



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 13 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:27 P.M., 13 December 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

CABINET OFFICE

■ 10 Downing Street: Social Media

Mr Richard Holden: [\[18214\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether there are plans for 10 Downing Street to communicate via the Blue Sky social media channel.

Georgia Gould:

The Government continues to look at ways to make sure the government's digital communications better reflect the way the public now consumes information online.

■ Prime Minister: Special Advisers

Mr Richard Holden: [\[18212\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many special advisers in 10 Downing Street cover foreign affairs.

Georgia Gould:

Special adviser appointments are published annually.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Cultural Renewal Taskforce

Mr James Frith: [\[18168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of re-establishing the Cultural Renewal taskforce.

Chris Bryant:

The Cultural Renewal Taskforce was set up to develop guidance for the safe reopening of DCMS sectors following the coronavirus pandemic. There are no plans at present to re-establish the Taskforce.

■ Rented Housing: Registration

Steve Darling: [\[18244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many full-time-equivalent civil servants are working on the short-term let registration scheme.

Chris Bryant:

Four, plus a percentage of time from senior colleagues who provide oversight, and from analytical, legal, and digital specialists.

DEFENCE**■ Defence Equipment: Decommissioning**

David Reed: [\[18311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the planners of the Strategic Defence Review were notified of the intention to retire (a) HMS Albion, (b) HMS Bulwark and (c) other assets.

Luke Pollard:

The decision to formally decommission HM Ships ALBION and BULWARK reflects the decision of the last Government. This has been in full consultation with the Service Chiefs and the SDR reviewers and neither ship could realistically be put to sea again ahead of their planned decommissioning in 2032 and 2033 respectively.

■ Defence: Procurement

James Cartlidge: [\[17848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has instituted a freeze in his Department on new procurement to satisfy Urgent Capability Requirements.

Maria Eagle:

The Department has not been told to put a hold on new procurement in this financial year.

■ Israel Defense Forces

Chris Law: [\[18144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16506 on Israel Defence Forces, whether (a) UK-Israel military cooperation and (b) the sale of arms was discussed during the meeting between the Chief of the Defence Staff and his Israeli counterparts on 25 November 2024.

Luke Pollard:

The topics mentioned in the hon. Member's question were not raised during the meeting between Lieutenant General Halevi and the Chief of the Defence Staff on 25 November.

In terms of the subject of discussions, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 27 November 2024, to Question 16506.

Attachments:

1. Israel Defense Forces [16506 - Israel Defense Forces.docx]

■ Military Strategic Headquarters

David Reed: [\[18323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many net additional full time equivalent roles will be required to staff the Military Strategic Headquarters; and at what cost.

Luke Pollard:

While the design, headcount and organisational structure of the future Military Strategic Head Quarters (MSHQ) is still in the development stage, it is expected that the establishment of the MSHQ will be cost neutral and contained within the overall Defence budget.

■ **Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Expenditure**

James Cartlidge:[\[17841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost has been of (a) capital and (b) non-capital expenditure on (i) HMS Albion, (ii) HMS Bulwark, (iii) HMS Northumberland, (iv) RFA Wave Knight and (v) RFA Wave Ruler in each of the last five financial years.

Maria Eagle:

A breakdown of the costs requested is set out below.

	19/20		20/21		21/22	
	Capital	Non-Capital	Capital	Non-Capital	Capital	Non-Capital
£M	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M
HMS Northumberland	-	-	-	-	-	-
HMS Albion	0.3	-	0.4	-	0.4	-
HMS Bulwark	-	-	-	-	-	1.2
RFA Wave Knight	2.0	1.4	3.9	9.9	1.6	-
RFA Wave Ruler	2.5	0.1	2.0	- 0.1	2.0	-
	22/23		23/24			
	Non-Capital	Capital	Non-Capital	Capital		
	£M	£M	£M	£M		
HMS Northumberland	-	-	-	5.5		
HMS Albion	-	-	-	-		
HMS Bulwark	-	28.0	-	28.3		

	22/23		23/24	
RFA Wave Knight	2.0	-	0.9	0.1
RFA Wave Ruler	2.7	-	2.4	-

■ Strategic Defence Review

David Reed:

[R] [\[18312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8456 on Strategic Defence Review, whether the artificial intelligence software being used to assess responses to the Strategic Defence Review was sourced from UK programmers down to lowest sub contract level.

Luke Pollard:

The Ministry of Defence is working with several technology providers in Defence's digital ecosystem to support the Strategic Defence Review (SDR). This allowed the team to leverage modern business practices and technologies to analyse a wide range of responses. The Department has rigorous controls in place to secure and use data in accordance with regulatory and ethical guidelines, to which SDR activities, including AI, aligned.

■ Undocumented Migrants

David Reed:

[\[18318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on (a) transporting and (b) housing illegal migrants.

Luke Pollard:

The Ministry of Defence regularly liaises with the Home Office on a range of issues, but there are no plans for Defence to undertake actions in relation to migration in the UK currently outside the Afghan relocations work.

EDUCATION

■ Care Leavers: Education and Training

David Williams:

[\[18263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking through the Youth Guarantee to support care leavers at risk of dropping out of (a) education and (b) training.

Janet Daby:

The department's vision for a Youth Guarantee is to ensure all young people aged 18 to 21 have access to training or employment support to prevent them from becoming

economically inactive before their careers have even begun. This includes young people leaving care.

From spring 2025, the department will launch trailblazers in eight mayoral authorities to design and test the Youth Guarantee. As the new framework for supporting young people into further learning and onto fulfilling work, it will guarantee tailored support to 18 to 21 year olds who need it, to ensure they can access quality training opportunities, an apprenticeship or employment support. The department will ensure that trailblazers test how the Youth Guarantee can best support groups that face additional barriers, including care leavers.

The Youth Guarantee offers will sit alongside other support available to care leavers who are particularly vulnerable to not being in education, employment or training. For example, care leavers are a priority group for a 16-19 bursary if they are studying in further education and up to £1,200 a year can be paid by their college.

In addition, care leavers who enter higher education are eligible for a statutory bursary of £2,000 from their local authority and care leavers who take up an apprenticeship are eligible for a £3,000 bursary.

■ Children: Communication Skills

David Williams:

[\[18261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support (a) language and (b) communication skills of children under three.

Stephen Morgan:

Early language skills are vital to enable children to thrive in the early years and later in life.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework sets the standards and requirements that all early years providers must follow to ensure every child has the best start in life and is prepared for school. The three prime areas of learning and development within the EYFS are particularly important for building a strong foundation, with communication and language being one of these prime areas.

Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children's progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. The assessment requirements in the EYFS includes the progress check at age two and the EYFS profile, both of which involve reviewing a child's development in communication and language.

To support early language skills, the department is providing funding for settings to undertake evidence-based continuous professional development programmes, including those focused on speech, language and communication, via a national network of Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs. Additionally, we are providing training through the Professional Development Programme and the online early years child development training, both of which include a specific module focused on early language. Furthermore, we are providing training for up to 7,000 special educational

needs coordinators that will help children with speech, language and communication needs and support earlier identification of needs.

In partnership with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), we have also developed the early language identification measure, which supports local area health and early years partnerships to work in a more integrated way, helping to identify speech, language and communication needs as early as possible. We are also enabling Family Hubs to train practitioners to support families with the home learning environment and to help parents learn new skills, including providing effective support for children's speech and communication.

Furthermore, we are developing programmes to support early language development, such as the department's joint home learning campaign with the DHSC, Little Moments Together, which encourages parents to chat, play and read with their children, and provides helpful tips on activities on learning to talk. The campaign can be accessed here:

<https://campaignresources.dhsc.gov.uk/campaigns/better-health-start-for-life/better-health-start-for-life-home-learning-environment-2024/>.

We are also working in partnership with NHS England to deliver the Early Language Support for Every Child pathfinders for 2-11 year-olds, working with partners to deliver an Early Language Local Innovation and Excellence programme which includes implementation of published speech and language communication pathway guidance and an early language identification measure. We are also publishing early years special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) assessment guidance and resources, which includes practical advice, tools and downloadable resources. These will help educators assess children with SEND, capture their voice, and set learning targets. It includes a dedicated tool for communication and interaction.

David Williams:

[18262]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the potential impact of workforce shortages in the early years sector on pre-school children's language and communication development.

Stephen Morgan:

Early language skills are vital to enable children to thrive in their early years and later in life, including in all aspects of their later attainment in school. To support early language skills, the department is investing over £20 million in the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme. NELI is an evidence-based programme targeting reception aged children needing extra support with their speech and language development and is proven to help them make four months of additional progress, increasing to seven months additional progress for those eligible for free school meals. In July 2024 the department announced funded support for the 11,100 schools registered for the NELI programme, two thirds of English state primaries, for the 2024/25 academic year.

To further support early language skills, the department is also delivering the early years education recovery programme. This includes providing funding for settings to

undertake evidence-based continuous professional development programmes, including those focussed on speech, language and communication, via a national network of early years stronger practice hubs. The department is also supporting training through the professional development programme and the online early years child development training, both of which include a specific module focused on early language. Additionally, training for up to 7,000 special educational needs coordinators will help children with speech, language and communication needs and support earlier identification of those needs.

The department is working in partnership with NHS England to deliver the Early Language Support for Every Child pathfinders for 2 to 11-years olds and is working with partners to deliver an early language local innovation and excellence programme which includes implementation of published speech and language communication pathway guidance and an early language identification measure.

The department is publishing early years special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) assessment guidance and resources, including practical advice, tools, and downloadable resources. These will help educators assess children with SEND, capture their voice and set learning targets, featuring a dedicated tool for communication and interaction.

This government sees the early years sector as more than just childcare, it is central to our Opportunity Mission to give every child the best start in life. We are determined to create a sea change in the approach to early years, focusing on high-quality early education, celebrating and supporting early years careers, and embedding the sector into the wider education system. We are supporting the sector to attract talented staff and childminders by creating conditions for improved recruitment, alongside programmes to better utilise the skills of the existing workforce and make early years careers as accessible and rewarding as possible.

Our key interventions include a national recruitment campaign urging the public to 'Do something BIG' and start a career working with small children, testing whether financial incentives and a childminder start-up grant in early years boost recruitment, and Skills Bootcamps for the early years which lead to an accelerated apprenticeship.

These interventions are in addition to a package of changes to the early years statutory framework and new childminder flexibilities which give providers more choice over how they operate, as well as uplifting funding rates to support providers in dealing with the costs they face, including staffing costs.

■ Children: Down's Syndrome

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[17747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of parent-delivered early language interventions for young children with Down Syndrome.

Catherine McKinnell:

Parents and carers have an important role to play in the learning and development of their child. Practitioners should work jointly with parents and carers to support a child's speech, language and communication needs in the home environment.

The department is strengthening the evidence base of what works to improve inclusive practice in mainstream settings, which will also consider the important role that parents and caregivers can play in defining and implementing these interventions. The department has also published guidance for local authorities about the expectations around the support they should make available through Family Hubs. This could include, for example, special education needs and disabilities appropriate parenting programmes, peer support for parents, respite provision and support for siblings or specialist health services. In some cases, parent-carer forums and respite provision may be located at the Family Hub, where appropriate.

This should be further supported by statutory guidance published by the NHS in May 2023 requiring that every Integrated Care Board (ICB) must identify a member of its board to lead on supporting the ICB to perform its functions effectively in the interest of people with Down syndrome.

Education: Antisemitism**David Pinto-Duschinsky:**[\[18336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the press notice entitled £7 million to tackle antisemitism in education confirmed, published by her Department on 7 October 2024, how her Department plans to use this funding in (a) Hendon and (b) the UK.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government have confirmed £7 million of funding to tackle antisemitism in education in the wake of the unacceptable rise of antisemitism across the country. £500,000 has already been awarded to the University Jewish Chaplaincy to continue providing welfare support for Jewish students on university campuses to ensure Jewish students feel safe and supported.

A £4.15 million Tackling Antisemitism in Education procurement is currently live and is open for tender applications until 16 January 2025. This procurement seeks to equip education staff from across England with training and resources to build confidence through educating about antisemitism, helping to prevent it. This procurement consists of three elements, including a scholarship for professionals and action learning network, training and resources for universities, and training and resources for schools and colleges. Delivery will commence from spring 2025. The delivery will be nationwide, but the successful supplier(s) will prioritise and target those areas and settings which require support and training most to improve their understanding and ability to deal with antisemitism.

The remaining funding will go towards a future innovation fund to help tackle and build resilience to antisemitism and hate, likely focusing on how to identify and

appropriately tackle misinformation and disinformation. Further details on the innovation fund will be provided in due course.

■ Mathematics: Qualifications

Ian Sollom:

[\[18254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of encouraging the Joint Council for Qualifications to include the Level 3 Core Maths qualification within the A level and Level 3 results documents to ensure their profile is aligned with similar sized qualifications.

Ian Sollom:

[\[18255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to (a) increase awareness and (b) raise the status with (i) universities and (ii) employers of the Level 3 Core Maths qualification.

Catherine McKinnell:

High and rising school standards, including in mathematics, are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best life chances. Our Core Maths suite of qualifications is designed to prepare students for the mathematical demands of university study, employment and life by strengthening and building on students' existing skills with a focus on using and applying mathematics. In the 2024/2025 academic year, a Core Maths premium of £900 per year per student was introduced into the 16-19 funding formula to support students' participation in programmes with core mathematics qualifications. Guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-core-maths-premium/16-to-19-funding-core-maths-premium#eligible>.

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. The review will seek to deliver an excellent foundation in reading, writing and maths and will look at ensuring all young people aged 16-19 have access to rigorous, high value qualifications and training.

Results data is published by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) annually. Departmental officials have discussed with JCQ what data they might report for summer 2025 and beyond. While JCQ regularly review what and how they publish their data, they are an independent organisation, and this is a matter for them to consider.

The department funds the Advanced Mathematics Support Programme (AMSP), to promote the value of, and discuss positive encouragement for, level 3 mathematics and Core Maths in particular. The AMSP monitors engagement with the programme and provides support to increase the uptake of Core Maths.

■ Science: Primary Education

Mr James Frith:

[18167]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the curriculum framework for primary school science as part of her Department's curriculum review.

Catherine McKinnell:

The Curriculum and Assessment Review is being independently conducted by a group of education leaders (the review group) and chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The terms of reference were published in July and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>.

As part of its work, the review group is undertaking a review of the existing national curriculum, including primary science. The role of the review group is to consider the evidence, the responses to the call for evidence and widespread engagement, and then make recommendations for the government to consider.

The review group will publish an interim report early in 2025 setting out its interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work and publish its final report with recommendations in autumn 2025.

■ Special Educational Needs: Rural Areas

Cameron Thomas:

[18331]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will take steps to ensure that additional funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in mainstream schools is equitably distributed in rural areas.

Catherine McKinnell:

Local authorities are responsible for allocating additional funding from their high needs budgets to mainstream schools for their pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The department is providing an increase of almost £1 billion for high needs budgets in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Gloucestershire County Council is being allocated a provisional funding amount of over £104.8 million in the 2025/26 financial year through the high needs national funding formula (NFF), which is an 8.3% increase per head of their 2 to 18 year old population, on their equivalent 2024/25 financial year NFF allocation.

■ Young People: Autism

Lincoln Jopp:

[17718]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will accept Ambitious about Autism's invitation to meet their Youth Network.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department works closely with stakeholders representing the autistic community, including Ambitious about Autism, to understand the issues faced by autistic children and young people and develop solutions.

We know that consistent, meaningful co-production is vital to improving the experiences of all children, young people and their families, and we are committed to listening to and working with autistic children and young people. As such, I would be happy to consider an invitation to meet with Ambitious about Autism's youth network.

We have recently announced the establishment of a Neurodivergence Task and Finish group which will bring together a group of leading neurodiversity experts who will work closely with the department. The group will work to improve inclusivity and expertise in mainstream settings, in a way that works for neurodivergent children and young people.

This group will carefully listen to the views and experiences of neurodivergent children and young people. The department is eager to hear their views on how we can improve systems and the support that is offered to them to ensure we make positive changes.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**■ Carbon Capture and Storage: Tees Valley****John Milne:**[\[17462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many projects in the Teesside carbon capture and storage cluster are (a) existing projects being retrofitted and (b) new developments.

Sarah Jones:

The Teesside Carbon Capture and storage cluster includes the projects mentioned below:

NEP (Transport and Storage Network) - New network with Northern Endurance Partnership

Net Zero Teesside (NZE) - New dispatchable gas-fired power station with carbon capture technology

H2 Teesside - New build CCUS-enabled hydrogen production plant

BOC - Existing industrial plant owned by BOC looking to add CCUS technology

The NEP and NZE are included in the current funding envelope related to the funding announcement made in October 2024.

H2 Teesside and BOC are currently a part of the Project Negotiation List (PNL). Following a period of assessment and due diligence, the Track 1 PNL was determined and published in March 2023. Projects that were most likely to be

delivered within our required timeframes and budget and storage capacity were selected.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Fisheries: EU Countries

Stephen Gethins: [\[18560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the future of EU fishing rights in the UK's exclusive economic zone.

Daniel Zeichner:

We have not held discussions with the EU on future access arrangements but have signalled willingness to listen to their proposals.

■ Flood Control

Richard Tice: [\[17675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what national framework contractors have been appointed for flood management; and how and on what criteria they were appointed.

Emma Hardy:

The information requested can be found in the attached document.

Attachments:

1. Attachment for PQ 17675 [PQ 17675 attachment.pdf]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Armenia: Foreign Relations

Aphra Brandreth: [\[18010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what his Department's planned timetable is for concluding negotiations on the UK-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement; and what steps he is taking to support Armenia in closer engagement with the West.

Stephen Doughty:

I reiterated this government's steadfast support and respect for Armenia to Foreign Minister Mirzoyan on 11 October. We will continue to support Armenia through our programming engagement to develop its governance and rule of law, our defence cooperation and our trade and economic ties.

Deepening our trading relationships is an important part of this government's Growth Mission. The Department for Business and Trade is currently developing a new Trade Strategy and the FCDO is reviewing the Political Cooperation Agreement

negotiations which were underway when the election was called. Next steps for the UK-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement are part of this work.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**

James Cartlidge:

[\[17843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the oral Answer by the Minister for the Armed Forces on 2 December 2024, Official Report, Column 27, if he will make an estimate of the cost to his Department of implementing the proposed UK-Mauritius treaty on the Chagos Islands excluding the Government-to-Government payment.

Stephen Doughty:

This Agreement will be underpinned by a financial package which will support a new era of economic partnership between the UK and Mauritius and demonstrate the commitment of both parties to support the welfare of Chagossian communities. Financial obligations arising from this agreement, including departmental budgetary responsibilities, will be managed responsibly within the Government's fiscal framework.

■ **British Overseas Territories: Companies**

Rachel Gilmour:

[\[18294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of legislation on tackling (a) tax evasion and (b) illicit financial transactions in British Overseas Territories; and what estimate his Department has made of when full public registers for British Overseas Territories will be published.

Stephen Doughty:

The Overseas Territories (OTs) work to uphold international standards such as those set out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Financial Action Task Force on tax transparency and countering illicit financial flows respectively. Responsibility for implementing their recommendations into legislation is a matter for OT governments.

At the Joint Ministerial Council last month, I confirmed the UK Government's expectation that OTs implement full Publicly Accessible Registers of Beneficial Ownership (PARBOs). Full PARBOs have already been introduced in Montserrat and Gibraltar, and commitments were made by the Falkland Islands and Saint Helena to introduce these by April 2025. Saint Helena has recently passed the relevant legislation.

Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands committed to implement Legitimate Interest Access Registers of Beneficial Ownership which offer the maximum possible degree of access and

transparency whilst containing the necessary safeguards to protect the right to privacy in line with respective constitutions, at the latest by June 2025.

■ Chagossians

James Cartlidge: [\[17844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when Ministers from his Department have met representatives of the Chagossian community since 4 July 2024; and which Minister met how many Chagossians on each such occasion.

Stephen Doughty:

I have met with members of the Chagossian community twice since 4 July 2024. There are a large number of Chagossian groups in the UK and internationally with a spectrum of views. We will continue efforts to engage the community.

James Cartlidge: [\[17845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when Ministers from his Department have met representatives of the Maldives Government to discuss the future of the Chagos Islands since 4 July 2024; and which Minister met which representative of the Maldives on each such occasion.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary met Maldives Foreign Minister Khaleel at the Commonwealth Heads of Government on 25 October. They discussed a range of issues, including matters relating to the British Indian Ocean Territory. Minister West also spoke with Foreign Minister Khaleel virtually on 14 October and met with the Maldivian High Commissioner on 30 September.

■ Georgia: Demonstrations

Blair McDougall: [\[17308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with international counterparts on the use of force against pro-democracy protesters in Georgia.

Stephen Doughty:

In his 9 December statement the Foreign Secretary strongly condemned the excessive use of force against protesters and journalists in Georgia. He also outlined the suspension of programme support to the Georgian government as a result of the crackdown. In my 3 December statement, I made clear our support for the Georgian people's European future, and I condemned the excessive force used against protesters and journalists. Protesters in Georgia are making clear their opposition to Georgian Dream's decision to stall the country's progress towards EU membership, directly undermining the Georgian Constitution. We are in regular contact with international partners regarding the situation. I continue to call on the Georgian authorities to listen, de-escalate, and reverse this harmful trajectory away from European values.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Asylum and Undocumented Migrants: Mental Health Services

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) irregular migrants and (b) asylum seekers attended how many NHS therapy sessions in the most recent year for which information is available; and what the cost to the public purse was of (i) those sessions and (ii) interpreters at those sessions.

Stephen Kinnock:

While NHS England does hold some data on this, the information is not considered robust enough to be published, given that only a small number of providers have recorded data in a format that allows asylum seekers and refugees to be separately identified. It is not possible to identify irregular migrants within this information.

Neither would it be possible to provide information on the actual cost of these therapy sessions, as this information is not held at this level of granularity.

■ Care Homes: Allowances

Daisy Cooper:

[\[17888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure the weekly personal expense allowance for those living in care homes is increased by the rate of inflation each financial year.

Stephen Kinnock:

The social care allowance rates, which include the Personal Expenses Allowance (PEA), are reviewed each year. The PEA rates have been uprated in line with inflation every year since 2022, and the rates for the 2025/26 financial year will be published in early 2025.

■ Chronic Illnesses: Children

Marie Goldman:

[\[18718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a hardship fund for parents of children who have been diagnosed with chronic illnesses and have been hospitalised for more than 2 months.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Building the Right Support Action Plan, published in 2022, contains commitments which have not yet passed their delivery dates, including the commitment to reform the Mental Health Act.

We do not plan to create new actions in a new action plan while the bill is before Parliament. However, we recognise that this is a vitally important area, and we are considering how to ensure that more people with a learning disability and autistic

people are supported well in the community, ahead of the commencement of the Mental Health Act reforms.

■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

Rupert Lowe: [\[17986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the benefits of a review of the cost effectiveness of the care home vaccine mandate during COVID.

Stephen Kinnock:

There are no plans to carry out such an assessment.

■ **Dementia: Rural Areas**

Sir John Hayes: [\[18483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve dementia care and support for families post-diagnosis in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) other rural areas.

Stephen Kinnock:

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for the provision of dementia care services. NHS England expects ICBs to commission services based on local population needs, and supports them with relevant resources, such as the recently updated RightCare scenario for dementia.

Lincolnshire is committed to continuing to look at how it can improve its offer to support the local population, following a diagnosis of dementia. The ICB is developing plans for a dedicated standalone service which will increase its capacity to offer support before, during, and after diagnosis.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' Dementia Intelligence Network has been commissioned by NHS England to develop a tool for local health systems to support investigation of the underlying variation in dementia diagnosis rates. This includes the assessment of underlying population characteristics, such as rurality and socio-economic deprivation. The aim of this work is to provide context for variation, and to enable targeted investigation and provision of support at a local level to enhance diagnosis rates. The tool has been released, and is available via the NHS Futures Collaboration platform.

■ **Dental Services: Employers' Contributions**

Mark Pritchard: [\[18353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the proposed increase in the rate of employers' National Insurance contributions on dental practices which provide NHS dentistry.

Stephen Kinnock:

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.

General Practitioners**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[18640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of patients unable to secure appointments with their GP due to (a) digital exclusion and (b) lack of telephone access.

Stephen Kinnock:

General practices (GPs) and other National Health Service organisations are encouraged to support patients to use online routes where this would be convenient for them, and there is work to improve the usability of digital tools so that they are accessible to larger numbers of patients. However, a choice of access routes should remain available.

As outlined in the GP Contract, digital services should be provided in addition to other channels for accessing GPs, such as in person visits, rather than as a replacement. Practice receptions should also remain open to ensure that those without access to a telephone or online services are not disadvantaged.

General Practitioners: Beckenham**Mike Martin:**[\[18007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 15983 on General Practitioners: Kent, how much it cost to set up Bromleag Care Practice in 2019.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 9 December 2024]: The Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) commenced the procurement process for an Enhanced Medical Support in Care Homes provider in May 2018.

Following the completion of that process, on 10 January 2019, the Bromley CCG primary care committee gave approval for the Alternative Provider Medical Services contract to be awarded to the Bromley GP Alliance, who run Bromleag Care Practice, for a term of five years, with an option to extend for a further five years.

The indicative financial envelope approved for the contract was £1.26 million. The costs of setting up the practice were included as part of that contract. The Bromleag Care practice was set up specifically to provide enhanced care for residents of nursing homes, residential homes, and those in extra care housing in Bromley.

To note, the total National Health Service payments paid to the Bromleag Care Practice in 2022/23 were reported as £5,317,351, which included payments received

by the practice on behalf of the local Primary Care Network. The total NHS payments to general practice minus deductions was £1,434,316.

■ General Practitioners: Employers' Contributions

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[19147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of increases in employers' National Insurance contributions on the (a) retention and (b) recruitment of salaried GPs.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[19148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of increases to employers National Insurance contributions on the (a) retention and (b) recruitment of nurses in GP surgeries.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[19149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to National Insurance contributions on the retention and recruitment of non-clinical staff in GP surgeries.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have made the necessary decisions to fix the foundations of the public finances in the Autumn Budget. The employers' National Insurance rise will be implemented in April 2025. We will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year in due course.

Primary care providers, including general practitioners (GPs), are valued independent contractors that provide nearly £20 billion worth of National Health Services. Every year we consult with each contracted sector about the services it provides, and the money providers are entitled to in return. 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.

■ Hospitals: Visits

Esther McVey: [\[18536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance his Department issues to hospitals on visiting times for friends and family.

Stephen Kinnock:

Contact with family and friends is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of residents in care homes and people in hospital. We have worked with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to develop the policy options to strengthen the expectation for care providers and hospitals in England to allow visiting. This included introducing secondary legislation to amend CQC regulations. Further information on CQC regulations, specifically Regulation 9A: Visiting and accompanying in care homes, hospitals and hospices, is available at the following link:

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/regulations/regulation-9a-visiting-and-accompanying>

■ Kidney Diseases: Mental Health Services and Social Services

Helen Maguire:

[18076]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle the (a) mental health and (b) social needs of kidney patients.

Stephen Kinnock:

Local authorities are responsible for assessing individuals' care and support needs, including kidney patients, and where eligible, for meeting those needs. Where individuals do not meet the eligibility threshold, they can get support from their local authorities in making their own arrangements for care services, as set out in the Care Act 2014.

Local authorities further have a duty to shape their care markets and commission a diverse range of care and support services that enables people to access quality care.

We recognise that too many people with mental health issues are not getting the support or care they need, which is why we will fix the broken system to ensure that we give mental health the same attention and focus as physical health and that people, including kidney patients where appropriate, can be confident in accessing high-quality mental health support when they need it.

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future and that is there when people need it, we will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across child and adult mental health services to reduce delays and provide faster treatment, which will also help ease pressure on busy mental health services.

The 10-Year Health Plan will ensure a better health service for everyone, regardless of condition or service area. On 21 October, we launched a national conversation on the future of the NHS, inviting views from across the country on how to deliver a health service fit for the future. Patients, staff, and organisations, including those with experience of or expertise in kidney disease, can make themselves heard by logging onto the online portal, which is available at the following link:

www.change.nhs.uk

■ Pharmacy

Joe Robertson:

[18799]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on community pharmacies.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, and this enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26.

Now that the Budget for Government has been set, we will shortly be resuming our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding funding arrangements.

Joe Robertson: [\[18800\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support community pharmacies to ensure (a) financial sustainability, (b) consistency in the provision of services, and (c) dispensing of prescriptions.

Stephen Kinnock:

Pharmacies play a vital role in our healthcare system. We are committed to expanding the role of pharmacies and better utilising the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists, as part of the shift from hospital to community, and from treatment to prevention.

Now that the budget for Government has been set, we will shortly be resuming our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding the funding arrangements for community pharmacy.

Vikki Slade: [\[18835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to respond to the consultation entitled Pharmacy supervision which closed on 29 February 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 12 December 2024]: A previous consultation on pharmacy supervision was published earlier this year. The Government and devolved administrations will set out plans for the policy when it responds to that consultation, in due course.

■ Social Services: Employers' Contributions

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[12582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of raising employer's National Insurance Contributions on (a) trends in the level of recruitment and (b) the provision of care in the social care sector.

Stephen Kinnock:

On 4 July, the Government inherited public finances that were in their worst state since the Second World War. We have considered the cost pressures facing adult social care as part of the wider consideration of local government spending within the Spending Review process.

In response to these pressures, the Government is 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 approximately 3.2%. We will continue to work with the adult social care sector to understand the pressures on adult social care delivery and local authority budgets.

HOME OFFICE**■ Firearms: Licensing****Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[18268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had meetings with representatives of (a) police, (b) gun control groups, (c) British Shooting Sports Council and (d) British Association for Shooting and Conservation to discuss firearms licensing in England, Scotland and Wales.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Home Office Ministers and officials meet with representatives of the police, the shooting community, gun control groups and others from time to time and will continue to do so.

This helps to ensure that all relevant views are taken into account in ensuring that our firearms controls are both proportionate and effective in keeping the public safe.

Charlie Dewhirst:[\[18269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to require General Practitioners to place a marker on the medical notes of firearms certificate holders.

Charlie Dewhirst:[\[18270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on the number and proportion of GPs who have downloaded the IT update to allow the placement of markers on the medical notes of firearms certificate holders.

Dame Diana Johnson:

It is a requirement that all applicants for a firearms licence must provide relevant medical information to the police with their application, and this is supported by a new digital firearms marker which is placed on the patient/licence holder's medical record by their GP.

The marker alerts the GP to the fact that their patient is a firearms licence holder if they are being seen or treated for a medical condition that might impact on their safe possession or use of a firearm.

The digital marker has been rolled out to all GP surgeries in England and GPs are asked to place the medical marker on the licence holder's medical records when a certificate is either issued or renewed.

The marker enables GPs to alert the police should their patient who is a firearms licence holder begin to suffer from a relevant medical condition and this ensures that the police can then assess whether it is safe for the individual to continue to have access to firearms.

Charlie Dewhirst:

[18271]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) efficiency of the National Firearms Licensing Management System; and whether her Department plans to update the system.

Dame Diana Johnson:

We keep the effectiveness of the National Firearms Licensing Management System under review.

The system was introduced in 2007 and we are now working with policing partners to consider options for updating it to provide police forces with enhanced functionality to improve the future efficiency of the firearms licensing function.

Charlie Dewhirst:

[18272]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many sound moderators are held on firearms certificates.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects and publishes information annually on the number of sound moderators.

The latest available data is for the year ending 31 March 2024 and can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/firearm-certificates-in-england-and-wales>.

As at 31 March 2024, 33% of the 624,245 firearms covered by a firearm certificate in England and Wales were sound moderators.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Homelessness

James McMurdock:

[18341]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support people who do not qualify for council funding and are (a) homeless and (b) at risk of homelessness.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness legislation includes eligibility criteria, consideration of vulnerability and whether someone is intentionally homeless to ensure that resources, including temporary accommodation and access to settled housing, are prioritised effectively and accommodation is there for people who need it most. Some individuals will be ineligible for statutory homelessness assistance due to their immigration status and we recognise that supporting this cohort can present unique challenges. The rules regarding eligibility relating to immigration status, including for those with restricted eligibility, have not changed.

The expectation is that migrants coming into the UK should be able to maintain and accommodate themselves without recourse to public funds. This reflects the need to maintain the confidence of the general public that immigration brings benefits to our country, rather than costs to the public purse.

However, this does not mean support cannot be offered to this group. Any funding we have provided can be used to help anyone, as long as local areas are acting within the law in doing so.

The Home Office Homelessness Escalation Service is a dedicated service to help local authorities and service providers to swiftly clarify and resolve the immigration status of individuals if they are rough sleeping or at risk of doing so.

JUSTICE

■ Rape: Trials

Sarah Gibson:

[\[18285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of rape trial waiting times on people who have made allegations of rape.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Rape is an abhorrent crime, and its victims are some of the most vulnerable in the criminal justice system. Despite the judiciary prioritising cases involving vulnerable complainants and witnesses, rape victims can wait disproportionately longer the victims of other cases for their trial.

Addressing this issue is central to this Government's commitment to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. We have committed to fast-tracking rape cases through the courts and will work with the judiciary to find the best way to deliver this nationally.

In addition, we are introducing specialist rape and sexual offence teams in every police force and will be rolling out free, independent legal advocates for victims of adult rape. The legal advocates will provide legal advice to victims on disclosure requests and potential appeals, reducing the number of those dropping out of the system.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Copyright: Data Processing

Mr James Frith:

[\[18169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to amend copyright legislation in relation to text and data mining.

Feryal Clark:

The Government will launch a consultation soon on a number of issues relating to copyright and AI, including text and data mining.

■ **Meta: Standards****Melanie Onn:**[\[18145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will have discussions with Meta on the potential impact of (a) the adequacy of its customer support team and (b) accounts being temporarily disabled on UK businesses; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of legislating minimum service standards in those areas to support UK businesses that rely on the services of (i) Meta and (ii) other online platforms.

Feryal Clark:

Ministers and officials have regular meetings with Meta on a range of issues, including their support for UK businesses.

The Online Safety Act (OSA), enacted in October 2023, requires in-scope platforms to have clear and accessible terms of service setting out what kinds of content are allowed on their platforms and in what circumstances they might suspend or ban a user. The Act also mandates that platforms provide users and affected persons with an accessible complaints process if they consider their account has been unfairly restricted or suspended.

TRANSPORT■ **Aviation: Disability****Jerome Mayhew:**[\[18619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has appointed additional members to the Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group.

Mike Kane:

The Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group was launched on the 7 November 2024. Members were selected for expertise, knowledge and willingness to put the needs of passengers first.

Based on feedback from stakeholders, the decision was taken to expand the group's membership ahead of the first meeting. This was done with a view to further strengthening its breadth of expertise and reach across industry, which is critical for the Group to deliver tangible progress.

■ **Aviation: Israel****Brian Leishman:**[\[18277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the number of applications for exemption to allow civilian cargo planes that are (a)

destined for Israel and (b) transporting munitions of war to overfly British sovereign airspace that have been (i) received, (ii) approved and (iii) rejected since 7 October 2023.

Mike Kane:

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has the responsibility of issuing approvals for the carriage of munitions of war in civil aircraft. The CAA has not received any applications for exemption to allow civilian cargo aircraft that are destined for Israel and transporting munitions of war to overfly UK sovereign airspace.

■ **Crewe Station: Facilities**

Paula Barker:

[\[17900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment has she made on the adequacy of of passenger facilities at Crewe railway station as a connection point for service between the North West and (a) the West Midlands and (b) the South East.

Lilian Greenwood:

Avanti West Coast and Network Rail are working together to address issues with the lifts and canopies at Crewe. Options to improve passenger facilities are also under consideration as part of the renewal works expected to complete by 2029.

■ **Department for Transport: Cost Effectiveness**

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[18616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will create a value for money team.

Mike Kane:

The Department takes value for money for the taxpayer seriously, and this is ingrained in the way the Department works. There are currently no plans to create a specific value for money team within the Department.

■ **Department for Transport: Data Processing**

Gareth Bacon:

[\[18201\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2024 to Question 12975 on Department for Transport: Data Processing, what the operational scope is of her Department's Organisational AI programme; and which Departmental area it is placed within.

Mike Kane:

The Department for Transport's Organisational AI Programme, sets out a holistic framework for the adoption of AI within the Department itself, and shares learning across the wider operational agencies and arm's length bodies. It is led and coordinated out of the Decarbonisation, Technology and Strategy Group.

■ Department for Transport: Departmental Responsibilities

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Rail Services Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18624\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Major Rail Projects Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Road Transport Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Aviation, Maritime and Security Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Public Transport and Local Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Decarbonisation, Technology and Strategy Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the (a) scope and (b) responsibilities of the Rail Services Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the (a) scope and (b) responsibilities of the Major Rail Projects Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the (a) scope and (b) responsibilities of the Roads Transport Group since 4 July 2024.

Mike Kane:

The Department for Transport is made up of seven groups led by a Director General or Permanent Secretary, which are subdivided into directorates and divisions.

Organisational structures are always kept under review to best deliver the Department's responsibilities. As of 10 December 2024, there have been no major organisational restructures which have resulted in substantive changes to the membership, scope or responsibilities of any of the groups since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[19007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Aviation, Maritime and Security Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[19008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Public Transport and Local Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[19009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the membership of the Decarbonisation, Technology and Strategy Group since 4 July 2024.

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[19010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made changes to the (a) scope and (b) responsibilities of the Corporate Delivery Group since 4 July 2024.

Mike Kane:

The Department for Transport is made up of seven groups led by a Director General or Permanent Secretary, which are subdivided into directorates and divisions. Organisational structures are always kept under review to best deliver the Department's responsibilities. As of 10 December 2024, there have been no major organisational restructures which have resulted in substantive changes to the membership, scope or responsibilities of any of the groups since 4 July 2024.

■ Department for Transport: Scotland

Gareth Bacon:

[\[18192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has (a) met and (b) had discussions with her counterpart in Scotland since July 2024.

Mike Kane:

The Secretary of State has not held discussions or met with her counterpart in Scotland since her appointment on 29th November. Louise Haigh held discussions with her Scottish counterpart.

■ Department for Transport: Welsh Government

Gareth Bacon:

[\[18191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions (a) she and (b) her predecessor has had with her counterpart in the Welsh government since July 2024.

Mike Kane:

The Secretary of State has not held discussions or met with her counterpart in Wales since her appointment on 29th November. Louise Haigh held discussions with her Welsh counterpart.

■ HGV Parking and Driver Welfare Grant Scheme

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[18620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding remains available through the HGV parking and driver welfare grant scheme.

Lilian Greenwood:

Lorry drivers are starting to benefit from improved roadside facilities and safer rest areas thanks to significant investment by DfT, National Highways and industry.

The HGV Parking and Driver Welfare Matched Funding Grant Scheme (MFGS) was launched in 2022 to fund investment in HGV driver welfare facilities, lorry parking provision, site security, and decarbonisation.

Window Three grant allocations were announced on 10 October 2024. There are 23 provisionally successful bids in this window, amounting to approx. £4.5 million of Government funding and leveraging approx. £8 million from industry.

Funding for financial years beyond 2025/26 is subject to the forthcoming Spending Review which will be completed in late Spring 2025.

My department continues to engage with key stakeholders to encourage the development of more safe, secure, and high-quality lorry parking to improve driver welfare.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Construction

Gareth Bacon:

[\[18200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2024 to Question 13063 on High Speed 2 Line: Construction, what information her Department holds on levels of compliance by contractors with the HS2 Environmental Minimum Requirements.

Lilian Greenwood:

The HS2 Environmental Minimum Requirements contain a range of controls to ensure compliance with (amongst other things) the environmental provisions in the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Act. More information is available in the HS2 Information Paper E1: Control of Environmental Impacts

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82e5cae5274a2e87dc386e/E1_-_Control_of_Environmental_Impacts_v1.7.pdf

HS2 Ltd publishes regular reports on compliance with the Code of Construction Practice provisions on managing noise, vibration, air quality and dust impacts on local communities. Latest reports are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitoring-the-environmental-effects-of-hs2-2024>. This is supplemented by annual reports setting out an assessment of how the HS2 programme is affecting the environment, how contractors are reducing their impact and examines progress in setting and meeting environmental controls. These reports are available here: <https://www.hs2.org.uk/documents/collections/hs2-environmental-sustainability-progress-reports/>

HS2 Ltd is required by the General Principles of the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Environmental Minimum Requirements to report any new significant environmental effects that exceed those which were reported in the Phase 1 Environmental Statement (as amended). A Supplementary Environmental Information report for each case is published on Gov.UK here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sei-reports-for-new-significant-environmental-effects-on-the-hs2-phase-one-route>.

TREASURY

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Cameron Thomas:

[\[18332\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of proposed changes to inheritance tax on (a) small family farm closures and (b) internal food production security.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms. It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (including those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

The UK has robust domestic food production, and these reforms will only affect a small number of estates. The small number of landowners affected will not necessarily need to sell the land and, if they choose to, then it does not necessarily mean the land would stop being used for food production. At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced the largest ever investment in sustainable food production in England.

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

■ Income Tax: Tax Rates and Bands

Rachel Gilmour:

[\[18292\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of freezing Income Tax thresholds until 2028 on the number of people who will begin paying (a) Income Tax and (b) the higher rate of Income Tax in each financial year of this Parliament.

James Murray:

The information requested is published as part of the OBR's Economic and Fiscal Outlook (EFO). The published table sets out the effects of the threshold freeze on taxpayers, by showing estimated numbers with and without indexation of the thresholds and the impact of the thresholds being frozen. This information has been updated in the EFO at each recent fiscal event.

The below is an extract from this published table:

3.18 EFFECT OF THRESHOLD FREEZES ON ADDITIONAL TAXPAYERS

	Million						
	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Number of taxpayers							
...brought into income tax	2.2	3.3	3.5	3.9	4.2	4.2	4.2
...brought into higher-rate band	1.4	2.2	2.5	2.8	3.0	3.0	3.0

The full table is available as Table 3.18 in the detailed forecast of receipts: [October 2024 Economic and fiscal outlook – detailed forecast tables: receipts \(obr.uk\)](#)

■ **Ports: Construction**

Tracy Gilbert:**[18274]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how the National Wealth Fund will support developing port capacity.

Tulip Siddiq:

The National Wealth Fund (NWF) will create a step change in our ability to mobilise private capital in the UK's most important sectors and assets. At least £5.8 billion of the NWF's additional capital will focus on the five sectors announced in the manifesto: green hydrogen, carbon capture, ports, gigafactories and green steel and will be committed over this Parliament.

The NWF is actively engaging across a number of opportunities where financing support for ports could have a catalytic effect on the floating offshore wind market.

■ Sales: Regulation

Matt Vickers:

[\[18228\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending deemed reseller rules to cover UK-established sellers.

James Murray:

Since 1 January 2021 overseas sellers, or online marketplaces where they facilitate the sale, are required to be registered and account for VAT for supplies of low value imports of £135 or less. Where an overseas seller sells goods located in the UK at the point of sale via an online marketplace, the online marketplace is liable for the VAT for goods of any value.

The changes were introduced to ensure a level playing field for UK high street and online retailers, ensure the continued flow of goods at the border and improve compliance.

Certified analysis by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimates the changes will raise £1.8 billion per annum by 2026-27.

The Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the policy making process.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Carers: Older People

Dr Roz Savage:

[\[18844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if her Department will take steps to provide financial support for pension-age carers providing full-time care but no longer eligible for Carer's Allowance.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Although there is no upper age limit to claiming Carer's Allowance, it cannot normally be paid with the State Pension. It has been a long-held feature of the UK's benefit system, under successive Governments, that where someone is entitled to two benefits for the same contingency, then whilst there may be entitlement to both benefits, only one will be paid to avoid duplication for the same need. Although entitlement to State Pension and Carer's Allowance arise in different circumstances they are nevertheless designed for the same contingency – as an income replacement. Carer's Allowance replaces income where the carer is unable to undertake full time employment due to their caring responsibilities, while State Pension replaces income in retirement. For this reason, social security rules operate to prevent them being paid together, to avoid duplicate provision for the same need.

However, if a carer's State Pension is less than Carer's Allowance, State Pension is paid and topped up with Carer's Allowance to the basic weekly rate of Carer's Allowance which is currently £81.90.

Where Carer's Allowance cannot be paid, the person will keep underlying entitlement to the benefit. This gives access to the additional amount for carers in Pension Credit of £45.60 a week and potentially other means-tested support. Around 125,000 people are receiving the Carer Premium with their Pension Credit. It is paid to recognise the additional contribution and responsibilities associated with caring. And even if a pensioner's income is above the limit for Pension Credit, they may still be able to receive Housing Benefit.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Labour Turnover

Kim Johnson:

[\[18225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish (a) staff turnover, (b) the number of new recruits and (c) the number of vacancies in her Department in each of the last three months.

Andrew Western:

a) The annual turnover rate for DWP ending in the last three months is 7.0% in September, 6.8% in October and 6.6% in November. Annual end of year turnover rates are published in the DWP Annual Report and Accounts.

b) DWP has had 2,063 new recruits between 2 September 2024 and 30 November 2024.

c) DWP has advertised 170 recruitment campaigns for up to 2147 roles.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Staff

Kim Johnson:

[\[18226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on (a) exemptions for and (b) flexibility in (i) sponsored visa and (ii) skilled workers visa guidance staff in her Department.

Andrew Western:

The Secretary of State, and ministers, regularly meet with Cabinet and ministerial colleagues, regarding a range of matters.

DWP takes the welfare of its staff very seriously and continues to provide a range of support to colleagues employed on time limited visas who are impacted by the uplift to Skilled Worker salary thresholds for sponsorship introduced in April 2024.

■ Personal Independence Payment: Mental Health

Jessica Toale:

[\[18767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the assessment process for Personal Independent Payment on the mental health of those assessed; and if she will reform that process.

Sir Stephen Timms:

DWP and our assessment providers are committed to providing a quality, sensitive and respectful service, with an approach aimed at continual improvement.

We recognise that attending a consultation can be a stressful experience for some people, which is why where there is sufficient available evidence, Personal Independence Payment assessments are carried out via a paper-based review. Where an assessment is required, claimants are encouraged to include another person where they would find this helpful, for example, by reassuring them or helping them during the consultation. The person chosen is at the discretion of the claimant and might be, but is not limited to, a parent, family member, friend, carer or advocate.

The Department's Health Transformation Programme (HTP) is modernising benefit services to improve customer experience, build trust in our services and the decisions we make, and create a more efficient service.

The Government believes there is a strong case to change the system of health and disability benefits across Great Britain so that it better enables people to enter and remain in work, and to respond to the complex and fluctuating nature of the health conditions many people live with today.

We will bring forward a Green Paper in spring 2025. We will listen to and engage with disabled people as we develop proposals for reform in this area and across the employment support system.

■ **Poverty: Kirklees**

Paul Davies: [\[18832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to tackle the number of people dying in poverty in Kirklees.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[19033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps the Government is taking to reduce the number of people dying in poverty in Lambeth.

Kim Johnson: [\[19069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the report entitled Dying in Poverty, published by Marie Curie in November 2024, what steps she is taking to tackle the levels of people dying in poverty in Liverpool.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department has noted the recommendations made in the report, and values Marie Curie as a key stakeholder which engages with us constructively in this area. The primary way the Department supports people nearing the end of life is through special benefit rules which are known as the Special Rules for End of Life (SREL). These enable people who are nearing the end of their lives to get faster, easier access to certain benefits, without needing to attend a medical assessment or serve waiting periods and in most cases, receive the highest rate of benefit.

For many years, the Special Rules applied to people who have 6 months or less to live, they have now been changed so they apply to people who have 12 months or less to live. Changes to the Special Rules mean that thousands of people nearing the

end of life are now able to claim fast-tracked financial support from the benefits system six months earlier than they were able to previously.

■ Refugees: Employment and Social Security Benefits

Rupert Lowe: [\[18448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what proportion of refugees are (a) employed, (b) unemployed, (c) in receipt of Universal Credit and (d) in receipt of other social security benefits.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department does not hold the information to produce the requested calculation.

Data on the total number of individuals with refugee status is held by the Home Office.

For a) and b), it is not possible to produce this information using the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey (LFS).

For part c), the Department is exploring the feasibility of developing suitable official statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish Universal Credit customers including refugees.

For part d), the Department does not hold the requested information on refugees in receipt of social security benefits other than Universal Credit.

■ Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations

Steve Darling: [\[18709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of trialling automated recording of health assessment information under the Health Transformation Programme.

Steve Darling: [\[18710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of trialling the provision of a copy assessment report when informing claimants of a decision on a benefit claim under the Health Transformation Programme.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Health Transformation Programme (HTP) is modernising benefit services to improve customer experience, build trust in our services and create a more efficient service. As we develop these services, we are exploring a range of ideas to establish what works best for our customers with HTP providing the platform for change and the flexible capability to trial new ideas.

Audio recording is available on an opt-in basis for face-to-face and telephone assessments. Customers are informed of the audio recording offer prior to their assessment in invitation letters. The programme is looking at how audio recording can also be offered for video assessments and will be seeking ways to improve the whole process. We will set out the detail of any changes in due course.

We have undertaken initial tests where assessment reports are shared with customers. We are evaluating the outcomes of these tests to establish next steps.