council	03/04/2024
Canadian Avenue Car Park	Greater London	SE6 2TX	London Borough of Lewisham	21/06/2024
Land South Hindley	Greater Manchester	NA	Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	09/08/2024
North Middlesex University Hospital	Greater London	NA	Greater London Authority	11/09/2024

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Data Processing

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[12978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps they are taking to use (a) artificial intelligence and (b) data to help increase their Department's productivity.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG is committed to improving its productivity, including through artificial intelligence and effective use of data.

MHCLG's Foundational AI Team is currently in the group testing phase of introducing a licensed version of Microsoft's Copilot to staff. This initiative is designed to evaluate the outcome of integrating Copilot into our department's workflow to evaluate its effectiveness in enhancing productivity and collaboration. Staff involved in this testing phase are participating in periodic surveys and evaluation meetings so we can

measure both the impact to productivity and staff satisfaction with Copilot's current capabilities. If the testing phase is a success, we will consider a wider deployment to the department that is supported by appropriate evidence and business cases.

The MHCLG's Foundational AI Team is also exploring the in-house design and production of dedicated AI chatbot tools tailored to be used with specific sets of data and information that the department holds. These tools would be configured to use data from specific documents and datasets, making them highly responsive in individual areas of MHCLG's work.

To ensure this and other AI work across the entire department is done safely and securely, we are also refreshing the department's internal generative AI policy to make sure it is up to date regarding the use of sensitive data by staff.

We will continue to regularly review our usage of AI and data to maximise productivity benefits for staff and the public.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: HOPE not hate**

Nick Timothy:

[\[12772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October 2024 to Question 8195, on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: HOPE not hate, what the forums were at which departmental officials were present; and on what reports generated by Hope not Hate officials have been sighted.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG officials have engaged with Hope Not Hate on various issues related to departmental policy interests, from incidents of unrest or community tensions, to hate crime and beyond.

Officials can and do access publicly available reports generated by Hope Not Hate, but do not routinely get access to such reports prior to public release, contribute to their development, or engage directly in other ways on the production of such reports.

■ **Planning Permission**

Helen Grant:

[\[12706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps through the National Planning Policy Framework to support local authorities with assessing the cumulative impact of multiple planning applications on (a) school places, (b) GP surgeries and (c) other local infrastructure.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets an expectation that the provision of local services is to be taken into account when planning for development.

Local development plans should address needs and opportunities in relation to infrastructure and identify what infrastructure is required and how it can be funded and brought forward. This will remain the case irrespective of whether any proposed

reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework or wider national planning policy are taken forward.

When preparing a Local Plan, Planning Practice Guidance recommends that local planning authorities use available evidence of infrastructure requirements to prepare an Infrastructure Funding Statement. Such Statements can be used to demonstrate the delivery of infrastructure throughout the plan-period.

The Government provides financial support for essential infrastructure in areas of greatest housing demand through the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

The Government is also committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure that new developments provide appropriate affordable homes and infrastructure. Further details will be set out in due course.

Rupert Lowe:

[13115]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the average length of time was for planning permission to be granted for (a) businesses and (b) residential properties in (i) Great Yarmouth constituency and (ii) England in each of the last 10 years.

Matthew Pennycook:

We do not hold this information. However data on the number of permissions granted for residential and non-residential development and local planning authority performance in deciding planning applications can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-planning-application-statistics>.

■ Rents: Payments

Ian Byrne:

[13017]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to tackle landlords charging high up-front rent payments.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government have long recognised that demands for extortionate rent in advance place a considerable financial strain on tenants and can exclude certain groups from renting altogether. We are very clear that the practice of landlords demanding large amounts of rent in advance must be prohibited.

Although it might be argued that the interaction of the new rent periods in clause 1 of the Renters' Rights Bill, which are a month or 28 days, and the existing provisions of the Tenant Fees Act 2019, relating to prohibited payments, provide a measure of protection against requests for large amounts of advance rent, the government believe there is a strong case for putting this matter beyond doubt. I am giving careful consideration as to how best that might be achieved through the Renters' Rights Bill.

■ Social Rented Housing

Ian Byrne: [\[13016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the supply of socially rented homes.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my hon. friend to the answer I gave to Question UIN [11383](#) on 31 October 2024.

JUSTICE

■ Courts

Caroline Voaden: [\[13068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment her Department has made of the potential implications for her policies of case backlogs in (a) criminal and (b) civil courts.

Heidi Alexander:

Criminal Courts

The Crown Court outstanding caseload remains one of the biggest challenges facing the Criminal Justice System. We have already shown we are committed to bearing down on the caseload and bringing waiting times down.

This Government has increased the number of Crown Court sitting days to 106,500, more than in six out of the last seven years. We are also in the process of extending magistrates' court sentencing powers from 6 to 12 months, freeing up 2,000 days in the Crown Court to handle the most serious cases.

Judges have been prioritising rape cases that have been waiting for over two years to go to trial. Despite this, there are some cases in the outstanding caseload which are taking far too long to progress through the system. We want to make sure every victim has the swift access to justice they deserve. This is why we have committed to fast-tracking rape cases through the courts, to deliver swift and effective justice to some of the most vulnerable victims in the criminal justice system and will say more on this in due course.

We consistently invest in the recruitment of c.1,000 judges and tribunal members across all jurisdictions annually alongside continuing to use 18 Nightingale courtrooms across eight venues to hear more cases.

Civil Courts

The civil courts play a crucial role in supporting the economy and growth as well as ensuring citizens have access to justice.

Performance remains a challenge in the civil courts and the Government is committed to resolving cases quickly, as well as ensuring that claims are dealt with appropriately and proportionately according to their complexity and value.

The Ministry of Justice is working closely with the senior judiciary to improve performance across the jurisdiction by reducing demand, increasing capacity and introducing efficiencies. For example, we continue to explore the expansion of integrated mediation in certain disputes, to enable the swift and cost-effective resolution of disputes. The county courts use a 'national and virtual region pool' which enables judges to hear cases outside their regional circuit, to ensure that available judicial resource can be deployed to areas of significant demand elsewhere when needed.

■ Ministry of Justice: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox:

[13140]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9266 on Ministry of Justice: Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in her Department's headquarters office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available.

Sir Ashley Fox:

[13142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9268 on HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS): Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in HMCTS's main office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available.

Alex Davies-Jones:

For the purposes of this reply, we have interpreted reference to the Ministry of Justice's headquarters building and the main office for HMCTS as being 102 Petty France.

The new Government has recently committed to keep to the current guidance on civil service office attendance. Office occupancy data for the period July - September has been published, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-hq-occupancy-data>.

Sir Ashley Fox:

[13141]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9266 on Ministry of Justice: Buildings, how many civil servants are assigned to work in her Department's headquarters in London; and how many individual desks are available in that office.

Sir Ashley Fox:

[13143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9268 on HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS): Buildings, how many civil

servants are assigned to work in HMCTS's main office; and how many individual desks are available in that office.

Alex Davies-Jones:

For the purposes of this reply, we have interpreted reference to the Ministry of Justice's headquarters building and the main office for HMCTS as being 102 Petty France.

The methodology used to calculate occupancy at the headquarters building at 102 Petty France does not take into account individual desk usage over specific time periods.

■ **Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices**

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[12889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 9269 on Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices, if she will publish the invoices for the work done.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Due to commercial sensitivity, it is against departmental policy to publish invoices.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ **5G: Wokingham**

Clive Jones:

[\[13055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the (a) quality and (b) total area coverage area for (i) 5G and (ii) other wireless data reception in (A) Wokingham and (B) along intercity transport routes; and what steps he is taking to improve in 5G coverage in those areas.

Chris Bryant:

Our ambition is for all populated areas to have higher-quality standalone 5G by 2030, and 95% 4G geographic coverage by the end of 2025. We are committed to ensuring we have the right policy and regulatory framework to support investment and competition, alongside improving mobile connectivity for rail passengers.

Although I am conscious that reports of mobile coverage often do not accurately represent people's lived experience and have written to Ofcom to urge them to review their reporting, they state that 98% of the Wokingham constituency area has 4G geographic coverage from all four mobile operators, and 93% of all roads have in-vehicle 4G coverage from all four operators. Also according to Ofcom, basic (non-standalone) 5G is available from at least one mobile operator outside 91% of premises. Ofcom does not currently publish data on 5G in-vehicle coverage, or coverage data for the rail network, but my own anecdotal experience suggests that 5G coverage along inter city routes is intermittent, poor and at times nonexistent.

The Shared Rural Network programme will improve mobile connectivity on an additional 16,000 kilometres of roads across the UK.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[13148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 25 October 2024 to Question 9826 on Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Buildings, how many civil servants are assigned to work in his Department's headquarters in London; and how many individual desks are available in the headquarters office.

Feryal Clark:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 November to Question 9825.

■ Government Departments: Finance

Chi Onwurah:

[\[13206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 4.99 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, over what period will £80 million be invested in corporate services across Government; and whether this investment will be in (a) IT, (b) human resources and (c) training.

Feryal Clark:

The multi-year investment relates to the Matrix Shared Services Transformation programme, which plays an important part in driving a modern digital government, giving people a more satisfying experience and their time back in nine government departments. The £80m investment will take place in the year from April 25 to March 26 inclusive with the programme running through to FY27/28. The scope of the investment covers the implementation of a new system, the associated service transformation and the staff costs to prepare for and enact the changes for the first tranche of departments. With this investment we'll move closer to reaching our overall ambition - to transform shared services and technology to enable civil servants to focus on what they value most, serving the public.

■ Instagram: Politics and Government

Sam Carling:

[\[12902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 10824 on Instagram: Politics and Government, if he will ask Ofcom to investigate Instagram's limiting of political content.

Feryal Clark:

The Online Safety Act has safeguards for freedom of expression and will give platforms that cross a certain threshold (known as 'Category 1' services under the framework) specific duties to safeguard news journalism and content of democratic importance. Ofcom will be able to review providers' compliance with these duties

when they come into effect. As an independent regulator, any investigations and enforcement decisions are a matter for Ofcom.

■ Manufacturing Industries: Digital Technology

Chi Onwurah: [\[13204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 4.94 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, by what process the figure of £37 million for the Made Smarter programme was arrived at; how many firms that figure is planned to cover; and what the expected return is.

Feryal Clark:

We will announce further details on the allocation of the R&D budget in 2025/26 in due course. We will ensure we continue to build on the success of the Made Smarter Innovation Challenge, which has supported more than 400 organisations, of which over half are SMEs.

■ Research: Finance

Lee Anderson: [\[13226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had recent discussions with the Office for Budget Responsibility on accounting for public sector funding for research and development in fiscal forecasts.

Feryal Clark:

Engagement with the Office for Budget Responsibility is led by HM Treasury. The Department engages with HM Treasury on a regular basis to discuss a wide number of topics.

■ Research: Investment Returns

Lee Anderson: [\[12757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the rate of return to public investment in UK R&D.

Feryal Clark:

Public R&D generates significant benefits for the UK, with each pound of public R&D investment estimated to leverage, on average, £2 of private R&D investment in the long run. We know businesses grow faster because of public R&D. In the 6 years after receiving their first R&D grant funding, employment increases in the average business by 21% and turnover grows by 23%.

The measurable returns of R&D projects will vary, depending on the specific area of research. Returns for closer-to-market research are generally less challenging to quantify than those for fundamental, curiosity-driven research. To ensure that public R&D investments continue to have high impact all new significant DSIT investments are assessed for their value for money and the Department evaluates programmes' impact.

■ Space Technology

Stephen Gethins:

[\[12970\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps the UK Space Agency to help develop high-skilled jobs in the space sector; and whether the agency supports (a) apprenticeships and (b) development programmes.

Chris Bryant:

The UK Space Agency Education and Future Workforce programme aims to build and strengthen a diverse workforce. This includes formal and informal educational activities, as well as specific support for developing a skilled workforce. Development programmes include the Space Placements in Industry internship programme, where 119 students were placed in UK space organisations in Summer 2024, alongside scholarship funding and the £2.1m Training Programmes Fund to address known skills gaps in the sector.

In July 2023, the Department for Education launched the Level 6 space degree apprenticeship, developed by a trailblazer group of space industry experts and building on the Level 4 space engineering technician apprenticeship launched in August 2020.

■ Universities: Research

Chi Onwurah:

[\[13203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 4.94 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, by what process the support for the commercialisation of university research will be allocated; and what the expected return is.

Feryal Clark:

DSIT and UK Research and Innovation are designing a new process to allocate this funding. This will build on engagement earlier in the year with the university sector on how to design proof-of-concept funding. While the benefits realised will depend on the precise design, evaluations of existing UKRI programmes show strong benefits. For example, the Medical Research Council's evaluation of their developmental pathway funding scheme found that spin-outs from those awarded funding raised on average £4 million, whereas most spin-outs from projects marginally rejected for funding raised very little, or nothing.

TRANSPORT

■ Bus Services: Finance

Dan Tomlinson:

[\[13041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department is providing funding to ensure the future viability of the 84B bus route.

Simon Lightwood:

Transport in London is devolved and decisions around bus services are for the Mayor of London and TfL.

The Government regularly engages with TfL to understand their funding needs and will continue to do so as part of the Spending Review process.

■ Electric Bicycles: Accidents**Rachel Blake:**[\[13349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data her Department holds on the number of road traffic incidents which involved bicycles operated by (a) Lime and (b) Forest in 2023.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department does not hold the information requested. The Department collects information on personal injury road collisions reported to police via the STATS19 data collection system. STATS19 data does not require information on whether the vehicle was hired, or who the operator of a hired vehicle was.

■ Railways: Carbon Emissions**Grahame Morris:**[\[12930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made on Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport took account of Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy which was previously used as guidance. However, with developments in the technology available, we are working with Network Rail, the Great British Railways Transition Team and rolling stock manufacturers and leasing companies to bring forward costed options for Government to carefully consider in terms of overall deliverability and affordability before any plan can be developed.

Grahame Morris:[\[12931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made on Great British Railways Decarbonisation plan.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport is working with the rail industry, notably Network Rail, the Great British Railways Transition Team, and rolling stock manufacturers and leasing companies to develop credible long-term plans for decarbonisation; whilst Network Rail and Train Operators continue to deliver their existing commitments. This includes both reducing rail's direct contribution to carbon emissions and the role rail should play in supporting wider decarbonisation of transport and industry. Once established, GBR will be accountable for delivery of these measures as part of the Secretary of State's Long Term Rail Strategy.

■ Railways: Freight

Grahame Morris:

[\[12928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress his Department has made on (a) the Folkestone to Wembley Rail Freight route and (b) adopting the gauge to W12 for cross-channel rail freight.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government fully supports the growth of international rail freight through the Channel Tunnel, recognising its economic and environmental potential.

Under our plans to deliver the biggest overhaul of the railways in a generation, Great British Railways will have a statutory duty to promote the use of rail freight, with an overall growth target set by the Transport Secretary.

Regarding gauge clearance, I am aware of industry proposals to enhance Kent routes to 'W12', in order to enable more containerised traffic from Europe. Alongside this, Network Rail has been considering more modest, incremental gauge clearance plans for it as a step towards W12. However, any investment decision will be subject to the usual business case process, working with industry, and will need to clearly demonstrate demand for enhanced infrastructure.

Grahame Morris:

[\[12929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made on the Government's Rail freight Growth Strategy.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State has tasked Shadow Great British Railways leaders with producing a delivery plan for both passengers and freight users.

The Secretary of State for Transport will place a statutory duty on Great British Railways to promote the use of rail freight. There will also be targets set for growing rail freight.

■ Rolling Stock

Olivia Blake:

[\[12766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 4.72 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, whether she plans to hold a consultation on the rolling stock strategy.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government is in the early stages of formulating a rolling stock strategy. The strategy will include considerations around the timelines for new build, refurbishments, and potential cascades which will provide more visibility to the rolling stock market.

■ South Fylde Line: Finance**Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[12744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will include the South Fylde Passing Loop Project in new rail infrastructure spending.

Lilian Greenwood:

Following the closure of the Restoring Your Railway (RYR) programme, the Department is now reviewing its portfolio, including proposals for the South Fylde line.

There is currently no DfT funding allocated to develop this project any further, but we encourage local authorities to lead the development of transport schemes that have a strong business case and clear benefits to their communities.

■ Telecommunications: Infrastructure**Clive Jones:**[\[13370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of (a) telegraph poles and (b) other infrastructure on inclusive mobility; and what steps she is taking to make streets more accessible.

Lilian Greenwood:

Accessibility is a priority for this Government. In order to reduce pavement clutter and ensure that footways are accessible to everyone, there are requirements on telecom operators and other operators to share apparatus and to use underground lines where practicable. There are regulations in place to support this and the Cabinet Siting and Pole Siting Code of Practice 2016 also includes guidance on how telegraph poles should be sited to account for health and safety and access concerns.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public authorities to have due regard to certain equality considerations when making decisions on matters of this sort. This is to ensure that they consider how their policies, programmes, and services, including, for example, decisions on the siting of apparatus of this sort, will affect people with different protected characteristics. Public authorities are also required to monitor the impact of their decisions on those with protected characteristics.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Finance****Rebecca Smith:**[\[13080\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief on the finances of farms of 215 acres in size.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms, and further explanatory information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/what-are-the-changes-to-agricultural-property-relief>. Around 500 estates across the UK are expected to be affected each year from 2026-27.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax**Sir John Hayes:****[12686]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department conducted an impact assessment on the proposed change on inheritance tax for agricultural properties.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms, and further explanatory information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/what-are-the-changes-to-agricultural-property-relief>. Around 500 estates across the UK are expected to be affected each year from 2026-27.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

David Chadwick:**[12861]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of how many farms in Wales will be affected by the changes to agricultural property relief in each of the next five years.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms, and further explanatory information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/what-are-the-changes-to-agricultural-property-relief>. Around 500 estates across the UK are expected to be affected each year from 2026-27.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Import Duties

Sarah Smith:

[\[12873\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to review import duty.

James Murray:

This Government has committed to publishing a Trade Strategy which sets out the UK's approach to trade. The Trade Strategy will consider a range of levers to achieve our economic and international objectives. As with all policy, the Government keeps import duty under ongoing review.

■ Inheritance Tax: South Norfolk

Ben Goldsborough:

[\[12841\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many estates were subject to inheritance tax in South Norfolk constituency in the (a) 2019-20, (b) 2020-21 and (c) 2021-22 financial year.

James Murray:

The Government publishes the latest Inheritance Tax liabilities statistics at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/inheritance-tax-liabilities-statistics>. Table 12.9 of the Inheritance Tax liabilities statistics has the estimated numbers of estates liable to tax on death by UK (Westminster) Parliamentary Constituency, for the latest available tax year, which is currently 2021-22.

In that year, 60 estates were liable for inheritance tax in the South Norfolk Parliamentary constituency. The equivalent number of estates in 2020-21 and 2019-20 were 56 and 48 respectively.

■ Land: Taxation

Daisy Cooper:

[\[12747\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has prepared terms of reference for a consultation on replacing business rates with a land value tax since 2019.

James Murray:

The government is creating a fairer business rates system that protects the high street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century.

At Budget 2024, we announced our intention to introduce permanently lower tax rates for high street retail, hospitality and leisure (RHL) properties from 2026-27. This permanent tax cut will ensure that they benefit from much-needed certainty and support. It must be sustainably funded, and so we intend to introduce a higher rate on the most valuable properties – those with rateable values of £500,000 and above.

This Budget announcement reflects the Government's first steps to support the high street. We want to go further to modernise the system, and so we have published a discussion paper setting out priority areas for reform. This paper invites stakeholders to help co-design a fairer business rates system that supports investment.

■ Off-payroll Working

Lee Anderson:

[\[13229\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of increasing the rate of employer national insurance contributions on contractors working inside IR35 via an umbrella company.

James Murray:

Raising the revenue required to fix the public finances and restore economic stability requires difficult decisions on tax, which is why we are asking employers to contribute more.

A Tax Information and Impact Note was published alongside the legislation when it was introduced to Parliament.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Care Leavers: Finance

Steve Darling:

[\[12799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of an enhanced financial support package for care leavers aged 18 to 25.

Andrew Western:

We understand the challenges care leavers face and that is why the department continues to provide additional dedicated support through a series of safeguards and easements aimed at simplifying their interaction with the benefit system.

This includes support with preparing applications for Universal Credit when approaching their 18th birthday, an exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate until their 25th birthday, and, for those aged 18-21, access to Universal Credit and housing support if they wish to take up full-time study in non-advanced education.

More widely, the Government is committed to reviewing Universal Credit.

■ Employment: Disability

Ian Byrne:

[\[13272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to improve employment support for disabled Universal Credit claimants.

Alison McGovern:

As part of the get Britain working plan, more disabled people and those with health conditions will be supported to enter and stay in work, by devolving more power to local areas so they can shape a joined-up work, health, and skills offer that suits the needs of the people they serve.

Good quality work is generally good for health and wellbeing, so we want everyone to get work and get on in work, whoever they are and wherever they live. We want

people to avoid poverty, and for this to happen we must ensure that disabled people and people with health conditions have the opportunity to work and save for as long as they wish and are able to.

Disabled people and people with health conditions are a diverse group who need access to the right work and health support, in the right place, at the right time. We have a range of specialist initiatives to support individuals to stay in work and get back into work, including disabled Universal Credit claimants. Measures include support from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres, Access to Work grants and the Work and Health Programme, as well as joining up health and employment support around the individual through Employment Advisors in NHS Talking Therapies and Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care.

Employers play a key role in increasing employment opportunities and supporting disabled people and people with health conditions, to thrive as part of the workforce. Our support to employers includes increasing access to Occupational Health, [a digital information service for employers](#) and the Disability Confident scheme.

■ Health: Working Hours

Sarah Coombes:

[13853]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support the health of night shift workers in West Bromwich constituency.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Reducing ill health at work is an important area of focus for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE published its 10 year strategy '[Protecting people and places](#)' in 2022 and this includes a strategic objective to reduce work-related ill health. HSE works closely with other government departments to ensure that they cooperate and collaborate on matters concerning their respective health responsibilities.

The Department for Business and Trade has overall policy responsibility for the [Working Time Regulations 1998](#). However, both HSE and Local Authorities (LAs) enforce certain aspects of the Regulations and night work is one of the requirements that HSE enforces.

The Working Time Regulations require employers to ensure workers do not exceed night work limits, and to provide night workers with the opportunity to have a free health assessment at regular intervals.

When organising and planning night work, employers must also comply with their general duties under the [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#) (HSWA) and the [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#) (MHSWR).

HSWA places a duty on all employers, so far as is reasonably practicable, to protect the health, safety, and welfare at work of all their employees. MHSWR places a duty on all employers to make an assessment of the risks to their employees from work

activities and introduce measures that are 'reasonably practicable' to remove or control these risks.

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

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

■ Household Support Fund

Mr Lee Dillon: [\[12880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending funding settlements for the Household Support Fund beyond one year.

Alison McGovern:

We recognise that certainty helps Local Authorities to design and deliver sustainable plans for local welfare assistance. Committing to funding the Household Support Fund until 31 March 2026 will allow them to plan their approach with greater certainty.

No decision has been made at this stage on funding beyond the end of March 2026. As with all other government programmes, any such funding will be considered in the round at Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Andy McDonald: [\[13509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the PIP application system; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) simplifying the application process and (b) introducing measures to reduce waiting times for decisions.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Personal Independence Payment application process, which was developed with the assistance of disabled people, is kept under constant review. This is to ensure that it is accessible to claimants, and that it helps the Department reach an accurate assessment of an individual's entitlement. The Health Transformation Programme (HTP) is modernising Health and Disability benefit services. It is developing a PIP service which will ultimately offer online application and reduce journey times, providing a more efficient service and an enhanced customer experience.

Steve Darling: [\[13636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the level of PIP to support disabled people with the extra cost of disability.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) provides a contribution to the extra costs that may arise from a disability or health condition. There is no objective way of deciding what an adequate level of PIP should be, as everyone has different requirements reflecting their own circumstances and priorities. DWP pays close attention to estimates of the extra costs faced by disabled people; including academic research, analysis by Scope, and DWP's own commissioned research on the Uses of Health and Disability Benefits from 2019.

In order to improve the evidence in this area, DWP is now undertaking a new survey of Personal Independence Payment customers to understand more about their disability related needs. This project has a methodological advisory group including representatives of disabled people's organisations, disability charities and academic experts. It is expected to produce findings in Summer 2025.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Appeals**Uma Kumaran:**[\[13366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of mandatory reconsideration for assessing Personal Independent Payment decisions.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department is committed to making the right decision as early as possible in the claim journey.

Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) is a valuable process that supports the resolution of disputes as early as possible, so that customers do not need to appeal, reducing unnecessary demand on His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). At the MR stage, a different Decision Maker will thoroughly review the decision, taking into account all available evidence and contacting the customer for further information where necessary. Decisions will be changed at the MR stage where the evidence supports this.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Medical Examinations**Andy McDonald:**[\[13508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average length of time is for a PIP assessment to be completed; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of these waiting times on applications for the carers allowance.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The median clearance time from a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) registration to a DWP decision is 15 weeks for both new claims under normal rules and reassessments from Disability Living Allowance, as of July 2024. For new claims with Special Rules, there is a median time of 3 working days from registration to clearance.

Delays in assessing PIP claims should not affect the amount of Carer's Allowance paid to the carer as the Carer's Allowance claim can be backdated to the date PIP is awarded from.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Patients

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[13503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many individuals have had personal independence payments withdrawn after entering hospital care for more than 28 days in the last four years.

Sir Stephen Timms:

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

Suspensions of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for admission to hospital are combined in the PIP Computer System with admissions to hospices and care homes. To distinguish hospital care from the other types of accommodation would require manual investigation of individual claimant records.

■ Social Security Benefits

Rupert Lowe:

[\[13877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the primary language of benefits claimants has been in each of the last 10 years.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department does not centrally hold the information requested as it is not a requirement for a customer to declare their 'primary' language. Customer communications and benefit information is provided in English and Welsh as appropriate. Necessary information can be provided in another language and translation services are available.

■ State Retirement Pensions

Gregory Stafford:

[\[13357\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of a 25 pence per week increase for state pension claimants.

Emma Reynolds:

No such assessment has been made. We are absolutely committed, through the Triple Lock, to supporting pensioners and giving them the dignity and security they deserve in retirement.

This means that from April 2025, subject to Parliamentary approval, the basic and new State Pensions will be increased by 4.1%. The full yearly basic State Pension will increase by around £360, and the full yearly rate of the new State Pension will increase by around £470.

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[13872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure the equitability of payment amounts between the (a) old State Pension, awarded until 2016 and (b) new State Pension, awarded from 2016 onwards.

Emma Reynolds:

We are absolutely committed to supporting pensioners and giving them the dignity and security they deserve in retirement.

It is not possible to make direct, like for like comparisons between State Pension amounts received under the pre 2016 State Pension system and the new State Pension. Under both systems, the amount people are entitled to varies according to their National Insurance record. It is not the case that everyone in the new system receives more than everyone in the pre 2016 system.

■ **State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[13402\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many applications her Department received from pensioners living in countries where the UK State Pension is not uprating yearly requesting that their pension be temporarily uprated because they are visiting (a) the UK or (b) travelling to a country where the State Pension is uprated in each year since 2021; and what the cost to the public purse was of maintaining a team in her Department to administer such requests in the same period.

Emma Reynolds:

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

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[13403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will hold discussions with Anne Puckridge on the exclusion of certain countries from the annual uplift to the UK State Pension during her visit to the UK in December 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

There are currently no plans to hold discussions with Anne Puckridge on this issue.

The UK's policy on the up-rating of the UK State Pension for recipients living overseas is a longstanding one. The UK state pension is payable worldwide and is uprated abroad where we have a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

Up-rating is based on levels of earnings growth and price inflation in the UK which has no direct relevance where the pensioner is resident overseas.

Over many years, priority is given to those living in the United Kingdom when drawing up expenditure plans for additional pensioner benefits.

People move abroad for many reasons and this can have an impact on their finances. However, the decision to move abroad is voluntary and remains a personal choice

dependent on the circumstances of the individual. For a number of years, advice has been provided to the public that the UK State Pension is not uprated overseas except where there is a legal requirement to do so. HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions publish information on the Government website.

■ **Universal Credit: Mental Health**

Rachel Gilmour:

[\[13359\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the impact of the journal system for Universal Credit on the mental health of applicants and users.

Sir Stephen Timms:

DWP are committed to providing the best possible support for all our customers, including the most vulnerable in society. Within Universal Credit, we recognise that customers have individual needs and different barriers, so we train and support all our work coaches to be able to respond appropriately to a customer's situation.

We have no plans to assess the impact of the journal system on the mental health of applicants and users., Independent research published in 2018 showed that the majority of customers found the journal easy to use. The DWP Customer Experience Survey for 2023-2024 showed that 88% of people found it easy to use their UC online account.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Food: Overseas Trade

Gareth Snell:

[\[12442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to promote UK-based food businesses to international markets.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 13 November 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Gareth Thomas:

DBT offers a wide range of export support for F&D businesses looking to expand overseas. ~~This includes our extensive overseas network, with trade advisors promoting UK food in over 100 countries.~~ We work with partners and industry across the UK to deliver **a comprehensive programme to showcase British food and drink and deliver export opportunities to industry** ~~a programme of trade shows, missions and events.~~ **With the support of our extensive overseas network we run a significant programme of trade shows, missions and events, with trade advisors promoting UK food in over 100 countries.** ~~For example, in~~ ~~the~~ October, we held a high-profile showcase at the British Residence in Paris, promoting the quality, heritage and innovation of UK F&D to a wide audience of global buyers. ~~In~~ September, as part of our Dairy Export programme, we held a showcase, promoting UK dairy to more than 40 countries.

~~We are considering what further steps we can take to increase the exports of British food and sell products to international markets.~~