



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 25 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:59 P.M., 25 November 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Department for Business and Trade: Staff

Mr Gregory Campbell:[\[15168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what changes have been made to the (a) numbers and (b) job types of staff employed in his Department's trade and investment hub in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months.

Justin Madders:

(a) The number of active employees attached to the Trade and Investment Hub in Northern Ireland during the previous 12 months is shown on Table 1. This is representative of active employees who are based in Northern Ireland and work for the Trade and Investment Hub, Northern Ireland. There are also employees in other teams and locations that indirectly support Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland.

DBT defines "staff employed" as Civil Servants on payroll with an active payroll assignment.

(b) All active employee records attached to the Trade and Investment Hub in Northern Ireland recorded the same job type, International Trade. This was not amended throughout the reporting period 1st December 2023 – 1st November 2024.

Table 1

REPORT DATE	COUNT OF ACTIVE EMPLOYEES
01/12/2023	12
01/01/2024	12
01/02/2024	10
01/03/2024	9
01/04/2024	9
01/05/2024	10
01/06/2024	9
01/07/2024	10
01/08/2024	10
01/09/2024	9
01/10/2024	10

REPORT DATE	COUNT OF ACTIVE EMPLOYEES
01/11/2024	10

■ Electric Bicycles

Chi Onwurah: [\[14944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of reports of incidents involving (a) e-bike batteries and (b) conversion kits on consumer trust in e-bike technology.

Justin Madders:

While e-bikes and e-scooters are used safely by millions of people every day, unsafe, non-compliant or improperly used lithium-ion batteries in e-bikes can cause serious fires. Public safety is our priority, and this Department's recent "Buy Safe. Be Safe" campaign was launched last month to raise awareness of the steps consumers can take to reduce the risk of fires. This is part of a wider programme led by the Office for Product Safety and Standards to tackle the causes of fires so that consumers are protected and can have confidence in these technologies.

■ Fireworks

Danny Beales: [\[15545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to improve the enforcement of fireworks regulations.

Justin Madders:

Enforcement powers exist for local authorities to take action when fireworks are unsafe, sold illegally or misused. Local authorities and the police also have powers to tackle anti-social behaviour caused by the misuse of fireworks. It is for local areas to decide how best to deploy these powers, based on their specific circumstances.

To inform any future decisions I intend to engage with businesses, consumer groups and charities shortly after the fireworks season to gather evidence on the issues and impacts of fireworks.

■ Fireworks: Bolton North East

Kirith Entwistle: [\[15351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle firework misuse in Bolton North East constituency.

Justin Madders:

Most people use fireworks in a responsible, safe, and appropriate manner and there are laws in place to address situations where fireworks are misused. The current regulatory framework is designed to support people to enjoy fireworks whilst lowering the risk of dangers and disruption to people, pets, and property.

The police and local authorities have powers to tackle anti-social behaviour caused by fireworks. It is for local areas to decide how best to deploy these powers, based on their specific circumstances.

To inform any future decisions I intend to engage with businesses, consumer groups and charities shortly after the fireworks season to gather evidence on the issues and impacts of fireworks.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: Slough

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[15231\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an estimate of the number of jobs created via foreign direct investment in Slough constituency in the last 12 months.

Sarah Jones:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) works closely with local authorities and investment partners to monitor and support the impact of foreign direct investment in the Slough constituency.

Foreign direct investment in the Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area resulted in 33 FDI projects and the creation of 399 new jobs in 2023-24, including both single-site and multi-site projects. While this area covers Slough, specific statistics for the parliamentary constituency are not published due to confidentiality concerns.

■ Post Office: Directors

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[14809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Post Office board.

Gareth Thomas:

Annually, in line with the Financial Reporting Council's Corporate Governance Code, the Post Office Board runs a Board Evaluation exercise to determine skills gaps on the Board and areas for improvement. The outcomes of this review are shared with DBT as the Post Office Shareholder. The Government monitors the implementation of their recommendations via the Shareholder Representative, UK Government Investments, to support the continuous improvement of the Board.

In line with Post Office's governance framework, the Government recently approved the Post Office Chair to lead the recruitment of new Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) specialising in technological transformation and organisational design to complement the Board's existing composition. A further two new Postmaster NEDs should join the Board in the near future, providing an ongoing voice on behalf of the postmaster community.

■ Post Offices: Closures

Chris Hinchliff:

[\[14169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what notice the Post Office plans to give of closure of branches; and what plans he has to mitigate the potential impact of such closures on rural communities.

Gareth Thomas:

No decisions to close any or all of the remaining Directly Managed Branches in rural and urban areas have been taken as of yet. Given the difficult financial position the Post Office is in, it is right that it reviews the costs of its operations and considers ways to reduce their costs further.

The Post Office will continue to deliver on the 11,500 minimum branch requirement set by Government. Longer term, Government has set out our plan to publish a Green Paper to consult with the public on the long-term future of the Post Office. This Green Paper will help inform what customers, communities and postmasters would like to see from a modern Post Office network.

Alex Easton:

[\[14509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with the Post Office on proposed closures.

Gareth Thomas:

The Secretary of State and I recently met with the Post Office Chair, Nigel Railton, and discussed his proposals for the future of the company before Mr Railton announced Post Office's Transformation Plan on 13th November. While Post Office has the freedom to make commercial decisions regarding the composition of its network, Government sets the parameters for the Post Office to operate in.

The Government protects the branch network by setting minimum access criteria which require 99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest Post Office outlet. The access criteria ensure that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

■ Post Offices: Rural Areas

Anna Gelderd:

[\[14565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) Liskeard and (b) other rural communities to maintain access to (i) banking and (ii) other essential services after the closure of local post offices.

Gareth Thomas:

The Government provides an annual £50m Network Subsidy funding to support the delivery of a minimum number of branches, including Liskeard and other rural & urban communities and to provide a geographical spread of branches in line with published access criteria. The access criteria ensure that however the network changes, Post Office delivers essential services, including banking and cash services, across the UK via its network of 11,500 branches.

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and high streets, and is committed to championing sufficient access for all. We have committed to work closely with banks to roll out at least 350 banking hubs, which will provide individuals and businesses up and down the country with critical cash and banking services.

■ Small Businesses: Morocco

Paulette Hamilton:

[\[15277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help increase trade and business support to Moroccan-British entrepreneurs in local communities; and whether he has plans to help promote UK-Morocco small business exchange programs.

Gareth Thomas:

Total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and Morocco was £4 billion in the 12 months to June 2024, an increase of 11% or £378 million in current prices, from the previous 12 months.

UK businesses can access DBT's business support via Great.gov.uk, the Business Support Service, their local Growth Hub, and Help to Grow.

DBT's trade promotion plan includes trade missions that will bring Moroccan and UK entrepreneurs together. This includes recent trade missions building up to the World Cup in 2030, rail sector and airport sector missions, with small businesses an important part of these delegations.

■ Taxis: Conditions of Employment and Pay

Shivani Raja:

[\[15040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that private hire drivers (a) are not exploited and (b) receive (i) appropriate pay and (ii) equal employment rights.

Justin Madders:

All employers must comply with their legal obligations to ensure those they engage receive the rights and protections to which they are entitled.

Entitlement to employment rights is determined by an individual's employment status. Private hire drivers can fall under any one of the three statuses: employee, limb (b) worker, or self-employed.

We have committed to consult on moving towards a simpler two-part framework that differentiates between workers and the genuinely self-employed.

If individuals believe they are not being afforded the rights they are entitled to, they can contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service for free and impartial advice.

■ Zero Hours Contracts: Regulation

Shivani Raja:

[15031]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of proposed changes in the regulation of zero hours contracts on average (a) staffing and (b) other costs for SMEs.

Justin Madders:

The potential impact of the proposed changes through the right to guaranteed hours, the right to advance notice of shifts and the right to payment for short notice shift cancellation, curtailment or movement are set out in the Government's Impact Assessments. These are published at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/employment-rights-bill-impact-assessments>.

CABINET OFFICE

■ 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection

Mr Richard Holden:

[15230]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 8943 on 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection, what works from the Government Art Collection with what reference numbers have been (a) added to and (b) removed from Downing Street since 5 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The Government Art Collection website lists the artworks on display in Downing Street:

https://artcollection.dcms.gov.uk/?s=&display=artworkonly&search_place=Downing+Street

■ 10 Downing Street: Official Hospitality

Mike Wood:

[15186]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the potential cost to the public purse was of (a) alcohol and (b) meat-based food at the recent Diwali reception in No 10 Downing Street.

Georgia Gould:

The cost of hospitality in 10 Downing Street is published in the Cabinet Office Annual Report and Accounts.

■ 9 Downing Street: Media

Alex Burghart:

[13808]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much has been spent on (a) new furniture, backdrops and fittings in and (b) other refurbishment of the 9 Downing Street Press Briefing Room since 30 May 2024; and on what items this was spent.

Georgia Gould:

No money has been spent on new furniture, backdrops, fittings or other refurbishment of the Press Briefing Room in 9 Downing Street since 30 May 2024.

■ Child Poverty Taskforce**Ms Julie Minns:**[\[15068\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Child Poverty Taskforce plans to (a) assess the (i) extent and (ii) potential impact on children of and (b) make recommendations on tackling hygiene poverty.

Ellie Reeves:

The Taskforce recognises families' access to essentials, including hygiene essentials, as a fundamental aspect of child poverty. Addressing acute poverty, including access to essentials, is a core focus of the work to develop through the child poverty strategy. This is set out in more detail in the 23 October publication 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing our Strategy'.

■ Civil Servants: Workplace Pensions**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[13825\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the estimated aggregate cost was of employer contributions to Civil Service pension schemes in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Georgia Gould:

The answer to the question raised is available in the public domain and can be found in the 2022/23 Civil Superannuation accounts on the UK Government website and the resources section of the Civil Service Pension website.

■ Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**Alex Burghart:**[\[13805\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many Government procurement cards have been issued across the Civil Service.

Georgia Gould:

The number of Government procurement cards issued across the Civil Service is not held centrally by the Cabinet Office.

■ Ethics and Integrity Commission**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[13827\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the terms of reference of the Ethics and Integrity Commission will be.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the honourable member to the answer given to PQ 1251 on 31 July 2024.

■ Government Departments: Contracts for Services

Rupert Lowe:

[14545]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many public contracts were awarded without competitive tendering by each Department in the last financial year; and for what reason each contract was awarded without competitive tendering.

Georgia Gould:

Details of all Government contracts, including the procurement procedure used, are published on Contracts Finder, and Find a Tender above a certain threshold. Details can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>

■ Government Departments: Procurement

Mr Richard Holden:

[14484]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 11029 on Government Departments: Procurement, what the criteria will be for including a foreign company on the debarment list.

Georgia Gould:

The Procurement Act 2023 does not differentiate between domestic and foreign suppliers. For any supplier to be added to the debarment list, a minister of the crown must be satisfied that the supplier is either an excluded or excludable supplier (as defined in s.57 of the Procurement Act 2023) and must consider that the supplier should be added to the debarment list.

■ Infected Blood Compensation Scheme

Ian Sollom:

[14775]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether Infected Blood compensation payments to affected (a) siblings, (b) children and (c) parents of deceased infected people will be given the same priority as those to living infected people.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

Following feedback from the infected blood community, the previous administration committed to prioritising making payments to people living with infections as a result of contaminated blood or blood products first. This Government has upheld this commitment and we expect the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to begin making payments to people who are infected under the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme by the end of this year. Payments to the affected are expected to begin in 2025, following a second set of regulations.

Ian Sollom:

[14777]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will ensure that affected (a) siblings, (b) children and (c) parents of deceased infected people receive the same Infected Blood compensation payments as affected partners of deceased people.

Ian Sollom:

[\[14780\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will ensure that Infected Blood compensation payments to the estates of deceased infected people are the same as those for living infected people.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The compensation amounts available to people who are infected and affected differ depending on their circumstances. As recommended by the Inquiry, the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme has been designed as a tariff-based framework. The proposed tariffs have been developed on the advice of the Infected Blood Inquiry Response Expert Group, which included clinical and legal advisors assisted by social care specialists. The tariff for infected people will be based on the severity of their infection or infections. The proposed tariffs for affected people will similarly be based on the severity banding in relation to their loved one who was infected. The tariff-based approach means that the Scheme will award compensation that reflects personal circumstances while making payments quickly.

■ **Infected Blood Compensation Scheme: Hepatitis**

Ian Sollom:

[\[14774\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the policy paper entitled Infected Blood Compensation Scheme overview: Living infected persons, published on 23 August 2024, when he plans to publish further evidence requirements for people infected with Hepatitis C after 1991.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

Under the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme, there are two ways for a directly infected individual to show eligibility, depending on the date of infection. For those infected during the specified date ranges, they only need to show that they received infected blood treatment during the date ranges and were subsequently diagnosed with a relevant infection. Those whose infection fell outside of the specified date ranges (which includes those who were infected with Hepatitis C after 1991) must also satisfy the Infected Blood Compensation Authority that the infected blood treatment caused the person to become infected with that infection. This is the higher evidence requirement referred to in the summary document published in August 2024, as set out in Regulation 7 of The Infected Blood Compensation Scheme Regulations 2024. It is intended that the Authority's approach to applications will be to be as proactive and sympathetic as possible, and consistent with appropriate and proportionate safeguarding of the integrity of the scheme.

■ **Infected Blood Compensation Scheme: Internet**

Ian Sollom:

[\[14778\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will take steps to ensure that information on the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme Summary gov.uk webpage remains (a) readily available, (b) accessible to the public and (c) up to date.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The Government is committed to ensuring there is regular communication with the public on infected blood. We will ensure that the gov.uk pages are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure the information remains up to date and correct. The Infected Blood Compensation Authority (IBCA) also sends out a regular newsletter to those interested in the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme and also has a helpline available for the community to contact.

■ Infrastructure and Projects Authority: Departmental Responsibilities**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[13821\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, which Minister is responsible for the Infrastructure and Projects Authority; and for what reason the Authority is not in the List of Ministerial Responsibilities updated on 6 November 2024.

Georgia Gould:

As Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office, I am the Minister responsible for the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. The List of Ministerial Responsibilities does not cover all responsibilities relating to every Arms-Length Body.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced on 10 October that the Government will be establishing the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA), which will be operational by spring 2025. NISTA will be formed by combining the functions of the National Infrastructure Commission and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

■ Public Appointments: Business Interests**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[14349\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether (a) direct ministerial appointments and (b) public appointments are required to declare interests.

Georgia Gould:

Prospective appointees to both public appointment and direct ministerial appointment roles are required to make a declaration of any potential conflicts of interests with the role and activities they are being asked to undertake.

■ Public Sector: Business Interests**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[14350\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether declarations of interest by (a) special advisers, (b) direct ministerial appointments, (c) non-executive directors and (d) other public appointments are published on a public Register of Interests.

Georgia Gould:

With regards to publication of special adviser interests, I direct the Rt Hon member to PQ5030.

For departmental non-executive directors, individual boards publish all relevant interests of individual board members

Declarations of interest for public appointments and direct ministerial appointments are not routinely published.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

■ Church Commissioners: Charities

Danny Kruger:

[13531]

To ask the Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, what the (a) charitable object and (b) nominal current value is of each (i) trust and (ii) other fund held by the Church Commissioners; and what document defines each such charitable object.

Marsha De Cordova:

The Church Commissioners' are a statutory body corporate and its charitable purposes are set out in a range of statutory provisions. There is no single instrument which specifies each of the purposes for which the Church Commissioners may apply their funds.

The Church Commissioners' was incorporated by the Church Commissioners Measure 1947 which makes provision for the Commissioners to hold a general fund from which it discharges the expenses and obligations which fall to the Church Commissioners' in the due discharge of their functions. Consistent with usual practice in the sector the Church Commissioners' undertakes some of its investment activity through subsidiary entities.

The Church Commissioners' net asset value is calculated annually, and detailed in the charity's annual report which is available in the library of the House of Commons, and the most recent report is available [here](#).

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Charities: South Holland and the Deepings

Sir John Hayes:

[14443]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support charities in South Holland and the Deepings constituency.

Stephanie Peacock:

Charities play a vital role in supporting our communities, and have a rich understanding of the local areas in which they are embedded, such as in South Holland and the Deepings.

DCMS is supporting the sector across England in a number of ways, including through the provision of grants through, for example, the VCSE Energy Efficiency Scheme and the Know Your Neighbourhood fund. DCMS also supports charities by

growing other sources of funding such as the social investment market and the dormant assets scheme, and building the capacity of VCSEs to bid for government contracts through the Contract Readiness Programme, which increases their sustainability.

Last year, the Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund distributed £76 million to VCSE organisations to support them with the rising cost of living. This included funding to organisations in the East Midlands - a full list of recipients can be [found online](#).

The Government values the work that charities do. Resetting the relationship between civil society and Government is a priority, and we want to ensure that the sector is recognised as a trusted and independent partner whose voice is heard. That is why DCMS has been working closely with key civil society bodies to develop a framework for a new Covenant between government and civil society, which was launched by the Prime Minister in October.

■ **Commonwealth Games: Gun Sports**

Jim Shannon:

[\[14606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of reports that the sport of shooting has not been selected for the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

Stephanie Peacock:

The sporting programme for the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games, and the recent decision not to include shooting as a sport, is a matter for the Commonwealth Games Federation and Commonwealth Games Scotland.

Shooting has been an optional sport for Commonwealth Games since a decision made at the 2015 Commonwealth Games Federation General Assembly, and its status as such is not, therefore, a decision for the UK Government.

In the last year, 315,700 people have participated in shooting activities, and Government continues to support the success of the sport. Sport England have funded British Shooting £1,197,420 from 2022-27 as part of their system partner investment. UK Sport will invest over £8m in supporting Olympic and Paralympic shooting 2021-2025, and will be making future funding decisions in due course.

■ **Gambling: Video Games**

Alex Mayer:

[\[14739\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that the Advertising Standards Authority maintains standards relating to advertisements offering cash prizes in mobile gaming apps that may be used by children.

Chris Bryant:

The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) is responsible for setting the UK Advertising Codes while the Advertising Standards Authority enforces them. Both are independent of the government.

Section 5 of the CAP Code contains the rules regarding advertising targeted at children. Section 8 contains rules for promotional marketing including prize draws. ASA guidance states that video and mobile game ads must be targeted appropriately if they contain elements unsuitable for children.

■ **Sports: Greater London**

James Asser: [\[14861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to help protect grassroots sports venues in London.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government recognises that grassroots sports facilities are at the beating heart of communities up and down the country and is acting to support more people to get active wherever they live through the delivery of the £123 million Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme in 2024/25.

Community facilities provide important places for people of all ages to be active, as well as vital social spaces and community hubs. The Government is committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, should have access to, and benefit from, quality sport and physical activity opportunities.

The Government encourages local leaders to prioritise access to sport and physical activity wherever possible. Local Authorities are responsible for decisions regarding sport and leisure provision in their area.

■ **Sports: Mental Health**

Dr Simon Opher: [\[15110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of grassroots sports programmes in strengthening mental health (a) literacy and (b) resilience of men and boys.

Stephanie Peacock:

Grassroots sports programmes provide important opportunities to bring communities together and to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of participants. Active lifestyles are also associated with 375,000 fewer people being diagnosed with depression.

The Government is committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has access to and can maximise the benefits from quality sport and physical activity opportunities.

The Government has committed to continue funding for grassroots facilities through the £123 million UK-wide Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme throughout

2024/25. The evaluation of this programme, which has already published a first interim report and will publish a further two reports in April 2025 and 2026, will consider the impacts on mental wellbeing and physical health. These future reports will seek to demonstrate a causal link between the programme and positive outcomes for mental wellbeing.

The latest report from Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey (November 2022-23) notes that there is a positive association between activity levels and mental wellbeing, and provides data split by gender. Being physically active can improve mood, decrease the chance of depression and anxiety and lead to a better and more balanced lifestyle.

The Active Lives Adult Survey (November 2022-23) survey shows 14.9 million men who are active have higher mental wellbeing scores than those who are inactive. Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (Academic year 2022-23) indicates that boys are more likely than girls to have three or more positive attitudes towards sport and physical activity.

DEFENCE

■ A400M Aircraft: Procurement

Claire Hazelgrove:

[\[14877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the procurement of the A400M Atlas Aircraft on (a) national security, (b) the number of skilled jobs in the defence sector in (i) Filton and Bradley Stoke constituency and (ii) England and (c) economic growth.

Maria Eagle:

The A400M aircraft entered service in 2014, primarily to provide tactical airlift and strategic oversize lift capabilities. In addition to this remit, A400M also has a 24/7 national standby commitment and has supported the UK Border Force with maritime reconnaissance in the English Channel, and long range search and rescue.

A400M wing production has sustained approximately 270 skilled jobs at Airbus' Filton base and it is estimated that almost 900 jobs have been sustained in the supply chain across the UK. To date, A400M production has contributed £1.5 billion to the UK economy.

■ Armed Forces: Young People

Mr Peter Bedford:

[\[14894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Education to recruit young people into the armed forces.

Luke Pollard:

Cross-Departmental engagement is at the heart of delivering our mission-based Government, particularly where more support can be offered to enhance the delivery

of Gatsby Benchmarks which serve as a framework for world-class careers provision in education.

The Armed Forces enjoy good relationships with schools, primarily in terms of engagement to support Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths curriculum areas but also in careers engagement. The Armed Forces only visit schools when invited to do so, usually in support of career events, citizenship talks, science and maths challenges and other exercises.

The Armed Forces do not target recruitment activity at under-16s, and no visits to schools by the Armed Forces are directly linked to recruitment, other than careers fairs which generally involve a range of employers. Presentations may be given highlighting Armed Forces careers, but no pupil is ever signed up or able to make a commitment to become a recruit during the course of a visit.

■ Defence: Skilled Workers

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[\[14529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 7 November 2024 to Question 12181 on Typhoon Aircraft: Procurement, what steps he is taking to ensure that skilled workers in the defence sector are retained.

Maria Eagle:

This Government is committed to bringing forward a Defence Industrial Strategy which ensures the imperatives of national security and a high-growth economy are aligned. The defence sector, including the combat air sector, provides highly skilled jobs across the UK and the Defence Industrial Strategy will consider how we grow and retain the skills needed, working closely with partners across Government, industry and skills bodies to ensure we retain and attract a skilled workforce across the sector.

■ Defence: Supply Chains

Blake Stephenson:

[\[14524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential of the Autumn Budget 2024 on the defence supply chain.

Maria Eagle:

The Autumn Budget settlement means the defence budget will grow in line with the economy.

The Department is committed to bringing forward a new Defence Industrial Strategy which will ensure national security and a high-growth economy. The strategy will deliver a better, more innovative and more resilient defence sector to boost capabilities in critical defence technologies.

■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Helen Morgan:

[\[15108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of (a) Sea King (b) Westland Wessex (c) Puma and (d) CH-47 Chinook helicopters on air quality in areas with high helicopter air traffic.

Maria Eagle:

Neither the Sea King nor Westland Wessex remain in service with the Ministry of Defence. They were retired in 2018 and 2003 respectively.

We do not believe that there is an increased risk to air quality from Puma and Chinook helicopters. However, we fully recognise the importance of acting on safety concerns. As such, the department has begun work to initiate a programme of engine exhaust emissions substance monitoring for in service helicopters in accordance with Health and Safety Executive approved methods.

■ Unmanned Air Vehicles: Procurement

Neil O'Brien:

[\[14667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the impact of the collapse of Reaction Engines Ltd on the UK Hypersonic Air Vehicle programme.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence is in discussion with the Administrators appointed by Reaction Engines Ltd. However, these discussions are commercial-in-confidence and I cannot disclose further details.

EDUCATION

■ Apprentices: Taxation

Neil O'Brien:

[\[15014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much and what proportion of apprenticeship levy funds were spent on Level 7 Apprenticeships in each year since the creation of the levy.

Janet Daby:

The apprenticeships budget in England is used to fund training and assessment for new apprenticeship starts in apprenticeship levy and non-levy paying employers, and to cover the ongoing costs of apprentices already in training and any additional payments made to employers and providers.

The table below shows spend on Level 7 apprenticeships, by both levy-paying and non-levy paying employers in England, and total spend on the apprenticeship programme.

FINANCIAL YEAR	OVERALL SPEND ON LEVEL 7		
	APPRENTICESHIPS (£ MILLION)	TOTAL SPEND (£ MILLION)	PROPORTION OF TOTAL SPEND (%)
2017/18	12	1,586	1
2018/19	50	1,738	3
2019/20	103	1,919	5
2020/21	165	1,863	9
2021/22	236	2,455	10
2022/23	234	2,458	10
2023/24	238	2,509	9

Spend is rounded to the nearest million and proportions to the nearest whole number.

■ British Students Abroad: EU Countries

Richard Baker:

[\[14544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help support students to study in the EU.

Janet Daby:

The Turing Scheme is the UK government's global programme to provide grants for students to study and work anywhere in the world, including in the EU. Students can develop new skills, gain international experience and boost their employability. For the 2024/25 academic year, education providers and other eligible organisations from across the UK have been allocated over £105 million to send more than 43,000 students on study and work placements across the globe.

Countries in the EU are popular destinations for UK students supported by the Turing Scheme, with EU countries making up five out of the top ten most popular destinations across both the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years.

The Turing Scheme breaks down barriers to opportunity by prioritising the most disadvantaged students, requiring education providers to demonstrate how their project will support them and provide additional grant funding for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to travel and living costs, this funding covers items that students may need to be able to travel, including vaccinations, visa applications, passports and insurance costs.

■ Children in Care: Undocumented Migrants

Neil O'Brien:

[14490]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of looked after children were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in each local authority area in 2024.

Janet Daby:

Information on the number and proportion of looked after children, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, is submitted to the department on an annual basis. This was recently published on 14 November 2024 at local authority level in our statistical release and is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/4e84f33a-d8a4-462c-0c25-08dd06f90d12>.

The latest information on the characteristics of looked after children in England as at 31 March 2024 is within this publication and can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions>.

Figures are produced on an annual reporting year basis rather than monthly or quarterly year basis.

■ Children's Centres

Jodie Gosling:

[14495]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Sutton Trust's Inequality in early years education report, published on 24 January 2024, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of establishing a national strategy for the reinvigoration of children's centres.

Janet Daby:

The government's Opportunity Mission aims to give all children the best start in life, breaking the link between young people's background and future success.

This means supporting strong family relationships and stable home environments, providing access to family services that provide the right help at the right time, alongside quality early education.

Family hubs do great work to help families access vital services. The Autumn Budget 2024 included an announcement of £69 million to continue delivery of the existing network of family hubs for 2025/26. More than 400 family hubs opened under the existing programme, targeted at the most disadvantaged areas.

The department's long term intention is to reform the early years system and improve family services to provide the foundation of opportunity and improved life chances for children.

The department is considering how best to achieve these aims under the terms of the subsequent multi-year spending review.

■ Education and Training: Coastal Areas

Steve Darling:

[14503]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve access to (a) university and (b) other further education and training opportunities for people living in coastal resorts in (i) the South West and (ii) the rest of the country; and what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of trends in the level of educational attainment in those areas.

Janet Daby:

This new government will be mission-led, with the Opportunity Mission building opportunities for all by giving every child the best start in life, helping them achieve and thrive, build skills for opportunity and growth and ensure family security.

Building skills for opportunity and growth is key to the Opportunity Mission. The department will ensure every young person around the country, including in coastal areas, can follow the pathway that is right for them. Whether built through high quality apprenticeships, colleges or universities, skills give people the power to progress into good jobs and seize opportunity. We will support the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university, regardless of their background, where they live and their personal circumstances. Opportunity should be available to all, and it is our aspiration that no groups are left behind.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) support the department's long term priority to drive local economic growth by reshaping the skills system to better align provision of post-16 technical education and training with local labour market needs and to support learners to gain the skills they need to get good jobs.

Over 50% (20 out of 38) of LSIP areas have coastal towns and communities within their geographies and in these areas, the designated employer representative body leading the LSIP may have engaged with coastal industry businesses and businesses and supply chain links operationally based in coastal towns and communities, as well as relevant local leaders and national sector and trade bodies.

For example, the Dorset LSIP has identified skills gaps within the marine industry and is in consultation with local providers around the introduction of Level 3 Marine Electrician and Marine Engineer Apprenticeships. These qualifications would help to resolve skills and labour shortages in coastal areas and build clusters of expertise in priority local industries.

A Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) was introduced to support local action. For example, the Cornwall and Isle of Scilly LSIP identified a need to improve sustainability skills in the local construction sector. As a result, Truro and Penwith College received £1.07 million to fund the development of a Level 3 Design, Installation and Commissioning of Electrical Energy Storage Systems, as well as the development of an industry-led Higher Technical Qualification for Construction in Cornwall.

In the South West there are a number of colleges within coastal locations or who are close enough to readily attract learners from coastal areas. All colleges have specialisms to complement a general offer delivering programmes from foundation level through levels 1 to 3 and then, in most cases, offering higher education provision. Further education colleges often work in partnership with key employers and stakeholders to ensure specialist provision meets local and regional need.

The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, an expert in education policy, including curriculum and social inequality. The review will look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people, and the barriers which hold children back from the opportunities and life chances they deserve, in particular those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, or with special educational needs or disabilities.

■ Educational Visits: EU Nationals

Richard Baker:

[\[14542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to reduce administrative requirements for school groups visiting the UK from Europe.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

As the department for opportunity, we recognise the importance of school trips and the impact that this valuable learning experience can have on children and young people. The department also recognises the difficulties that schools have faced in recent years when it comes to organising trips between the UK and the EU. Departments across government are working to mitigate these challenges. The department is working with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Home Office to improve border processing and facilitate school trips between the UK and the EU. The UK has an agreement with France which permits the use of national identity cards for French schoolchildren (aged 18 and under) travelling on organised trips and waives UK visa requirements for their classmates who are visa nationals.

The Home Office has recently announced that children aged 18 and under travelling as part of a French school group will be temporarily exempt from the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme requirement until a group solution is developed.

■ Free School Meals: Universal Credit

Jodie Gosling:

[\[14497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Sutton Trust's Closing the Attainment Gap report, published on 22 February 2024, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of expanding free school meal eligibility to all children on Universal Credit.

Stephen Morgan:

The government is driving an agenda of change to break down the barriers to opportunity and to reduce child poverty, working across local and national government.

Child poverty has increased by 700,000 since 2010, with over four million children now growing up in a low income family. That is why the government is committed to delivering an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty, tackling the root causes, and giving every child the best start at life. To support this, a new Ministerial taskforce has been set up to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, which will be published in the spring.

The department is also committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity so that all children have the freedom to achieve and thrive in education. To support this aim, the government is committed to introducing free breakfast clubs in every primary school to set children up for the day and ensure they are ready to learn, while supporting parents and carers to work.

Disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools, as well as 16 to 18-year-old students in further education (FE), are entitled to receive free meals on the basis of low income. 2.1 million disadvantaged pupils are registered to receive free school meals (FSM) and a further 90,000 are registered to receive FE free meals. In addition, all children in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England's state-funded schools are entitled to Universal Infant Free School Meals, which benefits around 1.3 million pupils.

As with all government programmes, we will keep our approach to FSM under review.

Further Education**Mr Toby Perkins:**[\[14604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the requirement for students studying Level 2 FE college courses to also study Maths and English GCSE if they have not already achieved that standard prior to enrolling on that course.

Janet Daby:

The department considers level 2 English and mathematics to be essential for enabling students to achieve and to seize opportunities in life, learning and work.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review is looking at how best to support 16 to 19-year-olds who currently do not achieve level 2 in English and mathematics by the age of 16.

The department is already strengthening the support offered to students under the mathematics and English condition of funding for students on 16-19 study programmes and T Levels who have not yet attained level 2 English and mathematics. This includes requiring providers to offer minimum hours of in-person, whole class, stand-alone teaching in English and mathematics, and for more students to be offered this.

■ Further Education: Pupil Premium

Jodie Gosling:

[\[14499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the pupil premium to post-16 institutions.

Janet Daby:

The department believes further education has a crucial part to play in ensuring the UK has the skills needed for sustainable economic growth. A range of options and priorities will be considered to secure a sustainable and adequate funding of post-16 institutions and learners as part of the next stage of the spending review, which is expected to conclude in late spring 2025.

■ Higher Education: Finance

Steff Aquarone:

[\[14242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the financial stability of the higher education sector in (a) Norfolk and (b) nationally.

Janet Daby:

The financial position of individual higher education (HE) providers is highly commercially sensitive. As such, it would be inappropriate to comment on the financial stability of HE providers in any individual local authority area.

The department recognises that the financial environment of the HE sector is challenging. The Office for Students' (OfS) update on the financial sustainability of the HE sector, published 15 November, states that up to 72% of HE providers could face a deficit in 2025/26 if they do not take mitigating action. The OfS has rightly affirmed that HE providers must take bold action to secure their long term sustainability. As autonomous bodies independent of government, it is for providers to decide on effective business models and to how to manage their finances.

However, in recognition of this challenging financial environment, this government has taken action to support the sector. The government has acted decisively to accept in full the recommendations of the independent review of the OfS undertaken by Sir David Behan. Sir David has been appointed as interim OfS Chair to oversee the important work of refocusing their role to concentrate on key priorities, including the HE sector's financial stability. The department continues to work closely with the OfS to monitor any risks and to ensure there are robust plans in place to mitigate them.

Moreover, the government has made the difficult decision to increase tuition fee limits in line with forecast inflation. As a result, the maximum fee for a standard full-time undergraduate course in the 2025/26 academic year will increase by 3.1%, from £9,250 to £9,535. The government also recognises the impact that the cost-of-living crisis has had on students. Maximum loans for living costs for the 2025/26 academic year will increase by 3.1%, from £10,227 to £10,544 for an undergraduate student

living away from home and studying outside London. Longer term funding plans for the HE sector will be set out in due course.

As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education set out in her oral statement on 4 November, this government will secure the future of HE so that students can benefit from a world class education for generations to come.

■ **Non-teaching Staff: Pay**

Laurence Turner:

[R] [15056]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to section 7.2.12 of her Department's publication entitled School workforce census guide 2024: Guide for schools including academies within a Multi Academy Trust, published on 11 October 2024, how many and what proportion of school support staff posts in publicly-funded schools in England were paid on (a) National Joint Council (Local Government Services) pay ranges, (b) other pay ranges, and (c) pay ranges for which data was not returned in the most recent workforce census period.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on the school workforce is published in the 'School Workforce in England' statistical publication, which can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

The attached table provides the pay ranges reported for support staff post contracts in the November 2023 school workforce census, which is the latest data available.

Support staff may have more than one contract, therefore individuals may be counted more than once.

School support staff play a vital role in children's education and development. The department values and recognises the professionalism of the entire school workforce and will address recruitment and retention challenges by reinstating the School Support Staff Negotiating Body.

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

Attachments:

1. [15056 school workforce table](#) [15056 attachment 201124.xls]

■ **Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education**

James McMurdock:

[14569]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will set out a timeline for the publication of guidance on Relationship, Sex and Health Education.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is currently reviewing the RSHE statutory guidance. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has been clear that children's wellbeing

must be at the heart of this guidance for schools and, as such, the government will look carefully at the consultation responses, discuss with stakeholders and consider the relevant evidence, including the Cass Review which has since been published, before setting out next steps.

We expect the results of the consultation and our response to be published on GOV.UK in 2025.

■ Pupils: Per Capita Costs

Mr Toby Perkins:

[\[14603\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding her Department provides to the educating organisation as an annual per pupil rate for an A Level student studying at (a) school, (b) sixth form college and (c) further education college.

Janet Daby:

The department calculates the basic funding for institutions for students aged 16 to 19 or students up to the age of 25 when they have an education, health and care (EHC) plan using funding rates, which depend on the size of the student's study programme.

All students are funded at the same national funding rates per student, per year, regardless of which type of institution they study at. However, the department then applies the other elements of the 16 to 19 funding formula, such as programme cost weights, support for disadvantage and area costs, meaning average per student funding levels do differ between schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges. Because the funding reflects the mix of programmes provided at each institution, the department does not have data on the rates of funding purely for A level students at these different organisations.

■ Schools: Admissions

Jodie Gosling:

[\[14496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the report entitled Social Selection on the Map, published by the Sutton Trust on 3 September 2024, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of (a) reviewing existing admissions code policies and (b) making Pupil Premium eligibility a required part of schools' oversubscription criteria.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department has no current plans to make eligibility for the pupil premium a mandatory oversubscription criteria in school admission arrangements.

However, through the Children's Wellbeing Bill, the department is planning to legislate on requiring all schools to cooperate with the local authority on school admissions, special educational needs and disabilities inclusion and place planning, by giving local authorities greater powers to help them deliver their functions on school admissions and ensure admissions decisions account for the needs of communities.

We expect this will require taking forward changes to the School Admissions Code. As part of this, the department will also consider any wider changes necessary to ensure fair access to school for all. Any changes to the Code will require a statutory process, including a full public consultation and parliamentary approval.

■ Sixth Form Colleges: Pay

Alex Sobel: [\[14467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Sixth Form Pay Award settlement to Non-Academized Sixth Form Colleges in addition to Academized Sixth Form Colleges.

Janet Daby:

The recent pay award for the 2024/25 financial year was for school teachers only. The government does not set or recommend pay in further education (FE).

This government recognises the vital role that FE teachers and providers play in equipping learners with the opportunities and skills that they need to succeed in their education and will consider workforce sufficiency and what this might mean for FE funding in future years.

The Autumn Budget 2024 set out the government's commitment to skills, by providing an additional £300 million revenue funding for FE to ensure young people are developing the skills this country needs. The department will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

■ Students: Loans

Jodie Gosling: [\[14500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the parental income thresholds used to determine the level of support for maintenance loans.

Janet Daby:

The department needs to ensure that the student funding system is financially sustainable. The department recognises the impact that the cost-of-living crisis has had on students, which is why the highest levels of support are targeted at students with household incomes of £25,000 or less.

For the 2025/26 academic year, the department will be increasing loans for living costs by 3.1%, which is in line with the forecast rate of inflation based on the RPI All Items Excl Mortgage Interest (RPIX) inflation measure. Vulnerable groups of students eligible for benefits, such as lone parents and some disabled students, qualify for higher rates of loans for living costs. This ensures that most support is targeted at students from the lowest income families, while keeping the student finance system financially sustainable.

There is much more to do to expand access and improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. That is why the department has announced that it expects

the higher education sector to do more to support students by working with the government and the Office for Students and by making the most of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. The department will be setting out longer term plans for the sector next year.

■ Universities: Care Leavers

Josh Newbury:

[\[15062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support her Department provides to care leaver university students outside of term time.

Janet Daby:

This government is committed to providing support for care leavers to ensure they have the practical and emotional support they need as they move towards independence.

Local authorities must provide assistance to care leavers near to the place they are receiving education, including outside their home authority. This assistance may take the form of either providing the young person with suitable accommodation, or by paying them enough to secure suitable accommodation themselves.

Care leavers must have pathway plans setting out what support they can expect from their local authority, including accommodation during term time, short vacations and summer vacation. If care leavers are unable to return to their former placements, they must be provided with alternative suitable accommodation. The requirement to assist with vacation accommodation lasts for as long as the young person continues on the course which has been agreed as part of their pathway plan.

Care leavers who enter higher education (HE) are entitled to a statutory bursary of £2,000 from their local authority and many universities offer additional support within their access and participation regimes. This may include additional financial support, pastoral support and 365 days per year housing whilst they are at university.

In addition, the Children's Commissioner for England has recently published a handbook for professionals working in HE on supporting care experienced students. The recommendations in the handbook come directly from care experienced young people and it includes practical proposals to improve their experience of HE.

■ Writing: Standards

Chris Vince:

[\[14518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the standard of writing in (a) primary schools, (b) secondary schools and (c) universities since 2015.

Chris Bloore:

[\[14575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the standard of writing in (a) primary schools, (b) secondary schools and (c) universities since 2015.

Catherine McKinnell:

High and rising school standards are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best life chances. The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review which will seek to deliver, amongst other things, an excellent foundation in core subjects of reading, writing and maths. The review group will publish an interim report early in 2025 setting out their interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work. The final review with recommendations will be published in autumn 2025. In the meantime, the department will continue to consider how to best support writing standards at all ages.

At the end of the academic year in which children turn five, which is usually reception year, each child's level of development must be assessed against the 17 early learning goals set out in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework. In the 2022/23 academic year, just 71% of children met the expected level of development in writing. The EYFS reforms were introduced in September 2021. As part of those reforms, the EYFS Profile was significantly revised. It is therefore not possible to directly compare assessment outcomes with earlier years.

In 2024, the key stage 2 national curriculum assessments in England showed that 72% of pupils met the expected standard in writing. The method of assessing writing changed in 2017/18, when 78% of pupils met the expected standard, therefore 2024 results are not directly comparable to 2015. In 2015, 87% of pupils achieved a level 4 or above in the writing teacher assessment.

The English language GCSE aims to provide all students with robust foundations in reading and good written English, and with the language and literary skills which are required for further study and work. While 50% of this GCSE assesses writing, the results do not directly reflect changes in the standard of writing over time, due to the way GCSEs are graded using comparable outcomes. In 2024, 61.6% of pupils entering the exam achieved a grade 4 or above. GCSEs were reformed for teaching in schools from September 2015 onwards, with first examinations in summer 2017, when 70.8% of pupils achieved a grade 4 or above.

The government takes very seriously the need for high academic standards in higher education (HE), as does the Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of HE in England. HE providers are autonomous organisations, responsible for ensuring the standards of students' work. However, the OfS explored the standard of writing in a sample of providers in its 2021 report 'Assessment practices in English higher education providers: Spelling, punctuation and grammar', which sets out the OfS's view that students should be assessed on spelling, punctuation and grammar in order to maintain quality and protect standards.

As part of the OfS's 'B4 Registration' condition, HE providers must establish academic regulations that are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable HE course.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Community Energy

Satvir Kaur: [\[14853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he is taking steps to (a) increase the number of and (b) expand existing community energy schemes.

Michael Shanks:

The Government recognises the role community groups play in our efforts to tackle climate change. Great British Energy's Local Power Plan will support Local and Combined Authorities and Community Energy Groups to develop up to 8GW of cleaner power by 2030.

The Government also supports the community energy sector through the £10 million Community Energy Fund, which enables communities across England to access grant funding to develop local renewable energy projects for investment.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Contracts

Tracy Gilbert: [\[14742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to extend Contract for Difference terms in future allocation rounds.

Michael Shanks:

The Government reviews the Contracts for Difference scheme before every round to ensure it continues to deliver our objectives. We are currently working with industry to accelerate ways to build upon the successful outcome of the last auction so that we can deliver our goal of clean power by 2030.

Tracy Gilbert: [\[14745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to consult with stakeholders ahead of the Contract for Difference Allocation Round 7.

Michael Shanks:

We are currently working with industry to accelerate ways to build upon the successful outcome of the last Contracts for Difference auction, so that we can deliver our goal of clean power by 2030. We will also consult formally with stakeholders on any changes to the scheme ahead of Allocation Round 7.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points

Satvir Kaur: [\[14852\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to help increase access to electric car charging infrastructure for people living in (a) flats and (b) houses without driveways.

Michael Shanks:

Electric Vehicle Chargepoint Grants are available for people living in homes without driveways, flat owners, renters, and landlords. These offer up to £350 towards the purchase and installation of a chargepoint. The Government will shortly publish guidance for local authorities on installing cross-pavement solutions for residents without off-street parking.

In addition, the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund supports local authorities in England to work with industry to transform the availability of EV charging for drivers without off-street parking, and will support the installation of tens of thousands of local chargers.

Electricity Generation: Fees and Charges**Tracy Gilbert:**[\[14744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reforming the Transmission Network Use of System charges.

Michael Shanks:

Ofgem is legally responsible for network charging arrangements and both Government and Ofgem recognise the importance of transmission network charges in considering wider electricity system reform. There are both near- and long-term proposals being considered for reform of Transmission Network Use of System charges and Government officials will continue to work closely with Ofgem as these proposals develop.

Energy Supply**Richard Tice:**[\[14783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department (a) is taking and (b) plans to take to ensure energy security during periods where renewable energy sources do not meet demand.

Michael Shanks:

The UK's diverse power mix reduces dependence on one generation source, ensuring security of supply in a range of conditions. Transitioning away from fossil fuels and towards a range of home-grown clean energy technologies will reduce the UK's vulnerability to unstable energy prices while ensuring energy security. The Government is accelerating the development and deployment of low-carbon flexible energy generation and storage, including batteries and pumped hydro, to manage the intermittency of wind and solar. The Clean Power 2030 action plan, set for release by year-end, will detail the Government's strategy for achieving a secure, clean power system by 2030.

Tom Hayes:

[15105]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will take steps to ensure that (a) viable, (b) funded and (c) consented projects are delivered despite National Energy System Operator objections.

Michael Shanks:

On 5 November, Government published an open letter,[1] jointly with Ofgem, supporting a reformed connections process that accelerates connections for viable projects aligned with strategic plans.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/aligning-grid-connections-with-strategic-plans/open-letter-from-desnz-and-ofgem-aligning-grid-connections-with-strategic-plans-5-november-2024>

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/aligning-grid-connections-with-strategic-plans/open-letter-from-desnz-and-ofgem-aligning-grid-connections-with-strategic-plans-5-november-2024>

■ Energy: Housing

Adam Jogee:

[14536]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent steps he has taken to ensure that people in Newcastle-under-Lyme can access the Warm Homes Plan.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's ambitious Warm Homes Plan will upgrade millions of homes across the country, including in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The plan will make homes cleaner and cheaper to run, from installing new insulation to rolling out solar and heat pumps.

We will partner with combined authorities and local and devolved governments to roll out the Warm Homes Plan. Full details will be announced in due course.

■ Energy: Rural Areas

Sir John Hayes:

[14445]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to support rural households off the gas supply network with the cost of energy.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government is committed to ensuring energy bills are affordable for all consumers.

The Warm Home Discount provides a £150 rebate off energy bills for eligible low-income households. We expect around 3 million households to receive this support this winter.

Although standing charges are a commercial matter for suppliers, and are regulated by Ofgem, we know that too much of the burden of the bill is placed on them. The

Government has worked constructively with the regulator on the issue of standing charges, and we are committed to lowering the cost of them.

As part of the Warm Homes Plan, we have committed £3.4 billion over the next three years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency. This includes £1.8 billion to support fuel poverty schemes, helping over 225,000 households reduce their energy bills by over £200. We will set out the full details of our ambitious Warm Homes Plan next spring.

■ National Grid

Alison Taylor:

[14828]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the locations of (a) the 80 essential and (b) all 88 network projects in the National Grid's transmission expansion plan have been identified.

Michael Shanks:

Network planning at a high level is undertaken by the National Energy System Operator (NESO) which identifies where reinforcements are needed, network companies then design and propose individual projects. The NESO's 2030 Advice identifies 80 specific projects as critical for the delivery of Clean Power by 2030. These projects are taken from NESO's Pathway to 2030 Report (2022), and are listed in Annex N1 of the NESO's [Clean Power 2030 Data](#) Workbook. The Government will set out further details when we publish the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan by the end of the year.

■ Nuclear Power

Tom Hayes:

[14869]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has set a target for the share of power to be provided by (a) small modular reactors and (b) other nuclear power by 2035.

Michael Shanks:

Nuclear power, as one of the most reliable, secure, low-carbon sources of electricity, is and will continue to be an essential part of our journey to net zero. This Government is working to get Hinkley Point C over the line, and, as announced at the Autumn Budget, Great British Nuclear's Small Modular Reactor competition has entered the negotiation phase with shortlisted vendors, with final decisions to be taken in the spring. The Budget also confirmed that a Final Investment Decision on whether to proceed with Sizewell C will be taken in Phase 2 of the Spending Review, as well as allocating £2.7bn of funding to support Sizewell C's development in the next fiscal year.

■ Nuclear Power: Skilled Workers

Sarah Hall:

[\[14721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with representatives from the energy sector on extending the skills passport to people (a) working in the nuclear sector and (b) entering the nuclear sector from the offshore oil and gas sector.

Michael Shanks:

The skills passport is an industry-led project that seeks to support Oil and Gas workers to transition into roles in the Offshore wind sectors. Currently there are no plans to transition such workers into the nuclear sector through this passport. However, the passport will provide a solid foundation for either expansion into other sectors such as nuclear in the coming years, to make such a transition possible.

The Government is committed to ensuring that the UK has the necessary skills needed to deliver our nuclear ambitions including through supporting the industry led National Nuclear Strategic Plan for Skills. The Plan is delivering fifteen projects supporting various aspects of the nuclear sector skills demand including two projects to attract and retain people from other industries, including Oil and Gas. The Destination Nuclear national communications campaign promotes the opportunities available in the sector and acts a centralised job board for the industry; and the Career Switchers project will provide nuclear upskilling support for those entering the sector with relevant engineering, trades support and business skills.

■ Renewable Energy: Education and Training

Jim Shannon:

[\[14609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Education on steps to increase awareness among young people of potential education and training opportunities in the renewable energy sector.

Michael Shanks:

The Department understands that more needs to be done to improve awareness and promote opportunities for young people in the clean energy sector, as these jobs can offer secure, well-paid careers. We are working closely with the Department for Education, Skills England, as well as industry and Trade Unions, to explore what can be done to improve this to encourage the uptake of skills and training provisions on offer for young people.

■ Renewable Energy: Scotland

Tracy Gilbert:

[\[14743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of Transmission Network Use of System charges on the viability of potential renewable energy projects in Scotland.

Michael Shanks:

Ofgem is legally responsible for network charging arrangements. Government and Ofgem recognise the importance of transmission charges to the development of renewable generation in Scotland. This is why Ofgem established an industry Taskforce to consider near-term improvements to transmission charges and has proposed a temporary cap and floor to alleviate the projected rise, and increasing volatility, in Transmission Network Use of System charges. This is expected to provide generators with greater certainty in time for future Contracts for Difference allocation rounds, including the next - Allocation Round 7.

■ Sizewell C Power Station: Finance**Wera Hobhouse:**[\[14687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what proportion of funding from the public purse for Sizewell C has been (a) spent on and (b) committed to companies with headquarters in (i) the UK and (ii) what foreign countries.

Michael Shanks:

The details of contracts agreed by Sizewell C with its suppliers are commercially sensitive. The project has made a commitment to spend 70 per cent of the construction value in the UK.

■ Small Modular Reactors: Finance**Tom Hayes:**[\[14867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much funding he plans to provide through Great British Energy for small modular reactors over the next 10 years.

Michael Shanks:

As Great British Energy (GBE) will be operationally independent, the exact mix of technologies GBE chooses to invest in will be determined by the company due course.

The Government is considering how GBE and Great British Nuclear (GBN) can work best together to ensure that the UK achieves energy security and clean power whilst securing thousands of skilled jobs. GBN is pushing forward with the SMR competition for UK deployment. GBN is in negotiation with four companies; once negotiations have concluded, they will be invited to submit final tenders, which GBN will then evaluate. Final decisions will be taken in the spring.

■ Small Modular Reactors: South West**Tom Hayes:**[\[14868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to (a) identify sites for and (b) deliver small modular nuclear reactors in the South West.

Michael Shanks:

Great British Nuclear (GBN) completed its purchase of the site at Oldbury-on-Severn (Gloucestershire) in June 2024.

As a site which has previously hosted a nuclear power station, and is now owned by GBN, Oldbury has the potential to host nuclear projects, though no decisions on projects or sites have yet been taken.

In line with manifesto commitments, this Government is working to get Hinkley Point C over the line and will aim to bring forward further nuclear projects at Sizewell C and those involving Small Modular Reactors. As confirmed at the Autumn Budget, Great British Nuclear is progressing the SMR competition and is negotiating with four companies. These companies will be invited to submit final tenders, which will then be evaluated by GBN. Final decisions are intended to be taken in the Spring.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Danny Kruger:**[\[901407\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to tackle hare coursing.

Mary Creagh:

This is a devolved matter and the information provided therefore relates to England and Wales only.

This Government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation. That is exactly what we will do, and we will be outlining more detail in due course.

The previous Government made changes to address illegal hare coursing through a package of measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. This broadened the circumstances in which police can investigate and bring charges for hare coursing related activity.

We plan to work with the police to ensure they can enforce the laws set out in the legislation.

■ Beverage Containers: Fees and Charges**Josh Newbury:**[\[14740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of a mandatory charge for single-use coffee cups.

Mary Creagh:

The Government recognises the urgent need to limit the environmental impact of single-use plastic, including fibre composite cups.

The Government has committed to reducing waste by moving to a circular economy. The Secretary of State has convened a Small Ministerial Group on Circular Economy and asked his Department to work with experts from industry, academia, civil society, and the civil service to develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England; supporting Government's Missions to kickstart economic growth and make Britain a clean energy superpower.

We will consider the evidence for action right across the economy and evaluate what further interventions may be needed in the plastics sector as we develop the Circular Economy Strategy.

■ **Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control**

Dr Allison Gardner:

[\[12896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to end badger culling.

Daniel Zeichner:

On 30 August, the Government announced the start of work on a comprehensive new strategy to drive down bovine TB rates to save cattle and farmers' livelihoods and end the badger cull by the end of this parliament.

The Government will work with farmers, vets, scientists and conservationists to rapidly strengthen and deploy a range of disease control measures.

A key part of the strategy is the ongoing development of a cattle vaccine, which is at the forefront of innovative solutions to help eradicate this disease. Planning is advanced on the next stage of field trials which will assess cattleBCG vaccination and the companion DIVA skin test on a broader cohort of herds to further inform our collective planning for delivery. We are continuing to work at pace but will only deploy the vaccine and companion DIVA skin test when we have all the right steps in place.

The new strategy will mark a significant step-change in approach to tackling this devastating disease. It will consider a range of further measures including boosting cattle testing, reducing the spread of disease through cattle movements, and deploying badger vaccination on a wider, landscape scale. This will build on Professor Sir Charles Godfray's 2018 independent strategy review.

Work to underpin the policy with robust science has begun immediately and includes a survey of the badger population for the first time in a decade, a wildlife surveillance programme, the launch of a Badger Vaccinator Field Force and a badger vaccination study to increase badger vaccination at pace to drive down TB rates and protect badgers.

■ **Clothing: Waste**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[14840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the environmental impact of fast fashion.

Mary Creagh:

The Government has not made an assessment of the environmental impact of fast fashion.

The Government is funding action on textiles through the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). As part of this work, WRAP has produced a number of reports including the Textiles Market Situation Report 2024 which looks at textile consumption, manufacturing and the post-consumer textiles market. This report, as well as a range of WRAP's other textiles-related reports, are published on their website at: <https://www.wrap.ngo/taking-action/textiles/key-resources>.

WRAP also manages the Textiles 2030 voluntary initiative on our behalf. This supports businesses and organisations within the fashion and textiles industry to transition to more sustainable and circular practices.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Data Processing**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:****[12973]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps they are taking to use (a) artificial intelligence and (b) data to help increase their Department's productivity.

Daniel Zeichner:

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

Central to this agenda will be delivering on our Digital and Data Transformation Strategy (2023-2030), which focuses on improving access to high quality data and digital services.

This year, we established our Chief Data Office, which aims to shape a consistent approach to data and information, common tooling and capability. Its 2030 ambitions will enable data sharing across Government, reduce duplication, and empower a more efficient workforce in Defra.

AI, particularly machine learning, is also being used to process large volumes of data quickly and accurately across the department. Our primary vehicle is the Data Analytics and Science Hub, an advanced analytics platform, which serves increasing demand to bring together complex data, derive insights, and improve decision-making and operational efficiency in a legal and ethical way.

We are also collaborating with the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) to trial generative AI products such as Microsoft 365 copilot, focused on improving the day-to-day productivity of staff.

We draw on a range of resources to inform our AI and data approach, for example, the Generative AI Framework, and have access to CDDO for expert advice.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Ministers' Private Offices**Sir Ashley Fox:** [9618]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in his Department since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items this was spent.

Daniel Zeichner:

To ensure the department was ready as part of the change of Government in July 2024, renovation and improvements worth approximately £2600 (exclusive of VAT) were conducted.

■ Dogs**Dr Ben Spencer:** [14802]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to regulate professional dog walkers.

Daniel Zeichner:

Professional dog walkers must comply with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and other relevant legislation, such as welfare in transport regulations and the Health and Safety at Work Act, and any public liability or other insurance policy requirements.

The Government has no current plans to regulate professional dog walkers. The Canine and Feline Sector Group has published best practice guidance to assist dog walkers which can be found here: <https://www.cfsg.org.uk/>.

■ Farms: Valuation**Steve Barclay:** [12707]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on the number of farm holdings that are estimated to have a net value of (a) between £1,000,000 and £1,499,999, (b) between £1,500,000 and £1,999,999 and (c) over £2,000,000 in (i) England, (ii) Cambridgeshire and (iii) North East Cambridgeshire constituency.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra does not hold financial data for farms at holding level. Some financial information is published at a farm business level (where multiple farm holdings can constitute a single farm business). This information is based on the Farm Business Survey which only covers farm businesses in England with a Standard Output of more than £21,000. Whilst the Survey captures the majority of agricultural activity, it excludes around 43,000 smaller businesses (which account for 2% of output). This means the statistics cannot be used to infer any statistical estimates for the whole population of farms. The published 2022/23 balance sheet statistics, which include the distribution of farms by net worth by region, are available in Table 6 of the Balance Sheets:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d0410957321cdac841840a/fbs_balance_sheet_analysis_2022_23.ods. The 2023/24 data will be published in March 2025.

For the East of England, the 2022/23 data shows that 17% of Farm Business Survey farms had a net worth between £1 million and £1.49 million, and 58% had a net worth above £1.5 million.

Farm business assets are not a clear guide to inheritance tax liabilities which are due on an individual's estate at the time of their death whereas farm businesses can have multiple ownership and can be passed on as gifts before death.

■ Hill Farming: Finance

Joe Morris:

[\[14718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of current payment schemes for upland farmers.

Daniel Zeichner:

Upland farmers have a key role to play in the future for delivering sustainable food production and our environmental targets.

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.

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 upland farmers.

We recognise the unique challenges that upland farmers face. We will work with the sector to continue to roll out, improve and evolve these schemes and ensure they work for everyone, including upland farms.

■ Horticulture: Import Controls

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[14722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) costs and (b) impact of the Border Target Operating Model on Environmental Horticulture businesses.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra continues to monitor and review the impact of the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM), including the Border Control Post at Sevington. We are working closely with industry, trade partners and enforcement agencies to minimise disruption and costs to trade, while continuing to protect our biosecurity. The effectiveness of the import controls has been demonstrated throughout September and October by

the interception at Sevington of 34 consignments of plants infested with *Pochazia Shantungensis*, a fruit tree pest native to China but now present in mainland Europe. The consignments were destroyed, preventing the potential for a damaging outbreak for UK fruit growers.

The BTOM is designed to assure the biosecurity of commercial imports. Illegal imports of products of animal origin are dealt with through intelligence led checks, conducted at the border by Border Force, in Border Force facilities, with the assistance of Port Health Authorities.

■ Litter

David Simmonds: [\[14343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to (a) publish a response to and (b) implement the policies set out in the consultation on statutory litter enforcement guidance that closed in April 2024.

Mary Creagh:

Defra recognises the role that appropriate and proportionate enforcement can play in helping local authorities keep streets clear of litter. Defra is considering the benefits of bringing forward statutory litter enforcement guidance and any new guidance will be announced in the usual way.

■ Livestock: Animal Welfare

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[14675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to help improve the (a) health and (b) welfare of farm animals.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government will introduce the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation. We are considering the most effective way to deliver this commitment and will be setting out next steps in due course. This will build on the support already available through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, which includes access to testing for priority diseases and advice to continually improve the health, welfare and productivity of farmed animals through funded vet visits.

■ Packaging: Recycling

Gavin Robinson: [\[15182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department plans to charge Extended Producer Responsibility fees retrospectively for obligated packaging producers.

Mary Creagh:

No. The amounts of the fees are calculated by reference to producers' activities in the previous year, they are not fees payable in arrears for that previous year.

Gavin Robinson:

[\[15183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether obligated packaging producers will be required to pay Extended Producer Responsibility fees for packaging data submitted to his Department for 2024.

Mary Creagh:

Yes. If the company is still a producer at the start of the 2025 assessment year then 2024 tonnage data will be used to calculate their obligation in 2025. This is in line with the current producer packaging recycling obligations that have been in place since 1997.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ **China: Foreign Relations**

Blair McDougall:

[\[14727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department's China audit will engage with Hong Kong BNO status holders that live in the UK.

Catherine West:

Work on the audit is underway and will involve consultation with a range of experts within and beyond government.

The audit will examine the UK's interests with respect to China. This will improve our ability - both inside and outside of Government - to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses. The audit is due to report in early 2025.

■ **Democratic Republic of Congo: Peace Negotiations**

Luke Taylor:

[\[14359\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what humanitarian steps he is taking to (a) support peace and (b) protect vulnerable communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is delivering a three-year humanitarian programme in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), providing life-saving emergency assistance and increasing the resilience of crisis-affected communities affected by the conflict. During his visit to the DRC in August Lord Collins, Minister for Africa, announced £3.1 million of new funding to help the DRC tackle the outbreak of mpox and cholera.

We are engaging with the DRC and Rwanda at the highest levels to encourage de-escalation and progress on the Luanda Peace Process - with Lord Collins having visited and met with the Presidents of Angola, DRC and Rwanda in August and September.

■ Israel: Export Controls**Richard Burgon:**[\[14459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to his oral statement of 2 September 2024 on Middle East Update, Official Report, column 37, if he will publish a list of items covered by the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria that continue to be exported to Israel.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We publish annual and quarterly reports on export licences issued, refused or revoked, by destination, including the overall value, type (e.g. Military, Other) and a summary of the products covered by these licences. They are available to view on GOV.UK at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>.

Summary data on our current export licences to Israel was also published on 11 June 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/export-control-licensing-management-information-for-israel>.

The next publication of full statistics covering the period 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2024 will be on 12 December.

■ Jimmy Lai**Blair McDougall:**[\[14726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Opinion No. 34/2024 on Jimmy Lai published on 26 September 2024.

Catherine West:

The FCDO takes the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's Opinion very seriously. The UK Government has consistently called for Jimmy Lai's release and raised concerns about his case directly with the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities.

The Prime Minister raised Jimmy Lai with President Xi at last week's G20 Summit in Brazil and the Foreign Secretary raised his case with Wang Yi during his visit to Beijing on 18 October.

■ Somaliland: Diplomatic Service**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[13756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many UK nationals have requested consular assistance in Somaliland in each of the last five years.

Anneliese Dodds:

There is very limited in-person consular support available in Somaliland. Consular assistance is overseen remotely from the British Embassy in Ethiopia. As such, our

case management system does not enable us to isolate all consular assistance cases from within Somaliland. The FCDO advises against all travel, or all but essential travel in some regions, to Somaliland. British nationals in Somaliland should read our travel advice and sign up for alerts.

■ **Ukraine: Development Aid**

Samantha Niblett:

[\[14811\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support the people of Ukraine through (a) medical and (b) educational aid.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK's non-military commitments to Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion amount to £5 billion. This includes programmes with FCDO partners to provide medical aid. We have committed £5.5 million to the World Health Organisation this year to support capacity building and system strengthening of Ukraine's rehabilitation sector. The FCDO also supports the Red Cross Movement, which has rehabilitated bomb shelters in schools and hospitals to enable the continued operation of these vital services. In Moldova, the UK has been supporting UNICEF's EduTech Labs, which provide a safe space for Ukrainian refugee children to continue their online learning in a physical school environment.

■ **USA: Foreign Relations**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[13445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with (a) US President-elect Trump and (b) his representatives on the (i) Good Friday Agreement and (ii) Northern Ireland Protocol in the last six months.

Stephen Doughty:

President-elect Donald Trump will not take office until the inauguration on January 20th. We look forward to working with the Trump Administration in the months and years ahead in the spirit of our shared values of freedom, democracy and enterprise. We continue to work with the current Biden Administration to ensure Northern Ireland can continue to prosper. The 10th April marks 27 years since the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement was signed - an achievement of which the UK, Ireland and the US are justifiably proud.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **Accident and Emergency Departments**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[14568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential risks associated with aggregating NHS performance data; and what steps

he is taking to provide transparent data on an individual hospital level for emergency departments.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England is publishing more data about patient care in hospital emergency departments than ever before. Performance data is published at an organisational level, so that it is appropriately aligned with accountability.

The Government will continue to consider how to increase the transparency of National Health Service data as part of future reforms.

■ **Alcoholism and Drugs: Rehabilitation**

Cat Smith:

[\[14642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to announce (a) whether Drug Strategy funding for drug and alcohol treatment providers will be renewed and at what levels and (b) the length of the funding cycle; and if he will take steps to ensure that local authorities have adequate notice of alcohol and drug treatment funding.

Cat Smith:

[\[14643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to announce the future funding for drug and alcohol treatment provision as part of the Drugs Strategy in time for services to avoid commencing redundancy consultations; and if he will change future treatment funding announcement cycles to give local authorities more time to (a) plan and (b) commission such services.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government supports investment in drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services, to ensure that those people with a substance use need get appropriate help and support. In addition to the Public Health Grant, the Department has allocated local authorities a further £267 million in 2024/25 to improve the quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery. This is alongside £105 million made available by the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to improve employment and housing support.

My Rt. Hon. friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced updates to the fiscal framework, and earlier this year launched the Spending Review which has now settled the 2025/26 departmental budgets. She has also made it clear that the Government will conclude a multi-year Spending Review in spring 2025. In future, we anticipate that Spending Reviews will be set every two years to cover a three-year period, including a one-year overlap with the previous Spending Review, helping build in greater certainty and stability over public finances.

Now that the Autumn Budget has been completed, the Department is working to be able to announce future funding allocations for drug and alcohol treatment and recovery systems. We will communicate with the sector about this as soon as we are

able to, as we recognise the importance of this information in maintaining delivery and planning for 2025/26.

■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Diagnosis

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[14698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time is for an ADHD Assessment in (a) Slough constituency and (b) the South East.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 21 November 2024]: The data requested is not held centrally; it may be held locally by individual National Health Service trusts or commissioners.

We are supporting a taskforce that NHS England is establishing to look at attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) service provision and its impact on patient experience. The taskforce will bring together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to better understand the challenges affecting people with ADHD, and help provide a joined-up approach in response to concerns around rising demand.

Alongside the work of the taskforce, NHS England will continue to develop a national ADHD data improvement plan, carry out more detailed work to understand the provider and commissioning landscape, and capture examples from local health systems, which are trialling innovative ways of delivering ADHD services to ensure best practice is captured and shared across the system.

■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Waiting Lists

Luke Murphy:

[\[13860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make a comparative assessment of waiting times for ADHD in (a) Hampshire and (b) other NHS Trusts in England.

Stephen Kinnock:

There is, at present, no single, established dataset that can be used to monitor waiting times for the assessment and diagnosis for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) either nationally, or for individual organisations or geographies in England. Although the data requested is not held centrally, it may be held locally by individual National Health Service trusts or commissioners.

We are supporting a taskforce that NHS England is establishing to look at ADHD service provision and its impact on patient experience. The taskforce will bring together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to better understand the challenges affecting people with ADHD, and to help provide a joined-up approach in response to concerns around rising demand.

Alongside the work of the taskforce, NHS England will continue to develop a national ADHD data improvement plan, carry out more detailed work to understand the

provider and commissioning landscape, and capture examples from local health systems which are trialling innovative ways of delivering ADHD services to ensure best practice is captured and shared across the system.

■ Autism: Health Services

Edward Morello: [\[14556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that support for minimal to intensive assistance are tailored to each adult with autism.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including support services for autistic people, in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.

The NICE quality standard for autism sets out that the needs of autistic people are varied, with some people needing complex levels of support from a range of professionals, and some people not wanting or needing any ongoing support. In line with this, the quality standard recommends that autistic people should have a personalised plan that is developed and implemented in a partnership between them, and their family and carers, if appropriate, and the autism team.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to deliver improved outcomes in all-age autism assessment pathways. The guidance sets out what support should be available before an assessment, and what support should follow a recent diagnosis of autism, based on the available evidence. This includes setting out specific considerations for developing post-diagnostic support for adults diagnosed as autistic.

In addition, under the Care Act 2014, it is the responsibility of local authorities to assess individuals' care and support needs, including where it appears that an autistic adult may have care and support needs, and, where eligible, for meeting those needs.

Edward Morello: [\[14559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help support for people during their transition from child to adult autism services.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including services for autistic people, in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.

NICE guidelines, specifically Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis, and Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: support and

management, provide guidance on the transition to adult services, including that local autism teams should make arrangements for a smooth transition to adult services.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance for autism assessment services. This guidance will help the National Health Service improve autism assessment services, and improve the experience for people referred to an autism assessment service. This includes guidance to local areas on how to manage referrals and transitions between child and adult assessment services.

The Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to conduct a transitions assessment for young people, adult carers, and young carers that are likely to have needs for care and support, or support as a carer, after they turn 18 years old.

■ Autism: Rural Areas

Edward Morello:

[\[14557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the availability of autism support services for adults in rural areas.

Stephen Kinnock:

Integrated care systems (ICSs) are responsible for the planning and delivery of health and care services in their local area, including meeting the needs of autistic people in rural communities. Local priorities are set out in the Integrated Care Strategy, which must be informed by local assessments of need. The Department published updated statutory guidance on integrated care strategies in February 2024.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to improve outcomes in all-age autism assessment pathways. This guidance will help integrated care boards, including those in rural areas, and the National Health Service to improve outcomes for children, young people, and adults referred to an autism assessment service. The guidance sets out what support should be available before an assessment, and what support should follow a recent diagnosis of autism, based on the available evidence.

The importance of supporting rural communities has been recognised by the Chief Medical Officer in his reports, which also recognise the role played by ICSs in understanding local needs and arranging services to meet these needs.

■ Autism: West Dorset

Edward Morello:

[\[14555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the number of autism support services for adults in West Dorset constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including

support services for autistic people, in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guidelines. The NICE guideline, Autism spectrum disorder in adults: diagnosis and management, aims to improve access and engagement with interventions and services, and the experience of care, for autistic adults.

On 5 April 2023, NHS England published a national framework and operational guidance to improve outcomes in all-age autism assessment pathways. This guidance will help ICBs and the National Health Service to improve outcomes for children, young people, and adults referred to an autism assessment service. The guidance sets out what support should be available before an assessment, and what support should follow a recent diagnosis of autism, based on the available evidence. This includes setting out specific considerations for developing post-diagnostic support.

The Dorset ICB advises that it has conducted an all-age review of services for people with neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism, and is currently working through the outcomes of that review, including in relation to assessment, diagnosis, and pre- and post-diagnostic support. In the meantime, the ICB has identified additional funding to increase capacity for additional appointments for those that have waited the longest. The ICB has also recently launched an online neurodiversity hub.

■ **Breast Cancer**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[11247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding his Department has provided for the early detection of breast cancer in the 2024-25 financial year.

Karin Smyth:

Improving early diagnosis of cancer, including breast cancer, is a priority for the Government. There are a number of National Health Service initiatives and funding streams across the NHS in England that support the early detection of breast cancer, and many organisations across the health service are involved. As a consequence, NHS England does not hold all the information on the initiatives and funding streams in 2024/25 as they are split across many budgets. Integrated care boards, supported by Cancer Alliances, provide funding for symptomatic pathways.

The NHS Breast Screening Programme is funded via a portion of the overall £1.8 billion funding across public health services, including NHS screening and vaccination, child health information services, wider health and justice and armed forces.

■ **Cannabis: Medical Treatments**

Jim Shannon:

[\[14627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department's policy is on legalising medicinal cannabis.

Karin Smyth:

Since 1 November 2018, there has been a legal route for cannabis-based products for medicinal use to be prescribed by doctors on the General Medical Council specialist register, in accordance with the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. The Government has no current plans to change this.

■ Cataracts: Surgery**Ian Byrne:**[\[14240\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what research other than by his Department has been carried out on the potential impact of the use of the independent sector to deliver cataract surgery on waiting times for (a) cataract patients and (b) patients waiting for ophthalmology services.

Stephen Kinnock:

Getting waiting lists down is a key priority for the Government. Independent sector providers have a role to play in supporting the National Health Service to do this by using additional capacity to tackle the backlog, whilst still delivering value for money and care that is free at the point of use. Throughout its history, the NHS has worked with non-NHS healthcare providers to deliver essential services to patients, especially at times of operational pressures.

The Department considers a wide range of sources when developing policy. This includes research by think tanks, academics, patient groups, and other relevant bodies.

■ Continuing Care: Standards**Tom Hayes:**[\[14864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment has he made of the adequacy of the NHS continuing healthcare programme.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department works closely with NHS England, which holds integrated care boards accountable and engages with them to discharge their functions, including via regular and well-established assurance mechanisms.

The Department also engages with the wider sector such as the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and voluntary organisations representing people with lived experience.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Charlotte Nichols:**[\[14477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what treatments are (a) available and (b) due to become available in the next 12 months on the NHS for people who have experienced adverse side effects to Covid-19 vaccines.

Andrew Gwynne:

In the very rare event where an individual may have suffered a severe adverse reaction to a COVID-19 vaccine, care and treatment will be best met and managed by National Health Service local specialist services, augmented as appropriate by national specialist advice. Individuals will be treated and managed through existing healthcare services, with any treatment dependent on the individuals' clinical needs.

■ Dental Services: Contracts**Jo White:**[\[12553\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which integrated care boards have reimbursed dental practices for up to 110% of General Dental Services contracts.

Stephen Kinnock:

In the 2023/24 financial year, 37 integrated care boards (ICBs) reimbursed at least one dental practice for over 100%, and up to 110%, of their General Dental Services contract value. These ICBs are as follows:

- Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB;
- South Yorkshire ICB;
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB;
- Mid and South Essex ICB;
- Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes ICB;
- Birmingham and Sihull ICB;
- Northeast and North Cumbria ICB;
- Derby and Derbyshire ICB;
- Suffolk and Northeast Essex ICB;
- Devon ICB;
- Lincolnshire ICB;
- Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland ICB;
- Southeast London ICB;
- Kent And Medway ICB;
- Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB;
- Northeast London ICB;
- North Central London ICB;
- Norfolk and Waveney ICB;
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB;
- Frimley ICB;
- Sussex ICB;

- Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICB;
- Greater Manchester ICB;
- Humber and North Yorkshire ICB;
- Bath and Northeast Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB;
- Northamptonshire ICB;
- Gloucestershire ICB;
- Hampshire and Isle Of Wight ICB;
- Northwest London ICB;
- Somerset ICB;
- Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB;
- Cornwall and the Isles Of Scilly ICB;
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB;
- Black Country ICB;
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICB;
- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire ICB;
- Dorset ICB;
- Southwest London ICB;
- West Yorkshire ICB;
- Coventry and Warwickshire ICB;
- Surrey Heartlands ICB; and
- Cheshire and Merseyside ICB.

■ **Department of Health and Social Care: Cultural Heritage**

Nick Timothy:

[\[13798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he plans to decolonise the artwork or heritage assets in (a) his department and (b) each of its Arm's Length Bodies; and what is the policy of NHS England on this issue.

Karin Smyth:

The Department borrows art from the Government Art Collection and does not own artwork. As separate legal entities, the responsibility for creating policy and guidance for artwork sits with each individual Arm's Length Body, rather than with the Department. NHS England does not have a national policy on artwork and heritage assets.

■ Depressive Illnesses

Rupert Lowe: [\[13924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people were diagnosed with depression in each of the last ten years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department does not hold this information centrally.

■ Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome

Mark Swards: [\[14715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support people diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to improving the lives of those living with rare diseases, such as Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS). The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities collaboratively developed with the rare disease community. These include better coordination of care and improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. We remain committed to delivering under the framework, and will publish an annual England action plan in 2025 which will report on progress.

NHS England commissions some specialist services for patients with EDS, currently delivered by two centres in England, the London North West University Healthcare Trust and the Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust. The Complex EDS service provides diagnosis and advice to referrers on the treatment and management of complex cases.

■ Endometriosis: Diagnosis

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[15011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help to reduce the average diagnosis time for endometriosis.

Karin Smyth:

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of the Government's Health Mission, and we are urgently looking into waiting times for gynaecological issues, including for endometriosis.

Funding has been confirmed to support the delivery of our commitment to an extra 40,000 National Health Service operations, scans, and appointments per week, a first step to delivering on the 18-week standard.

The Department is working with NHS England to support the establishment of at least one pilot women's health hub in every integrated care system. This is a key step to reducing endometriosis diagnosis times, as they will include care for menstrual problems, including endometriosis.

The recently updated National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline on the diagnosis of endometriosis will also help women to receive a diagnosis more quickly.

■ Fires: Health Hazards

Julia Buckley:

[\[14533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps to raise public awareness of the potential health risks of open (a) coal and (b) wood fires for cooking and heating in the home.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government recognises the importance of raising awareness of air pollution and the associated health impacts. The Department of Health and Social Care is supporting the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on their comprehensive Clean Air Strategy, which will include consideration of interventions to reduce emissions so that everyone's exposure to air pollution is reduced. In addition, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is undertaking a review of how we communicate air quality information to ensure members of the public, and vulnerable groups in particular, have what they need to protect themselves. The Government will also continue to raise awareness about the impact of domestic solid fuel burning.

■ Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People Independent Review

Nick Timothy:

[\[14803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2024 to Question 10237 on Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People Independent Review, when he plans to update the House on further developments.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 21 November 2024]: With reference to the answer I gave the Hon. Member on 31 October 2024, to Question 10237, my Rt. Hon friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is actively considering the timing of a further update, such that it can be of most use to the House.

■ General Practitioners: Closures

Dr Ben Spencer:

[\[12555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October, whether he has made an estimate of the number of GP practices which will close as a result of increased Employer National Insurance contributions.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at Autumn Budget 2024, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6

billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26.

The Employer National Insurance rise will be implemented in April 2025, with the Department setting out further details on allocation of funding for next year in due course.

■ General Practitioners: Fees and Charges

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[15115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the practice of GP surgeries charging fees to patients for (a) signed certificates, (b) reports and (c) medical letters.

Stephen Kinnock:

For general practices (GPs), there are some medical evidence letters, certificates, or reports that GPs may charge for, and other certificates that they must not charge patients for. The legislation that sets this out is the General Medical Services and Personal Medical Services Regulations, which form the basis of the GP Contract with the National Health Service. There is no statutory limit to the level of such fees, as this is outside of core NHS work. However, we would expect the practice to charge a reasonable sum appropriate for the workload involved.

The Professional Fees Committee of the British Medical Association (BMA) suggests guideline fees for such services to help doctors set their own professional fees. However, these fees are guidelines only, not recommendations, and a doctor is not obliged to charge the rates suggested. Where doctors intend to charge for services to patients, the BMA advises them to forewarn patients at the earliest opportunity of the likely level of fees.

■ Gluten-free Foods: Prescriptions

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[15066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to help support people with Coeliac disease with the cost of food; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of widening access to gluten free products on prescription.

Karin Smyth:

We recognise the pressures people are facing with the rising cost of living. Our extensive arrangements to help people afford National Health Service prescription charges mean that almost 89% of prescription items in England are already provided free of charge. For those who are not exempt from charges, pre-payment certificates can be used to cap costs at just over £2 a week for regular prescriptions.

The national prescribing position in England remains that gluten free bread and mixes can be provided to all coeliac patients on an NHS prescription, and a wide range of these items continue to be listed in part XV of the Drug Tariff. This means that prescribers can issue NHS prescriptions based on the individual preferences of their

patients, while also being mindful of which product best suits the patient's dietary needs.

■ GP Surgeries: Finance

Helen Morgan:

[\[12177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of an increase in employers national insurance contributions on GP surgeries' finances.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 5 November 2024]: Primary care providers, for instance general practices (GPs), dentists, pharmacies, and eye care, are valued independent contractors who provide nearly £20 billion worth of services within the National Health Service. Every year we have discussions with each sector both about what services they provide, and what their pay will be. In accordance with the usual process, this issue will be dealt with as part of those discussions. We will shortly begin negotiations on the annual GP contract.

■ Health Services: Employers' Contributions

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[12776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to support (a) hospices, (b) GPs and (c) care homes, in the context of proposed changes to employer National Insurance contributions.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, and the Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for the next year in due course.

■ Health Services: Finance

Susan Murray:

[\[13119\]](#)

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, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional support to (a) GP practices, (b) pharmacies and (c) dental services.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, which has enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, and

the Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year in due course.

Primary care providers, including general practice (GP), dentistry, pharmacy, and eye care, are valued independent contractors who provide nearly £20 billion worth of National Health Services. Every year we consult with each sector both about what services they provide, and the money providers are entitled to in return under their contract. As in previous years, this issue will be dealt with as part of that process.

We will shortly begin discussions on the annual GP Contract and on the funding arrangements for community pharmacy in 2025/26. I am unable to say more until these have been concluded.

■ Health Services: Hearing Impairment

Gill Furniss:

[\[14680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure greater accessibility to healthcare for deaf people.

Stephen Kinnock:

Under the Equality Act 2010, health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. Since 2016, all National Health Service organisations and publicly funded social care providers are required to meet the Accessible Information Standard (AIS), to meet the communication needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment, or sensory loss, including deaf people.

NHS England has undertaken a review of the AIS. The review considered its effectiveness, how it is implemented and enforced in practice, and identified recommendations for improvement.

The revised standard is being reviewed with a view to publication, in the meantime NHS England will continue work to support implementation with awareness raising, communication and engagement and a review of the current e-learning modules on the AIS. The intention is to ensure by several routes that staff and organisations in the NHS are aware of the current standard implemented in 2016 and the importance of meeting the needs of disabled people using services.

■ Health Services: Information

Gill Furniss:

[\[14676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to publish the sixth stage of the Accessible Information Standard.

Stephen Kinnock:

Under the Equality Act 2010, health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. Since 2016, all National Health Service organisations and publicly funded social care providers are required to meet the Accessible Information Standard (AIS), to meet the

communication needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment, or sensory loss, including deaf people.

NHS England has undertaken a review of the AIS. The review considered its effectiveness, how it is implemented and enforced in practice, and identified recommendations for improvement.

The revised standard is being reviewed with a view to publication, in the meantime NHS England will continue work to support implementation with awareness raising, communication and engagement and a review of the current e-learning modules on the AIS. The intention is to ensure by several routes that staff and organisations in the NHS are aware of the current standard implemented in 2016 and the importance of meeting the needs of disabled people using services.

Gill Furniss:

[\[14677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to revise the Accessible Information Standard to improve accessibility to healthcare for deaf people.

Stephen Kinnock:

Under the Equality Act 2010, health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. Since 2016, all National Health Service organisations and publicly funded social care providers are required to meet the Accessible Information Standard (AIS), to meet the communication needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment, or sensory loss.

NHS England has completed a review as part of its revision of the AIS. The review considered the effectiveness of the current AIS, how the standard is implemented and enforced in practice, and identified recommendations for improvement.

Once the revised standard receives publishing approval, NHS England will support implementation of it to ensure NHS staff are better aware of the standard and their roles and responsibilities.

Gill Furniss:

[\[14678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the accessibility of healthcare (a) information and (b) communication for deaf patients using British Sign Language.

Stephen Kinnock:

Under the Equality Act (2010), health and social care organisations must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. Since 2016, all National Health Service organisations and publicly funded social care providers are required to comply with the Accessible Information Standard and meet the information and communication support needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment or sensory loss, including patients using British Sign Language (BSL).

NHS England has undertaken a review of the Accessible Information Standard (AIS), and a revised standard is being reviewed with a view to publication. Within the revised standard and implementation guide, there is specific mention of BSL in 'requirements to implementing the standard'. These include organisations identifying and recording needs and ensuring that BSL interpreters meet the appropriate professional registrations.

The British Sign Language Act 2022 provides the legal recognition of BSL and helps to promote and facilitate its use. The Act also provides a specific duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to prepare and publish a "British Sign Language report". This is a report describing what each named ministerial department has done to promote and facilitate the use of British Sign Language in their public communications. The Government is committed to championing the rights of disabled people, including Deaf BSL users, and will publish this data in the coming months.

■ Health Services: Women

Samantha Niblett:

[\[14254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the research and development of femtech solutions; and what assessment he has made of the potential impact of femtech solutions on women's health outcomes.

Andrew Gwynne:

While no explicit discussions have been held or assessments made, supporting patients' equitable access to innovative technologies, and empowering their decision-making in care are key priorities for the Department and NHS England. The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), the research delivery arm of the Department, has funded and continues to fund research relevant to FemTech. For example, a recent study used new technology to analyse magnetic resonance images using artificial intelligence software to aid the diagnosis of endometriosis. The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including FemTech solutions.

■ Heart Diseases

Mr Toby Perkins:

[\[14602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to implement a heart disease action plan.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to ensuring that fewer lives are lost to the biggest killers, such as heart disease, which includes cardiovascular disease (CVD), and stroke. That is why in our Health Mission to build a National Health Service fit for the future, we have committed to reducing deaths from heart disease and strokes by a quarter within ten years.

We are taking steps to reduce heart disease. The NHS Long Term Plan set an aim to prevent up to 150,000 heart attacks, strokes, and dementia cases by 2029, and activity is underway. The NHS Health Check programme, England's CVD prevention programme, engages over 1.3 million people a year and prevents approximately 500 heart attacks or strokes each year. To improve access and engagement with the NHS Health Check, we are developing a new digital service which people can use at home to understand and act on their CVD risk, providing people with a more flexible, accessible, and convenient service. We are also piloting a new programme to deliver more than 130,000 lifesaving heart health checks in the workplace. These checks can be completed quickly and easily by people at work across 48 local authorities until 31 March 2025.

■ Heart Diseases: Strokes

James MacCleary:

[\[14839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) prevent heart disease and stroke, (b) prioritise timely NHS heart care and (c) accelerate research into future treatments and cures.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to ensuring that fewer lives are lost to the biggest killers, such as heart disease, which includes cardiovascular diseases (CVD), and stroke.

The NHS Health Check, England's flagship CVD prevention programme, engages over 1.3 million people each year and prevents approximately 500 heart attacks or strokes. To improve access and engagement to this life saving check, we are developing a digital NHS Health Check, a service which people can use at home to understand and act on their CVD risk, providing people with a more flexible, accessible, and convenient service. We are also piloting a new programme to deliver more than 130,000 lifesaving heart health checks in workplaces across the country.

The NHS Long Term Plan (NHS LTP) is committed to improving the care and outcomes for people with CVD through enhanced diagnostic support in the community, better personalised planning, and increased access to disease-specific rehabilitation. NHS England's stroke priorities include rapid diagnosis and increased access to time-dependent acute stroke care, as well as facilitating ambulance service use of pre-hospital telemedicine, and supporting access to the use of artificial intelligence decision support tools for brain imaging.

■ Hospices: Rural Areas

Edward Morello:

[\[14560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will undertake a review of the funding model for hospices serving (a) rural and (b) other isolated communities.

Edward Morello: [\[14561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Department is taking to support hospice funding to ensure (a) sustainability and (b) quality care in regions with limited alternatives.

Edward Morello: [\[14562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to provide additional funding for hospices in (a) West Dorset constituency and (b) other rural areas.

Stephen Kinnock:

Most hospices are charitable, independent organisations which receive some statutory funding for providing services within the National Health Service. The amount of funding each charitable hospice receives varies both within and between integrated care board (ICB) areas. This will vary depending on demand in that ICB area but will also be dependent on the totality and type of palliative and end of life care provision from both NHS and non-NHS services, including charitable hospices, within each ICB area.

Palliative care services are included in the list of services that ICBs, including the Dorset ICB, which covers the West Dorset constituency, must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supports commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

NHS England has also developed a palliative and end of life care dashboard, which brings together all relevant local data in one place. The dashboard helps commissioners understand the palliative and end of life care needs of those their local population, thereby enabling ICBs to put plans in place to address and track the improvement of health inequalities.

I have met NHS England and discussions have begun on how to reduce inequalities and variation in access to, and the quality of, palliative and end of life care. We, alongside key partners NHS England, will continue to proactively engage with our stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and independent hospices, on an ongoing basis, in order to understand the issues they face.

We will consider next steps on palliative and end of life care, including funding, in the coming months.

■ Hospitals: Berkshire

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese: [\[15232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of patients at (a) Upton Hospital and (b) Wexham Park Hospital have been discharged into social care in each of the last 12 months.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold information on the proportion of patients that have been discharged into social care in individual hospitals in each of the last 12 months. NHS England publishes data detailing how many patients are discharged through each discharge pathway, broken down by trust. This includes data on discharge pathway 3, which involves discharge to a care home placement. Further information is available at the following link: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/discharge-delays-acute-data/>

Huntington's Disease: Mental Health Services**Sarah Hall:**[\[14717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people with Huntington's disease have a named health professional who can coordinate their care.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England specialised commissioning does not centrally commission dedicated care co-ordinators for Huntington's Disease within integrated care boards (ICBs). ICBs are responsible for working with their local communities to understand the needs of the local populations and make decisions about how best to commission services that meet those needs, including the treatment of Huntington's Disease, in partnership with other local commissioners and organisations.

Steps are being taken to improve coordination of care for all rare diseases as a priority under the UK Rare Diseases Framework. England's Rare Diseases Action Plans detail a range of measures to improve coordination of care. NHS England committed to include the definition of coordination of care in all new and revised services specifications for patients with rare diseases. All highly specialised centres are required to work collaboratively with other providers in the service and have shared care arrangements in place with local hospitals as required. The National Institute of Health and Care Research has commissioned research to provide the evidence needed to operationalise better co-ordination of care for rare diseases in the National Health Service.

Maternity Services: Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**Jeremy Hunt:**[\[R\] \[13748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the investigation into maternity incidents at Gloucestershire Hospitals Foundation Trust has started.

Karin Smyth:

The trust has committed to a thematic review of all neonatal and maternal deaths since 2019. This has started for neonatal deaths but not for maternal deaths, due to delays identifying an external assessor.

The trust is engaging with the NHS England South West Region to resolve this issue as soon as possible, and remains committed to publishing and sharing the findings from both reviews openly.

■ Maternity Services: Safety

Jeremy Hunt:

[R] [\[13758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will launch a new National Maternity Safety Ambition.

Karin Smyth:

The National Maternity Safety Ambition was launched in 2015 and will end in 2025. As part of our consultation on the 10-year health plan, we will first consider the best ways to improve maternity safety so that the NHS has the tools it needs to deliver improved safety outcomes for women and their babies and to meet any associated targets.

■ Migraines: Health Services

Josh Simons:

[\[14784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support for people who experience migraines; and whether he plans to provide additional support.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guideline, Headaches: Diagnosis and management of headaches in young people and adults, updated in December 2021, sets out best practice for healthcare professionals in the care, treatment, and support of people who suffer from headaches, including migraines. It aims to improve the recognition and management of headaches and migraines.

At the national level, there are a number of initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with migraines, including the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) Programme for Neurology and the RightCare Headache and Migraine Toolkit. The GIRFT Programme published a National Speciality Report, which makes several recommendations in relation to improving recognition and diagnosis of migraines by general practitioners. Additionally, the RightCare Headache and Migraine Toolkit sets out key priorities for improving care for patients with migraines, which includes correct identification and diagnosis of headache disorders.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has developed two e-learning modules about migraines and cluster headaches, which aim to raise awareness amongst primary care clinicians about the different types of migraine and their associated symptoms, and how to differentiate.

Over the last four years, a new class of drugs, calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) inhibitors, has been made available on the National Health Service for the prevention and treatment of episodic and chronic migraines. On 15 May 2024, Atogepant became the latest CGRP inhibitor for which the NICE has published

guidance. The NICE recommended Atogepant for use as a preventive medication for the treatment of migraines on the NHS in England.

■ NHS: Employers' Contributions

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[R] [\[13768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question 11938 on NHS: Employers' Contributions, whether he has made a estimate of the cost of changes to national insurance contributions announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 to (a) his Department, (b) NHSE, (c) general practices, (d) hospices, (e) charities delivering healthcare, (f) social care providers, (g) care homes, (h) air ambulance service providers, (i) each acute trust's direct costs, (j) each acute trusts indirect costs, (k) dental clinics providing NHS care, (l) opticians providing NHS appointments, (m) private healthcare providers providing NHS appointments or operations, (n) each mental health trust, (o) each ICB, (p) the cost of agency nursing staff, (q) the cost of locum doctors, (r) local pharmacies and (s) NHS suppliers and contractors.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 18 November 2024]: We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at Autumn Budget. This has enabled a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The Government is also providing at least £600 million of new grant funding for social care in 2025/26, as part of the broader estimated real-terms uplift to core local government spending power of around 3.2%.

The rise will be implemented from April 2025, and the Department will set out further details on allocation of funding for next year in due course, taking employer National Insurance contributions into account. The information requested is not available centrally, as the range of organisations and individuals being asked about have very different contractual relationships with the Department, NHS England, local integrated care boards and National Health Service providers.

■ NHS: Safety

Jeremy Hunt:

[R] [\[13757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to recommendation 44 of the Report of the Morecambe Bay Investigation, published in March 2015, what steps his Department has taken to establish a proper framework on which future investigations could be promptly established.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to ensuring that all women and babies received safe, personalised, equitable, and compassionate care. We are determined to learn lessons from inquiries and investigations.

The Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch became an independent investigations body known as the Health Services Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) in April 2023,

through the Health and Care Act 2022. Its role is to investigate incidents occurring during the provision of health care services that have, or may have, implications for patient safety. The HSSIB will conduct investigations using a no-blame approach, that is supported by a safe space which encourages participants, including patients, families, and staff, to share information in confidence. This aims to encourage the spread of a culture of learning within the National Health Service and independent sector.

As set out in the Health and Care Act 2022, the HSSIB will also provide advice, guidance, and training to NHS bodies upon request. The HSSIB has established their own processes and principles around matters such as evidence handling and access to documentation.

NHS England has created a National Independent Patient Safety Investigation Framework, which is an internally focussed approach to support the commissioning and management of independent investigations.

■ NHS: Staff

Richard Tice:

[\[14787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of NHS staff are (a) qualified healthcare professionals and (b) administrative staff.

Karin Smyth:

The following table shows the number and proportion of full time equivalent (FTE) staff employed by National Health Service trusts and integrated care boards in England, by broad staff groups, as of July 2024:

	NUMBER, FTE	PROPORTION
Professionally Qualified Clinical Staff ¹	713,627	53.0%
Support to Clinical Staff ²	283,369	21.1%
Administrative and Clerical Staff ³	250,108	18.6%
Managers and Senior Managers ⁴	39,595	2.9%
Other NHS Infrastructure Staff ⁵	58,952	4.4%
Other Staff or Those with Unknown Classification	380	0.0%
Total Staff	1,346,030	

Source: NHS England, NHS Hospital and Community Health Service Workforce Statistics

Notes:

1. Professionally qualified staff will mostly be degree level professionally qualified staff such as doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, allied health professionals and professionally qualified scientific staff.
2. The support to clinical support group will be staff such as healthcare assistants, nursing associate, nursing assistant practitioners, maternity support workers, ambulance technicians, assistant/assistant practitioner AHPs, healthcare science assistants. They will likely hold a range of qualifications relevant to their role.
3. Administrative and clerical staff will include both those with regular interaction with patients such as ward receptionists or clerks (included in published statistics as clerical and administrative support to clinical staff) and also those staff working in 'back office' central functions such as finance or human resources roles.
4. Managers or senior managers who are not required to be a specific professionally qualified staff member to undertake their roles.
5. Other NHS infrastructure roles will include NHS property, estates and hotel staff.

Further data is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics>

■ NHS: Translation Services

Rupert Lowe:

[14781]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the number of NHS patients who have received (a) translation and (b) interpretation services in each of the last 10 years.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold this information centrally.

■ Nurses: Registration

Tom Hayes:

[14873]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending article 9 of the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 to abolish the registration fee requirement.

Karin Smyth:

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the independent regulator of nurses and midwives in the United Kingdom, and nursing associates in England. The Government has no current plans to amend the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001, to abolish the requirement for NMC registrants to pay a registration fee.

The UK's model of healthcare professional regulation is founded on the principle of regulators operating independently from the Government. All registered health and social care professions in the UK pay an annual registration fee to their regulatory body. Being funded by registrant fees enables the NMC to maintain its independence, allowing it to take action if it identifies risks to patient safety or the public's confidence in the profession.

■ **Nurses: Schools**

Adam Jogee:

[15030]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with the School and Public Health Nurses Association on the number of school nurses in schools in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency, (b) Staffordshire and (c) England.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to creating the healthiest generation of children ever. The child health workforce, including school nurses, who lead the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme for five to 19-year-olds, is central to how we support children, young people, and families.

We are also committed to training the staff we need to ensure everyone receives care from the right professional, when and where they need it. We will need to do this in the context of the 10-Year Plan.

Local authorities are best placed to determine local workforce needs, as they know their communities best. Determining the skills and workforce requirements should be underpinned by a local plan, and led by the area's identified health needs.

The Chief Public Health Nurse Office has established a programme of work which aims to improve the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme, which includes school nursing.

■ **Palliative Care: Newbury**

Mr Lee Dillon:

[15090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure the provision of adequate (a) palliative and (b) end-of-life care in Newbury.

Stephen Kinnock:

Palliative care services are included in the list of services that integrated care boards (ICBs), including Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB, which covers the Newbury constituency, must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supports commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

NHS England has also developed a palliative and end of life care dashboard, which brings together all relevant local data in one place. The dashboard helps

commissioners understand the palliative and end of life care needs of those their local population, thereby enabling ICBs to put plans in place to address and track the improvement of health inequalities.

I met NHS England and discussions have begun on how to reduce inequalities and variation in access to, and the quality of, palliative and end of life care.

Additionally, we have committed to develop a 10-Year Health Plan, to deliver a National Health Service fit for the future, as part of which we will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact people with palliative and end of life care needs, with input from the public, patients, health staff, and our stakeholders as we develop the plan. More information about how they can input into the 10-Year Health Plan is available at the following link:

<https://change.nhs.uk/en-GB/>

■ Parkinson's Disease: Medical Treatments

Dan Norris:

[14903]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help reduce the waiting list for people seeking treatment to relieve the symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

Andrew Gwynne:

We recognise that patients have been let down whilst they wait for the care they need, including within neurology services. The NHS Constitution sets out that 92% of patients should wait no longer than 18 weeks from referral to treatment. We will deliver an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments per week, as a first step in our commitment to ensuring patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks.

At the national level, there are a number of initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with Parkinson's disease, including the Getting It Right First Time Programme for Neurology and the RightCare Progressive Neurological Conditions Toolkit. These initiatives aim to reduce variation and deliver care more equitably across the country.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance, Parkinson's disease: Diagnosis and management in primary and secondary care, updated in 2017, sets out best practice for clinicians in the identification and treatment of Parkinson's, in line with the latest available evidence. The guidance states that if Parkinson's is suspected, people should be referred quickly to a specialist with expertise in the differential diagnosis of this condition.

We expect integrated care boards (ICBs) and National Health Service trusts to have due regard to relevant NICE guidelines. It is the responsibility of ICBs to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, in line with these NICE guidelines.

Once diagnosed, and with a management strategy in place, most people with Parkinson's can be cared for through routine access to primary and secondary care.

NHS England commissions the specialised elements of Parkinson's care that patients may receive from 27 specialised neurological treatment centres across England. Within specialised centres, neurological multidisciplinary teams ensure patients can access a range of health professionals, including Parkinson's disease nurses, psychologists, and allied health professionals such as dieticians and speech and language therapists, and that they can receive specialised treatment and support, according to their needs.

■ Prescriptions: Care Leavers

Helen Hayes: [\[15221\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the affordability of NHS prescriptions for care leavers aged between 18 and 25.

Karin Smyth:

There has been no recent assessment of the feasibility of extending free prescriptions to care leavers aged between 18 and 25 years old.

■ Prostate Cancer: Blood Tests

Andrew Rosindell: [\[14923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to encourage the introduction of the Prostate-Specific Antigen blood test on the NHS for men (a) a strong family history of prostate cancer and (b) under 50.

Andrew Rosindell: [\[14924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to introduce further Government advertising to encourage men to (a) speak to their GP about their risk of prostate cancer and (b) seek further testing if they are categorised as high risk.

Andrew Gwynne:

Too many cancer patients are waiting too long to be treated, and we are determined to change that through faster and earlier diagnosis. We are investing £16 million towards the Prostate Cancer UK led TRANSFORM screening trial seeking to find better methods to catch prostate cancer. NHS England is taking steps to raise awareness of the symptoms of prostate cancer, where there are opportunities to do so.

The UK National Screening Committee does not currently recommend screening for prostate cancer as the prostate-specific antigen test does not meet the required accuracy for use in a national screening programme. Current methods offer insufficient benefits in relation to harms caused by overdiagnosis, such as invasive investigative procedures and unnecessary treatment.

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening

Josh Babarinde:

[\[14516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment NHS England has made of the potential impact of the Royal Marsden Man Van project on prostate cancer testing in areas with high rates of late diagnosis.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England has not made a specific assessment.

We will find the safest and most effective way to screen for prostate cancer. The Department is investing £16 million into the Prostate Cancer UK led Transform screening trial, which seeks to diagnose prostate cancer as early as possible. This trial will compare the most promising tests that look for prostate cancer in men that do not have symptoms, and aims to address disparities in early detection rates across different groups.

NHS England has funded 10 clinical audits, which includes audit work on prostate cancer. Using routine data, collected on patients diagnosed with cancer in a National Health Service setting, the audit will look at what is being done well, where it's being done well, and what needs to be done better. This will seek to reduce unwarranted variation in treatment and reduce inequalities across different groups.

■ Respiratory Syncytial Virus: Vaccination

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[15055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to publish real world evidence on the effectiveness of the respiratory syncytial virus vaccine in the 75-80 cohort; how much such evidence has been collected; and whether such evidence from other countries has been taken into account in consideration of extending eligibility for that vaccine.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK Health Security Agency is working on vaccine effectiveness analysis within the 75 to 80-year-old age group for this winter season 2024 to 2025. We are collating data on respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) hospitalisations in England and general practice consultations in a sentinel network.

Data is required from across the entire RSV season to give an accurate estimate of effectiveness. Analyses are therefore likely to take place around the end of the winter season 2024-2025. Publication is expected to follow in due course.

Evidence of effectiveness in all age groups in all countries where data has been made available is being used to inform eligibility considerations. Emerging real-world evidence will be reviewed by the Joint Committee on Vaccination & Immunisation as part of its considerations for a potential extension to the older adults RSV immunisation programme, currently aimed at people aged between 75 and 80 years old, to include people over 80 years old and risk groups.

Freddie van Mierlo:

[15061]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the recommendation from the French health authority that the RSV vaccine should be provided to (a) 75-80 and (b) over 80 year olds.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is the United Kingdom's expert committee that advises the government on immunisation programmes.

In line with JCVI advice, the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccination programme for adults turning 75 years old began on 1 September 2024 in England alongside a one-off catch-up programme to rapidly vaccinate all those already aged between 75 and 79 years old. The JCVI considered that there was less certainty about how well the vaccine works in people aged 80 years old and older, as there were not enough people of this age in the clinical trials to be able to see if the vaccines are protective in this age band.

Whilst the JCVI notes what takes place in other countries, its advice is specific to the UK. The JCVI continues to keep evidence under review, including data from clinical trials and real world evidence emerging from immunisation programmes in different countries.

The JCVI recently discussed the RSV programme at their committee meeting on 2nd October 2024. The minutes from this meeting are publicly available at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation>

■ Sepsis: Research

Edward Morello:

[14554]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of providing funding for research into the early detection of sepsis.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department funds research on health and social care through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health and care, including sepsis diagnosis. These applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients, and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

In the last five years, the NIHR has invested over £9.2 million into 10 research projects to improve the diagnosis of sepsis. In addition, the NIHR Research Delivery Network, which helps patients, the public, and health and care organisations to participate in high quality research, has supported 19 studies on sepsis diagnosis.

The NIHR's investment into sepsis diagnosis includes research into the application of novel point-of-care diagnostic tests for sepsis, predicting those most at-risk of developing sepsis, and evaluating the accuracy of pre-existing measures to identify patients with suspected sepsis.

For example, the NIHR funded the Prehospital early warning scores for adults with suspected sepsis (PHEWS) study, which aimed to determine the impact and accuracy of early warning scores to identify sepsis requiring urgent treatment. In 2024, the PHEWS study found that the National Early Warning score, a standardized early warning system based on simple measurements used to identify acutely ill patients, including those with sepsis, was as good as or better than all the other scores to prioritize people with suspected sepsis, and avoided missing patients with sepsis. This finding supports the early diagnosis of sepsis in patients, therefore reducing treatment delay, and consequentially deaths caused by sepsis.

The UK Health Security Agency is conducting ongoing work to explore the development of two diagnostic tests to bridge gaps in early detection and disease confirmation, and inform detection and ongoing management.

■ **Social Services: Labour Turnover and Recruitment**

Richard Burgon:

[\[14655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of changes in the number of people working in the social care sector on services for people with disabilities; and what steps he is taking to help improve (a) pay, (b) training, (c) career progression opportunities and (d) other recruitment and retention measures in that sector.

Richard Burgon:

[\[14656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of career development and progression opportunities for the social care workforce supporting people with disabilities; and if he will take steps to increase (a) the pay scales of that workforce in line with a minimum of NHS band 3 and (b) other measures that support the (i) development and (ii) retention of that workforce.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department has made no assessment on the potential impact of changes in the number of people working in the social care sector on services for people with disabilities. Although the Department does not collect statistics on the number of people working in social care on services for people with disabilities, the latest data from Skills for Care shows that in 2023/24, there were 1.705 million filled posts for the adult social care sector. This marks an increase of 4.2% on the previous year.

The Department is continuing the development of the Care Workforce Pathway, the first national career structure for adult social care. The first phase of the pathway was published on 10 January 2024, following a call for evidence and development with a sector specific expert consultation group.

Enhancing skills for staff working in social care is of critical importance. The pathway sets out the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and values needed to work in adult social care, as well as a clear career structure. The pathway includes suggested learning programmes which are available for funding through the Adult Social Care Learning and Development Support Scheme (LDSS), which launched in September. The LDSS course list provides a variety of sector specific training courses and qualifications.

We are introducing the first ever Fair Pay Agreement to the adult social care sector. This will empower worker representatives, employers, and others to negotiate pay, and terms and conditions in a regulated and responsible manner. We will engage those who draw upon, work in, and provide care and support, as well as local authorities, unions, and others from across the sector. The exact structure of that agreement is subject to consultation and negotiation.

This work in combination will be an important part of the first step towards a National Care Service.

■ Spinal Muscular Atrophy: Babies

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[15067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of testing newborn babies for spinal muscular atrophy.

Andrew Gwynne:

Work is already underway to assess the potential merits of testing newborn babies for spinal muscular atrophy (SMA).

This is following the UK National Screening Committee's two-fold recommendation in 2023, to simultaneously develop a new cost-effectiveness screening modelling study for the United Kingdom's screening context, and to start scoping work for an in-service evaluation of newborn screening for SMA in real world National Health Services in the UK.

■ Visual Impairment

Ian Byrne: [\[14124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of people who have lost their sight due to insufficient staffing levels after presenting at an Accident and Emergency department in each of the last five years.

Andrew Gwynne:

This information is not held centrally. We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the National Health Service. A central and core part of the 10-Year Health Plan will be our workforce, and how we ensure we train and provide the staff, technology, and infrastructure the NHS needs to care of patients when and where they need it.

Action is also being taken to improve the referral, triage, and management of patients between primary and secondary eye care services. This includes looking at how we can deliver more care in the community. These measures aim to free up hospital eye service capacity for those that need specialist input.

Providers regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) are required to ensure that there are enough suitably qualified, competent, skilled, and experienced people to provide safe care and treatment to patients. Where incorrect staffing levels or mix of staff are having an impact on patient outcomes, the CQC can take enforcement action.

HOME OFFICE

■ Antisocial Behaviour

Kirith Entwistle:

[\[15349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisocial behaviour in (a) Bolton North East constituency and (b) the UK.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for this Government and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission.

We are committed to delivering an additional 13 000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables into neighbourhood policing roles so residents know who to turn to when things go wrong. We will crack down on those causing havoc on our high streets by introducing tougher powers, including new Respect Orders to tackle repeat offending and to get persistent offenders off our streets.

■ Asylum

Marie Goldman:

[\[901406\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle the asylum case backlog.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Mr Speaker, this government inherited an asylum system in crisis, with decision-making on cases at its lowest level for years, £8 million per day being spent on asylum hotels, and a £6 billion in-year overspend on asylum and illegal migration costs.

We have increased asylum decision-making, stepped up returns of failed asylum-seekers, and combined with the ending of the Rwanda partnership, committed in the Budget to reduce costs by £4 billion over the next two years. We cannot fix the system we inherited overnight, but we are working flat out towards that goal.

■ Asylum: Bibby Stockholm and MOD Wethersfield**Mr James Cleverly:**[\[14328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what criteria she used to close the Bibby Stockholm; and whether she will apply those criteria to the Asylum Reception Centre at former RAF Wethersfield.

Dame Angela Eagle:

We are determined to reduce asylum accommodation costs, which reached record levels under the previous government, and decisions on individual sites are made on a case by case basis with that objective in mind will save an estimated £7 billion for the taxpayer over the next ten years and are delivering a major uplift in returns to remove people with no right to be in the UK.

■ Asylum: Mental Health**Uma Kumaran:**[\[14173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her immigration policies of the Royal College of Psychiatrists report entitled Protecting the mental health of people seeking sanctuary in the UK's evolving legislative landscape, published in September 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

We are determined to restore order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly, and fairly. Clearing the asylum backlog is our priority.

The Home Office continues to invest in a programme of transformation and business improvement initiatives to speed up and simplify decision making, reduce the time people spend in the asylum system and decrease the number of people who are awaiting an interview or decision.

We will prioritise the mental health of asylum claimants at all times.

The Home Secretary will decide on the future of current Home Office policies, considering all evidence available during policy development, and announcements will be made to Parliament in due course.

■ Asylum: MOD Wethersfield**Mr James Cleverly:**[\[14327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made changes to the Special Development Order on the Asylum Reception Centre at former RAF Wethersfield since 1 July 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Special Development Order (SDO) was laid in Parliament by the previous Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 21 March 2024 and it came into force on 11 April 2024. No changes have been made to the SDO but work to discharge the conditions in the current SDO is ongoing.

Mr James Cleverly:

[\[14329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many incidents of disorder there were at the Asylum Reception Centre at the former RAF Wethersfield between 1 July and 1 October 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The safety and security of the local communities, the staff and those accommodated on the sites are of the utmost importance, with a specialist and experienced provider of security services permanently on site.

We also work closely and routinely with Essex Police to ensure appropriate security arrangements are in place. The Home Office also continues to engage regularly with representatives from the Council, the NHS, the Police, and local partners to address the concerns of those most impacted by the site and to keep them informed.

During the period 1 July to 1 October 2024, there has been one incident of disorder on site at Wethersfield.

Mr James Cleverly:

[\[14460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to maintain the cap on the number of asylum seekers at the Asylum Reception Centre at the former RAF Wethersfield.

Mr James Cleverly:

[\[14461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to consult with the local community before any changes to the cap on the number of asylum seekers at the Asylum Reception Centre at the former RAF Wethersfield are made.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Occupancy at the Wethersfield site is currently capped at 580 as part of the Special Development Order. This means that during current operation of the site, the population will not exceed 580.

Once the relevant Special Development Order conditions have been discharged, regular occupancy will be capped at 800. The number of residents on the site at any one time is likely to vary due to a number of factors, including individuals having moved to onward dispersed accommodation while their claims are being considered.

In addition to verbal updates given at various engagement forums with key stakeholders and partners the [Wethersfield: Factsheet](#) is revised regularly and updated to provide relevant information to the community.

Mr James Cleverly:

[\[14619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to shut down the asylum reception centre at the former RAF Wethersfield.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Any decisions on the future use of Wethersfield will be made in due course and announced in the normal way.

■ Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre

Calum Miller: [15050]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what reason final approval of the redevelopment of Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre was provided by the Cabinet Office rather than her Department.

Calum Miller: [15051]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when the decision was taken to award the contract to redevelop Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre.

Calum Miller: [15052]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on what financial criteria her Department awarded Galliford Try the contract to redevelop Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre.

Calum Miller: [15154]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish her Department's financial assessment of the contract to redevelop Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre.

Calum Miller: [15155]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which Minister was responsible for the decision to award the contract to redevelop Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Development of Campsfield is being undertaken in two phases. The commercial agreement with Galliford Try for Phase 1 is a two-stage design and build arrangement. This arrangement was put in place on 24 January 2023 under a Project Partnering Agreement, following the former Home Secretary's (Priti Patel) agreement to proceed with procurement plans for Campsfield in June 2022. A Commencement Agreement for Phase 1 construction was signed on 29 May 2024, following approval from the Cabinet Office on the 13 May 2024. The published contract award can be found at the following link: [Campsfield IRC Phase 1 Refurbishment - Contracts Finder](#).

A competition for the Phase 1 constructor was conducted between suppliers, using the Strategic Alliance framework, on a "Most Economically Advantageous Tender" basis, which considers both quality and costs. As part of the contracting process, the costs of the contract were assured by a third-party cost consultant appointed by the Home Office and independent of the constructor. The financial business case remains commercially sensitive.

Public procurement is governed by a spends control process managed by the Cabinet Office. Departments have delegated authority to approve procurements within set maximum whole life costs. Where contracts exceed this value, they require Cabinet Office approval to award. The decision to proceed with the Commencement

Agreement with Galliford Try for phase 1 construction was approved within the Home Office prior to submission to and subsequent approval by the Cabinet Office on 13 May.

■ Compulsorily Detained Psychiatric Patients

Ian Sollom:

[14520]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people were detained in health-based places of safety under the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year between 2017 and 2023; and what section of that Act they were held under.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office annually collects and publishes data on detentions under section 136 and section 135 of the Mental Health Act 1983 as part of the Police Powers and Procedures publication series.

The most recent data can be found in the Detentions under the Mental Health Act data tables which can be downloaded from here: [Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, March 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/stop-and-search-arrests-and-mental-health-detentions-march-2024). The information provided includes the type of place of safety the person was taken to.

Data for detentions under section 136, for the years ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2024, is available in table MHA.08.

Data for detentions under section 135, for the year ending March 2024, is available in table MHA.105a. Data for previous years is not available.

The data provided covers only detentions carried out by the police and does not include people taken to a health-based place of safety by other agencies.

■ Crime: Rural Areas

Steff Aquarone:

[901408]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help tackle crime in rural areas.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government recognises the importance of tackling rural crime and the devastating impact it can have on communities and the agricultural sector.

That's why we're bringing forward tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, including in rural areas, strengthening neighbourhood policing, and taking action to prevent fly-tipping. I am also committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 to help prevent the theft and re-sale of high-value equipment, particularly for use in an agricultural setting.

The Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee will deliver thousands of neighbourhood police, community support officers, and special constables, across England and Wales, including in rural areas, to speed up response times and build public confidence.

■ Crimes of Violence: Foreign Nationals

Richard Tice: [\[14206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many violent crimes committed by non-UK citizens were reported in each of the last 3 years, broken down by police district; and what proportion of these cases resulted in (a) an arrest, (b) a charge and (c) a conviction.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects information on the number of violent offences recorded by the police in England and Wales. It is not possible to identify from these data whether an offence was committed by a non-UK citizen or not.

■ Defending Democracy Taskforce

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis: [\[901403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent progress the Defending Democracy Taskforce has made.

Dan Jarvis:

Mr Speaker, it is vital that elected representatives and their staff can discharge their duties without threat of intimidation or assault.

We have seen wholly unacceptable behaviour, especially around the general election.

The Defending Democracy Taskforce is looking urgently at these issues and I will update the House further in due course.

■ Domestic Abuse: Mortgages

James MacCleary: [\[15124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help prevent joint mortgages being used as a method of financial abuse.

Jess Phillips:

The Government recognises the devastating impact financial and economic abuse can have on victims, which extends far beyond the impact to their finances and includes the use of joint mortgages to control or exploit victims.

We continue to work closely with and fund organisations that seek to promote awareness of economic abuse to improve the public and private sector's response. This includes funding Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA), which supports victims of economic and financial abuse, with £200,000 this year to help improve the response to economic abuse and provide vital support and economic safety for victims.

■ Drugs: Slough

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[15234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to reduce levels of drug offences in Slough constituency.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Reducing drug-related crime is a key priority for this Government and is part of our mission to drive down crime and antisocial behaviour.

An additional £267 million in drug and alcohol treatment is being invested into services this year to improve quality and capacity, which has the potential to reduce crime and reoffending.

As part of the Government's work to reduce drug-related harms and crime, every area in England has a dedicated Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP). Slough sits within Berkshire, where the Government has supported the establishment of a Berkshire Combating Drugs Partnership to help bring together key local partners to address drug related-crime, drug use and drug deaths, in line with local context and need. Between March 2022 and August 2024 there has been an increase of 72 treatment places in Slough.

Broader work across the county to reduce drug offences has included targeting drug treatment referrals at offenders. As well as continuing work with the National Police Chiefs Council to increase police referrals into drug treatment.

We are committed to reducing drug offences in supply of illicit drugs. Recent police activity on County Lines has resulted in over 5,100 drug dealing line closures, over 15,600 arrests and over 8,000 safeguarding referrals. In addition, we are working continuously to disrupt the organised criminal gangs behind the importation and supply of drugs in the UK.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Floods

Shaun Davies:

[\[14493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the capacity of fire and rescue services in England to respond to flooding.

Shaun Davies:

[\[14494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a statutory duty on fire and rescue services in England to respond to major flooding events.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Defra is the Lead Government Department for Flooding and are responsible for response and prevention of flooding.

Fire & Rescue Services, with continued support from the Home Office, remain ready to respond to flooding. The Home Office supports FRAs in responding to flood incidents by providing national resilience High Volume Pump (HVP) capability

comprising 45 HVPs. These are available to be used by Fire & Rescue Services across the country during major flood incidents.

Fire and Rescue Authorities have duties under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) to prepare for emergencies, including major flooding. Fire Rescue Authorities also have discretionary powers to respond to incidents under their general powers in the Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004) and in response to the risks set out in their Community Risk Management Plans prepared under the National Framework.

The Home Office is undertaking further work alongside Defra, National Fire Chiefs Council and other relevant stakeholders to understand in more detail if there are gaps in the Fire and Rescue Services flooding response and resilience system.

■ Gangmasters

Sir John Hayes: [14448]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many applications for gangmaster licences have been refused in the last five years.

Jess Phillips:

The annual number of applications for gangmaster licences that have been refused are published in the Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority's Annual Reports and Accounts. Annual accounts have been published up to and including the 2022-23 financial year. From the available published data, the total number of refused applications since 2019/20 up to and including 2022/23 is 42.

■ Health Services: Undocumented Migrants

Sir John Hayes: [14585]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many irregular migrants have received a waiver from paying the immigration health surcharge in each year since 2017.

Sir John Hayes: [14586]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many irregular migrants have received a refund for paying the immigration health surcharge since 2017.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Information on Fee Waiver outcomes is published as part of the Migration Transparency statistics; however it is not possible to disaggregate Fee Waivers granted to irregular migrants from the data. The Migration Transparency data can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/migration-transparency-data>

Data is not held on whether individuals receiving refunds are regular or irregular migrants. The IHS refund is linked to the outcome of an application, rather than the status of a migrant.

■ Human Trafficking: Prostitution

Joani Reid:

[\[901413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support victims of sex trafficking.

Jess Phillips:

Sex trafficking is a truly terrible crime. Those who've endured it are some of the bravest people I've ever met. Victims of modern slavery in England and Wales receive tailored support, through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract, to help rebuild their lives, engage with the criminal justice system, and transition back into the wider community.

Supporting victims is a devolved power, so comparable tailored support is provided in Scotland and Northern Ireland by the devolved administrations and their partnering organisations.

■ Members: Correspondence

Nick Timothy:

[\[15092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October to Question 9811 on Members: Correspondence, when she plans to respond to the letter of 1 September 2024 from the hon. Member for West Suffolk.

Dame Angela Eagle:

We apologise for the delay and will provide a response as soon as possible. The Honourable Member will also be pleased to know that the breakdown of expenditure on the Rwanda Agreement will be published next week, to mark the one-year anniversary of the former Home Secretary's visit to Kigali.

■ Migrants: Childbirth

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many migrants have entered the UK and given birth within three months by visa type.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office does not hold this information.

■ Non-crime Hate Incidents

Sir John Hayes:

[\[14010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will collate the number of non-crime hate incidents recorded by police forces in each of the last five years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not currently centrally hold or collate information on the number of non-crime hate incidents recorded by police forces.

■ Non-crime Hate Incidents: Children**Sir John Hayes:**[\[14446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many children have been investigated for non-crime hate crimes in the last five years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not centrally hold or collate information on the number of children who have been investigated by police forces for non-crime hate incidents.

The statutory Non-Crime Hate Incidents Code of Practice makes it clear that a child who is subject of a non-crime hate incident report may have lower appreciation of the impact of their words or behaviour, thus recording their personal data may be a disproportionate response.

■ Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[14916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of her Department's agreements with Northern Ireland Government departments in place of the strategic migration partnership.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office continues to engage with Northern Ireland Government departments to progress agreements to ensure continued delivery for service users in Northern Ireland. Regular strategic and operational engagement between all parties ensures effective implementation of government policy on asylum and resettlement.

■ Oppression**Blair McDougall:**[\[14510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what support her Department provides to UK residents threatened by agents of authoritarian regimes overseas.

Dan Jarvis:

The first duty of any government is to keep the country safe and protect its citizens. The UK does not tolerate attempts by any state to threaten or intimidate UK residents. We continually assess potential risks and take the protection of individuals' rights, freedoms, and safety very seriously. This involves taking a proactive approach to countering the most acute forms of state-directed threats to individuals.

We will continue to implement measures in the National Security Act 2023, which make the UK a harder target for those states which seek to conduct hostile acts.

Home Office officials work closely with operational partners, the FCDO and other government departments to ensure that UK residents are safe and secure. Where individuals have concerns for their safety, they are advised to contact their local police in the first instance.

■ **Oppression: Hong Kong**

Blair McDougall:

[\[14511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what support her Department has provided to British citizens from Hong Kong living in the UK who have had bounties placed on their heads by the Chinese government.

Dan Jarvis:

It is the first duty of government to keep its citizens safe. Attempts to intimidate and silence individuals in the UK by foreign powers, including China, are unacceptable. The protection of individuals' freedoms, and safety is of the utmost importance. Where individuals are identified as being of heightened risk, we are proactive in the deployment of protective security guidance and other measures as appropriate. Anyone who is concerned for their safety should contact the police in the first instance.

■ **Police Interrogation**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many suspect interviews were conducted broken down by the language used in the interview in each police force in the last 12 months.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not hold the information requested.

The Home Office annually collects and publishes information on the number of people detained in custody. The latest available data is for the year ending March 2023 and can be found here: [Other PACE powers, year ending March 2023 \(second edition\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Information on whether an interview was conducted whilst in detention, including the language used, is not centrally collected by the Home Office.

■ **Police: Apprentices**

Claire Young:

[\[14371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is committed to ensuring there are consistent, high standards for entry into the police and that police training is of the highest quality. Maintaining professional standards in policing is key to ensuring the workforce is equipped to respond to the crime challenges they face daily as well as improving public trust and confidence.

The College of Policing regularly reviews the national policing curriculum for new recruits, to ensure that it is delivering for both policing and for recruits. This applies to all entry routes including the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship.

The College is currently working with the policing sector and other partners to ensure that all police constable entry routes are as effective as they can be, to improve the experience of forces and participants and to enable streamlined, practical training with reduced cost to forces.

■ Police: Essex

James McMurdock: [\[14416\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much was spent by police forces in Essex on celebrating Pride Month in June 2024.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not hold information relating to how much money was spent by police forces on pride month for 2024.

■ Police: Hampshire

Dame Caroline Dinenge: [\[14033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the police allocation formula on (a) policing, (b) crime and (c) council tax in Hampshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The government will consider police funding, including the allocation of funding to forces including Hampshire Police, in the round as part of phase 2 of the Spending Review.

Each year the Home Office produces a Police Grant Report which is published and voted on by Parliament and contains grant funding allocations for the following year to be paid out under the Police Act 1996.

The funding formula used for distributing Home Office Police Main Grant divides funds between different activities that (a) the police undertake and (b) in tackling crime. (c) Setting the police council tax precept is a matter for Hampshire's Police and Crime Commissioner who will take into account the views of the local community and the Police and Crime Panel.

A copy of the most recent Grant Report for 2024-25 has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and can be found online:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b913a1ee7d49000d9849d4/E03063051 - Police Grant Report England and Wales 24-25 Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b913a1ee7d49000d9849d4/E03063051_-_Police_Grant_Report_England_and_Wales_24-25_Accessible.pdf)

■ Police: Mental Health Services

Chris Philp:

[\[14982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13777 on Police: Mental Health Services, if she will publish the updates received by her Department from police forces on implementation of the Right Care, Right Person model.

Dame Diana Johnson:

I remain grateful for the Right Honourable Member's continued commitment to the successful implementation of the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) approach and I will be happy to provide him with regular updates on its implementation when there is relevant progress to update.

■ Police: Recruitment

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[15299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on recruitment of (a) warranted police officers, (b) Police Community Support Officers and (c) Special Constables.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is committed to ensuring police forces are supported to tackle crime effectively.

The latest Home Office statistics for the overall Police Workforce show a 1.2% increase when compared to the previous year. The total paid police workforce in the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales was 236,588 full-time equivalents (FTE) as at 31 March 2024; an increase of 2,752 FTE, compared to 233,836 FTE as at 31 March 2023. This includes 147,746 FTE police officers (up 0.2% on 147,434 in March 2023); and 81,303 FTE police staff and designated officers (up 3.4% on 78,596 in March 2023).

As part of the Government's Safer Streets mission, the Home Secretary has made a clear commitment to strengthen neighbourhood policing through the introduction of a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. This includes delivering an additional 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles. More detail on the Guarantee will be set out in the coming weeks.

■ Police: Reform

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[15297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Written Statement of 19 November 2024 on Police Reform, HCWS232, how the increase in the core grant for police forces will be divided up.

Dame Diana Johnson:

On 19th November, the Home Secretary announced that central government funding for policing will increase by half a billion pounds; this includes an increase of over

£260m in the core grant for police forces, and additional funding for neighbourhood policing, the NCA and counter terrorism.

Force level funding allocations for the financial year 2025-26 will be confirmed at the police funding settlement.

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[15298\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Written Statement of 19 November 2024 on Police Reform, HCWS232, what her definition of a community is.

Dame Diana Johnson:

As part of the Government's Safer Streets mission, the Home Secretary has made a clear commitment to strengthen neighbourhood policing through the introduction of a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. More detail will be set out in due course.

■ Refugees: Ukraine

Samantha Niblett: [\[14808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to further support (a) Ukrainian refugees and (b) those who are hosting Ukrainian refugees in (i) Derbyshire and (ii) the East Midlands.

Seema Malhotra:

To provide future certainty, Ukrainians who have been provided with sanctuary in the UK under the Ukraine schemes will be able to apply for 18 months further permission to remain in the UK through a bespoke Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme due to open in early 2025.

Sponsors continue to be eligible for thank you payments for the duration of their guest's Homes for Ukraine visa permission. For arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, local authorities also continue to receive a tariff of £5,900 per Ukrainian arrival in their area to support guests to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities.

■ Road Traffic Offences: Bolton North East

Kirith Entwistle: [\[15353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle speeding on residential streets in Bolton North East constituency.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Excess speed is still a major cause of death and serious injury on our roads. Anyone who breaks the speed limit should expect to face a swift and strong sanction.

Enforcement of speeding offences in Bolton North East constituency and the deployment of available resources and capabilities is an operational matter for Greater Manchester's Chief Constable and Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime

Police to determine, taking into account the specific local problems and demands with which they are faced.

■ Rural Areas: Crime

Andrew Cooper:

[15143]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with agricultural machinery manufacturers on the potential impact of enhanced security measures on agricultural vehicles on the level of rural crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Rural crime can have devastating consequences for countryside communities. That is why this Government is committed to tackling crime in rural areas.

We are committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 and support its intentions to fend off the theft and re-sale of high-value equipment, particularly for use in an agricultural setting. I recently met with Ruth Bailey, CEO of Agricultural Engineers Association on the 5th November 2024.

The Act requires secondary legislation before it can come into effect. We are currently considering the views of those who may be affected by the legislation and its regulations, including manufacturers, to understand the potential implications and determine the scope of the legislation, including what equipment it will include.

■ Shoplifting: Hampshire

Luke Murphy:

[14157]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) reports of, (b) charges for and (c) convictions for shoplifting there were in (i) Basingstoke constituency and (ii) Hampshire in each year since 2010.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects and publishes information on the number of shoplifting offences and their investigative outcomes recorded by the police in England and Wales on a quarterly basis.

The proportion of shoplifting offences, broken down by Police Force Area, including Hampshire, which resulted in a "Charge/Summonsed" outcome can be derived from the Outcomes Open Data tables, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

Information at the Parliamentary Constituency level is not held by the Home Office.

The Ministry of Justice publish statistics on convictions at courts in England and Wales, including a breakdown of convictions at courts in the Hampshire police force area. These are available in the Outcomes by Offence data tool that can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2023>

In the last year of the previous government shoplifting soared to a twenty-year high.

This Government will end the effective immunity, introduced by the previous Government, granted to shop theft of goods under £200 and we will introduce a standalone offence of assaulting a shopworker, so everybody can feel safe at work.

■ Sodium Nitrite: Misuse

Anna Gelderd: [14566]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle the (a) supply and (b) use of sodium nitrite.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Certain chemicals can be used in the illicit manufacture of explosives or to cause harm. These are called explosives precursors and poisons.

The Poisons Act 1972 sets out the legal obligations in relation to the sale, purchase, and use of these chemicals for suppliers, professional users, and members of the public.

Sodium nitrite is a reportable poison listed in Part 4 of Schedule 1A of the Poisons Act 1972; this means it is lawful to sell this substance in Great Britain without further controls, however suppliers have a legal obligation to report any suspicious transactions.

The Home Office work with retailers to raise awareness and emphasise their legal obligation to report suspicious activity for regulated and reportable substances.

■ Undocumented Migrants

Richard Tice: [14213]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what her current budget is for (a) processing illegal immigration cases, (b) managing legal appeals to such cases and (c) deportation operations; and what steps she is taking to increase efficiency in the (i) allocation and (ii) use of this funding.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes relevant information regarding departmental expenditure on the asylum and immigration systems on a regular basis in its annual reports, the most recent editions of which can be found at the following link: [Home Office Annual Report and Accounts 2023 to 2024 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk).

Rupert Lowe: [901404]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle illegal migration.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Mr Speaker, this Government came to office with a pledge to crack down on the organised crime gangs responsible for the vile trade in people-smuggling across the Channel, working with our counterparts in Europe and beyond, and I am pleased to report that those efforts have produced significant successes in recent weeks.

Working with agencies across government and with international partners, our new Border Security Command will continue to lead the UK's efforts to dismantle the smuggling gangs, and disrupt their supply chains, and I look forward to further successes resulting from that work in the weeks and months to come.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Age and Deportation

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance is available to immigration staff for dealing with irregular migrants found to have given false information about their age; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of deporting those migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

If there is a discrepancy between the information someone provides at any stage in the asylum process, and any related facts subsequently established, this will be taken into account alongside any other underlying factors when assessing their credibility in line with section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004 and the relevant policy guidance.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what funds her Department has provided to the French government to help prevent irregular migrant crossings of the English Channel.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Our cooperation with France on irregular migration is underpinned by the UK's commitments under the 2023 Sandhurst Treaty, published on 10th March 2023 and available at the following link:

[UK-France Joint Leaders' Declaration - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-france-joint-leaders-declaration)

■ Undocumented Migrants: Hotels

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the total number of nights spent in hotels by irregular migrants is by constituency.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Available 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables))(opens in a new tab).

The Government is determined to restore order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly and fairly. This includes identifying a range of options to end

the use of hotels over time and ensuring efficiency and value for money across all accommodation arrangements.

■ **Visas: English Language**

Ian Sollom:

[R] [\[14162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the introduction of Secure English Language Test on (a) international students, (b) research students and (c) skilled workers.

Seema Malhotra:

Secure English Language testing is already in place via commercial arrangements that underpin the policy requirements. The commercial arrangements, and those being considered for the future, will not negatively impact our customers but continue to support the visa application process. As part of both our business-as-usual management of services and any future arrangements, global test centre coverage is a key consideration and we will continue to ensure that test centres have good availability for our customers.

■ **Visas: Married People**

Neil O'Brien:

[\[14981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of partner visas were granted where the applicant used cash savings to count towards the minimum income threshold in each year since 2012.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office publishes data on Partner entry clearance visas in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. However, this information is not broken down by the means by which the Minimum Income Requirement is met.

Data on visas issued are published in Table Vis_D02 in the [detailed entry clearance visa dataset](#). The Partner visa subgroup is included in the 'Family' visa type, which covers visas where an individual is applying for a visa on the basis of their relationship to a person settled in the UK or a British citizen.

Information on how to use the datasets can be found in the 'Notes' page of each workbook. The latest data relates to 2024 Q2.

■ **Youth Mobility Scheme: Economic Growth**

James MacCleary:

[\[14163\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an estimate with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of existing youth mobility schemes on economic growth in each (a) country of the UK and (b) year since 2010.

Seema Malhotra:

The Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS) provides valuable cultural exchange opportunities for young people aged 18-30 (or 18-35 for some nationalities) to experience life in

another country for up to two or three years, and to make lifelong ties and friendships overseas.

Each YMS is subject to a bilateral, reciprocal arrangement designed to offer cultural exchange. It is therefore not designed, nor intended, to be a route for economic growth or to address any specific labour shortages, although individuals participating in the scheme are able to work if they wish to do so.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Environment Protection: Planning Permission

Blake Stephenson:

[\[14528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will require local authorities to refer planning decisions where the Environment Agency objects for a call in.

Matthew Pennycook:

Local planning authorities are currently required to refer certain planning applications where they are minded to grant planning permission. Such applications include proposals for major development in a flood risk area to which the Environment Agency has made an objection that it has not been able to withdraw. Full details are set out in the [Town And Country Planning \(Consultation\) \(England\) Direction 2024](#).

■ Housing: Disability

Marsha De Cordova:

[\[12990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to raise the default minimum accessibility requirement to the M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable standard for all new residential buildings.

Alex Norris:

I understand that accessibility in new homes, and accessibility standards for buildings in general, are an important concern. Housing is one of this Government's top priorities, everyone deserves to live in a decent home in which they feel safe. We will set out our policies on accessible new build housing shortly.

■ Housing: Older People

Max Wilkinson:

[\[14473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to prevent (a) residents in retirement properties from being over-charged and (b) charging relatives for a property once the resident has passed away.

Matthew Pennycook:

Leaseholders living in retirement housing who pay variable service charges will benefit from measures contained in the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024.

The measures in question will ensure all leaseholders receive minimum key financial and non-financial information on a regular basis, including introducing a standardised service charge demand form and an annual report, so that leaseholders can scrutinise and better challenge costs if they are considered unreasonable.

The government is committed to acting quickly to implement the provisions of the Act. Further detail can be found in the Written Ministerial Statement made on Thursday 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

■ Housing: Solar Power

Mark Swards: **[12866]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will bring forward regulations to ensure that solar panels fitted to new housing are (a) safe and (b) pose a low fire risk.

Alex Norris:

The Building Regulations apply to new building work and are intended to protect people's safety, health and welfare. They may apply when somebody is putting up a new building, making material changes to a building, extending an existing building or altering building services. They include provisions for electrical and fire safety, including adequate resistance to fire spreading over the roof and from one roof to another.

Part P (Electrical Safety) of the Building Regulations requires work to the fixed electrical systems in homes, including solar panels, to be carried out safely to protect people from fire or injury. It should also be noted that all products placed on the GB market must comply with applicable product safety legislation. Nevertheless, our commitment to building safety and system wide reform of the construction sector means that we continue to push for higher standards.

The Building Safety Act 2022 introduced new competence requirements on anyone carrying out design or building work and also requires the safety and standard of buildings to be kept under review; Building Regulations can then be updated as needed. This mechanism offers Government a source of evidence if Regulations or guidance are in need of amendment or to reflect advances in building safety knowledge and technologies.

■ Local Government: Pension Funds

Mr Clive Betts: **[R] [14909]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the amalgamation of local government pension funds will be compulsory; whether pension funds will be able to choose which new fund to join; and whether she has had recent discussions with (a) the Local Government Association and (b) pension funds on her proposed changes.

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[14910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Pension megafunds could unlock £80 billion of investment as Chancellor takes radical action to drive economic growth, published on 13 November 2024, whether she plans to appoint a body that will be legally accountable for (a) investment decisions, (b) paying pensions and (c) acquiring contributions from councils for proposed amalgamated local authority pension funds.

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[14911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Pension megafunds could unlock £80 billion of investment as Chancellor takes radical action to drive economic growth, published on 13 November 2024, who will be responsible for appointing trustees for new amalgamated pension funds.

Mr Clive Betts:

[\[14912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Pension megafunds could unlock £80 billion of investment as Chancellor takes radical action to drive economic growth, published on 13 November 2024, whether the assets and liabilities of amalgamated local authority pension funds will remain with councils or become part of the Government's accounts.

Jim McMahon:

The Government is consulting on proposals relating to asset pooling in the Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) England and Wales, following extensive engagement with sector stakeholders including the LGA.

The proposals in the consultation do not include mandatory merging of funds, and so a) assets and liabilities b) paying pensions and c) acquiring contributions from councils would remain the responsibility of the administering authority. Administering authorities would remain responsible for setting an investment strategy, with its implementation delegated to the pools.

All pools would be FCA-regulated investment management companies, with partner administering authorities as sole shareholders. Boards of all pool companies would be required to have the skills and experience appropriate to the leadership of an investment management company, meeting the requirements for FCA authorisation.

■ Private Rented Housing: Rents

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[15245\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make it her policy to prohibit a landlord from (a) demanding and (b) accepting more than one month's rent in advance in respect of a (i) tenancy and (ii) licence of residential accommodation tenancy.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government recognise 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, we believe there is a strong case for putting this matter beyond doubt.

The government is therefore giving careful consideration as to how best that might be achieved through the Renters' Rights Bill.

■ Shared Ownership Schemes: Fire Prevention**Mike Amesbury:**[\[12997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing grants to housing associations to buy back homes from shared ownership leaseholders unable to sell their homes due to delays in completing building safety remediation works.

Alex Norris:

Social housing providers have the option to repurchase homes where shared owners are unable to sell due to building safety issues. This is not an automatic entitlement for shared owners and is available at providers' discretion. Providers will have their own policies setting out when this option is available, including any relevant eligibility criteria. These policies should be published on providers' websites.

Ten mortgage lenders have signed a joined statement confirming they will lend on properties in buildings before they have been remediated. Leaseholders, including shared owners, should be able to sell their homes even where there are delays in remediation works.

We are taking the steps necessary to accelerate the removal of unsafe cladding from buildings and improve outcomes for residents of all tenures, including working closely with partners across the social housing sector to identify barriers to remediation and ways to overcome them. Further announcements will be made shortly.

■ Tenants: Overcharging**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[14433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to require landlords and managing agents to pay automatic compensation to tenants when overcharging occurs.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[14434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make it her policy to pay automatic compensation to all tenants when landlords and managing agents are slow to reimburse tenants after overcharging.

Matthew Pennycook:

Since 2014, all letting and managing agents in England have been required by law to be members of one of two mandatory agent redress schemes. These schemes already have statutory powers to require agents to pay compensation in circumstances where their actions or behaviours fall short of a fair and reasonable standard. These services are independent and free for tenants to use.

Through provisions in the Renters' Rights Bill, currently before Parliament, the government will establish a new Private Landlord Ombudsman Service. This will similarly empower tenants to seek redress – including compensation – in relation to their landlord's behaviour or actions.

JUSTICE

■ **Burglary: Convictions**

Jim Shannon:

[\[14612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many convictions for burglary there were in the last 12 months.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on prosecutions for a wide range of offences, including burglary up to and including June 2024 in the Outcomes by Offences data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal justice statistics - GOV.UK](#).

This can be accessed by navigating to the 'Prosecutions and Convictions' tab and using the Offence filter to search 'Burglary' in the Outcomes by Offence Tool.

■ **Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes**

Caroline Voaden:

[\[14829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to help ensure that victims of domestic abuse are supported through the family courts system.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Government recognises the impact family court proceedings can have on children and adult survivors of domestic abuse which is why we are committed to halving incidences of violence against women and girls; reforming the family justice system so that victims of domestic abuse are supported is key to this.

The courts hearing family proceedings have the power to prohibit the cross-examination of domestic abuse survivors by their abusers. Victims of domestic abuse

are automatically considered to be vulnerable when the court is determining whether to make special measures, such as allowing someone to give evidence by video link, or from behind a screen. The Family Procedure Rules and Practice Directions allow for Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers to accompany parties in the courtroom.

Central to the Department's work on reforming the family justice system is the Pathfinder pilot. This entirely reformed court model uses a more investigative and less adversarial approach for private law proceedings relating to children and is currently operating in Dorset, North Wales, Birmingham and South-East Wales. The pilot seeks to improve the experiences of children and families in proceedings, in particular for survivors of domestic abuse, and reduce re-traumatisation. At the heart of this model is closer multiagency working which has led to improved communication, greater consistency in information and multi-disciplinary training. The pilot courts work closely with the specialist domestic abuse sector including Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers to ensure that adequate domestic abuse risk assessments and support is in place. We are exploring options for further rollout to ensure that more people can benefit from this approach.

■ Employment Tribunals Service

Max Wilkinson:

[\[14574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of employment tribunal processes on litigants without legal representation.

Heidi Alexander:

Tribunals, including the Employment Tribunals, are designed to be expert, accessible, low cost and without a need for legal representation. Legal aid is available for legal advice and assistance in relation to discrimination cases which fall under the Equality Act 2010 and some earlier discrimination enactments, subject to passing the means and merits tests. Legal aid for other employment matters may be available through the Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) Scheme, if a failure to provide legal aid would breach, or likely risk a breach of, an individual's human rights under the Human Rights Act 1998.

We are providing over £10 million of grant funding to improve access to legal support and advice, including for litigants in person. This includes support to help people navigate the process effectively where court or tribunal proceedings are needed, as well as the provision of online support across a range of civil, family and tribunal jurisdictions. This includes online advice for the employment tribunal.

For free independent legal advice, litigants may approach the following organisations: Law Centres Network; The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service; Advocate; Law Works.

■ Family Courts

Caroline Voaden:

[\[15034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to protect parties during family court proceedings.

Alex Davies-Jones:

This Government is committed to ensuring the family court system is safe and supportive for all parties, particularly those who are survivors of domestic abuse.

Family courts have various tools available to protect participants. Courts have the power to prohibit the cross-examination of domestic abuse survivors by their abusers. Victims of domestic abuse are automatically considered to be vulnerable when the court is determining whether to make special measures, such as allowing someone to give evidence by video link, or from behind a screen. The Family Procedure Rules and Practice Directions allow for Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers to accompany parties in the courtroom.

In proceedings relating to children, the court has powers under section 91(14) of the Children Act 1989 to make orders to prevent a person from making applications to court without prior permission from the court, for example where further proceedings would risk causing harm to parents or children.

■ Family Proceedings: Children

Caroline Voaden:

[\[14830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure children's wishes are considered by the Family Court during a hearing.

Alex Davies-Jones:

When deciding an issue relating to the upbringing of a child, the child's welfare must be the court's paramount consideration. When considering arrangements to be made for a child, the court must have particular regard to a list of factors, including the wishes and feelings of the child, considered in light of the child's age and level of understanding. Depending on the type of proceedings, the child may automatically be a party to the case or may be made a party by the court if it is in their best interests to do so.

In most proceedings relating to a child, it is part of the role of Cafcass, or Cafcass Cymru, to engage with children to establish their wishes and communicate these to the court. Cafcass and Cafcass Cymru officers can use various methods to ensure children can make their feelings and wishes clear to the court in their own words and will submit their own analysis of the evidence to the court.

The Government is exploring how to enhance the voice of the child in private family law proceedings to ensure children's wishes and views are central to proceedings concerning them via the Pathfinder pilot currently in place in Dorset, North Wales, Birmingham and South-East Wales. As part of the evaluation of the pilots we are working with partners and stakeholders to assess methods of child engagement and

understand more about the voice of the child in the initial pilot sites of Dorset and North Wales. We expect the findings of this to be published in Spring 2025.

■ Offences against Children

Rupert Lowe: [\[14731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many individuals per nationality were convicted of child sex offences in each of the last ten years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes information on the number of defendants convicted for sexual offences in the [Outcomes by Offence data tool: December 2023](#). However, it is not possible to identify an offender's nationality from the centrally collated convictions data. This information may be held on court records but to examine individual court records would incur disproportionate costs.

Foreign national offenders who commit crime should be in no doubt that the law will be enforced and, where appropriate, we will work with the Home Office to pursue their deportation. This will help to manage prison pressures, keep the public safe and reduce crime. We are currently on track to remove more foreign national offenders this year than at any time in recent years and we are working across government to explore the ways we accelerate this work further.

■ Offences against Children: Sentencing

Rupert Lowe: [\[14730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of convictions for child sex offences did not result in a custodial sentence in each of the last ten years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the sentencing outcomes for offences at criminal courts in England and Wales in the Outcomes by Offence data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal Justice Statistics](#).

Although child sex offences is not a defined category within the tool, you can filter offences using the HO Offence code to select the specific offences of interest.

■ Prison Accommodation

Munira Wilson: [\[13490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when she plans to publish the 2023-24 report on the state of prison estate.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

We are considering when and how to publish an ad-hoc report on the prison estate conditions survey, which will contain summary information.

In addition, we have also committed to publish a 10-year capacity strategy by the end of 2024 which will outline the steps the Government is taking on the future of the prison estate.

■ Prisons: Care Leavers

Helen Hayes:

[\[15222\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to review the impact of the 2019 HMPPS Strategy for Care-Experienced People.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

We know that people taken into care as children are disproportionately likely to end up in the criminal justice system, with research estimating that 24-31% of the adult prison population spent time in care as children.

We are committed to addressing this disproportionality, both by improving support for people with care experience while in the criminal justice system, and by working with colleagues across government to reduce the number of people with care experience who enter the criminal justice system.

As part of this, we are reviewing existing support available to people with care experience in the criminal justice system, and considering how to build on the work set out in the 2019 strategy. We are developing our approach to this currently and will say more once our plans have been finalised.

■ Probation

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[15167\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what changes have been implemented in the Probation Service following HM Chief Inspector of Probation's thematic review on Probation Recall, published on 14 December 2023.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation published a report on 14 December 2023 entitled: 'A thematic inspection of imprisonment for public protection (IPP) recall decisions'.

In this report, the Chief Inspector found that the Probation Service were taking proportionate and necessary decisions to recall offenders on licence for public protection. The report did, however, also find that in some cases, additional support might have helped manage offenders in the community and made recommendations, which were accepted by the previous Government. HMPPS aligned and embedded the actions to address the recommendations into the IPP Action Plan and has taken these forwards in 2024/25.

Specifically, the HMPPS IPP Action Plan, a refreshed version of which was laid in Parliament on 15 November, has led to three key changes to support the management of IPP offenders on licence in the community. The first is the roll out of IPP Delivery Plans in each HMPPS operational area, which include a specific

strategic objective to support the community reintegration of newly released IPP offenders and improve the effectiveness of management of IPP cases in the community. The second is for HMPPS Psychology Services to work alongside the Probation Service in supporting those offenders with complex needs during the challenging transitional period following first release. The third is the commencement of a pilot to improve the level and type of support offered to IPP offenders whilst they reside in an Approved Premises and in the lead up to their required move-on to new accommodation.

The Government also acted swiftly to commence the IPP measures in the Victims and Prisoners Act, which led to the automatic termination of licence for 1,742 cases on 1 November 2024.

■ Reoffenders: Foreign Nationals

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14537\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question 12200 on Reoffenders: Foreign Nationals, how many (a) non-violent and (b) violent foreign national reoffences there were in each of the last five years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

It is not possible to identify which reoffences committed by foreign nationals are 'violent' and 'non-violent' from the Ministry of Justice extract of the Police National Computer. This would require a manual search of court records and would therefore be of disproportionate cost.

We refer all foreign national offenders in receipt of custodial sentences to the Home Office. Those sentenced to 12 months, or more are automatically considered for deportation.

Foreign national offenders who commit crime should be in no doubt that the law will be enforced and, where appropriate, we will work with the Home Office to pursue their deportation. This will help to manage prison pressures, keep the public safe and reduce crime. We are currently on track to remove more foreign national offenders this year than at any time in recent years and we are working across government to explore the ways we accelerate this work further.

■ Stalking: Convictions

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question 12201 on Stalking: Convictions, whether her Department collects data on foreign national offenders found guilty of stalking involving fear of violence.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The Ministry of Justice publishes information on the number of defendants convicted for stalking offences involving fear of violence in the [Outcomes by Offence data tool: December 2023](#).

However, this does not include an offenders' nationality. This information may be held on court records but to examine individual court records would only be possible at disproportionate cost.

We refer all foreign national offenders in receipt of custodial sentences to the Home Office to be considered for deportation. Following the referral, checks will be completed on Home Office databases to confirm the person's identity, immigration status and criminal history. These are essential in determining whether deportation can lawfully be pursued and whether further considerations are necessary.

Foreign national offenders who commit crime should be in no doubt that the law will be enforced and, where appropriate, we will work with the Home Office to pursue their deportation. This will help to manage prison pressures, keep the public safe and reduce crime.

■ **Wandsworth Prison: Unmanned Air Vehicles**

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:

[\[14968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the correspondence of 12 and 26 September 2024 from the Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending to the hon Member for Tooting on HMP Wandsworth, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of installing protective netting in HMP Wandsworth to prevent drone incursions.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Additional netting is one of a number of measures that HMP Wandsworth is seeking to progress in the coming months, in order to address the shortcomings that have been identified by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

HM Prison & Probation Service is continuing to work collaboratively with the Metropolitan Police to ensure appropriate sharing of intelligence to support the apprehension of those involved in drone use.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ **Foetal Valproate Spectrum Disorder: Northern Ireland**

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[\[14888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with the (a) Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and (b) Northern Ireland Executive on access to a UK-wide compensation scheme for victims of fetal valproate syndrome in Northern Ireland.

Hilary Benn:

I have not had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Health or the Northern Ireland Executive regarding access to a UK-wide compensation scheme for victims of fetal valproate syndrome in Northern Ireland. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department of Health confirmed on 12 November that the Government

will be providing an update to the Patient Safety Commissioner's report at the earliest opportunity, and is engaging with devolved Governments, including the Northern Ireland Executive.

■ **Parades: Northern Ireland**

Gavin Robinson:

[\[14953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of (a) the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 and (b) subsequent amendments to that Act; and how many prosecutions there have been under the Act in each year since it came into force.

Hilary Benn:

The Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 (as amended) currently provides an effective framework for managing public processions and related protests in Northern Ireland. As set out in the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements, any alternative arrangements for managing public processions in Northern Ireland would need to be agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive. Prosecutions under the Act are a matter for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service.

■ **UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland**

Alex Easton:

[\[14551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the (a) Windsor Framework and (b) Northern Ireland Protocol on businesses in North Down constituency; and what steps his Department is taking to help support those businesses.

Hilary Benn:

The Government is committed to the Windsor Framework and to protecting the UK internal market. The Framework guarantees unfettered access for Northern Ireland's businesses to the UK market on a permanent basis.

The Windsor Framework also provides a long-term basis for traders to do business, with over 9,000 firms signed up to the UK Internal Market Scheme and many taking advantage of the support provided by the Trader Support Service.

Traders will benefit further when the UK internal market system is implemented in the New Year. The Government will continue to work constructively with stakeholders to ensure that the arrangements set out under the Windsor Framework work well for businesses and people.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ 5G: Standards****Helen Grant:**[\[14453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential causes of poor 5G connectivity.

Chris Bryant:

Network congestion, hills, buildings, trees, and the distance from the mobile mast can impact on a consumer's experience of 5G outdoors and the material construction of properties can additionally affect indoor connectivity.

■ Copernicus Programme and Horizon Europe**Richard Baker:**[\[14548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to maximise the benefits of rejoining the (a) Horizon and (b) Copernicus programmes.

Feryal Clark:

It is our priority to make Horizon association a success. Government have launched a series of initiatives have been launched to help UK organisations engage with the programme. These include a marketing campaign and large-scale events around the country to promote Horizon Europe, and pump priming support to help increase application numbers, delivered by the British Academy and Innovate UK. On Copernicus, DSIT has been working closely with the UK Earth observation sector to promote the opportunities from renewed participation in the EU Copernicus programme. This includes hosting two Copernicus industry days, investing £250m to support industry and academics to stay at the forefront of Earth observation and through the UK Space Agency. For both programmes, the Department is actively working with European partners to promote UK expertise and capabilities and encouraging collaboration opportunities.

■ Digital Technology: Grants**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[14571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what his policy is on the future of the Digital Growth Grant after April 2025.

Feryal Clark:

The DSIT settlement of £15.1 billion in 2025/26 announced at the October Budget provides the investment required to further the UK's science and technology ambitions. DSIT is undertaking an internal allocations process to set 2025/26 budgets but until then, we cannot confirm future funding decisions. Programmes such as the SEIS/EIS schemes, R&D Tax Credits and various visa routes demonstrate the UK's commitment to supporting tech companies in thriving in the UK. DSIT further

continues to unlock investment in the tech sector, through the British Growth Partnership, the National Wealth Fund and the Pensions Review.

■ **Epilepsy: Research**

Sir Geoffrey Cox:

[\[13179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to support innovation in epilepsy research.

Feryal Clark:

UK Research and Innovation's Medical Research Council spends around £3 million each year on epilepsy research, spanning discovery science and fundamental understanding of the disease through to new approaches for diagnosis and intervention. Such as £2.64 million to University College London for A Network Approach to Gene Therapy for Refractory Epilepsies.

Between April 2019 and March 2024 Innovate UK has awarded a total of £8.38 million of grant funding to 25 projects relating to epilepsy.

In addition, the 2023/24 Early Career Researchers fund allocated over £1.6 million of funding towards epilepsy research, mainly through the Epilepsy Institute to advance research into the causes, prevention and treatment of epilepsy and its associated conditions.

■ **Galileo System**

Richard Baker:

[\[14547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to replace the Galileo scheme.

Chris Bryant:

There are no plans to replace the EU's Global Navigation Satellite System – Galileo – with a UK system. The Government is implementing the October 2023 Government Policy Framework for Greater Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT) Resilience, which will provide greater resilience for the PNT services that the UK relies upon in the event of any disruption to Global Navigation Satellite Systems.

■ **Government Departments: Artificial Intelligence**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[14483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has issued guidance to other departments on using AI to (a) read and (b) analyse responses to government consultations.

Feryal Clark:

The digital centre of government within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, has been established to bring together central digital, data, technology and AI teams and act as a catalyst for technology adoption and service transformation across government. To date it has not issued guidance on using AI for

reading or analysing the responses to government consultations. The Central Digital & Data Office (CDDO) within the digital centre of government does publish wider guidance on the use of AI across the government (Generative AI Framework for HMG).

■ Government Departments: Finance

Chi Onwurah:

[\[14939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 15 November 2024 to Question 13206 on Government Departments: Finance, which Departments are included in the first tranche; what the new system is; and how the new system is being procured.

Feryal Clark:

The first full tranche includes Cabinet Office, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Department for Business & Trade, Department for Science, Innovation & Technology and Department for Energy Security & Net Zero plus associated Arm's-Length Bodies in scope.

Workday is the Technology (alongside System Integrator Cognizant). It's an AI-enabled, cloud-based, user-friendly software that brings together HR and Finance into one application.

Workday & Cognizant were identified as the preferred bidders following the conclusion of an 18-month Competitive Procedure with Negotiation (CPN). Which was in full compliance with Public Contract Regulations and aligned with commercial best practices throughout.

■ Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network

Chi Onwurah:

[\[14940\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2024 to Question 13205 on Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network, what minimum service levels his Department expects 4G coverage delivered as part of the Shared Rural Network programme to meet.

Chris Bryant:

The Shared Rural Network is delivering good 4G outdoor coverage across rural parts of the UK. For 4G networks, Ofcom defines good coverage based on the minimum signal strength required to deliver a 95% probability of making a 90-second telephone call successfully completed, and of getting a download speed of at least 2Mbit/s.

■ Research: Budget October 2024

Blake Stephenson:

[\[14526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on UK R&D.

Feryal Clark:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with the Chancellor on a range of issues. In the Autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced that total HMG investment in R&D is rising to a record allocation of £20.4bn in 2025/26, with DSIT's R&D budget rising to £13.9bn, a real terms increase of 8.5%. This investment increases Core Research funding to at least £6.1bn, protecting funding for the UK's world leading research base in real terms, and fully funds the UK's association with Horizon Europe. Further details on how this funding will be allocated will be set out in due course.

■ Research: Equality**Chi Onwurah:**[\[14938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his department is taking to help increase diversity in the research workforce.

Feryal Clark:

DSIT is committed to increasing diversity in the research workforce. We are supporting the pipeline of diverse talent, for example through the CREST Awards and the UKRI funded STEM Ambassador programme. We are supporting UKRI's EDI Strategy to ensure that those with the best research ideas can access research funding regardless of their backgrounds.

We are improving understanding of the issues through a second edition of the UK-wide Research and Innovation Workforce Survey in July this year. UKRI also publishes diversity data and commissions high-quality research evidence that informs policy and practice in the R&D system, e.g. through its EDI Caucus.

■ Social Media: Young People**Paula Barker:**[\[15033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help protect young people from (a) misogynistic behaviour and (b) unrealistic expectations of young women on social media platforms.

Feryal Clark:

The Online Safety Act requires in-scope services to protect users from harmful illegal content, much of which disproportionately affects women and girls. Services must also employ age-appropriate measures to protect children from legal abusive and hateful misogynistic content. User-to-user services and publishers of pornography must also prevent children from encountering online pornography.

Services over the designated threshold will need to remove misogynistic content where it is prohibited in their terms of service. Companies will need to have effective, accessible mechanisms in place for users to be able to report abuse and receive an appropriate response from the platform.

Media literacy helps address online safety issues by raising awareness that online actions have offline consequences, encouraging critical engagement with content and

fostering a respectful online environment. Since 2022, the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology has provided almost £3 million in grant funding for a range of media literacy projects. This covered funding for the National Literacy Trust's 'Empower' programme which includes delivering media literacy education with a focus on women and girls' online experiences to students aged 11-16.

■ Telecommunications: Cornwall

Ben Maguire:

[\[14567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help improve the (a) reliability and (b) longevity of back-up Voice over Internet Protocol phone batteries for vulnerable people; how many (i) telephone exchanges and (ii) mobile telephone masts have back-up generators; and if he will take steps to ensure that (A) the 999 service and (B) other critical infrastructure in Cornwall remains telecommunication operational at all times.

Chris Bryant:

On 18 November, the Department published [guidance](#) which defines the groups of vulnerable people to whom Communication Providers must provide extra support as they are migrated from the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony.

The Department also published a [checklist](#) of actions that telecoms companies should take before migrating customers to VoIP without their active consent. One of the actions stipulated in the checklist is for telecoms companies to provide resilience solutions that go beyond Ofcom's regulatory minimum of 1 hour of continued, uninterrupted access to emergency services during power outages for users that depend on their landline.

The Department does not record the number of telephone exchanges and mobile telephone masts with back-up generators in the UK. However, the Communications Act 2003, mandates public telecom providers to take measures to protect the security and resilience of their networks, including critical infrastructure and access to 999. The sector does this by having backup generators in phone exchanges and allowing all 999 calls from mobiles to switch to another network if needed. Ofcom sets, monitors, and enforces these regulations. The Department is working together with Ofcom and other key stakeholders to enhance the power resilience of telecommunications across the UK.

SCOTLAND

■ Borders Railway Line

John Lamont:

[\[14684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has with the Scottish Government on funding of the feasibility study for the Borders Railway extension.

Ian Murray:

I have regular meetings with the Deputy First Minister, where we discuss local economic growth as one of the key missions of this Government.

My officials have had discussions with the Scottish Borders Council and with officials from both the Department for Transport and the Scottish Government on the funding of the feasibility study for the extension of the Borders Railway as part of the Borderlands Growth Deal.

John Lamont:[\[14685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on funding of the feasibility study for the extension of the Borders Railway.

Ian Murray:

Officials from my department remain in discussion on this matter with counterparts in the Department for Transport. The Department for Transport will continue to work with the Scotland Office, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Borders Council on the next stage of development for this scheme as part of the Borderlands Growth Deal.

John Lamont:[\[14686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions his officials have had with Scottish Borders Council on funding of the feasibility study for the extension of the Borders Railway.

Ian Murray:

My officials have had discussions with the Scottish Borders Council and with officials from both the Department for Transport and the Scottish Government on the funding of the feasibility study for the extension of the Borders Railway.

The Department for Transport will continue to work with the Scotland Office, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Borders Council on the next stage of development for this scheme as part of the Borderlands Growth Deal.

■ Scottish Seafood Industry Action Group**John Lamont:**[\[14682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how often the Scottish Seafood Industry Action Group has met since 5 July 2024.

John Lamont:[\[14683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, when the Scottish Seafood Industry Action Group will next meet.

Ian Murray:

The Scottish Seafood Industry Action Group last met under the previous Government, in March 2024. This government recognises the vital role these industries play in ensuring coastal communities and the wider Scottish economy

thrive. Since taking up office in July 2024, Scotland Office Ministers have met with Salmon Scotland, the Scottish Fisherman's Federation, Loch Long Salmon, and many others across the seafood and fisheries sectors. The UK government will continue to work closely with industry representative bodies on issues that impact the sector.

TRANSPORT

■ Active Travel: Hire Services

Siân Berry:

[\[14884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data she holds on the (a) age, (b) gender, (c) disability status and (d) other demographic make-up of users of micromobility services.

Simon Lightwood:

The term micromobility can be defined in different ways. For the purposes of this question, we have taken it to refer to rental e-scooters and cycles.

DfT's Transport and Transport Technology Tracker survey is designed to be representative of the wider population of adults aged 16 and over across England. The most recent published data from Wave 11 (data collection - Dec 2023) of the tracker surveyed 3,622 adults.

Rental e-scooters

The survey found that of 244 respondents who said they had used a rental e-scooter at least annually:

- Age: young people are much more likely to use rental e-scooters at least annually (20% of 16-24s vs 1% of those aged 55 or older)
- Gender: men are more likely than women to use rental e-scooters at least annually (8% vs. 5%)
- Disability status: 5% of people with a health condition that reduces their activity use rental e-scooters at least annually (vs. 7% of those that do not have a health condition that reduces their activity)
- Other demographic make up: ethnic minorities are more than three times as likely to use rental e-scooters at least annually (16% vs 5% of white people)
- Urban vs rural: urban residents (8%) were more likely than rural residents (3%) to have used a rental e-scooter at least annually.

E-cycles

10% of respondents (355 people) said they have used an e-cycle at least annually. Of these:

- Age: young people are more likely to use e-cycles at least annually than older people (13% of 16-24s vs 8% of 55-74 year olds).

- Gender: men are more likely to use e-cycles at least annually than women (12% vs 7%).
- Other demographic make-up: ethnic minorities are more likely to use e-cycles at least annually compared to white people (16% vs 9%).

Standard Cycles:

36% of respondents (1298 people) said they have used a standard cycle at least annually. Of these:

- Age: younger age groups are more likely to use a standard cycle at least annually compared to other age groups (47% of 16-24s vs 36% of 55-64 year olds)
- Gender: men are more likely to use a standard cycle at least annually compared to women (44% vs 27%)
- Disability status: people without a health condition that reduces their activity are more likely to use a standard cycle at least annually compared to those without (38% vs 29%)
- Other demographic make-up: ethnic minorities are more likely to use a standard cycle at least annually compared to white people (41% vs 35%).

■ Bus Services: Ashfield

Lee Anderson:

[\[14650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to support local bus services in Ashfield constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

Improving local bus services is a key part of this government's growth mission. The government will introduce a Buses Bill later this Parliamentary session. This will put the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders right across England, including in Ashfield and Mansfield, to choose the model that works best in their area, whether that be franchising, high-quality partnerships with private operators or local authority ownership.

In addition, the government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities across the country. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities. East Midlands Combined County Authority has been allocated £40.5 million.

■ Bus Services: Disability

Jodie Gosling:

[\[15125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to her Department's press release of 17 November 2024 entitled £1 billion government funding boost for bus

services across England to help end postcode lottery, what proportion of the additional funding will be allocated to improving the experience of disabled passengers.

Simon Lightwood:

The government wants everyone to have access to public transport and is committed to improving services so they are more inclusive and enable disabled people to travel safely, confidently and with dignity.

At the Budget we confirmed over £1 billion in funding to improve services, protect vital routes and keep fares down. On 17 November, we confirmed how we are distributing £955 million that funding, with £712 million for local councils to deliver bus service improvement plans (BSIP) and better meet local needs, and a further £243 million for bus operators, including funding a long-standing grant to drive down fares and drive up services.

Funding allocated to local authorities to deliver BSIPs can be used in whichever way they wish to improve services for all passengers, including disabled passengers. The Department for Transport's guidance to local authorities on developing their BSIPs makes clear that these must consider accessibility, inclusiveness, personal safety and security when deciding how to improve the experience for passengers.

■ **Bus Services: Fares**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[14849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will ensure that any future review of the bus fare cap will take account of (a) young people and (b) low paid workers.

Simon Lightwood:

On Monday 28 October, the Prime Minister confirmed the government will introduce a new £3 cap on single bus fares from 1 January 2025 until the end of 2025. Moving forward, the government will also explore more targeted options that deliver value for money to the taxpayer, to ensure affordable bus travel is always available for the groups who need it the most - such as young people.

■ **Bypasses: Lincoln**

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[15268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the letters of 29 July and 8 November 2024 from the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, what progress she has made on billing the North Hykeham Relief Road.

Lilian Greenwood:

It is the responsibility of the Local Authority, Lincolnshire County Council, to provide the Department with a Full Business Case, which will be reviewed and assessed prior to a decision whether to grant full approval for the scheme. We are expecting to see the Full Business Case in the summer of 2025 and my officials are working with the council to progress that.

■ Driving Licences: Northern Ireland**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[14917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland on the graduated driving licence pilot scheme.

Lilian Greenwood:

No discussions have taken place with the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland on the graduated driving licence pilot scheme.

Whilst we are not considering Graduated Driving Licences, we absolutely recognise that young people are disproportionately victims of tragic incidents on our roads, and we are considering other measures to tackle this problem and protect young drivers.

■ Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Diabetes**Sarah Bool:**[\[14859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing legislative proposals to recognise development of diabetes (a) care and (b) management for drivers with group 2 licences.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Secretary of State for Transport's Honorary Medical Advisory Panel on driving and diabetes mellitus, has recommended that continuous or flash glucose monitoring systems, may be used to monitor glucose for the purpose of driving.

Following a consultation with stakeholders in 2018, it was decided that the testing of interstitial fluid can be permitted for driving licensing purposes for people with diabetes and Group 1 licences (cars or motorcycles).

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is in the process of assessing the potential merits of introducing legislative proposals to extend the use of this technology to Group 2 licences (bus and lorry drivers) with diabetes. A targeted consultation was launched on 18 November 2024 and will run for a period of four weeks.

■ Large Goods Vehicles: Testing**Mr Will Forster:**[\[14833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the Goods Vehicles (Plating and Testing) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2017 to permit 44 tonne operations.

Lilian Greenwood:

Permitted weights are governed by the Road Vehicles (Authorised Weights) Regulation 1998, as amended. Under these regulations, many goods vehicles are already permitted to operate at up to 44 tonnes.

■ Logistics: Employers' Contributions

Sir John Hayes:

[\[14907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions on the logistics sector.

Lilian Greenwood:

To repair the 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 support the smallest employers which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of businesses with NICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year.

■ Public Transport: Rural Areas

Samantha Niblett:

[\[14812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve access to public transport in rural communities in (a) Derbyshire and (b) the UK.

Simon Lightwood:

Good local bus services are an essential part of prosperous and sustainable communities. As announced in the King's Speech, the government will introduce a Buses Bill later this parliamentary session, which will put decision-making into the hands of local leaders across England, including in rural areas. This will allow local areas to determine how best to design their bus services so that they have control over routes and schedules.

In addition, the government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities across the country. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities. East Midlands Combined County Authority has been allocated £40.5 million.

■ Railways: Standards

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14505\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the number of people affected by train delays in each of the last ten years.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department does not hold information on the number of people affected by train delays. Rail industry data measures train delays. The Office of Rail and Road publishes quarterly and periodic (four-weekly) statistics on punctuality, reliability and

causes of delay for passenger trains operating on the mainline network in Great Britain.

This data set includes the percentage of recorded station stops that were arrived at 'On Time' (early or less than one minute after the scheduled time).

Table: Proportion of recorded station stops that were arrived at 'On Time', Great Britain

2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
64.5%	63.2%	62.0%	62.8%	63.5%	65.0%	79.8%	73.1%	67.8%	67.6%

Source: Table 3138 - Train punctuality at recorded station stops by operator (periodic), Office of Rail and Road Note: Financial year ending 31 March

These statistics can be found on the passenger rail performance data portal at the following link:

<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/performance/passenger-rail-performance/>.

■ Roads: Safety

Jodie Gosling:

[14492]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of vision zero approaches to road safety in other countries.

Lilian Greenwood:

The safety of our roads is a priority and we are currently developing a road safety strategy – the first in over a decade.

The DfT Chief Scientific Adviser is meeting with international experts to understand the effectiveness of a range of interventions and their implications for road safety in this country.

Deirdre Costigan:

[15300]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help improve safety for (a) children and (b) other vulnerable road users.

Lilian Greenwood:

On 19 November 2024, Active Travel England and the Department for Transport published guidance for local authorities in England on how to set up and manage a School Streets scheme. The guidance can be viewed online at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-streets-how-to-set-up-and-manage-a-scheme.

The Highway Code was updated in 2022 to improve road safety for cyclists and pedestrians, by strengthening pedestrian priority on pavements and at crossings and introducing the Hierarchy of Road Users, which places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision at the top of the hierarchy. The Highway Code makes it

clear that those in charge of vehicles that can cause the greatest harm in the event of a collision bear the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger they pose to others.

■ Roads: Suicide

Laurence Turner:

[15053]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 14142 on Roads: Suicide, and with reference to the Answer of 12 July 2016 to Question 42206 on Roads: Suicide, for what reason data on incidents logged as suicides or attempted suicides is no longer available.

Lilian Greenwood:

This limitation is not unique to the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and is also the case for all UK roads. National Highways record incidents using operational data and plan interventions based on this. National Highways cannot be confident that every incident it records using operational data was a confirmed suicide or attempted suicide.

■ Transport for Wales: Standards

Shaun Davies:

[14724]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will publish the performance of Transport for Wales trains from Aberystwyth to Birmingham International via Telford in both directions; and what steps she plans to take to help improve performance.

Simon Lightwood:

Contracting of Transport for Wales services is devolved to the Welsh Government. Performance information from across the rail network in Great Britain is published by the Office for Road and Rail (<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/performance/passenger-rail-performance/>); further details are available on operators' websites.

■ Whitchurch (Shropshire) Station: Access

Helen Morgan:

[15073]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has to ensure step-free access to Whitchurch Railway Station.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government is committed to improving the accessibility of the railway and recognises the social and economic benefits this brings to communities.

Given the short time since the general election, I regret I am not yet able to comment on next steps regarding specific stations including Whitchurch station. We are carefully considering the best approach to the Access for All programme and we will provide updates to MPs and other stakeholders in due course.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Colum Eastwood:****[15098]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the number and proportion of farms that will be affected by changes to agricultural property relief in Northern Ireland.

James Murray:

I refer the Honourable Member to the PQ referenced 12861 published on 15th November 2024 at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-11-05/12861>.

The Chancellor also recently wrote to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee, and her letter may be of interest:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/>.

■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances**John Glen:****[14625]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 11 November 2024 to Question 12457 on Music Venues: Business Rates, what the cost of Retail, Hospitality and Leisure business rate relief was in 2024-25.

James Murray:

Discretionary relief is given to Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) properties at 75% for 2024-25, up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business. Based on local authorities' Non-Domestic Rates form (NNDR1) returns, RHL relief is forecast to cost £2.4bn in 2024-25. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will subsequently publish outturn figures, based on data collected by local authorities, which set out the final amount of business rate relief which has been given to businesses over the 2024-25 financial year.

Paul Holmes:**[15243]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her plans for a retail, hospitality and leisure multiplier in 2026-27 and the associated increase in the multiplier for hereditaments over £500,000, whether it is her policy that (a) the two policies will be revenue neutral and net off and (b) there will be a (i) positive or (ii) negative change in net receipts.

James Murray:

As set out at Budget, the government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for high-street retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties from 2026-27. However, this plan to support the high street must be sustainable. That is why we intend to apply a higher rate from 2026-27 on the most valuable properties - those with a Rateable Value of £500,000 and above. These represent less than one per

cent of all properties, but include the majority of large distribution warehouses, including those used by online giants.

The Government will confirm the rates for the new multipliers at Budget 2025, taking account of the outcomes of the 2026 revaluation as well as the broader economic and fiscal context. As set out at Budget, the Government intends for the lower multipliers to be funded by the new higher multiplier.

■ Children's Play: Business Rates

Josh Newbury:

[15064]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with representatives of the indoor play sector on her planned review of business rates.

James Murray:

HM Treasury releases a quarterly record of Ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations. This can be found online:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

At the Autumn Budget, the government published the *Transforming Business Rates* Discussion Paper, which sets out priority areas for reform. This paper invited stakeholders to help co-design a fairer business rates system that supports investment and is fit for the 21st century. Engagement will take place over the coming months with stakeholders who registered interest by the 15 November deadline, and the government is open to receiving further written evidence to transformingbusinessrates@hmtreasury.gov.uk.

■ Financial Services: Euro

Lauren Edwards:

[R] [13971]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with her European Union counterparts on the future of EU denominated clearing in the UK beyond June 2025.

Tulip Siddiq:

The EU took the decision in early 2022 to extend its equivalence decision for UK central counterparties, made under Article 25 of the European Market Infrastructure Regulation, until June 2025. Equivalence decisions are made on a unilateral basis by EU authorities and it is therefore a decision for EU authorities on whether this is extended. The UK Government is committed to maintain and strengthen our high standards for CCP regulation.

■ Migrant Workers: Fees and Charges

Jake Richards:

[15153]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how the money raised from the Immigration Skills Charge has been spent over the last five years.

Darren Jones:

The Immigration Skills Charge is administered by the Home Office and is classified as Trust Statement income. Government departments are required to surrender all Trust Statement income to the Consolidated Fund (CF).

Receipts surrendered to the CF are not ring-fenced for any specific area of government spending but will be used towards general government expenditure, which includes funding for departments' budgetary Supply Estimates approved by Parliament.

Off-payroll Working**Max Wilkinson:**[\[14474\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the effectiveness of IR35 regulations for UK businesses working together in foreign markets.

James Murray:

The off-payroll working reforms have proved effective in reducing non-compliance. As well as preventing tax non-compliance, keeping the reforms in place also protects around £1.5 billion a year of government revenue, which supports strong public finances and helps fund our vital public services.

Revenue and Customs: Bank Services**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[14970\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on what criteria HMRC awards a contract to provide it with banking services; and whether those criteria include (a) the ownership of the bank and (b) whether the Government owns shares in the bank.

James Murray:

The criteria HMRC uses as a contracting authority to award Government banking services are guided by the Cabinet Office Sourcing Playbook, and for clarity includes the following:

- Economic & Financial Standing,
- Security & Accessibility,
- Management Activity,
- Social Value, and
- Service Delivery

Company structure and ownership is assessed as standard practice, during the Economic & Financial Standing evaluation.

Further information on the Award stage criteria for the procurement of the Government banking services is available at: <https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Notice/008993-2024>

■ Revenue and Customs: Translation Services

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14531\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much has been spent by HMRC on (a) translation and (b) interpretation in each of the last 10 years.

James Murray:

HMRC don't hold all of the data required to provide a full response to the question. However, data is available on spend information from April 2020 up to November 2024:

2020/2021 – a) £0.32m b) £0.50m

2021/2022 – a) £0.29m b) £0.53m

2022/2023 – a) £0.45m b) £0.63m

2023/2024 – a) £0.59m b) £0.59m

2024/2025 – a) £0.41m b) £0.30m

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ Government Equalities Office: Ministers' Private Offices

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[9062\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items this was spent.

Anneliese Dodds:

The data requested is not held centrally. The Office for Equality and Opportunity is not a standalone department, and Ministerial offices are located across various Government departments.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme

Steve Darling:

[\[15295\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in each region are experiencing delays in processing their applications for Access to Work grants.

Alison McGovern:

The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Carers' Benefits: Personal Independence Payment

Ruth Cadbury:

[\[15024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what financial support is available to carers who incur additional living costs supporting people whose Personal Independence Payments are stopped upon entering hospital as long-term in-patients.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The primary purpose of Carer's Allowance (CA) is to provide a measure of support and recognition to those whose caring responsibilities mean they are unable to work full time. In order to receive CA, the person being cared for must be in receipt of a disability benefit at the appropriate rate, this is one of the ways we establish that care is required.

Where the adult disability benefit ceases as a result of the cared for person entering a hospital for more than four weeks, CA will also cease. This is to avoid a double provision of public funds to provide care for this individual. A period of 28 days is allowed to determine whether this situation is long term before the relevant benefit payments stop.

However, carers may be entitled to further support. Local Authorities have duties to support people caring for their family and friends. The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to deliver a wide range of sustainable, high-quality care and support services, including support for carers.

Local authorities are also required to undertake Carer's Assessments to support people caring for their family and friends who appear to have a need for support and to meet their eligible needs on request from them.

I would encourage carers who are not receiving a means-tested benefit already to check on Gov.UK to see whether they may be entitled to any other benefits, which may include support with the additional costs of caring. Advice can also be sought from organisations such as Carers UK and Citizens Advice.

■ Children: Maintenance

David Chadwick:

[\[14887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of moving Child Maintenance Service payment calculations to a monthly Universal Credit style system.

Andrew Western:

Information about the paying parent's gross income is taken directly from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for the latest tax year available. This allows calculations to be made quickly and accurately. Any income subject to income tax, including bonuses and overtime received by an employed paying parent, is included within their gross weekly income when calculating a child maintenance liability.

The Child Maintenance Service is designed to deliver stability by reviewing the liability annually, unless a substantial change in income has occurred. The 25% tolerance for in-year changes ensures liabilities remain consistent, and both parents can factor this into their financial planning, providing ongoing stability for the child.

In light of societal changes since it was last evaluated, a review of the calculation is currently ongoing to ensure it is fit for purpose and fair for both parents.

■ **Civil Servants: Political Impartiality**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[15237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 4 October 2024 to Question 4699 on Civil Servants: Political Impartiality, whether there have been disciplinary investigations of potential breaches of political impartiality restrictions by campaigning in elections by officials in her Department in the last 18 months.

Andrew Western:

The information you have requested is not on a central system. Gathering this information would require input from team leaders and will incur disproportionate costs.

Within the Civil Service Code and re-iterated within the DWP's Standards of Behaviour policy, is the statement that all Civil Servants must consistently demonstrate honesty, integrity, objectivity and impartiality in their conduct.

■ **Department for Work and Pensions: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[14479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's transparency data entitled DWP and CMG: spending over £500, July 2024, published on 3 September 2024, for what reason her Department spent (a) £533 at Back Market, (b) £580 at Bright Horizons, (c) £1259 at Cheltenham Mowers, (d) £699 and £599 at Currys, (e) £520 at Elya Catering, (f) £1,167 at Happy Days South West, (g) £555 at Moss Brows, (h) £527 at Argos, (i) £970 at Fitness Superstore and (j) multiple amounts with Trainline.

Andrew Western:

All these transactions would fall into the 'Barrier Spend' Category which is where the Flexible Support Fund (FSF) should be considered to remove barriers that are a) preventing claimants from moving closer to the job market, b) hindering a claimant's search for work, c) preventing a claimant from accepting a firm job offer or moving into self-employment or d) preventing them from increasing their earnings, either through increased hours or job change.

Examples of 'barrier spend' may include smart clothing for interviews or to start work, essential work wear (excluding safety wear as it is the employer's duty to provide this), essential tools and equipment for specialist roles/sectors (ie chef's knives). This

could also include travel costs where the inability to afford travel is preventing access to an employment opportunity.

The Trainline transactions are all for the purchase of 'travel expenses'. Trainline often offers the most price effective ways of travel. FSF travel payments can be made in advance if it removes the barrier of arriving to and sustaining employment. This includes customers taking on additional job(s) or additional hours in current job(s). Most of these transactions were for a monthly pass to allow someone to start employment within London. After the first monthly wage, they would then be able to sustain their own travel costs.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[14480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to her Department's transparency data entitled DWP and CMG: spending over £500, August 2024, published on 24 October 2024, for what reason her Department spent (a) £1,249 at John Lewis, (b) £868 and £579 at Sam Turner Sons, (c) £679, £899 and £1,139 at Screwfix, (d) £1,436 at Next Day Catering, (e) £589 and £534 at Halfords, (f) £1,099 at Laurastar SA, (g) £629 on Singer Outlet, (h) 11 amounts with SE Online and (i) £999, £619, £619, £557 and £504 at Argos.

Andrew Western:

All these transactions would fall into the 'Barrier Spend' Category which is where the Flexible Support Fund (FSF) should be considered to remove barriers that are; preventing claimants from moving closer to the job market, hindering a claimant's search for work, preventing a claimant from accepting a firm job offer or moving into self-employment or preventing them from increasing their earnings, through increased hours or job change.

Examples of 'barrier spend' may include smart clothing for interviews or to start work, essential work wear (excluding safety wear as it is the employer's duty to provide this), essential tools and equipment for specialist roles/sectors (ie chef's knives). This could also include travel costs where the inability to afford travel is preventing access to an employment opportunity.

The SE online transactions are all for the purchase of 'Travel expenses' from the supplier 'Southeastern Railways'. FSF travel payments can be made in advance if it removes the barrier of arriving to, and sustaining, employment. This includes customers taking on additional job(s) or additional hours in current job(s).

■ Employment Schemes: Care Leavers

Helen Hayes:

[\[15223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to provide targeted employment support for unemployed care leavers.

Andrew Western:

We recognise the challenges care leavers face as they move out of the care system and are working closely with Department for Education to ensure care leavers can

access the right skills, opportunities, and wider support, to move towards sustained employment and career progression.

Under the new Youth Guarantee, all young people between 18-21 years will be able to access support to enter employment, education and training opportunities. This includes Care Leavers who we know are more likely than their peers to not be in education, employment or training and may benefit from more tailored support to support their transition as they leave the care provided by their Local Authority.

We are working closely with the Department for Education on the design of the Youth Guarantee, which is in the early stages of development. The Autumn Budget announced that we will establish eight Youth Guarantee Trailblazer areas to test new ways of supporting young people into employment, education or training, by bringing together and enhancing existing programmes in partnership with local areas. Further details will be set out in the up-coming 'Get Britain Working' White Paper.

Meanwhile, care leavers who are in receipt of Universal Credit and available for work will continue to be supported by the DWP Youth Offer. This provides individually tailored work coach support to young people aged 16-24 who are in the Universal Credit Intensive Work Search group and can include access to specialist work coaches, for example the Youth Employability Coaches, which help address complex barriers to work, as well as the partnership led Youth Hub network.

We have also taken steps to improve the career opportunities of care leavers through government recruitment schemes such as the Civil Service Care Leaver Internship, the Social Mobility Apprenticeship Scheme and our ongoing partnership with Movement to Work. These are all designed to consider challenges disadvantaged young people face as they take their first steps on the career ladder.

■ Employment: Down's Syndrome

Mike Amesbury:

[\[15288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to improve employment rates for adults with Down's syndrome.

Alison McGovern:

The Government is committed to supporting disabled people and people with health conditions, including Down's syndrome, with their employment journey.

The Government has ambitious plans around employment, including disability employment, set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper, published this week, and the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill and the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill. We know that there is more to do to address the labour market challenges of today and tomorrow.

A fully inclusive labour market that enables disabled people and people with health conditions to have access to the same opportunities as everyone else to the benefits of work is crucial to meeting our ambition for an 80% employment rate. 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.

There are a number of initiatives to support individuals to stay in work and get back into work, these 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. As part of the Get Britain Working plans the Government is launching *Keep Britain Working*, an independent review into the role of UK employers in reducing health-related inactivity and to promote healthy and inclusive workplaces.

■ **Local Housing Allowance: Temporary Accommodation**

Kim Johnson:

[14991]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of not increasing Local Housing Allowance rates in 2025-26 on the number of households requiring temporary accommodation.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Government recognises that homelessness levels are too high and there are a range of contributing factors. We will look carefully at these issues as we develop our strategy for ending homelessness.

When reviewing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the Secretary of State considered a range of factors, including the private rental situation, the Government's goals and missions, and the wider fiscal context and engaged with MHCLG.

DWP currently spends around £30bn annually on housing support and the April 2024 increase to LHA costs approximately £7bn over 5 years.

For those who need further support, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available from local authorities. DHPs can be paid to those entitled to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit who face a shortfall in meeting their housing costs.

As announced at the Budget, funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233m compared to this year (2024/25). The increased spending will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping. This brings the total spend to nearly a billion pounds in 2025/26.

■ Maternity Allowance: Foreign Nationals

Sir John Hayes:

[14904]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of Maternity Allowance claimants were not UK citizens in the last three years.

Andrew Western:

DWP does not hold data on the number of claimants that were not UK citizens when claiming Maternity Allowance. This is because the qualifying conditions for Maternity Allowance are based on a woman's recent employment and earnings, not on their nationality.

For the year 2023/24 the caseload for Maternity Allowance was 48,000. For more information on caseloads, please see [Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-expenditure-and-caseload-tables-2024).

■ Motor Vehicles: Older People

Sarah Owen:

[R] [14967]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of enabling people over 65 who are not eligible for the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to access mobility vehicle support.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Disability Living Allowance is aimed at providing additional help with the extra costs of disability to people who are severely disabled early, or relatively early, in life and who as a result, have had fewer opportunities to work, earn and save. Those who become disabled, or develop mobility needs, after reaching the age of 65 will have had no disadvantage on grounds of their disability during their working lives. It is normal for pensions and benefits systems to contain different provisions for people at different stages of their lives, because the help provided needs to reflect varying priorities and circumstances.

We will keep the policies of the department under review, to ensure they meet current needs.

■ Pension Credit: Birmingham Northfield

Laurence Turner:

[15084]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in Birmingham Northfield constituency have (a) applied for and (b) been awarded Pension Credit since 29 July 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

Data on how many Pension Credit applications we received by the Department between 1 April 2024 and 22 September 2024 was recently published on gov.uk. This data is published at National level. It is not currently possible to provide application data at a sub-national or constituency level. [Weekly Pension Credit claims received from 1 April 2024 to 1 September 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/weekly-pension-credit-claims-received-from-1-april-2024-to-1-september-2024)

On 28 October 2024, the Department announced updated Pension Credit applications and award statistics will be published on 28 November 2024. This publication will provide Pension Credit applications and also awards statistics since 1 April 2024, again at national level.

[Published Statistics Announcement - Pension Credit Applications and awards November 2024](#)

■ **Pensioners: Social Security Benefits**

Steve Darling:

[14521]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to increase the number of eligible older people claiming (a) Pension Credit and (b) other pension-aged benefits.

Emma Reynolds:

Our communications campaign to promote Pension Credit has been running since September. The latest phase of the campaign takes a new approach targeting friends and family - asking them to tell people they know about Pension Credit, encourage them to check their eligibility, as well as help them make a claim. It will appear on TV, radio, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, on YouTube and on advertising screens, including on GP and Post Office screens.

We continue to focus on encouraging pensioners to apply for Pension Credit before the 21 December 2024, which is the last date for making a successful backdated claim for Pension Credit in order to receive a Winter Fuel Payment or the pension age winter heating payment in Scotland.

The Government has also written to around 11.5 million pensioners about the change to the eligibility rules for the Winter Fuel Payment and informing them about Pension Credit. We have also directly targeted 120,000 pensioner households in receipt of Housing Benefit, identified as being potentially entitled to, but not currently claiming, Pension Credit.

As part of our wider stakeholder outreach campaign and in order to get the message out through as many channels as possible, we have engaged with key stakeholders and partners, including other government departments, local councils, housing associations, community groups, local libraries and service providers as well as charities and third sector organisations.

The Government is committed to ensuring that older people receive the support they are entitled to. DWP uses a wide range of channels including information on Gov.uk, in letters, leaflets and via telephone to communicate information to older people about pensioner benefits.

■ Statutory Sick Pay

Melanie Ward:

[\[14837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to (a) review and (b) consult on the rate of statutory sick pay in the Spring 2025 Spending Review.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is paid entirely by employers and so the rate is not subject to departmental spending decisions that will be made at the Spring 2025 Spending Review.

The rate of SSP is reviewed as part of the annual uprating process. Subject to Parliamentary approval the rate of SSP will increase in line with the September 2024 CPI rate of 1.7% to £118.75 per week from April 2025.

Through the Employment Rights Bill, introduced on 10th October 2024, the Government has removed the SSP waiting period and extended eligibility to those earning below the Lower Earnings Limit. The changes introduced within the Bill will mean that for some lower earners, including those earning below the Lower Earnings Limit, their rate of SSP will be calculated as a percentage of their earnings instead of the flat weekly rate.

The Government is currently consulting on what this percentage should be, so that it provides a fair earnings replacement when these employees need to take time off work. This consultation will close on 4th December 2024.

■ Unemployment: Newbury

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[15087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to reduce unemployment among people aged 50 to 65 in Newbury constituency.

Alison McGovern:

Improving employment outcomes for people of all ages will play an important part in the government's economic growth and opportunity missions. We are reforming jobcentres, so they match people, including older workers, to the right job and combine employment skills and career focused support.

This new jobs and careers service will transform our ability to support people into work and help people get on at work across Great Britain. We will set out more details about this and other labour market reforms through our forthcoming White Paper to Get Britain Working.

The Government is delivering a package of support to help older workers, including those in Newbury, to remain in and return to work.

Our jobcentres provide tailored support for older workers, including a review of health, finances and skills. In addition, over seventy 50Plus Champions are working in Districts across Great Britain, to drive local activity for older workers.

■ **Universal Credit: Foreign Nationals**

Richard Tice:

[\[14782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of Universal Credit claimants are not UK citizens.

Andrew Western:

The Department checks immigration status when assessing eligibility for Universal Credit, but the requested statistics are not readily available. We are, however, exploring the feasibility of developing suitable statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish customers Universal Credit claimants.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Final Negotiations to develop an International Treaty on Plastic Pollution

Minister for Water and Flooding (Emma Hardy):

[\[HCWS247\]](#)

Plastic pollution is one of the greatest environmental challenges the planet faces. The world produces 400 million tonnes of plastic waste each year. Scientists predict there will be a threefold increase in the amount of plastic entering the ocean between 2016 and 2040. A global agreement on plastic pollution is urgently needed to coordinate a response to this complex issue.

UNEA Resolution 5/14 initiated discussions to agree an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. An intergovernmental negotiating committee was established with the ambition of completing its work by the end of 2024. The fifth and final planned meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee is being held in Busan, the Republic of Korea, from 25 November to 1 December 2024.

The draft Treaty under discussion includes provisions on production and consumption of primary plastic polymers; problematic products and chemicals of concern in plastic; product design; waste management; emissions and releases of plastic into the environment; existing plastic pollution; just transition; financial assistance, technology transfer and capacity building; implementation and compliance; national plans; reporting; effectiveness evaluation and monitoring; awareness raising, education and research; health and final provisions on processes necessary for the establishment of an international treaty.

The Government has an ambition to catalyse the transition to a circular economy and the treaty is one of the key levers available to us to achieve the systems-wide changes needed to make that a reality.

Plastic waste has for too long littered our streets, polluted Britain's waterways and threatened our wildlife. This Government is committed to cleaning up Britain and cracking down on plastic waste. We will roll out extended producer responsibility to incentivise businesses to cut plastic packaging and the Deposit Return Scheme to incentivise consumers to recycle.

The UK is an active member of the High Ambition Coalition, a group of 67 countries seeking an ambitious treaty that will end plastic pollution by 2040 by taking a full-lifecycle approach. At INC-5 we will continue to take a leadership role and work closely with other countries to push for agreement of an ambitious and effective treaty in Busan. The science tells us that to be effective we must take action at all stages of the plastics lifecycle from production to waste management and emissions.

In developing the UK negotiating approach we have worked closely with Devolved Governments and UK Overseas Territories as well as a wide range of stakeholders,

including producers, manufacturers, retailers, eNGOs and academia. On 6 November, I hosted a roundtable on the treaty for leading businesses and financial organisations ahead of His Majesty's International Sustainability Reception. Participants of the roundtable agreed a statement calling for an ambitious treaty that will create a more harmonised regulatory environment and a level playing field.

The UK remains committed to securing an agreement in Busan as a critical step towards ensuring the global action needed to end plastic pollution by 2040.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ World Health Organization Pandemic Accord Negotiations and the International Health Regulations

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention (Andrew Gwynne): [\[HCWS246\]](#)

I would like to update the House regarding the most recent round of negotiations on the legally binding international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response – the Pandemic Accord – at the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the outcome of negotiations to agree targeted amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR). The most recent round of Pandemic Accord negotiations took place 4 – 15 November.

Pandemic Accord Negotiations:

As outlined in my statement of 9 September 2024, infectious diseases do not respect borders. The risk of another pandemic is very real – a question of “when” rather than “if”. All countries would benefit from strengthening our collective ability to prevent, prepare for and respond to the next pandemic threat. The Pandemic Accord is an important opportunity to establish a framework for a comprehensive new global approach to pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Co-operation with countries around the world does not compromise our sovereignty; it strengthens our security and no amendments to the Accord have been proposed or agreed that would give the WHO powers to impose domestic public health decisions on the UK. The UK Government remains committed to negotiating a Pandemic Accord that enhances UK and global health security and is firmly in the UK's national interest.

Member states of the WHO have until the World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2025 to reach an agreement on the Pandemic Accord, following an extension agreed at the WHA in May 2024. Member States have reached provisional agreement on over 70% of the text, while negotiating on the principle that ‘nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’. At the latest round of negotiations, provisional agreement was reached on the issues of regulatory systems strengthening, and sustainable and geographically diversified local production.

On Monday November 11, a discussion was held by Member States on whether to call a special session of the WHA in December with the aim of agreeing the Accord before the

new year. Given the number of outstanding issues on which consensus is yet to be found, including on prevention, One Health, technology transfer, the pathogen access and benefit sharing mechanism, and the legal form and status of the Accord, Member States chose not to call a special session in December. However, the Government remains committed to working with others to secure an effective agreement as soon as possible and will continue to work towards the May 2025 deadline, with the option to conclude negotiations earlier if this is deemed feasible while still delivering a good agreement.

As negotiations continue, we will keep working closely with the Devolved Administrations, Crown Dependencies, and the Overseas Territories to ensure the process reflects their interests, and we will keep engaging with civil society organisations, institutions, academia, and the private sector. The latest public version of the text and other relevant documents can be found online here: <https://apps.who.int/gb/inb/index.html>.

The International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR):

The IHR are an important, legally binding technical framework that helps to prevent and protect against the international spread of disease. Amendments to the IHR, were agreed by countries at the World Health Assembly that took place from 27 May to 1 June 2024. The amendments aimed to reflect lessons learned from recent global health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, including by improving information sharing and collaboration for public health emergency response. On 19 September 2024, the WHO Director General formally notified all States Parties of the official amendments adopted by the WHA. From this date of notification, the UK has 10 months to complete the domestic review of IHR amendments and then notify the WHO Director General whether we wish to reject or reserve on any or all the amendments by 19 July 2025. Adopted amendments (that we have not rejected) would then come into force for the UK in September 2025.

DHSC officials have been leading work across Government to confirm the implications of the amendments for the UK. Officials are also working with their counterparts in the Devolved Administrations, our Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies to ensure all relevant territories are considered. This analysis will inform the decision about which amendments are in the UK's national interest and whether we wish to reject or reserve on any or all of them before the July 2025 deadline. No decision has yet been made.

In parallel with the approach to the Pandemic Accord negotiations, respect for each country's sovereignty has been a fundamental element of the IHR amendments. The UK Government will of course only formally adopt amendments to the IHR that are in the UK national interest.

The latest available full text of the agreed IHR amendments can be found online here: https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA77/A77_ACONF14-en.pdf.

Given the significance of the Pandemic Accord negotiations, the IHR amendments, and their potential to make our country stronger and safer, I am committed to keeping the House updated at relevant and important junctures.